

Gardens



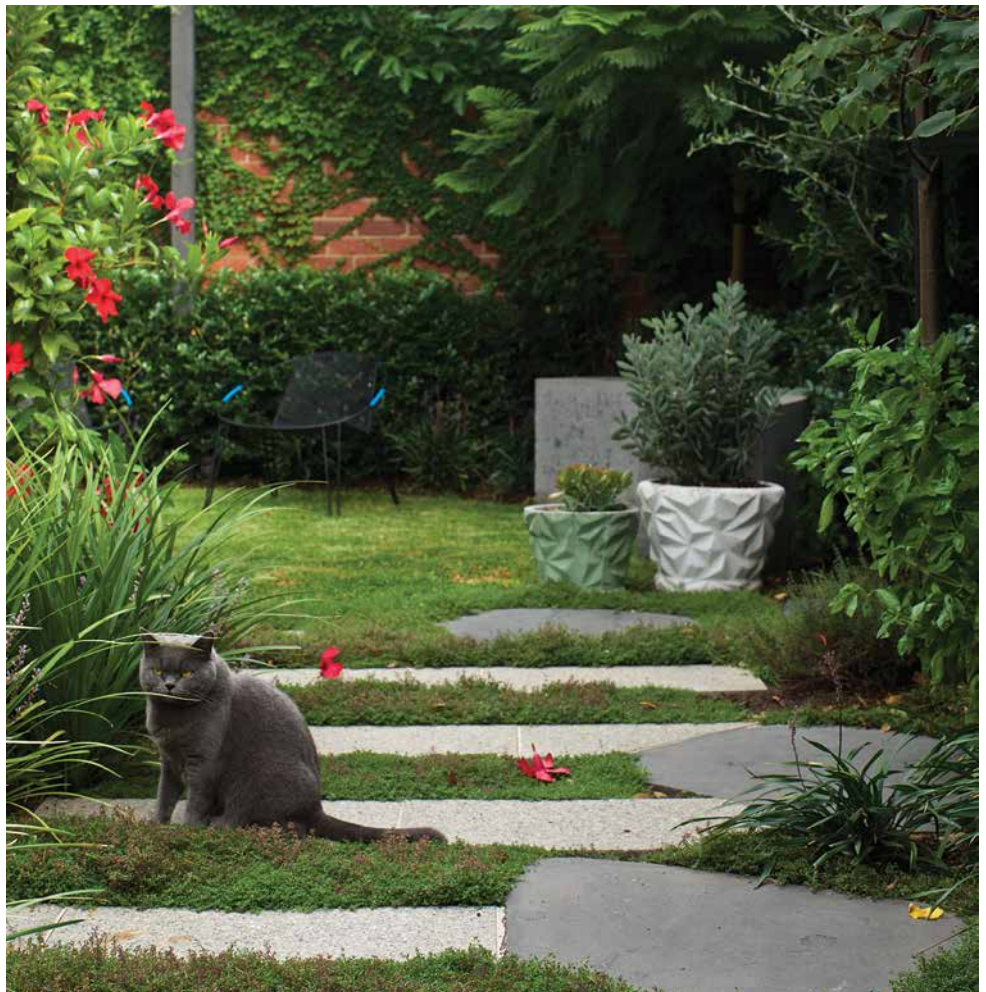
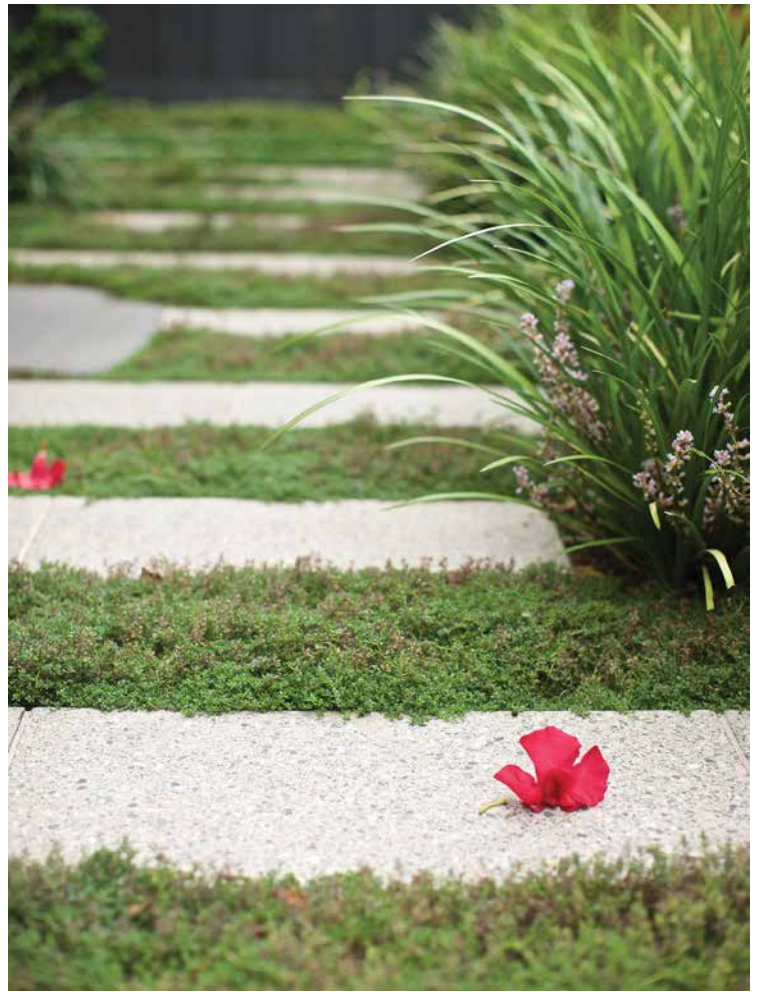


