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Issue 3  
AUS \$8.95\*  
NZD \$9.95  
(both incl. GST)



ISSN 1836-7240

9 771836 724002

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**Garden designer:**  
Alicia Ferrer,  
KOKATU design  
**Garden location:**  
East Fremantle,  
Western Australia  
**Photographer:** Ron Tan

Although the garden may have been in a parlous state, the owners are a dynamic young couple who enjoy the good things in life — including holidays in tropical locations. Until Jasmine grows up, travelling will be off the agenda, so the brief was to design a tropical garden with a large area to entertain friends (cooking, eating and chilling out), a sandpit for Jasmine, a hot tub to cool down in during the long Perth summer and an area for growing some fruits, vegetables and herbs.

Luckily, the owners are plant lovers and had an extensive collection of mature plants in pots such as *Cordyline terminalis*, *Dracaena marginata*, →



# MAGICAL MAKEOVER

An inspired tropical design takes this garden from the worst in the street to the best

After winning the Don Fleming Landscape Design award at the Melbourne International Garden and Flower Show in 2009, I was approached by The Garden Gurus to design a garden makeover for their television series *Battle of the Burbs*. My mission was to design a transformation from the worst garden into the best

possible garden with a tight budget and a challenging time frame.

The owners of the garden, Monica and Sam, had recently bought a house in East Fremantle but since the arrival of their baby Jasmine they had neglected their backyard, causing it to reach a point of no return. It was so pitiful they won the "worst garden" competition!





*Philodendron 'Xanadu', Agave attenuata and Cyathea cooperi*, so I reused lots of them. Most of the plants in the ground, however, except a mature lemon and a palm tree, were in bad shape and had to be removed.

When I arrived, the backyard was a barren sand plot with a horrible huge shed that was falling apart, junk everywhere, asbestos fences and weeds. Everything needed to go except a pizza oven that Sam had built himself.

Although the backyard is almost flat, a good thing when designing an entertaining space, we realised quite late that there were limestone boulders very close to the surface in the area where the sandpit was planned. This meant we needed to build limestone retaining walls (which blew the budget very quickly) in order to plant a *Lagerstroemia indica* to cast some shadow on the play area.

Finding space for an edible garden was important and the one we created consists of an aquaponic set (whose fish can be part of their menu as well), a vegie patch, some dwarf fruit trees and potted herbs. Adjacent to it is the large hot tub in an enclosed area protected with a semi-frameless pool fence. This area is shaded by a frangipani, which also adds →







*“Transformation from the worst garden into the best possible garden”*

fragrance to enhance the bathing experience.

To get to the hot tub there’s a sweeping path of grey stepping stones and pebbles with lush tropical planting on both sides. These curves contrast and balance the dominant rectangular areas of lawn and deck. The asbestos fence was replaced with brushwood fencing and, thankfully, the rest of the garden walls were already rendered in limestone and dark grey colours, giving us some budget advantage.

The curved path connects the hot tub with the deck and hidden ‘utilities area’ where a small shed, clothesline and bins are located. The path also takes you to a new side gate that Sam and Monica will use during parties so guests don’t need to tramp through the house.

Adjacent to the tropical garden and path there is a large rectangular decked area with a cube-shaped structure where you can hang outdoor drapes, giving privacy and shade to a custom-made day bed. This is a magical part of the garden in which Sam and Monica can rest, listen to music or relax with friends. Alternatively, it could be a “tickle castle” when playing with their child.

On the other side of the deck is a charming wicker dining set that is lit by the indirect lighting from a laser-cut metal feature panel

crafted by a local Fremantle artist and hung from the house wall. The rectangular lawn mirrors the adjacent deck and separates the freestanding outdoor kitchen that is naturally located nearby the existing pizza oven.

The entire garden is lit by LEDs so insects are not attracted to the light. All fabrics used are UV- and mould-resistant as well as machine washable, so the outdoor space is as easy to maintain as it is to look at. ■

