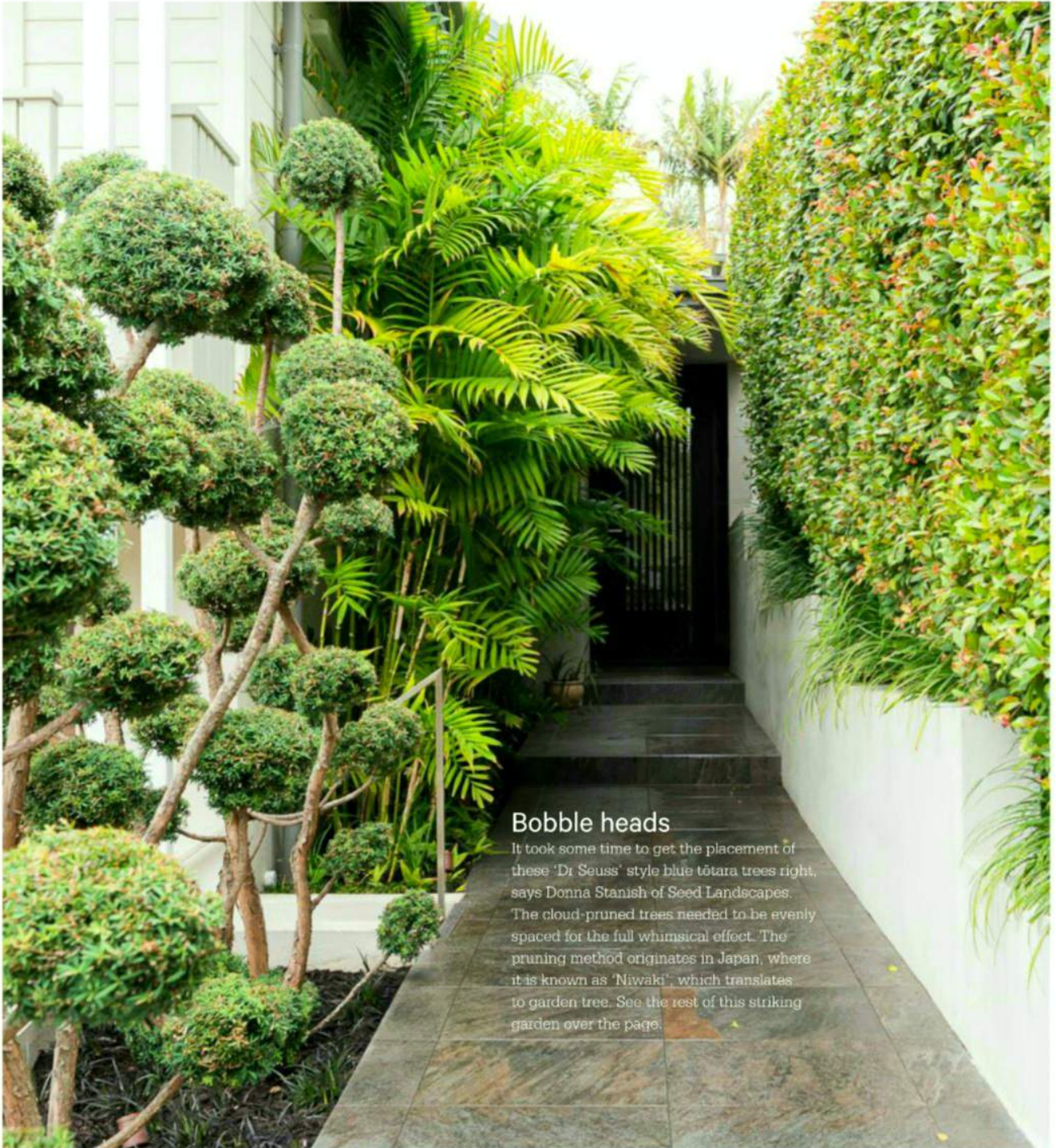


# YOUR Garden

Gardening, landscaping and outdoor living



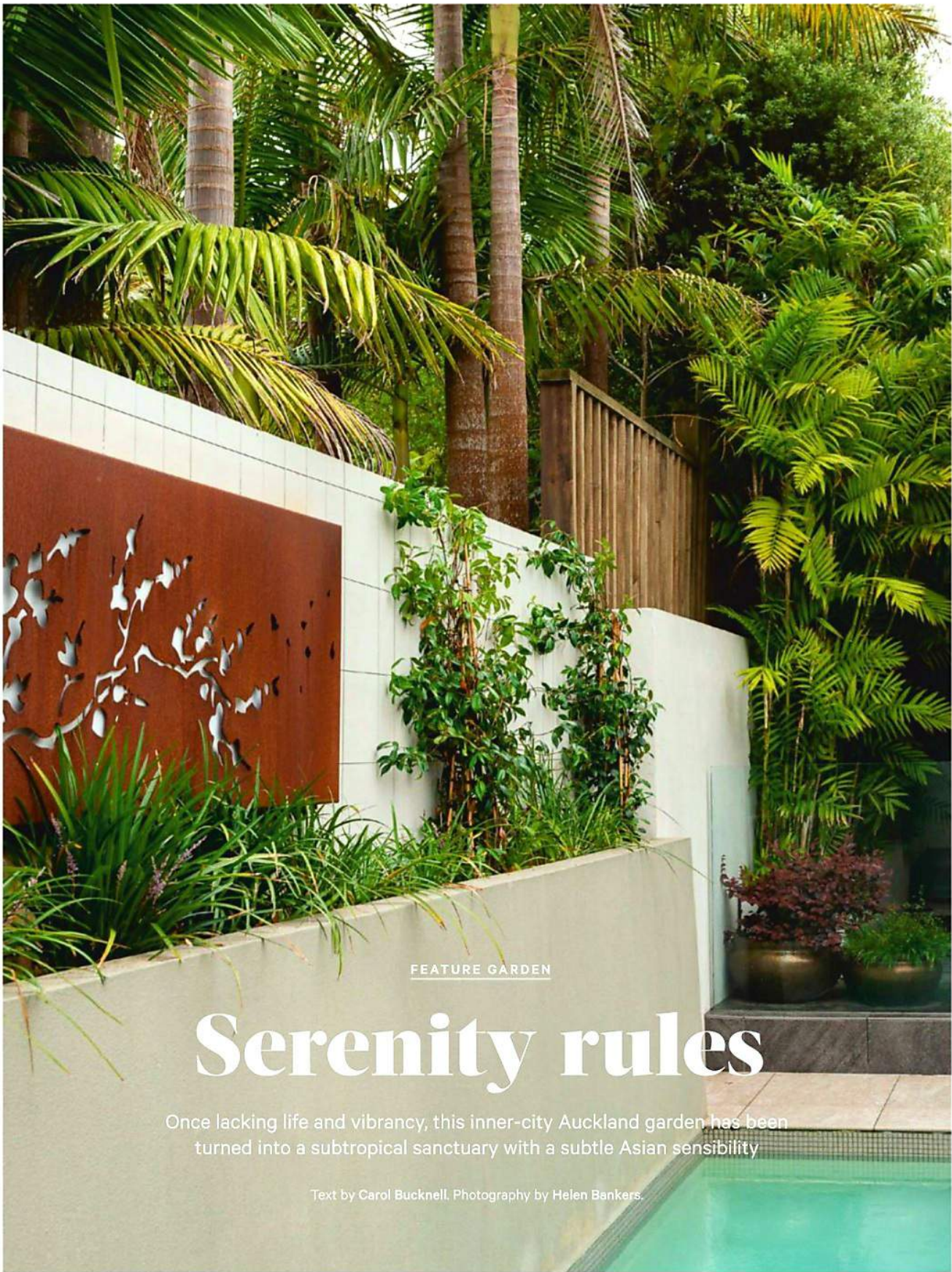
## Bobble heads

It took some time to get the placement of these 'Dr Seuss' style blue tōtara trees right, says Donna Stanish of Seed Landscapes. The cloud-pruned trees needed to be evenly spaced for the full whimsical effect. The pruning method originates in Japan, where it is known as 'Niwaki', which translates to garden tree. See the rest of this striking garden over the page.

Photography by Helen Bankers.

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FEATURE GARDEN

# Serenity rules

Once lacking life and vibrancy, this inner-city Auckland garden has been turned into a subtropical sanctuary with a subtle Asian sensibility

Text by Carol Bucknell, Photography by Helen Bankers.





**COLOUR FIELD** The weeping maple *Acer palmatum* 'Tamukeyama' puts on a show with foliage that changes colour through the seasons. The raised lawn is bordered by Corten steel. The view of neighbouring palm trees creates an enclosed, subtropical feel.



**A**mong the many beautiful architecturally designed homes and gardens that line the streets around Auckland's inner-city, there's a special set of trees that grab the attention of passers-by. The graceful trunks and cloud-pruned foliage of the blue tōtara trees lining the driveway of this delightful property have earned the admiration of many. "People stop and comment on them all the time," says designer Donna Stanish of Seed Landscapes. "The children from the primary school up the road love them. They call them 'Dr Seuss trees'."

