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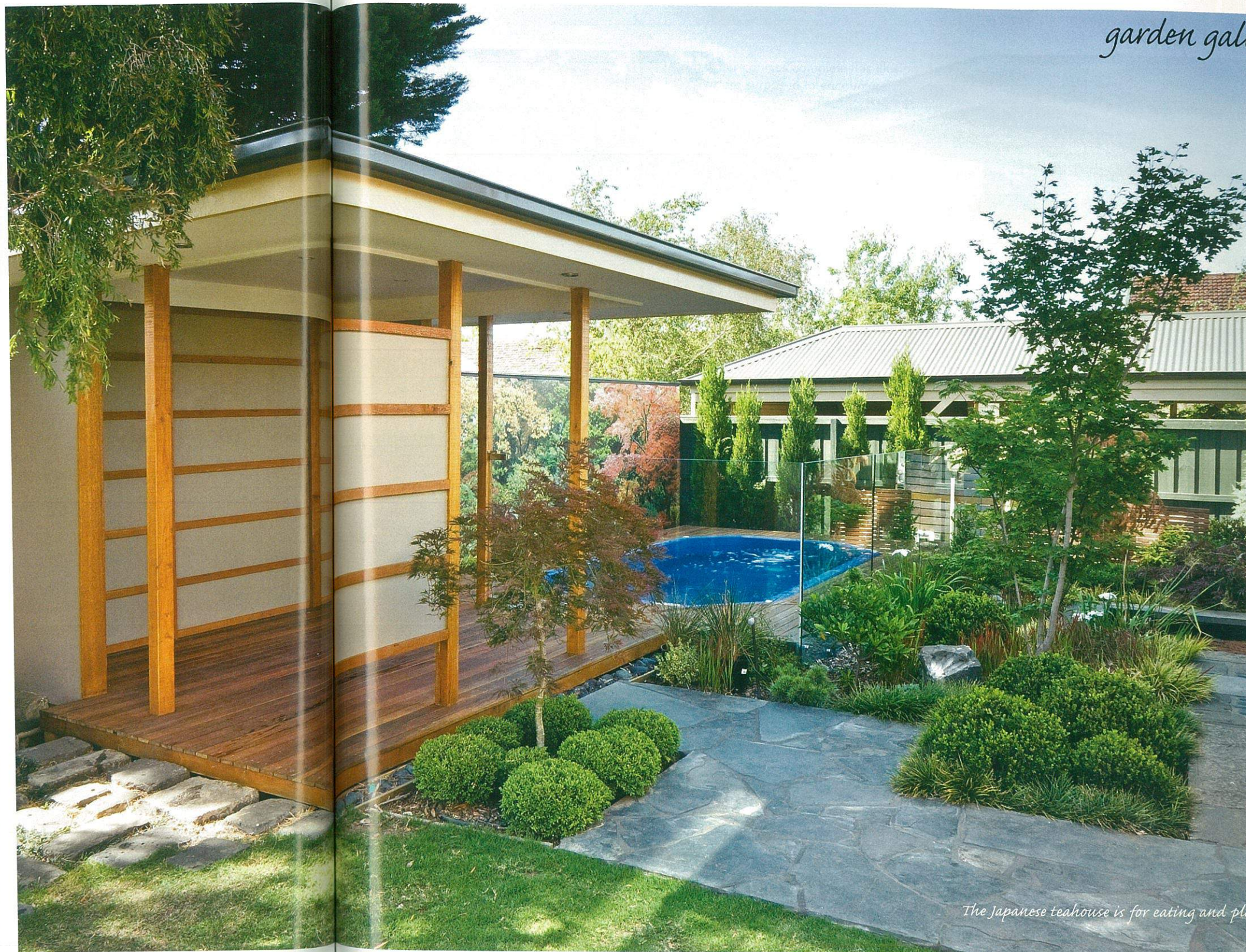
Designer: Sandra McMahon, Gardenscape Design
Garden: Moonee Ponds, Victoria
Photos: Patrick Redmond

TIME TO PLAY

Carved into a network of rooms, each with a distinct personality, this garden is a playground for all ages



A path of granitic sand leads through foliage.



The Japanese teahouse is for eating and play.

This garden was completed, virtually from scratch, several years ago. The brief was to create an exciting garden that would flow around, and into, the home, but substantial renovations and extensions to the fine old Hawthorn brick Victorian residence had left little to work with apart from an old ash tree to the south of the house and a young catalpa, both showing signs of stress.

