

backyard revolution

Across Australia, enormous changes are happening outside our back doors. There's an emerging confidence in design as we take the best international styles and give them a distinctive Australian flavour, just as we've done with food. This exciting two-part series looks at designers, gardens and ideas that are transforming the Australian landscape. In this issue:

- **Sea change** A garden where style and sustainability meet
- **Trop art** A masterful garden that redefines tropics Australian-style

NEW
2-PART
SERIES

BACKYARD REVOLUTION

It is possible to have an Australian garden that, while acknowledging international design, is wholly and utterly of its own time and place. Karkalla is living proof.



This garden features many native plants topiarised into balls. Here the local indigenous plants moonah, sea box, she oak and *Correa alba* are all clipped to form spheres. Mounds of spear grass echo their shape through the garden's beds.

PHOTOS: VIRGINIA CUMMINS



Fiona Brockhoff and David Swann's garden on the Mornington Peninsula combines natives with low-water succulents to create a place of natural beauty.

new wave



Emerging from the dunes at Victoria's Mornington Peninsula is a garden that seems as though it has naturally evolved. JOHN PATRICK talks to the designers who have so cleverly captured nature's rhythms.



As an inveterate garden visitor I see many new gardens each year, both overseas and in Australia. What is becoming noticeable around the world is that gardens are being created that are much more sensitive to their setting, place and time.

Fiona Brockhoff and David Swann have created one such garden, Karkalla at Sorrento, far down on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. Here is a garden that offers so many lessons to designers in 21st century Australia. It is ecologically responsible and responsive, meets the needs of the family who occupy it, and it shows so much wit.

The garden works closely with the 1950s-inspired house, designed by Sydney architect Thomas Isaksson in association with Fiona to hark back to the beach houses of Fiona's childhood. The lower parts of the house are

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constructed using local limestone reinforced with besser blocks. These provide a link to the surrounding landscape while the stained timber offers a strong coastal feel.

From here David and Fiona run their landscape design and construction business. With solar heating and composting toilets, the house is ecologically sensitive, but it also provides the central core to much of the garden design with the front entry a focus to the arrival area and outdoor terraces extending from the house.

The other dominant element of the garden is its coastal setting. There are obvious aspects to this, such as the use of salt-tolerant plants, but there are other more subtle qualities like crushed sea shells and wave-weathered glass that appear as incidental elements of

the mulch and old pier timbers that have provided much of the construction material for the site. It is the restraint and subtlety with which these elements have been handled that confer so much charm on the garden.

NATURAL BOUNDARIES

This sense of place is apparent on arriving at the garden. The driveway provides a big-dipper experience as you ascend and descend the dunes that dominate the landscape. These are covered by vegetation, much of it tea tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) that has grown here following clearance of moonah for lime burning. When the garden was begun, some of the dunes had been levelled out to offer easier access. Fiona and David reinstated them, using earth-moving equipment, to great effect, for the undulating driveway

not only creates a strong sense of place but a real sense of arrival.

The fences throughout the garden are swathed in vegetation, often

indigenous, which makes their lines less obtrusive. To the southeast is another garden, 'Offshore', where close friends of Fiona and David follow a similar philosophy so that the gardens are effectively integrated. The large proportion of indigenous plants means the boundary with the Mornington Peninsula National Park to the east has also become blurred.

A forecourt at the end of the driveway is paved with local granitic gravel. Pier timbers provide a step to separate the path to the front door from the drive. This is one of the few parts of the garden where exotics are used in numbers. The native spiny-headed mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) dominates planting here, but there is also *Agave americana* and the perennial statice (*Limonium perezii*).



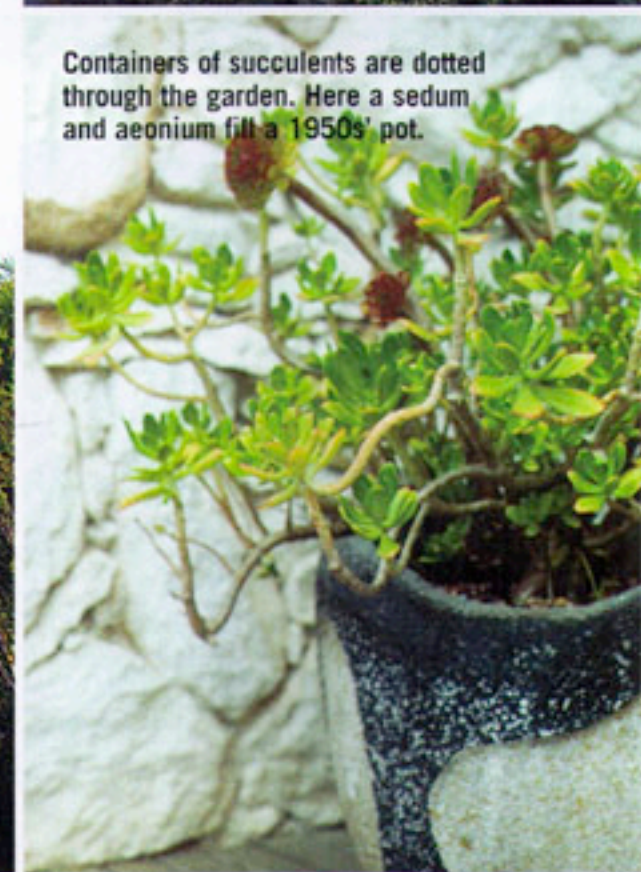
Fiona and David have integrated sculpture throughout the garden, most perfectly with Chris Booth's 'Koonya Beach Columns' which was commissioned for the site.



A clumped mix of (left to right) *Lomandra longifolia*, *Leucophypta brownii*, *Cotyledon orbiculata* and *Phormium 'Maori Chief'*.



This topiarised she oak adds height above spear grass and *Correa reflexa var. nummularifolia*.



Containers of succulents are dotted through the garden. Here a sedum and aeonium fill a 1950s' pot.



The garden is built right up to the house, with terraces and decks giving a feeling of sea wharves.

PLANTS IN THIS GARDEN

Fiona and David have used mostly native plants indigenous to their area. Many of these will grow well in all temperate coastal gardens.

Sea box (*Alyxia buxifolia*), spear grass (*Austrostipa stipoides*), knobby club rush (*Ficinia nodosa*), cushion bush (*Leucophypta brownii*), coastal daisy (*Olearia axillaris*), coastal banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*), coastal everlasting (*Ozothamnus turbinatus*), and native hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii* West Coast form) are repeated throughout the garden.

In between, moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*), she oaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) and other native shrubs are topiarised. Accents come from agaves, sedums, *Cotyledon orbiculata*, *Aeonium 'Zwartkop'* and *A. arborescens var. atropurpureum*. All are united by repeated tufts of phormiums and *Lomandra longifolia*.

Above. The picket fence at the front of the house is made of tea tree. *Cotyledon orbiculata* and *Phormium 'Kiwi Dazzler'* grow around it.

PHOTOS: VIRGINIA CUMMINS