

A RECTANGULAR ARCH AT THE END OF A COLONNADED PORTICO FRAMES AN ANTIQUE PITHOI OLIVE JAR. IN THE BACKGROUND, A HEDGE OF 'LEIGHTON GREEN' LEYLAND CYPRESS IS BORDERED WITH CLIPPED WESTRINGIA AND BUXUS. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.



## Mediterraneo

*Affectionately called the 'Godfather Garden' by the family whose lives play out within its walls, this garden captures the essence of Mediterranean style.*

**THIS PAGE:** THE STRONG RECTILINEAR LINES OF THE CLASSICAL FAÇADE, CLAD IN WEST AUSTRALIAN SOMERSTONE, ARE SOFTENED BY FORMAL YET CONTEMPORARY ASYMMETRICAL TOPIARY SPHERES OF BUXUS, WESTRINGIA, FEIJOA (PINEAPPLE GUAVA) AND SANTOLINA THAT COMPLEMENT THE OCHRE-COLOURED STONE.

THE BENIGN DRY warmth of the Mediterranean inspires a certain style of architecture: sun-bleached colours; bold, simple forms; and unfettered, classical detail. This was the essence of the brief given to architect Phil Abram for a new Sydney home, and in turn inspired a garden so cleverly and thoroughly integrated that the two are viewed as a single entity.

Landscaper and designer Hugh Main, of Spirit Level Designs, worked in tandem with the architect to achieve a cohesive vision from the outset. "There was no need to compete with the building, no flaws to disguise," says Main. "The garden is designed to enhance the architecture, and in turn the building gives a framework and backdrop that accentuates the design. They reference each other very strongly."

The spartan, rectilinear building is clad in West Australian limestone, a soft buff-coloured natural stone that gives the building an earthy, natural feel. The building material informed the detail of the garden. Deep rectangular openings in the limestone façade form a colonnaded portico at the front of the house. The limestone was sliced into tiles and laid in a traditional herringbone pattern in the portico and also laid more informally into a stepping-stone path to the front gate. Set in gravel lawn, a random, asymmetrical planting of clipped topiary spheres pay homage to the building's classical lines while softening its effect.

"There is little detailing in the architecture so there needed to be little detail in the garden, or something floral," says Main. "The garden is appropriate to the house. It was more about creating something classical and traditional. A formal garden would be clipped, but rather than a symmetrical, rectilinear shape we've gone for something more organic, partially because the side entry didn't allow a balanced symmetrical approach. The form of the sphere also contrasts with the very strong rectilinear architecture, and allowed us to be more asymmetrical, more contemporary."

The choice of plants is also a mix of traditional and contemporary, spanning a palette of green and grey to complement the ochre-coloured limestone. >



CASUALLY LAID WEST AUSTRALIAN LIMESTONE PAVERS LEAD TO AN INFORMAL COURTYARD GARDEN AT THE REAR OF THE PROPERTY. THE ARCHITECTURE FRAMES STILL-LIFE VIEWS OF ORNAMENTS OR FURNITURE, SUCH AS THE VENUS STATUE. BOTH THE STATUE AND THE STONE PLINTH BENCH ARE FROM YARDWARE.



< A strong traditional base of conifer hedging is mixed with *Buxus*; *Westringia*, a native coastal rosemary; *Santolina*, a grey Mediterranean plant; and *Feijoa*, another Mediterranean variety.

At the rear of the property the limestone is randomly laid in what the family has nicknamed the 'Godfather Garden', an informal courtyard with an outdoor table-setting sheltered by an avenue of *Olea europaea* (olive trees). The canopy of olive trees acts as an umbrella, giving a sense of intimacy and dappled cool. Even in the heat of the Sydney summer it is a delightful place to retreat or entertain. There is a strong classic reference in the plantings here, with the carefully laid avenue without any under-plantings or floral interludes and a restrained colour scheme of olive trees, gravel and hedges for privacy. The trees also frame views of the garden and the home.

This house doesn't have a view, so the outlook from every window was carefully

treated as an opportunity to create a still life: a combination of sculpture, objects, furniture, a pond – all are framed and embellished with plant material. "The whole composition of the garden was thoroughly thought out, from every vantage point from within the house and within the garden."

Each area has a distinct personality, but there is also a unity. All share a combination of limestone, gravel and plant materials. The palette is the same, but the texture and patterns are different, and the level of detail changes as you move about the garden.

Detail is also evident in the manicuring of this garden, but it's seen as therapy rather than hard work. "The concept of low-maintenance gardens is appropriate for people who don't like gardening," says Main. "For those who actually like the process it is something to be embraced and enjoyed. Putting effort into caring for your environment has huge benefits to your soul." HELEN REDMOND



ABOVE TOP: NICKNAMED THE 'GODFATHER GARDEN', AN INFORMAL SETTING IS SHELTERED BY A CANOPY OF *OLEA EUROPAEA* OLIVE TREES. A LEYLAND CYPRESS HEDGE SCREENS A HERB GARDEN ON THE BOUNDARY AND FRAMES CROSS VIEWS OF A CLASSICAL URN, ABOVE.