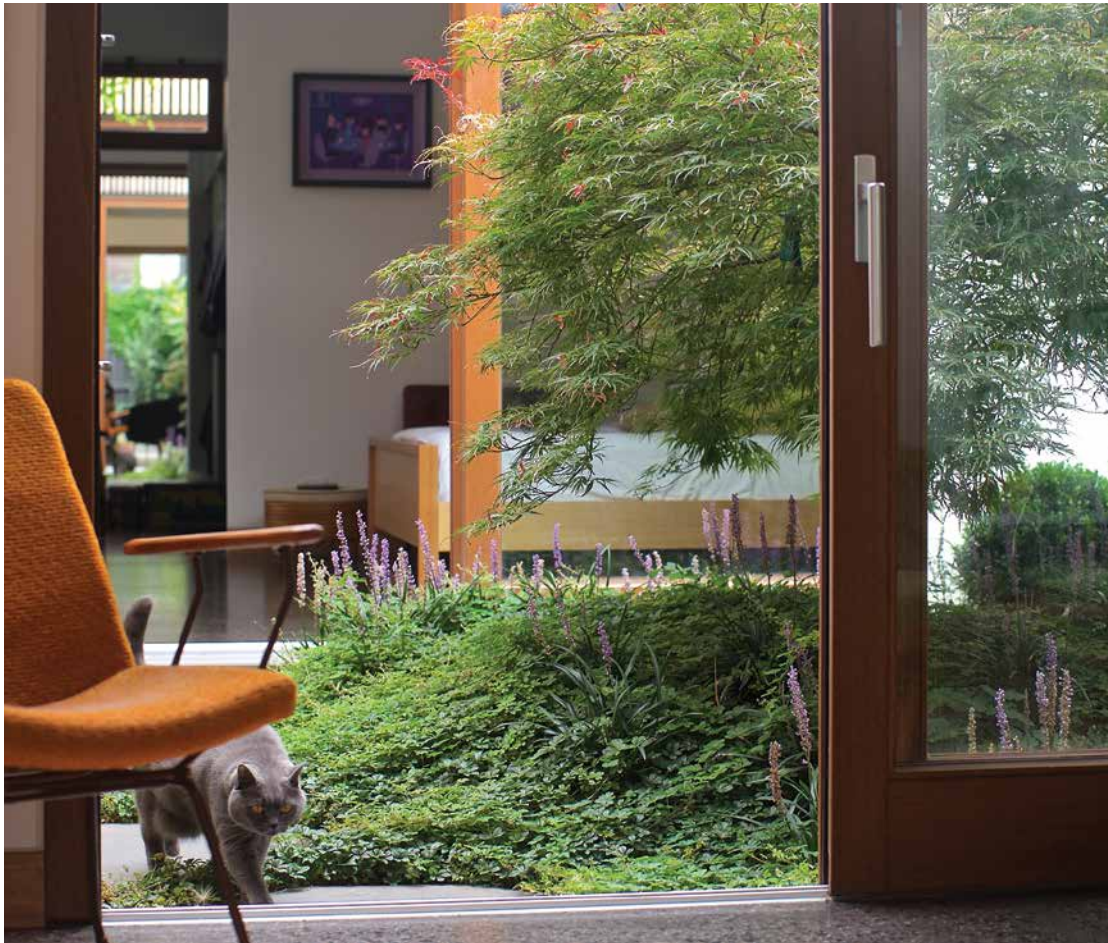
Retro Zen

text: **Vanessa Murray** photography: **Tamsin O'Neill**

The classic division between in- and out-of-doors falls away in this tranquil north-facing dwelling, where the owners' twin love for Japanese aestheticism and 1950s modernism led the design.

