



open invitation

Words & Photos: Sandra Batley

With an emphasis on entertaining, this subtropical-inspired front garden adds a sense of serenity



For many people, the ultimate escape from the pressures of everyday life is a holiday in a tropical paradise. Rather than wait for a holiday, the homeowners of this property decided to create their very own lush oasis in their front garden.

Faced with an overgrown wilderness at their doorstep, the owners of this property wanted to transform their garden into a subtropical paradise and called on Sandra Batley from Flourish to work her magic on their garden.

Both the home and garden of Pat and Roger Ansin were hidden under towering macrocarpa and gum trees, permanently shrouding it in shade. It was run-down and had been untouched for a number of years. "We were never inclined to entertain or to even go outside to relax," says Pat. "We felt like hermits in our own home."

The site posed a number of challenges and required some clever design solutions. As their landscape designer, I wanted to create something very special for them. The key was to maximise the outdoor space for entertaining

as well as provide an attractive, functional entrance and driveway area.

The homeowners' dream was to create a private garden where they could entertain and retreat after a busy day working. "We wanted a tranquil environment — somewhere to relax and feel secluded," says Pat.

The brief was to create a separate and attractive entrance to the property as well as an outdoor living area to entertain in. The homeowners also wanted to create a sense of space while keeping their privacy. They dreamt of coming home to a resort-style garden so it would feel like they were on holidays every day of the year.

During the design process, I quickly came to the conclusion that everything had to go; there was nothing worth keeping. The 15-metre-high trees that had blocked out the sun for years had also caused havoc with drainage, retaining walls, the driveway and paving. Once they were removed, a whole new dimension immediately opened up.

There were also some serious issues to contend with regarding drainage. The tree

roots had crushed the stormwater line, which was one metre underground. All the water was therefore seeping out and undermining the driveway, causing it to slump 250mm and not allowing the homeowners to drive into the garage. All the damaged pipes had to be replaced and an extensive drainage system was put in place to prevent any further damage to the house.

Landscape contractor John Eagleton from Outside Edge took on the challenge of turning the concept into reality. The result is an eye-catching, dynamic design that cleverly separates the entrance and driveway area from the new sunny entertainment space. The stylish outdoor living area now flows directly from the interior living space.

A comfortable bench seat was built into the retaining wall to provide an additional place to sit. Solid cedar fences and entrance gates were built to provide much-needed privacy and seclusion from the road. Dark natural oil was applied to protect and enhance the natural grains of the timber.



It was important to use natural materials in an innovative, stylish way. Kwila was used for the decks and the timber batten detail that clads the face of the timber retaining walls. This detail was also used in a feature wall to clearly define and separate the two main areas, also giving the garden an exotic feel. Large-format sandstone pavers lead you to the entrance door from the driveway and add a sophisticated, welcoming first impression.

It was important to enhance the natural beauty of the site and recreate a touch of the tropics. To achieve this, a palette of predominately green, bold-leaved tropical plants was introduced to create a restful, serene garden environment. The plants are now flourishing in the microclimate that was inadvertently created with the new high boundary walls and warm, north-facing aspect.

Plants were chosen for their bold architectural form with a strong emphasis on foliage versus flowers. Two graceful kentia palms add instant structure to the garden →

front gardens

and give it an established feel. *Ligularia reniformis* has been planted in pockets around the garden for a dramatic effect. Green taro is planted in the background and *Gardenia augusta* 'Veitchii' was planted for its sweet scent, with *Cycad revoluta* (sago palm) and *Dicksonia fibrosa* (tree fern) chosen for their amazing form.

A lighting system was also installed to showcase the plants and other special features and to link the house with the garden at night. Extending the use of the garden well into the evening was also made possible with outdoor lighting.

Water gently slips down the face of a large black stone pot modified into a water feature. "It provides a calming effect in the garden," explains Roger. "We fell in love with it once we had it placed in the garden."

The clients absolutely love their new garden. "It has completely changed the way we live because it has opened up the outside to us — our front yard was practically non-existent before the makeover," says Roger. The homeowners now have a place to escape to and can spend more time in their garden enjoying the serenity and privacy it provides. ■

Sandra Batley is a multi-award-winning landscape designer. Her company, Flourish, is based in Auckland. www.flourishgardens.co.nz



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