### THE SITE

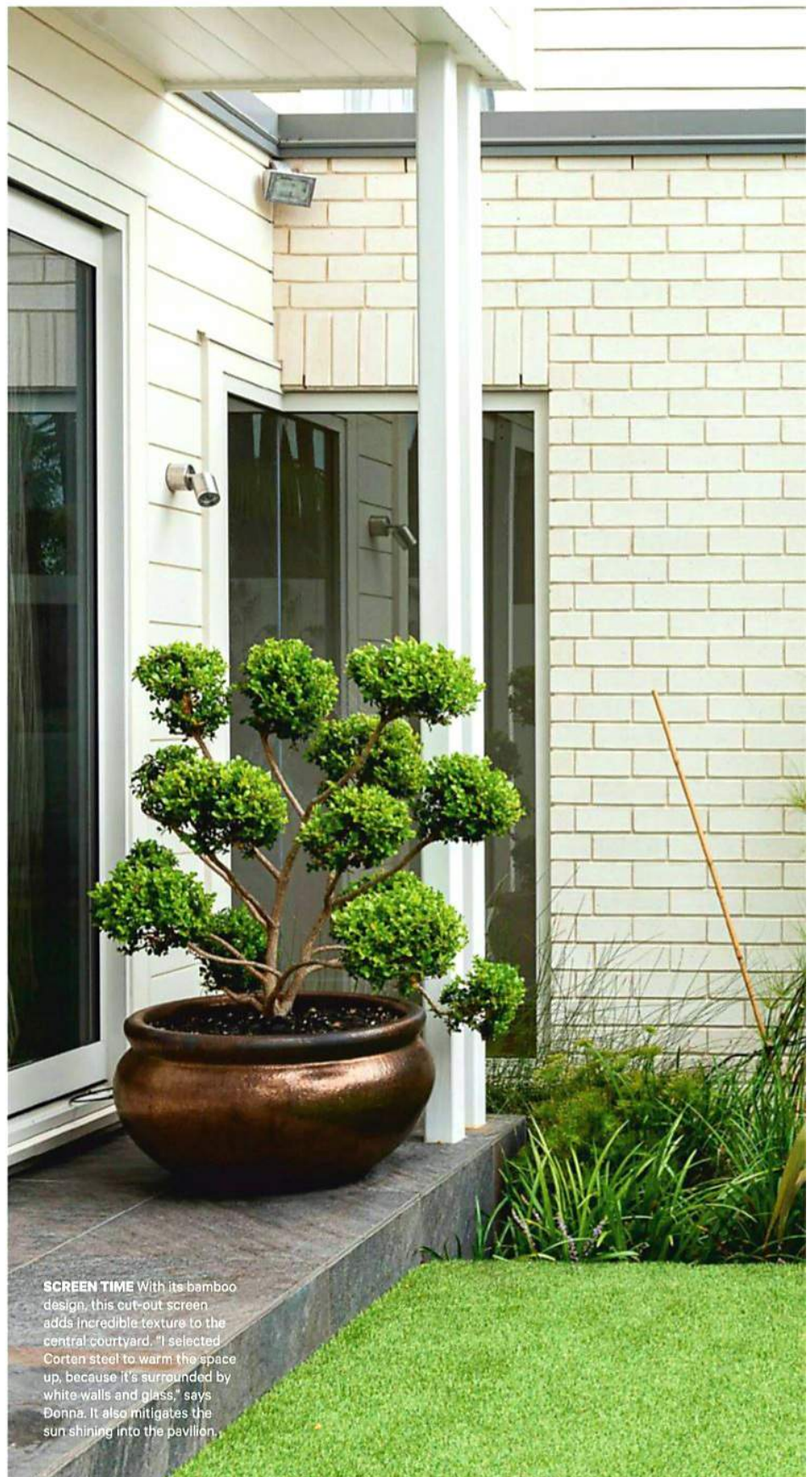
A fusion of Asian and contemporary landscape ideas features throughout the garden, which covers a steep, narrow site. The modern house, designed by Leuschke Kahn Architects, is comprised of two double-storey pavilions linked by a glass rectangle, with three courtyard gardens and two narrow side areas around it. Five years ago, not long after buying the property, the owners, Khoo and Eve, approached Donna to come up with a landscape plan for the outside spaces, which were uninspiring to say the least.

"The house was built by a developer for resale," the designer explains. "He had planted tractor seat plants (*Ligularia*) everywhere and they were not doing well. The garden did not measure up to the quality of the home and was devoid of personality. It was bare and uninviting. The driveway, lap pool, decks and paving were all there, but the central courtyard was like a carpark with cracked ready lawn and bare gravel. The top courtyard had an uneven surface and just wasn't welcoming."