A circular lawn is given a secret garden vibe with lush plantings, retro pots and pops of colour in the back garden.
opposite page The front garden presents passersbys with a Japanese mountain landscape in miniature.





The view from the lounge through the second courtyard into the main bedroom. **opposite page top left** Boston ivy climbs all of the boundary walls on the property. **right** Rectangular strips of Terrazzo tiles. **bottom left** Lush groundcover nestles the bluestone pavers. **right** Asymmetry in the design creates Japanese style balance.

Once a nondescript single-storey yellow brick house, today the new build that straddles this property in a quiet heritage pocket of Melbourne's vibrant inner-north has both the grandeur and reclusive hush of a Japanese mountain retreat.

Crafted from custom-made concrete brick and spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*), the house sits low and squat on the block. Two gabled rooves peak asymmetrically skywards, while inside, the distinction between internal and external dissolves. This is due to the unique and award-winning design that sees a series of pavilions and courtyards unfold with the beauty and precision of origami, anchored by gardens at the front and the back.

"The house contains five distinct internal pavilions, or houses, and three courtyards, or voids. Each pavilion has a discrete function, and is linked through a main axis, which doubles as circulation spine," explains architect Steffen Welsch.

The house is also a stunning example of passive solar principles in practice. Of note is the way the courtyards draw in natural light and ventilation, as well as the presence of a timber screen made from sustainably sourced teak on the exterior of the highly insulated lightweight walls. These reduce heat loads in summer and, along with the verdant planting, assist with shade and cooling.

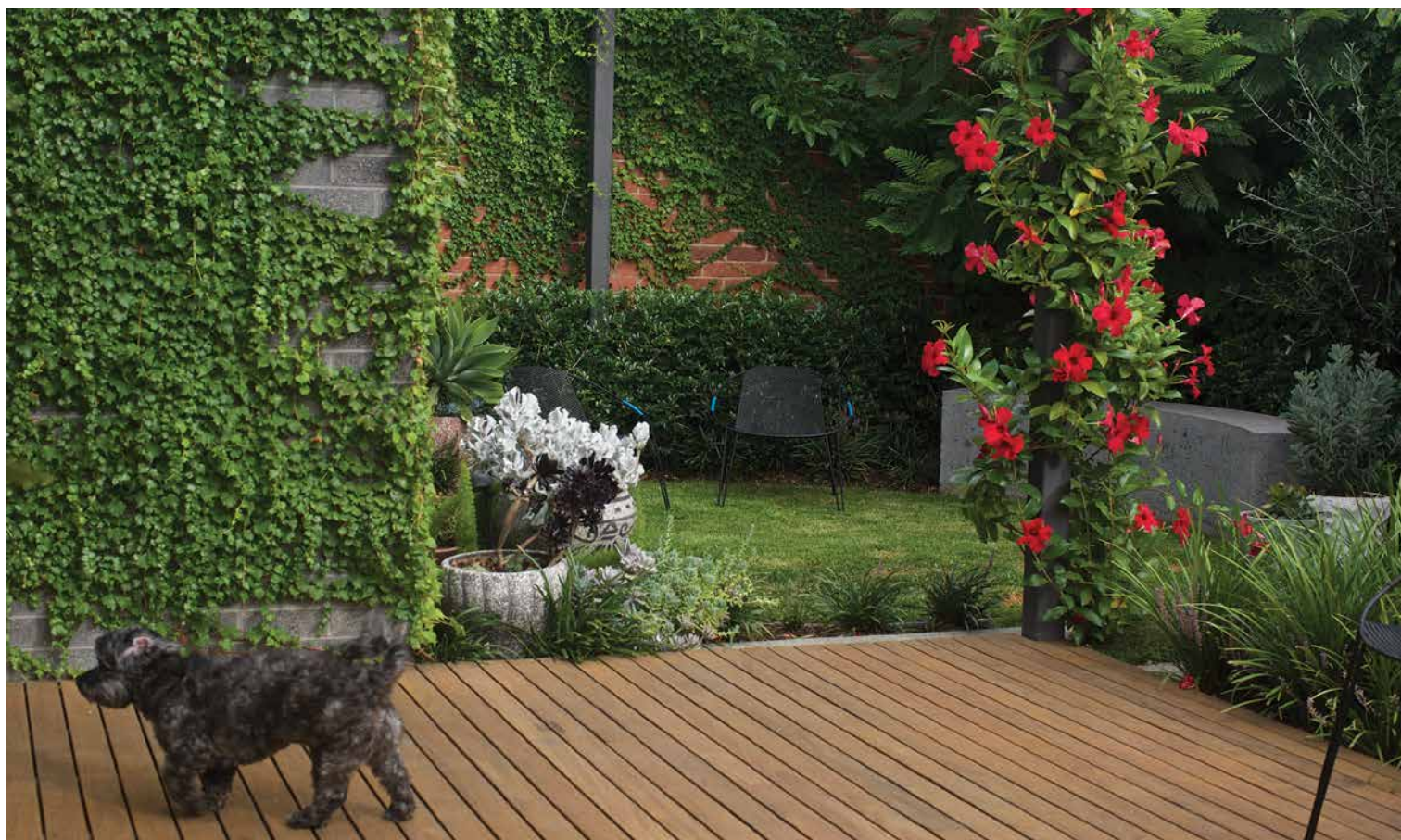
Landscape designer Kate Seddon has carried the house's Japanese aesthetic into the gardens and courtyards, along with

