

GARDEN ROCK STARS

A non-negotiable for homeowners Claire and Anthony was plantings of cone-shaped *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'. "We even love them when they turn a rusty brown colour and die off for the winter, they are so beautiful," says Claire.





Good foundations

Selecting items that will age well over time has not only been a winning formula inside this Auckland home, it's worked brilliantly outside as well

Text **Carol Bucknell** Photography **Helen Bankers**



MAKING SCENTS

Fragrant lavender, rosemary and gardenia as well as asparagus fern and rain lilies have been used to clever effect in this low-maintenance garden.



Choosing plants for your garden can be a challenge for some. Not for interior designer Claire Bruford who had her heart set on white hydrangeas for her newly designed outdoor space well before any spades had hit the dirt. And the results are stunning with the liberally planted, creamy flowered shrubs contrasting beautifully with the green hedges, topiary and the crisp lines of the garden designed by Donna Stanish of Seed Landscapes.

“The one plant that was a non-negotiable was my favourite, the cone-shaped *Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Limelight’. We have 20 or more of these around the garden and between January and April they are absolutely spectacular. We even love them when they turn a rusty brown colour and die off for the winter, they are still so beautiful,” enthuses Claire.

She and husband Anthony have lived in their central east Auckland property for 10 years, moving in the day their middle child Charlotte was born. An essential part of the brief for the garden design was that it was robust and spacious enough for Charlotte, 10, her two siblings Kate and James (aged 12 and seven respectively), two cats and Ruby the dog.

As the owner of Le Mieux Interior Design, Claire was naturally very clear about the look she wanted: “We like formal gardens with a bit of a soft edge, juxtaposing the clean clipped lines of box hedging with some more informal planting to soften the edges. Scented plants like lavender, rosemary and gardenia, plus pretty little plants like rain lilies (*Zephyranthes*) run the length of the pool and soften the glass. It’s a relatively low maintenance garden, which makes it even more enjoyable as we don’t feel we have to constantly work on it, although we do enjoy spending the odd morning working in it ourselves.”

The couple took five years to plan the renovation of their 1920s built house with a year spent on construction. After that the swimming pool was built in the back, west-facing side of the property and the garden completely redesigned. “The garden was not connected to the house [the site drops seven metres from front to back],” explains Claire. “I envisaged doing a split level extension that dropped the house down to the garden, and then the garden would be raised up to create the flow we wanted. I also love cooking so we wanted a vegetable garden and lots of nice little areas

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CLAIRE BRUFORD



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to sit and enjoy the garden as the sun moved around to the back of the site during the day.”

The style of the garden reflects that of the interior, which has a palette of greens, browns, natural and earthy colours. “A casual vibe,” says Claire. “I designed and styled the interior using natural honest materials that patina over time. Things that wear-in and not out. That was our hope for the garden – simplicity, for it to improve with age and not date as such. The garden has lots of weathering steel detailing [the raised garden beds, risers on the steps and also the grass edging], which is a colour I love and have brought inside too.”

The pool is a well-used addition to the garden, she says. “There’s a constant flow of friends here in the pool and it has been great for all the kids’ birthday parties. In summer it’s used from dawn ‘til dusk. Luckily, the neighbours say they enjoy the sound of the kids having fun in the pool – they are very accommodating. Especially with all the lockdowns during 2020, it was a brilliant way to feel like we were on holiday at home.”

She credits the garden’s success to Donna’s insistence they bring in good quality soil and use good quality plants. “I liked that she had a long-term outlook on the garden as that is my philosophy for interiors, making sure the foundation is good before anything else is layered over the top.

“Donna really listened to our brief and understood exactly what we wanted from the garden. It’s linked seamlessly to the house and she chose plants that were robust and beautiful at the same time. It was really fun going around the various nurseries and picking out the plants and talking to the growers. That part of the process was really interactive and we loved that. I also love how seriously she took her job and her knowledge of plants is next level.”

Claire’s favourite part of the garden is the side path where the “practical bits” such as clothes line, vegetable garden, bird bath, herb garden are located. “It’s functional but it’s really beautiful. The changes in levels, rounded planters and weathering steel step risers, exposed aggregate concrete steps, crunchy limestone hoggin [fine off-white limestone chip], the Japanese maple (we lived in Japan for several years) are really special. I love the sight lines back to the house and then out to the valley beyond, with the hydrangea lining the path.” ●



SEAMLESS LINK The outdoor area transitions beautifully from the house, with the style of the garden reflecting the earthy, natural green and brown palette used in the home's interior.

