

GARDEN NOTES

MELBA

The Robin Boyd designed house at 'Melba' sits comfortably in an Australian native garden located on the clifftops above Point Roadknight in Anglesea. The house has been through various renovations, and many of the original features are still present in and around the building. The site's elevated position captures views down onto the family-friendly beach plus views to the east towards Point Addis. This favourable location also provides wonderful morning light entering the garden and house.

Stonework

There are two types of stonework that are present in the house and garden. The yellow coloured sandstone in some of the walls that are in and around the garden is a local stone from Airey's Inlet. The garden walls don't actually sit on the title boundaries and tend to be on a slight angle. It was necessary to 'tread carefully' around these when the garden was being built, because as good as they look, they are quite fragile and could actually fall down if encouraged or were bumped. The other type of stone is a red coloured ironstone, often found in and around Anglesea along the riverbank and in the Bindley Parade area. This stone may have also been harvested and taken up to the site.

The garden

After house renovations in 2010, some initial garden work was undertaken including re-paving of the courtyard and other areas. Retaining walls were reinstated, car parking areas were established and some planting was carried out.

In 2015 the owners approached Peter Shaw from Ocean Road Landscaping with a garden remake in mind and it was initially decided that a full redesign of the garden was the best starting point for the project. It was important to recognise the history of the building and to take into account the original garden style and design, which authentically links the landscape to its place in time. The other focus of course, was designing and building a garden that would survive the harsh conditions of Anglesea's location and creating a space that would thrive under the majestic, large existing Eucalypts. From within the house itself, the valuable coastal views the house enjoys from both upstairs and downstairs needed to be maintained. This, along with the extreme coastal frontage (although there is some shelter) became predominant factors in the design.

One key design material used – often present in gardens from the early native Australian garden era – is stone. The new stone, such as in the garden paths, steps and fire pit area, links in with the original stonework already in the house and in the rambling garden walls. Inspiration was drawn from the likes of Edna Walling, Ellis Stones and Gordon Ford. In their time, these gardening pioneers changed the shape of gardening and garden styles in a positive direction for the Australian climate.

Ultimately, the design did not call for major changes to be made – rather working in with existing levels, surfaces and infrastructure that was already in place. The fire pit and stone work are a key feature in the central back garden which was really the only 'blank canvas' available to work with and the only area where structural changes could be made. During this process, a major consideration was the removal of invasive environmental weeds that had made their home over time in the garden. Coast Wattle, Bellarine Pea, pittosporum and other weeds had become prevalent. Once these areas were cleared, space became available for the new planting theme.



Extensive soil preparation was undertaken, adding compost and preparing for new plantings. A drip irrigation system was installed to help establish the new planting over its first few years. This is a key factor in gardening under eucalypts in a coastal, sandy soil environment.

With irregular boundaries, it was still important for the owners to have some secluded and private space for family and pets to enjoy. The new timber fence and gate became an integral part of the project and it was important to make this aspect fade into the natural environment while still being practical and easy to use. The shared driveway and common ground was landscaped at the same time as the garden, which enhances the look and feel of the landscape as a whole and creates a generous garden space to be enjoyed.

The muted and verdant planting scheme sits underneath the old graceful gums and offers a true sense of place relative to its coastal home. Little touches here and there relate back to the home's original design, such as ivy growing over the old stone entry wall and rustic leaning walls. There is a feeling of seclusion from the street, with the house and garden both well screened through planting. The new fencing offers a boundary to the private area and creates a backdrop for the garden to shine.

Recently a decorative steel screen work by local artist Cinnamon Stevens has been installed.

Overall the result has proven to be a low-maintenance, attractive Australian garden that sits nicely around an iconic Australian house and complements its outstanding coastal position. The garden offers a sense of peace and solitude through rustling leaves, birdsong and the distant crashing waves of Point Roadknight. It's an inviting space that encourages you to spend time in it.

The plants

Semi-formal to informal cottage garden styles are fascinating elements of the garden – using non-traditional plants such as Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*), and the newly re-established Honey Myrtle (*Melaleuca incana* 'Sea Mist') hedges. Combinations of contrasting foliage and flower colours of low-growing *Grevillea lanigera* 'Mt Tamboritha' and *Grevillea lavandulacel x alpina* 'Jelly Baby', *Correa pulchella* 'Autumn Blaze' and the funky mounding *Casuarina glauca* 'Cousin It' are playful and functional components, bordering and softening stone path edges, whilst helping cover free-draining soil surfaces to minimise water loss via evaporation and assisting with the garden's drought tolerance in the coastal environment.

Newly planted *Alyogyne huegelii* 'Blue Heeler' (a native hibiscus) and dwarf Native Frangipani (*Hymenosporum flavum* 'Luscious') reference old-fashioned use of brightly-coloured tropical hibiscus and frangipani in traditional cottage gardens. Occasional use of non-native plants such as ornamental Indian Hawthorn, hebes and Silver Spurflower (*Plectranthus argentatus*) tie native plants with exotic to play with themes and contrast the modern and traditional.

Many of the plants, and the style of the garden in general, could be described as contemporary coastal cottage, with neatly clipped darwinias, *Correa* 'Dusky Bells' and *Olearia axillaris* all taking once-considered open, straggly, short-lived shrubs into a new realm of gardening with the application of annual fertiliser and regular pruning to improve shape, density and longevity.

In its structural planting form, stately Messmates (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) provide the 'roof'; Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*), leptospermum and leucopogon the 'walls'; and a colourful mix of Cut-leaf Daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*), kangaroo paws, dwarf lilly pillies, and tufting lomandra and Swamp Foxtail Grass (*Cenchrus purpurascens*) feature within the pallet of plants 'carpeting' the rear yard's peaceful and relaxing fire pit and picnic table areas. The bright flowers featured in spring and summer make this retreat a pleasure to visit.

Most plantings are featured *en masse*, but occasional playful single-use plants surprise and offer a quirky presence around inviting corners of the beautiful stonework home. The highly floriferous Chef's Hat Correa (*Correa baeuerlenii*) is but one example. Enjoy finding the others...