### THE BRIEF

"My clients wanted a garden that reflected their cultural heritage along with a love of art and beautiful materials," continues Donna. "But the more we talked, the more the brief expanded as we discussed how they liked to live. Eve liked all the suggestions I made. The house was built pretty much as a spec home and was devoid of personality. They needed to be able to put their stamp on it."

"It was about creating an inviting and attractive entrance and lush subtropical planting in the courtyards, with an Asian sensibility – beautiful spaces that would be well used for lounging and entertaining."



**SCREEN TIME** With its bamboo design, this cut-out screen adds incredible texture to the central courtyard. "I selected Corten steel to warm the space up, because it's surrounded by white walls and glass," says Donna. It also mitigates the sun shining into the pavilion.



**“It was about creating an inviting and attractive entrance and lush subtropical planting...beautiful spaces that would be well used.”**







**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** *Chamaedorea costaricana* cluster palms lead to the main entrance; installing and spacing the cloud-pruned tōtara trees proved a puzzle for the garden designer but the results never fail to capture the attention of passers-by, especially children, who call them "Dr Seuss trees"; scented plants, including gardenias, give off a lovely fragrance that wafts into the house throughout summer; the choice of materials has created a rich and varied sanctuary.



## THE PROCESS

Implemented by Craftsman Gardener Services, the top of the site was retained and levelled and a herb garden added, making a more usable private space for the bedrooms that open onto it. In the central courtyard, a huge amount of material had to be removed and the badly compacted soil considerably improved before any planting could take place. "It was a mission," says Donna, who project-managed the whole thing.

A paved terrace with a louvred pergola has replaced the deck off the living area. A raised artificial lawn softens the hard surfaces, its edges made of Corten steel. The same material has been used for two laser-cut decorative panels on either side of the courtyard, one above the pool and two larger ones on either side of the doors to the glass hallway pavilion.

"I put the screen over the big windows because that pavilion was so hot, it was like a big box of glass that didn't connect to the garden. The idea is to have some pattern and shadows inside and out, but to be able to see through the screen," Donna explains.

## PLANTING

Most of the existing *Ligularia* and several palms were removed but the existing *Syzygium* hedge was saved, although it was in serious decline.

"We had to run some emergency irrigation and mulching. Then we organised a company called New Leaf to come in and spray it with an organic seaweed-based foliar fertiliser which revitalised the plants as well as helping to reduce pests. It's a lifesaver for sick hedges."

Donna also kept the existing cluster palms (*Chamaedorea costaricana*) in the side areas leading to the main entrance, underplanting them with *Litrope* 'Evergreen Giant'. "This plant is a good height, 600mm x 600mm, and great for disguising the bare ankles of trees and shrubs. I have used it in most areas to bring a sense of cohesiveness to the garden. It's good in sun and shade as long as you lay snail bait in September/October."

Maples are star plants of the garden. In the central pool courtyard is an elegantly trained grafted Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Tamukeyama') and up higher, in the top rear courtyard, is a row of coral bark maples (*Acer palmatum* 'Senkaki') which have brilliant autumn leaves and flame-red stems in winter. Donna sourced them from specialist nursery Tamata Holdings.

Placement of the cloud-pruned blue tōtara (*Podocarpus totara* 'Matapouri Blue') in the entrance garden was quite a feat, she recalls. "I had to make sure the trees were not blocking each other and that they were evenly spaced. The arrangement of the balls could not overlap, nor should there be large gaps. It took me quite a while to get it right – drove everyone mad!"



## THE RESULT

Eve and Khoo now have two small children and the garden works well for the family, both during the day when lounging by the pool in the sheltered courtyard, and at night when the Jenny Pullar-designed lighting comes into its own.

"The garden looks amazing when lit," says Donna. "We also added many perfumed plants and the scent drifts into the house through the louvre windows, bringing the garden indoors."

"The lawn areas are the best spaces for our young kids," says Eve. "We bought a beach tent to put on the back lawn and we pretend we are camping, surrounded by all the fragrant plants."

"Through the whole process, Donna taught us how to look after the garden and how the blend of plants can be used to enhance our Asian culture. She actually gave me quite a few mini lectures about plants and the New Zealand climate," she laughs. •

[seedlandscapes.co.nz](http://seedlandscapes.co.nz)  
[craftsmangardener.co.nz](http://craftsmangardener.co.nz)

**SPACE TO RELAX** Equipped for swimming or sitting back, and with space for the kids to pitch a beach tent on the lawn, the garden is a stylish family retreat. Above the pool, a screen with a cherry blossom motif conceals feature lighting that switches things up at night.