



# EAST MEETS WEST

A blend of Balinese elements and local design gives this garden a dramatic new look

Story: Sandra Batley  
Photos: Frances Oliver



**W**hen it came to creating a garden for their new home, Tony and Debbie Wilson were inspired by a recent trip to Bali. Their aim was to merge the experience of a Balinese resort-style holiday with a simple, down-to-earth style of architecture.

“We wanted to create a tranquil environment to emulate some of the ambience of Bali using water, tropical plants and other sculptural elements, but still maintain a unique Kiwi flavour,” says Tony. The result is a spectacular garden exhibiting an innovative blend of styles and eye-catching features.

Simon Stevenson of Stevenson’s Architects was commissioned to design the family home on a piece of land situated a stone’s throw from Lucas Creek in Albany, Auckland. “It was important to have the landscape designed and built at the same time as the house so there was a cohesive, unifying result,” says Tony.

Tony and Debbie collaborated on the design of the garden with landscape contractor John Eagleton of Outside Edge. He had also designed and built two previous successful projects with them and was familiar with their working style.

During a family vacation in Bali, Tony and Debbie came across a village of Balinese and Italian artisans who were creating amazing stone interior and exterior products destined for the European market. This greatly influenced the final look and feel of their new home and garden. Two containers filled with stone tiles, large pots and other artefacts were shipped back to Auckland to be incorporated into the garden.

The single-storey, low-slung home sits comfortably at the centre of the 1750m<sup>2</sup> property, dividing the areas to be landscaped into two clearly defined spaces. Stage one of the project was to landscape the front section of the property. In view of the site sloping away from the road, two main areas were designed to step down from the street entrance. One single cut was excavated and a long, low retaining wall was built to define and separate the lower courtyard from the upper garage area. The decision was made to construct one long gabion wall to sit in front of a timber retaining wall, adding a simple iconic element to the design.

Earlier concepts saw the top area being terraced into a series of low retaining walls. What evolved was an innovative flight of tiled steps designed to access the house from the street. A wide timber boardwalk then leads you directly to the front door. At night, the steps become an eye-catching focal point using simple but dramatic lighting. The remaining sloping area was carefully prepared and an expansive serene green lawn was established, which they have regularly maintained to keep it looking lush and healthy. →



The contemporary Zen-like feel of the garden was achieved using a strict, dramatic palette of colours: black, cream and green. "The key was not to use too much white or the garden would look too stark and if there was too much black it would look morbid," says Tony. "We wanted to create a calm, restful scene." The restrained use of colour was key to relating the garden to the dark exterior of the cedar slat house.

Black was echoed in the garden using a few key accessories. Three large ebony stone pots sit on individual concrete plinths that jut dramatically out from a sea of green grass. Stylish black outdoor couches contrast with the cream sandstone tiles in the courtyard.

Black slat screens wrap around a hidden edible garden where Debbie grows a variety of aromatic kitchen herbs and vegetables.

Plants were chosen for their bold architectural form with a strong emphasis on foliage versus flowers. The garden is a mix of tropical plants, planted in groups for maximum impact and simplicity. John planted a single sweep of *Gardenia radicans* as a scented groundcover. The arching fronds of two large butia palms also make a strong visual statement in the lower garden. *Ligularia reniformis* is thriving underneath the long gabion wall. The huge, glossy green leaves add a dramatic touch.

Water gently slips down the face of three terrazzo stone water features flanking one side of a long timber boardwalk leading to the front door. "They provide a sensory element, which was very important to this garden," explains Debbie.

A small paved square courtyard is an extension of the home's living room. The easterly aspect captures the morning sun, making it an ideal space to have morning coffee. "We have uninterrupted views through the house out to the water, which makes this space very relaxing to be in," says Debbie.

The family swimming pool designed for the rear garden was completed in time for summer. "We are really looking forward to chilling out by the pool," says Tony. ■