



## GARDEN NOTES

### SUNNYMEADE

It was not a difficult choice to purchase our land back in 2000. The 'For Sale' sign had fallen over and the trees on the nature strip hid the true nature of the block of land. The greatest asset was the twisted Messmate Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) that gracefully stand on the site. We first moved onto the site shortly after the house was finished in 2003. Apart from planting some sheoaks and moonahs (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) before the house was started, not much thought had gone into the garden. By December we had moved in and the adrenaline and euphoria helped us ignore the mud, dust and scarred land!

From here on time was gladly spent dreaming about what to do in the garden. We wanted to have a garden that was easy to care for, fun for the kids and suitable for everyday family life. With a passion for plants we set out to use robust species – many of which are local or indigenous species.

We installed the water tanks, connecting some of the infrastructure. By the end of the second year we were ready to move forward. No amount of weekend work would make a difference without a plan. Everything seemed to be revolving around us establishing what we really wanted from the garden. (I can understand why people say the mechanic's car never gets a service and the landscaper's garden is never finished, as overcoming the challenge to do it for ourselves was rather difficult, including running a business and having four small children.) We had some great ideas, but even as a professional landscape gardener I really wanted to collaborate with a well-respected design team I had come to know through my own business. I put a call into Jim Sinatra and Phin Murphy from Sinatra Murphy. I had first met them through a project we undertook in Jan Juc together a few years earlier on an award-winning job, and at the same time we first met our architect Luke Middleton of EME design who designed the house. Jim and Phin spent a day with us working on a design idea which we felt was really strong and were happy to work with. A main focus was that the garden was to be more structured close to the house, and less structured further away. They discussed the ideas with Luke as well so we felt that we had a sense of cohesion.

The work started a year or so out from completing the design with excavations and footings for all the stone walls. Lots of infrastructure went in and for a while we lived in a 'war zone' of trenches, piles of dirt and piles of rock. I can distinctly remember guiding friends out at night under torch light with a trench on either side of the narrow path. The trenches slowly filled and the digging ended, however the stone piles continued for at least the next four years. We found this time incredibly frustrating; it felt like no man's land. The little time I had to work in the garden barely scratched the sides, so I just had to learn to be patient. However I could not get away from it as the view out each window was a reminder of all the things that had to be done.

We were able to finish some sections as the walls were completed which enabled us to 'stagger' the mostly indigenous planting. The area around the house was our first priority to have finished, with the front beds being planted along with the entry garden. From this point the garden began to feel semi-finished. This, along with the very early planting (pre-building), make some areas look well-established. The living screen structure was installed at this time along with the clothesline and the decks. The walls slowly came together which meant we could move forward with other aspects. Finally a day arrived when all the old stone was gathered up and removed, freeing up the site for the soft landscape. By mapping out the soft landscape and installing the main lawn, vegetable garden and garden beds out the front, it felt that finally time was working with us now and our garden began to grow as did our enjoyment.



The garden on the east side of the drive has been called the 'sacred garden'. This is because it is a reference to what was on the site before we moved in. It's the only true part of the 'natural bush' block left. Along with many interesting indigenous plants a flush of orchids come up in this garden in late winter and spring. We have infill-planted with indigenous plants.

Our architect's main influence on the garden was the alignment of the garage with the building. His idea was to bring the garden into the house and anchor the garage to the landscape with the use of strong lines in the form of a wall. Jim and Phin took on that challenge and turned it into a 'living screen'. The timber has been up for some time, the steel has only recently been installed and the planting will follow. The plan is to use a contrasting plant to the green-grey tones of the coastal garden: something bright and bold. Jim and Phin's influence is centred on this screen, it being the pivotal line from which linear plantings extend out at ninety degrees. The walls and the entry garden are also influenced by the living screen.

After living with a flat lawn for a number of years, we decided it was time for a change, so within the last year there is another addition. Nothing at Sunnymeade has been done in an ordinary way – that's a part of the charm of the garden! It's always been a dream of ours to have a sculpted lawn, which has probably come from Peter's green-keeping days. The logical design seemed to be to take the soil levels up, partly because the tree roots were sucking a lot of moisture out of the old lawn, and partly for the opportunity to sculpt. A three-dimensional image was drawn up showing almost perfect circles rising up out of the ground, which then became the favourable approach. Shade-tolerant buffalo lawn has been used, and low water use under-surface irrigation was installed, connected to the water tanks. This has brought a new dimension to the way in which the family uses the space: for instance children's play and reading a book on the lawn, as well as the visual impact you have when you walk in the gate.

It's often said that the landscaper's garden is never finished, but it's safe to say that all gardens are never finished – they are just going through their current stage. This is how we feel about our garden: it's an ongoing process that we can play a part in as time moves on and as our needs and experiences change. Only recently we had the idea of putting the small meandering track through the front garden. This has completely changed the way we move through the garden, and I walk people down this track to start with because you experience the site so differently. Our garden would not be a reality if it were not for the help, design ideas, upkeep and hard work of the people that work with Ocean Road Landscaping.

In 2014 this lovely and inspirational garden was awarded 'Best Use of Plants in the Landscape' by Landscaping Victoria.

The Sunnymeade story was also featured in the design files and the plant hunter.  
<http://thedesignfiles.net/2017/05/peter-shaw-sunnymeade/>

This garden is owned by Peter and Simone Shaw who also operate Ocean Road Landscaping, a company that Designs, Constructs and offers Garden Maintenance, a business which has been established for 20 years. Recently, the company has one various awards for its designs and business values.

*Peter and Simone Shaw*