some references, both playful and personal, to the clients' love for all things 1950s modernism.

"The front garden is a small, idealised representation of a natural landscape, which is a typical feature of Japanese garden design. Asymmetry is important – the three cross-sections of bluestone boulders give the impression of mountain ranges receding into the distance," says Seddon.

Three maples echo the pattern, while five bluestone pavers mark the path to the front door. They wend their way through an assortment of textured groundcover: dwarf mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), blue bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and turf lily (*Liriope muscari*). A delicate smooth hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens Annabelle*) gives a nod to the 1950s, along with terrazzo paving and a sturdy Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) that climbs the house and boundary walls.

Plants and design elements that feature in the front garden are threaded through the house's other green spaces too. In the first courtyard, which sits between two bathrooms, a tall brushy conifer (*Cupressocyparis leylandii*) gives users privacy, even if they choose to shower with the timber-framed glass swing doors open. A landscape in miniature defines the second, which is located between the master bedroom and lounge on the western side. Five bluestone pavers traverse each. →

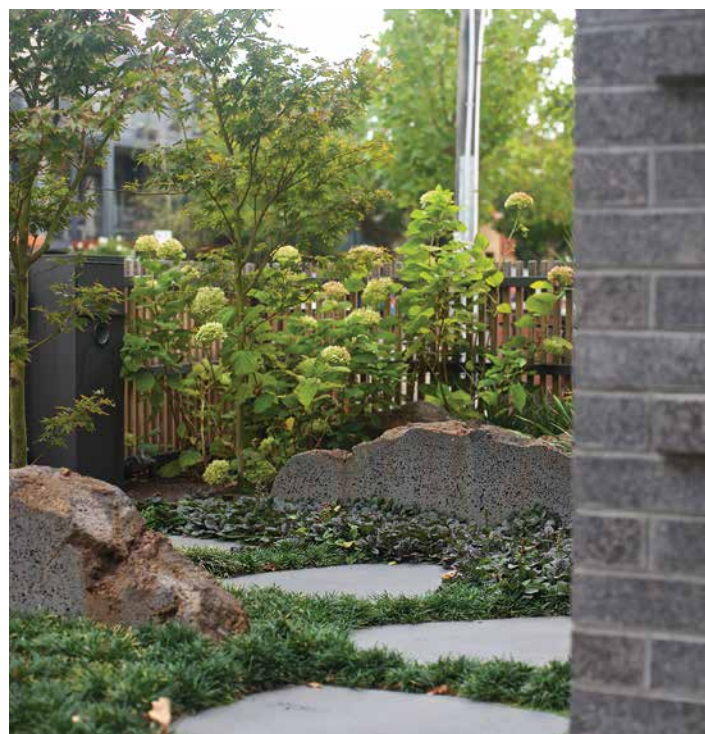


top The back deck is crafted from radial sawn silvertop ash (*Eucalyptus sieberiana*). **bottom** Dramatic cross-sections of rough hewn bluestone emphasised by smooth pavers and a stunning smooth Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens Annabelle*).

“We created a framed view from these rooms by sculpting a mound that features a beautiful weeping Japanese maple (*Acer ‘Dissectum Atropurpureum’*), while the English box hedging (*Buxus*) beyond mimics a backdrop of hills. An antique granite Japanese lantern stands in one corner, the clients’ hummingbird fuschia (*Fuchsia magellanica*) in another – to emphasise the perspective,” says Seddon.

The third courtyard bridges the study and kitchen to the east, and is the house’s largest. It’s floored with radial sawn silvertop ash (*Eucalyptus sieberiana*) decking for outdoor dining. The same ash is carried through to a small deck extending from the parquet-floored dining room into the back garden.

Beyond the deck, rectangular strips of terrazzo tiles and bluestone pavers punctuate low ground cover. At one end is the washing line and service area; at the other, a circular lawn with a curved exposed aggregate bench at its zenith. Retro-style planters spill over with succulents and a passionfruit vine (*Passiflora edulis*) climbs the western boundary wall, while a jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) will grow to provide canopy for the residents of this thoughtfully designed home for years to come. 🌿



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