



Golden grasses and hardy coastal shrubs encircle this beachside home, softening the angles of the architecture. For more on this salt- and wind-tolerant garden, turn the page...

Gardens

PLANT-FOCUSED SPACES THAT INVITE AND DELIGHT

Designed by landscape architect Bethany Williamson, the garden surrounding this beach-facing home mimics natural outcrops of vegetation found locally. The plant palette includes ground-hugging succulents, hardy shrubs and grasses – all species that can withstand the salt spray yet tumble and bend with the breeze. The grasses in the rooftop section of the garden include wheat-toned *Poa poiformis*, lime-coloured *Dianella* 'Little Jess' and golden coast spear grass (*Austrostipa stipoides*). The spear grass is Bethany's favourite: "I just love its form and colour."

FULL EXPOSURE

This frontline coastal property on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula is subjected to both surf mist and salt breezes, so it took some clever planting to produce a garden that digs in and looks at home in the bold location.

STORY *Elizabeth Wilson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Mitch Lyons*



Some of the plants are indigenous to the area, but not all. “I wasn’t concerned with picking just indigenous plants, it was more about selecting plants that would work with the conditions and provide the colour, form and texture I wanted,” says Bethany. Apart from some irrigation in the roof garden, the plants rely on rainfall. Shrubs at the front of the property include silvery cushion bush (*Leucophyta brownii*), white native fuchsia (*Correa alba*) and white-flowering creeping boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium* ‘Broad leaf’). The gravel driveway is compacted Dromana toppings with bluestone crazy paving leading to the front door.

Sometimes, the wind roars so fiercely around Kate and Will Parson’s beachside home that they have trouble standing upright against the force. “It can be brutal,” says Kate. “But it’s exhilarating!” So when they decided to build a new residence on this clifftop site at Ocean Grove, on Victoria’s Bellarine Peninsula, they wanted to create a home and garden that could stand their ground against the elements and celebrate the ocean-facing setting. And that’s exactly what they have achieved – although it has taken a couple of decades of trial and error to get here.

The couple bought the property in 1995, intending to make it a weekend home. The original dwelling, a postwar fibro shack nestled behind sand dunes, was sweet but needed upgrading. They built a replacement home but within a decade it, too, had succumbed to the extreme conditions and started falling apart. Then, a few years ago, with visions of making this their permanent residence, they started yet again – this time enlisting Auhaus Architecture to design a contemporary, environmentally savvy bolthole to stand the test of time. The result is a concrete and hardwood home that wraps protectively around the site, enclosing an elevated, tiered courtyard and pool. Firmly planted and harnessing light, the home is a salve to those onshore gales.

Having a garden was always part of Kate and Will’s plan, “to help soften the concrete and settle the structure into the landscape”. Their previous gardening attempts here had been hit and miss (more miss than hit, admits Kate – with the exception of lavender and cumquats) so they knew the answer lay in using native species. Auhaus recommended landscape architect Bethany Williamson, who came onboard early in the construction phase. Bethany was excited by the site, and the challenge of contending with swirling, salt-laden winds. “Obviously we needed to work with plants that would survive,” she says. “And that meant using frontline coastal native plants.”

There are lots of plants labelled ‘coastal’, but not all of them can cope with salt spray, says Bethany. For her cues she looked to the local environment. “I focused on the species growing naturally in the sand dunes and at what was growing happily in other people’s gardens nearby – that’s always a good indication of what will work,” she says.

Drawing on this inspiration, she created a plant palette of groundcovers, shrubs and grasses that looks uncannily naturalistic. “I wanted the garden to look like it was part of a sand dune,” says Bethany. “It needed to look like no one had designed it – like the planting had naturally wrapped itself around the house.”

The planting occurs in three key areas: the rooftop above the garage; the front entrance and the cliff face. ►



For visual consistency, Bethany used combinations of the same species throughout, planting them in swathes and drifts as a counterpoint to the bold angles of the architecture. Textural groundcovers such as pigface (*Carpobrotus*), cut-leaf daisy (*Brachyscome*), creeping boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium*), blue chalksticks (*Senecio serpens*) and pig's ears (*Cotyledon*) mingle with reliably resilient shrubs including *Correa alba*, cushion bush (*Leucophyta brownii*) and woolly bush (*Adenanthos*).

There are four different grasses: coastal tussock grass (*Poa poiformis*), dianella, knobby club rush (*Ficinia nodosa*) and spear grass (*Austrostipa stipoides*). All the species are native except for the *Cotyledon* (a South African native) and two New Zealand Christmas trees. Colour-wise, Bethany has created a tapestry of muted grey-greens with drifts of lime-green (dianellas) and daubs of silver (cushion bush) while the wheaten-toned grasses echo the tones of the timbers cladding the home. "The colours are delicate," says Kate, who enjoys being able to see the colour and movement of the swaying grasses from every room of the house.

Kate and Will love their "extreme garden" as they describe it. And they're not alone. "It has created a wonderful wildlife habitat, too. We've never seen so many insects, butterflies and lizards here," says Kate.

H&G

*Bethany Williamson Landscape Architecture,
Melbourne, Victoria; bethanywilliamson.com.au.*

Bluestone crazy paving leads to the front door. "I love how natural the garden is," says Kate. "It tumbles down the sides, it drapes, it spills and looks like it belongs."
OPPOSITE *Clockwise from top left* The garden is a foil for the hard angles of the architecture. Silvery and wheaten grasses are a perfect colour match for the weathered hardwood timber cladding. The riot of grasses and shrubs was "designed to look not-designed" says Bethany. A tapestry of texture and colour greets at the front entrance.



FEATURE PLANTS

GROUNDCOVERS

- Creeping boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium*)
- Cut-leaf daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*)
- Pigface (*Carpobrotus*)
- Kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*)
- Blue chalksticks (*Senecio serpens*)
- Cotyledon orbiculate (*Pig's ear*)

SHRUBS

- Woolly bush (*Adenanthos sericeus*)
- Correa alba*
- Cushion bush (*Leucophyta brownii*)

GRASSES

- Flax lily (*Dianella* 'Little Jess' and *D.* 'Breeze')
- Knobby club rush (*Ficinia nodosa*)
- Coastal tussock grass (*Poa poiformis*)
- Coast spear grass (*Austrostipa stipoides*)

