

EXPRESSIVE NATURE

By using traditional plants in unexpected ways and mixing manicured with wild elements, a Melbourne designer has produced a character-rich garden.

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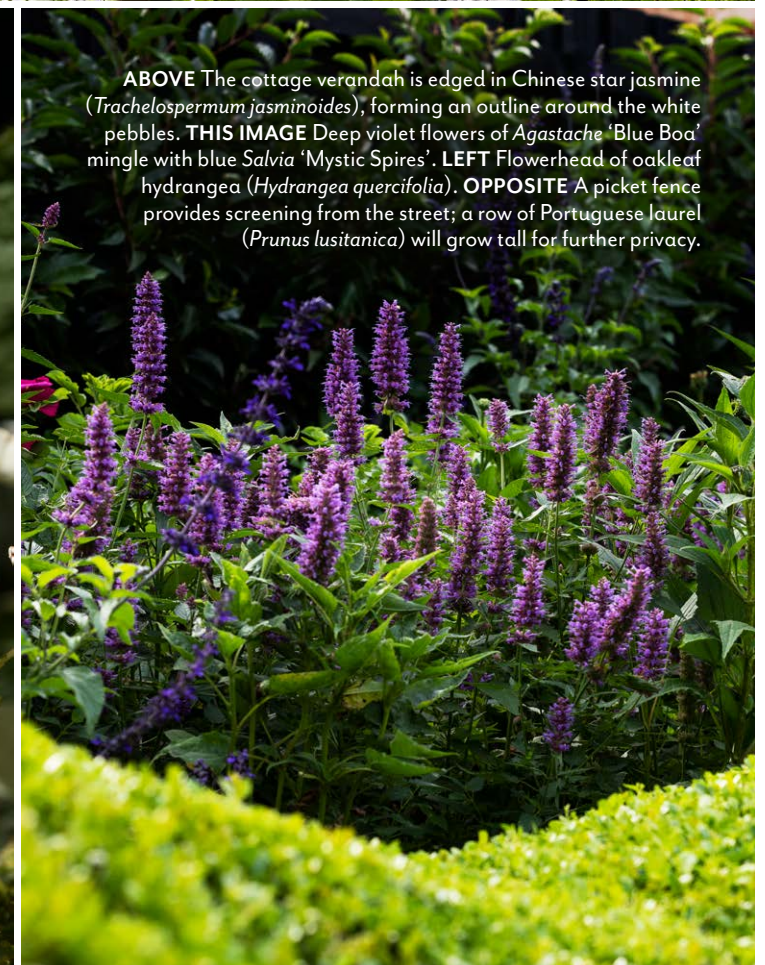
Landscape architect Bethany Williamson came up with a novel approach to bring life and personality into this front garden: she swapped lawn for white pebbles and sculpted undulating mounds of evergreen buxus which sit like dramatic islands of greenery amid the white. Offsetting the solid-looking mounds she planted slender-trunked silver birch trees (*Betula pendula*) and a bed of purple-flowering perennials, ensuring the garden is one of balance and contrast. White pebbles from Rock&Stone Outdoor Living.

H&G GARDENS

Some people might be surprised to hear a garden described as having “great personality”. That’s the way landscape architect Bethany Williamson sums up this garden she designed in Melbourne – and it’s easy to see why.

Bethany knew something special and unexpected was required for this garden from the moment she inspected the site. The heritage cottage had just been renovated with a super-sleek extension at the rear by Neil Architecture, and the homeowners enlisted her to create a front garden to match. She felt it was logical to take her cues from the home’s old-embraces-new narrative. “The garden needed to be in harmony with the home’s traditional facade but it also needed to hint at the very contemporary extension at the back,” she says. “It couldn’t be a traditional garden.”

With no car access needing to be factored into the 15x12-metre layout, “it was to be designed purely as a space for visitors to enter”, says Bethany, who was given total creative freedom by the homeowners. “They wanted it to look good, be low maintenance and plant focused.” ▶



ABOVE The cottage verandah is edged in Chinese star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), forming an outline around the white pebbles. **THIS IMAGE** Deep violet flowers of Agastache ‘Blue Boa’ mingle with blue *Salvia* ‘Mystic Spires’. **LEFT** Flowerhead of oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). **OPPOSITE** A picket fence provides screening from the street; a row of Portuguese laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*) will grow tall for further privacy.



With this open brief, Bethany focused on creating a lovely, atmospheric environment to make the homeowners smile. When it came to plant selections, her approach was to think about species that would traditionally be used to complement a heritage home – and then give them a contemporary twist.

The masterstroke of the design is her inventive use of Japanese box (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*). She has taken what is a traditional hedging plant and turned it into a sculptural medium, clipping the plants into big undulating forms. “We’ve used a familiar plant and a familiar approach – clipping it into shapes – but we’ve given it more personality,” says Bethany. “Buxus spheres would have looked too busy in this garden. These bigger forms feel like they’re in scale. They add beautiful curves and sit comfortably in the rectangular space.”

To achieve the effect, Bethany selected different-sized buxus specimens and planted them close together. “This produced an instant shape and allowed them to take on the appearance of a single form rather than growing separately,” she says.

Early on, Bethany and the homeowners decided to move away from a traditional layout of a front path flanked by lawn. “We wanted to dispense with lawn, for environmental and maintenance reasons,” says Bethany. “The owners didn’t want to be constantly mowing and keeping weeds down.” They decided that paving would look too stark and green groundcovers would camouflage the sculptural buxus forms. “Using white pebbles was the perfect way to highlight the green of the mounded buxus,” says Bethany. “The pebbles also add a lovely texture, as well as a sense of movement and sound.”

Unlike a traditional, formal front layout, this garden is joyously asymmetrical. On one side of the central pathway is a row of silver birch trees (*Betula pendula*), positioned to add soft canopy foliage. Behind them is a snake-shaped buxus mound next to which is a bed of flowering perennials, designed to add “something wild to offset the manicured elements”. There is a mix of three perennials here – *Agastache* ‘Blue Boa’, *Salvia* ‘Mystic Spires’ and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) – and a hybrid rugosa rose, *Rosa* ‘Rugspin’.

On the other side of the path are two separate buxus mounds and a jacaranda underplanted with a pretty pocket of oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). A row of ficus (*Ficus microcarpa hillii* ‘Flash’), which will eventually be a pleached hedge, grows along the boundary.

This garden makes a statement, sitting singularly in its leafy suburban street, catching the eyes of passersby. “My favourite element? It would have to be the shaping of the buxus. Without it, the space would look very different,” says Bethany. “As soon as you walk in the front gate, there’s a sense of calm – and it just feels right,” says Bethany. **H&G**

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TOP Shimmering silver birch trees add vertical elements. **LEFT** The jacaranda is encircled by oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). Inside the front fence a hedge of Portuguese laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*) and a lower layer of *Pittosporum* ‘Miss Muffet’ provide screening.