



GROUND CONTROL

Tucked below the escarpment fringing Kangaroo Valley in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, a gently mounded, sculptural garden takes root in the wider landscape.

PHOTOGRAPHER: NICHOLAS WATT PRODUCER/WRITER: HELEN REDMOND



TOP LEFT: THE GRAVEL DRIVEWAY IS FLANKED WITH PLANTINGS OF *HELICHRYSUM PETIOLARE* (LICORICE PLANT), *NEOMARICA CAERULEA* (WALKING IRIS), *VIBURNUM TINUS* (LAURUSTINUS) AND *WESTRINGIA FRUTICOSA* (COASTAL ROSEMARY). **LEFT:** A COPSE OF SILVER BIRCH IS GENEROUSLY UNDER-PLANTED WITH NATIVE VIOLETS AND SELF-MOUNDING *SANNANTHA BIDWILLII* (TWIGGY HEATH MYRTLE).

ABOVE: BORDERING THE LAWN AND POOL SPACES, THE CLIPPED MOUNDS ADD FORMALITY TO THE LARGE COUNTRY GARDEN, CONTAINED WITHIN STRONG BLADES OF HEDGES THAT ACCENTUATE THE BROADER VISTA. "THE WAY WE TREAT THE VIEW IS JUST TO FRAME IT," SAYS LANDSCAPE DESIGNER HUGH MAIN. THE WARM, EARTHY PALETTE OF STONEMWORK IN LOCAL BUSH ROCK COLLECTED FROM THE SITE REAPPEARS IN THE ESCARPMENT, ROCKS AND SOIL. SELECTED NATIVE SPECIES "BORROWED" FROM THE EXTERNAL WINDBREAKS HAVE BEEN FILTERED INTO THE GARDEN TO PROVIDE A NATURAL LINK TO THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE.




WHEN THE MISTS that regularly shroud the valley disperse in the morning sun, the softly billowing, sculptural silhouette of the garden emerges beneath the escarpment. Reminiscent of the cloud gardens of Japan, the formal clipped 'pillows' have more in common with the organic gardens of Spanish landscape architect Fernando Caruncho and French designer Nicole de Vesian than the traditional rectilinear gardens we associate with the idea of 'formal'. But the gently mounded, manicured garden that has taken root in this benign valley climate also takes inspiration from natural wind-pruned headland vegetation and its setting in the Australian bush. "Overwhelmingly there is the 360-degree view," says designer Hugh Main of Spirit Level Design. "You need to access the dramatic escarpment, the rolling hillsides and the open valley below and respond."

The garden unfolds as a series of connected spaces, each distinct. There is the car park garden, the stepping-stone garden and arbour, the walled vegetable garden with direct access to the kitchen, the amoeba garden – taking its name from the free-form shapes – and then the main lawn, the open space between the house and the pool. The rhythm of the spaces is a response to architecture and landscape. "It's very practical and organised, except perhaps for the amoeba garden, which is pure folly," says Main. Designed by his business partner, Adam Jones, the maze-like garden was drawn up and then

handed to Main to translate into plantings. *Elaeagnus pungens* (silverberry), an experimental choice, has proved a great success. Throughout the garden, a mix of natives and exotics have been chosen for their ability to thrive in this light, a muted palette of soft greys, green and silvers that "just works" in the Australian landscape. Manicured mounds of *Viburnum tinus* (*laurostimus*), *Westringia fruticosa* (coastal rosemary), Japanese box and *Helicrysum petiolare* (licorice plant) blend with *Eucalyptus maculata* (spotted gum) and selected native species drawn from the surrounding windbreak to connect the garden to the broader landscape. Elements of the previous garden, a mature copse of silver birch and avenues of claret ash lining the drive, were expanded and filtered into the new plantings, anchoring the fledgling garden, which in this climate has a maturity that defies its relatively short existence. Spaces were set up to place sculpture as focus points, but it became evident this was unnecessary – the landscape more than satisfies the role. Careful openings in the blade hedges and points of access channel views and frame the valley scene.

It's a sizeable garden, more than 5000 square metres, and to maintain a garden of this scale and complexity "takes a lot of love", Main admits. Its intense horticultural beauty has become a drawcard for its transient owners, a business couple with young children, who commute when they can to what they call their "slice of heaven on earth". VL



A TAPESTRY OF INTENSE HORTICULTURE, THE WALLED VEGETABLE GARDEN IS ACCESSIBLE FROM THE KITCHEN AND IS LAID OUT IN A FORMAL CRUCIFIX DESIGN, CONTAINED WITHIN A LILLY PILLI HEDGE TO SHELTER IT FROM WIND. THE OWNERS, AVID COOKS, AIMED FOR A COMPLETELY SUSTAINABLE VEGETABLE GARDEN.



SET BENEATH A TOWERING ESCARPMENT TO THE NORTH, **OPPOSITE PAGE**, THE FORMAL CLIPPED MOUNDS OF ELAEAGNUS PUNGENS (SILVERBERRY) ECHO THE ROLLING HILLSIDES, THE AMOEBA GARDEN, **THIS PAGE**, OVERLOOKS THE FORMAL KITCHEN GARDEN, WHICH IS HEDGED WITH LILLY PILLY.

