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The gentle curves of the Art Deco house are reflected in the sinuous brick courses defining the lawn



Front of house

Designed to complement an Art Deco home, this front garden is a plant lover's paradise



ABOVE The perennial plantings provide seasonal interest and work with the stone walling.

RIGHT Coldstream stone, which has long been used in this part of Melbourne, adds character.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP The skilful planting ensures the garden has strong year-round structure.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

Picea pungens 'Montgomery' is a non-flowering evergreen with blue needle-like foliage.



WORDS: Sandra McMahon **PHOTOS:** Patrick Redmond

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rom the start, it was clear that this had to be a garden that would offer something eye-catching to the streetscape. The site, occupied by a distinctive Art Deco home, is a prominent one on a corner of one of Melbourne's better known boulevards.

Popular with strollers, the area overlooks a beautiful section of the Yarra River.

While the owners were keen to enhance the streetscape, this was to be balanced with the need for privacy and to screen out traffic signs and any undesirable views. And, of course, the garden design needed to complement the period of the home.

Work on the new garden began in 2010. The existing garden was largely overgrown with woody weed species, so the site was cleared of everything except three *Cedrus deodara*, a tree that became popular in the late 19th century and is synonymous with this part of Melbourne.



The inherent difficulties of the site became clearer once work had started: it was often very wet in winter (receiving run-off at the bottom of a hill) and dry in summer (having to cope with very large eucalypts along the boundary and a number of established cedars). Given the prevailing drought in Melbourne at the time, it was decided to construct a 30,000-litre concrete tank under what would become the lawn.

The shape of the stunning new natural stone retaining walls and brick courses in the lawn were designed to reflect the bold Art Deco curves of the house. This can be readily appreciated when the garden is viewed from the upper street. As I wanted the walls to look as if they had always been there, Coldstream stone was the obvious choice, being iconic in the area.

The garden was designed to achieve year-round structure through skilful planting, not just through the hard landscaping elements. The plant palette is very broad, ranging from native plantings in the particularly challenging areas of the garden to stunning year-round perennial plantings closer to the house and along the lower street frontage – with a seamless interface between the two.

In time, the various plantings will provide an element of privacy, particularly from pedestrians on the lower street. »

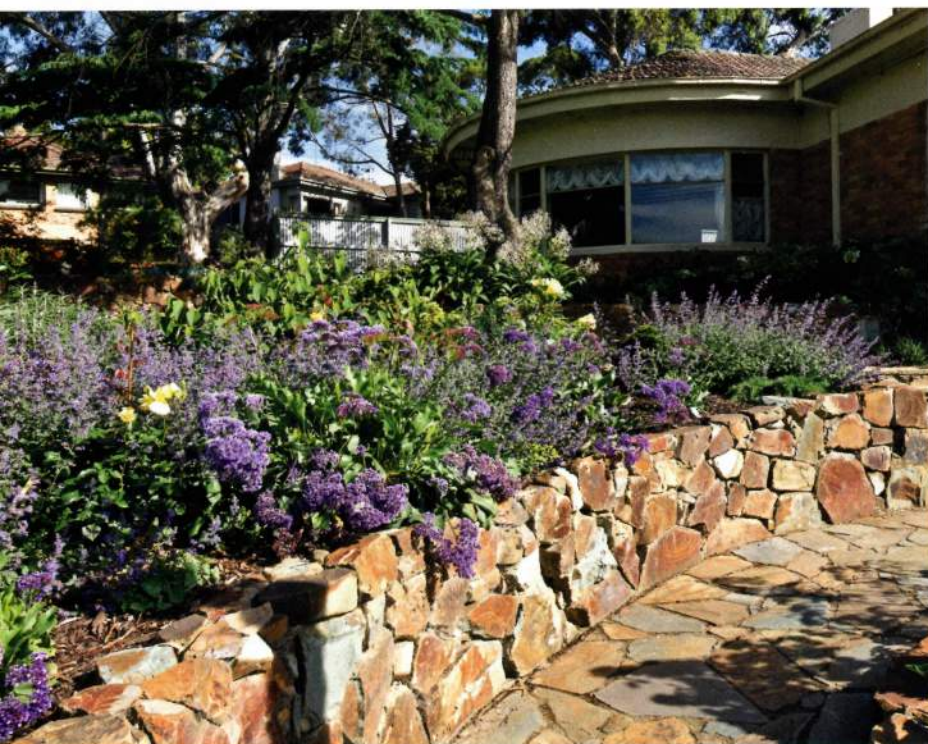




“The garden was designed to achieve year-round structure through skilful planting”

ABOVE The planting along the extensive street frontage is a very hardy mix that includes several *Westringia* varieties.

LEFT The natural stone walling adds a warm, rustic touch that perfectly complements the design of the home and garden.



By considering the angle of elevation from the footpath, it was calculated that plantings around the lawn needed to be just over one metre tall. This meant the owners could still enjoy their lovely view over the river valley.

The eye-catching perennial display all along the street, the longest side of the garden, is anchored by the use of evergreen trees and shrubs, such as pencil pines, olive trees, *Strobilanthes*, *Teucrium fruticans* and several varieties of *Westringia* (all balled in differing sizes). Among the perennials used to increasing effect as we move into summer and autumn are *Kniphofia* ‘Ascot Lemon’, *Agastache* ‘Sweet Lili’, *Sedum* ‘Matrona’, *Limonium perezii*, shasta daisies and *Achillea*.

The bones of the garden are revealed in winter when the evergreen plantings provide structure and bulbs emerge to provide cheer. As the bulbs retreat into the soil, perennial plantings erupt in a succession that carries the garden right through spring, summer and autumn, at which point these are finally cut back to reveal the bulbs that have thoughtfully reappeared ... and so it goes on. No season here is without interest. ■

Sandra McMahon is a Melbourne-based landscape designer and founder of Gardenscape Design.