GOOD VIBES

Taking inspiration from the tropics, this garden has
been transformed into the ultimate chill-out zone.

STORY *Tammy Huynh* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Natalie Hunfalvay*

This coastal home is enveloped in tropical and subtropical
plants for year-round impact. Foxtail agave (*Agave attenuata*),
bromeliads, gingers and *Philodendron* 'Xanadu' form the
luscious understorey, while palms, *Dracaena draco* and tree
aloe (*Aloe barberae*) bring height and drama to the palette.

Wanting a garden that would lure them outdoors, the owners of this home on Sydney's Northern Beaches called on Matt Beckett, lead designer and director of Reflective Gardens to reconfigure their space. The plot was generous – spanning 620 square metres – but lacked definition and purpose.

In the front, they wanted "an entry with 'wow' to lead people through to the front door." For the back garden, they sought a multifaceted layout with a lawn, pool, and "spaces to chill" and soak in the views. The backyard also required privacy from the neighbouring homes.

To deliver on the brief, Matt's team cleared the weeds, trimmed overgrown hedges, thinned shrubs, and set aside plants for transplanting. "A lot of the bones of the garden were in place, but it was difficult to see them," says Matt. The team also enriched the site with plenty of good-quality, organic fertilisers to improve the soil. Next, Matt devised a plant palette suitable for the site. "Some parts of the garden bear the full brunt of the westerly sun, while other parts are exposed to onshore winds," says Matt. As fate would have it, both the owner and Matt are great admirers of tropical gardens, and this style of planting lent itself beautifully to the site. "The beauty of this was we could layer plantings to suit the coastal conditions."

The strong sculptural form of a dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) complements the home's architectural lines. *Pennisetum* 'Nafray' is planted below to help soften the sharp lines of the sandstone path. **OPPOSITE** A double retaining wall, made of corten steel and sandstone blocks, provides an opportunity for tiered planting. *Dichondra repens* and *Casuarina* 'Cousin It' spill over the sides, contrasting with the sword-like foliage of mother-in-law's tongue. A tree aloe presides over the entrance.

DESIGN NOTES
Pots Gather Co and Robert Plumb.
Firepit and stools Robert Plumb.
Edging Corten steel, Ideal Edging.

Matt selected a mix of 'tropical-style' plants that deliver on both lushness and hardiness. Ones that are adapted to a coastal environment, but also combine well to create an impactful display. In the side and rear beds, frangipani, *Heliconia* 'Hot Rio Nights', existing palms, and elephants ears (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) provide structure and height, while ctenanthe, agaves, giant bromeliads (*Alcantarea*), *Philodendron* 'Congo', and *P.* 'Rojo Congo' add texture and drama below. Refurbished sandstone steppers take you on a journey through the space and into the backyard.

The path also has a delightful surprise: it forks and leads to a secluded viewing platform complete with a firepit to soak in the garden and surrounding views. "It was built on a bank, so our construction team engineered a corten-steel retaining wall and filled it with deco granite," says Matt.

The serenity continues into the back garden, which has distinct zones for play, rest and relaxation. "The timber fence was existing and continues to act as both a boundary and windbreak," says Matt. Crassula and pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) take the edge off the structure, while the large rustic pot with *Euphorbia* 'Cowboy' is a point of interest by the pool. A dry-stacked sandstone bench is nestled between the lush greenery, providing a private spot for contemplation.

Matt took a slightly different approach in the front garden. To maximise functionality on the sloped site, a corten steel and sandstone retaining wall/planter was installed to create a terrace. It's filled it with hardy, sun-loving plants, mixing their shapes and textures for visual impact. A striking tree aloe (*Aloe barberae*) by the gate and a dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) by steps to the front door give the home a wonderful sense of arrival. **H&G**

Reflective Gardens; reflectivegardens.com.au.

"Know the aspect, know the soil, and work with a designer you connect with and trust. But, most importantly, have fun – gardens are great for the mind and soul." Matt Beckett, landscape designer

Beach views can be enjoyed from various standpoints, but privacy is maintained throughout the garden thanks to clever planting and viburnum hedges. **OPPOSITE** Densely planted beds of bromeliads and philodendrons surround the corten-steel viewing platform.

Feature plants

TREES
Dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*)
Frangipani (*Plumeria acutifolia*)
Tree aloe (*Aloe barberae*)
SHRUBS
Cordyline fruticosa 'Kiwi'
Alpinia zerumbet 'Variegata'
Giant bromeliad (*Alcantarea* spp.)
Elephants ears (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*)
Rhaphiolepis indica 'Oriental Pearl'
Heliconia 'Hot Rio Nights'
SUCCULENTS
Agave 'Blue Glow'
GROUNDCOVERS
Native violet (*Viola hederacea*)
Casuarina glauca 'Cousin It'

A firepit surrounded by greenery is the ideal drawcard to encourage time outdoors. **OPPOSITE** The journey through the garden is as enjoyable as the final destination. A path made of reclaimed sandstone flagging sets the tone, encouraging a slow pace to soak in the verdant backdrop. **H&G**