

„CIAO, BELLA

Given a new lease on life, this courtyard is now an open, inviting space that beautifully blends the indoor-outdoor life.


STORY *Tammy Hynoh* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Nicholas Watt*



A lush garden scene featuring various plants in pots and a large tree in the background. The plants include a large tree with reddish leaves, a large green tree, and several smaller plants in pots, including a large green leafy plant in the foreground and a small green plant in a woven basket. The background is a grey wall.

GARDENS H&G

Designed by landscape designer Mark Curtis, an advanced olive tree – top of the wish list for this Sydney garden renewal – is the focal point of this Italian-style garden. While beautiful, it's highly practical too. "The tree is essential in providing privacy from the house next door and shading the little breakout area," says owner Julie Manfredi Hughes. **OPPOSITE** A palette of mixed verdant tones makes up the planting scheme. Here, the juxtaposition of textures, shapes and growth habits help maintain visual impact in this green-on-green scene.



When the owners of this home in inner-city Sydney undertook extensive renovations of their house, they knew the courtyard had to follow suit. Interior designer Julie Manfredi Hughes (decorjmh.com) and her husband Larry Marlow were clear on what they wanted, so enlisted the help of landscape design consultant Mark Curtis of Secret Gardens to bring their vision to life.

When Mark visited the site, he recalls how cramped the courtyard felt. "The garden beds dominated the landscape and were filled with neglected and overgrown shrubs, including a large, diseased mandarin tree." The brief was to "create more space so the garden beds would not feel overbearing and the plantings were not encroaching the entertaining areas." Julie's overall vision for the courtyard was for an "Italianate green garden with a contemporary feel".

At the top of the wish list was an olive tree. "It's hard not to have a love affair with olive trees," says Julie. What cemented the idea of including one was a fabulous lunch. "An afternoon sitting under an olive tree at Totti's restaurant in Bondi planted the seed in my mind," says Julie. But it couldn't be a young specimen. As a focal point, it needed to be of a scale to provide instant impact and privacy from neighbouring properties. An advanced specimen from Transplant Industries was hand-selected by Mark, craned in and underplanted with Japanese star jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*).

In this area, Mark specified Eco Outdoor's Arbon baton pavers, laid in a herringbone pattern, but the remainder of the courtyard was tiled with large-format Beauford pavers, also from Eco Outdoor. This subtle but distinct design element was employed to "create the illusion of two rooms", says Mark. The colour choice for the pavers was deliberate too: they contribute to the "European flair" Julie desired plus allow the lush layers of greenery to shine.

To resolve the dominant garden beds, Mark replaced them with curved galvanised-steel edges painted Dulux Monument. "Unlike masonry, a steel edge leaves no footprint."

explains Mark. "This allowed room for the courtyard to breathe, creating an open atmosphere that aligned with the architectural renovations," he says. "The contemporary edge also marries beautifully with the other metalwork in the build," says Julie.

The hallmark of an Italianate garden is order. Mark introduced structure with cloud-pruned *Juniperus chinensis* 'Spartan'. Their upright stature references the slatted screen in the background. But it's the underplanting – the broad glossy foliage of tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*) – that bolsters the scene. It's the perfect combination of balance and lushness. "It has such wow factor," says Julie. The green-on-green palette continues with the use of Chinese and Japanese star jasmine as groundcovers in the beds. "Jasmine is a lovely groundcover to use in this context," says Mark. "It's a great creeper that also delivers some height." Potted plants are dotted around the courtyard: Japanese buxus balls intermingle with Mediterranean-style shrubs, including *Rosmarinus* 'Chef's Choice', *Lavandula stoechas* 'Avonview', thyme and sage, giving a sense of relaxed formality.

There are several seasonal elements to enjoy too. "The climbing rose, *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll', was lovingly selected by Larry," says Julie. It is trained along a tension wire and further adds to the piazza feel of the courtyard. Below it, the soft grey-green foliage of Walker's Low catmint (*Nepeta x foassensis* 'Walker's Low') helps soften the scene. While not traditional, a Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Atropurpureum') is both beautiful and practical. It was included to hide the services, provide seasonality and, eventually, filter out the westerly sun.

Julie and Larry adore their new courtyard. It spills out seamlessly from the kitchen and indoor dining areas, and now, they find almost any excuse to be outside. "It has given us a whole new living space to enjoy," she says. ▶

Secret Gardens, Botany, NSW: (02) 9314 5333 or secretgardens.com.au.

Cloud-pruned junipers (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Spartan') underplanted with a sea of glossy green *Ligularia reniformis* bring the "wow factor" to this courtyard. Hutt lounge and chair, Eco Outdoor. Hay 'Palissade' lounge chair and stool, Cult Design.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT A trio of birch trees adds a vertical element to the front garden. The Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Atropurpureum') brings seasonal colour and provides a lovely focal point when viewed from indoors. The Japanese maple foliage dances above the white blooms of New Zealand rock lily. A slatted screen hides the garage and doubles as a backdrop for the plantings, including tractor seat plant and cloud-pruned juniper. ▶



"The plantings really are a delight, especially the cloud-pruned junipers and glossy green tractor seat plant." Julie Manfredi Hughes, owner

Feature plants

Groundcovers

- Chinese star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)
- Japanese star jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*)
- Walker's Low catmint (*Nepeta x faassenii* 'Walker's Low')

Shrubs & perennials

- Tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*)
- *Lavandula stoechas* 'Avonview'
- New Zealand rock lily (*Arthropodium cirratum*)
- Japanese box (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*)
- *Rosmarinus* 'Chef's Choice'
- *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll'

Trees

- Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Atropurpureum')
- *Juniperus chinensis* 'Spartan'
- Olive tree H&G

The breakout area is paved with smaller tiles in a herringbone pattern to create the illusion of two 'rooms'. Bistro chairs, Fermob.