The garden was designed as a "garden of rooms", complementing the period in which the home was built in the front sections, while providing numerous opportunities for outdoor living towards the rear. The owners were keen to incorporate a broad range of plant interest, as well as distinctive hard landscaping with

the emphasis on natural materials. Above all, the garden had to entice their children out of doors, so plenty of opportunities exist for play in different areas.

The first "room" in the garden is a semi-formal box, rose and perennial garden at the front of the house. The second runs along the south side of the house, where a grafted weeping cherry marks the entry to this less formal lawn and shrub garden.

Roses around the lawn include the small and successful David Austin roses 'Tamora', 'The Prince' and 'Sharifa Asma'. Shrubs thriving in the shelter of this side of the house include *Murraya paniculata*, *Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Snowflake', and *Loropetalum*

'China Pink'. Perennials giving good definition to the lawn edge and coping well with the heat include *Salvia chamaedryoides*, *Stachys* 'Big Ears', *Libertia peregrinans* and *Ophiopogon jaburan* 'Variegata'.

Towards the end of the lawn, perennials including *Kniphofia* 'Zambia', *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm', *Hosta* 'Francee' and *Canna* 'Carmen' thrive with the help of a little extra dripper water. Larger feature plants around the lawn include *Acer* 'Bloodgood', *Viburnum plicatum* 'Mariesii' and *Magnolia* 'Little Gem'.

Beyond the lawn is a 'Jungle Garden', designed with the children in mind. This area was inspired by childhood memories of the lure of dark and mysterious gardens — memories

that still evoke the thrill of hide-and-seek played on shadowy paths meandering between and beneath exotic plantings.

Few plants of jungle origin would survive in Melbourne's conditions, but careful selection of plants with bold and lush architectural foliage and flowers serves to suggest a place of far higher rainfall than is actually the case in Moonee Ponds! These include *Clerodendro ugandense*, *Brugmansia*, *Zantedeschia*, *Arthropodium*, *Acorus* 'Ogon', *Melianthus major*, the stunning mauve-flowered *Eupatorium megalophyllum*, cannas, tree ferns and a fruiting sugar banana palm.

A short section of timber walkway suggests the presence of water here. Plants associated

garden gallery



*The photographic mural is
of a Japanese forest.*



*“Plenty of opportunities exist
for play in different areas”*

A flourishing feature maple takes pride of place.



with water courses complete this illusion. Small visitors are surprised to encounter Ellie, a topiary elephant, emerging from the “jungle” at this point.

Where the granitic sand path meets the timber deck, the garden takes on a Japanese feel. This is achieved in part through appropriate plant selection, the presence of still water and the careful placement of natural stone steppers. Trees here include the maples *Acer palmatum* ‘Herbstfreude’ and ‘Bloodgood’ and *Acer japonicum* ‘Aconitifolium’ as well as the beautiful conifers *Abies nordmanniana* and *Cupressus glabra* ‘Blue Ice’. Other shrubs include Korean, Faulkner and variegated boxes, Japanese bloodgrass, Japanese iris and *Pieris* ‘Temple Bells’.

An intriguing stone walkway leads from the deck past the reflective pond to the rest of the rear garden. This walkway was constructed entirely of remnant stone from the house renovations: old bluestone foundations, lintels and black limestone hearths. A Japanese-inspired teahouse at the rear, designed as an outdoor eating area, doubles as an undercover play area.

The size of the back garden precluded the inclusion of a standard-size swimming pool. The spa adjacent to the teahouse was a satisfactory compromise with the jarrah timber floor of the teahouse extending to become the decking around the spa. A novel and temporary touch — lending a feel of infinite depth to this area — was the installation by the owners of a photographic mural, enlarged from a photo of a forested Japanese hillside.

A lawn of Santa Anna Couch, a drought-hardy, fine-leaf running grass, extends in a half-moon shape from the rear of the house.

This path is of remnant stone from the house.



Plantings around the edge screen the rear boundary and give the illusion of greater depth.

This has been a rewarding ongoing project. While a few plants have struggled to cope with the stringencies of water restrictions, regular discussions with the owners and mutual co-operation have ensured that this garden flourishes — and that it continues to evolve according to the broad intention of the original design. ■

The raised timber deck is ideal for entertaining.

