

# INSIDE

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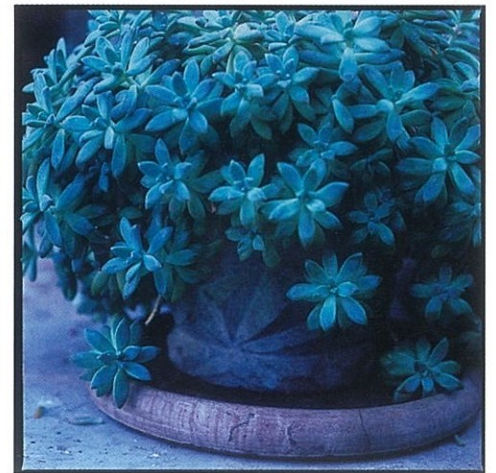
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**INNER-CITY GARDEN: THE ULTIMATE URBAN OASIS**







# *sunken treasure*

When filled with water, this concrete jungle becomes the owner's floating world

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Alice, the photographer's daughter, steps across the custom-coloured stones at one end of the wading pool under the watchful eye of 14-year-old Colin the cat. **Opposite, clockwise from top left** In various parts of the garden are forget-me-nots, Dutch irises and *Pelargonium*; *Echeveria elegans*; *Wisteria floribunda*; *Echeveria* succulent; *Aeonium*; and *Dracaena*. ➔





A pergola covered in *Wisteria floribunda* 'Alba' (detailed right) shelters the outdoor dining area (left) where Rikki is pictured. She designed the benches and table, then had them made from wrought-iron and recycled timber slats. Rikki's former business partner designed the Greek-style barbecue (above), presently topped with a large *Agave attenuata*.



The year Rikki Stubbs moved into her two-storey, semi-detached house in Petersham, an inner-western suburb of Sydney, parterre gardens were all the rage. It was 1989. Rikki and Howard Crump, her partner in a painted finishes business called Crump & Stubbs, decided to buck the trend, however, and create something completely different. Instead of brick paving, gravel paths and neat hedges of clipped *Buxus*, Howard took his cue from the surrounding yards of Rikki's Portuguese neighbours.

Part sunken garden, part sun-baked terrace, the extraordinary north-facing courtyard is divided almost equally into these two areas. Closest to the house, the sunken section becomes a large ornamental wading pool in summer, while in the cooler months it's drained and dotted with pot plants.

Dividing and fringing the two spaces are beds filled with ornamental plants and herbs. Succulents of all shapes and sizes grow among irises, geraniums, forget-me-nots, lilies, gardenias, birds of paradise, oleanders and bromeliads. Holding it all together, both visually and literally, is concrete.

"Most people would never believe we poured 22 tonnes of concrete in here," says Rikki, laughing. "They'd think it was an insane idea. Usually one of the first things you do when you move into an old house is take up the concrete, not lay it. Back then, concrete wasn't fashionable, but now it's come into its own – Howard was always ahead of his time."

Not long after the garden was complete, Howard moved to France, where he now works for a stream of well-known clients. Rikki stayed in Australia and started the interior



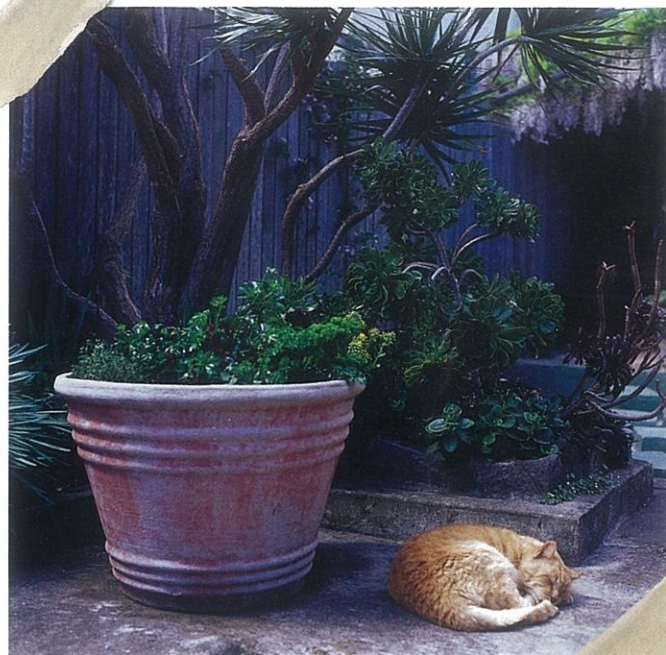


A frangipani tree provides shade and branches to hang lanterns. Rikki had the slightly recessed area on the top level finished with custom-coloured paving paint by Covered In Paint. The big pot on the left is by Sydney ceramicist Pamela Scott (through PureColour) and the canvas chair is from Ici Et La.









colour design consultancy PureColour. “Both Howard and I grew up in Queensland, where concrete gardens were part of childhood,” Rikki explains, citing her grandmother’s rockery garden at Yeppoon. “This garden is a hybrid of all the things I like. I’ve always loved courtyards, especially those you find in Greece, Morocco and North Africa.”

When the structure was in place, the beds needed to be filled. Neighbours pressed cuttings, many of them from succulents, into Rikki’s grateful hands. “My neighbours were growing them in their gardens years before they became fashionable.”

One friend gave her a few Dutch iris bulbs and their grey-green, sword-like leaves now thrust skywards from every bed. A dracaena that had been languishing in a pot was planted in the garden and has since thrived. Its tall, spiky form is now one of the most arresting features of the terrace, along with a frangipani tree in the opposite corner that could well be as old as the 1850s cottage behind which it stands.

In summer, the frangipani’s canopy provides a permanent umbrella of shade in which to sit, plus convenient branches for hanging paper lanterns. “This is the perfect party garden,” ➤

Four stepping stones provide a crossing for Geoffrey (left), another of Rikki’s cats, and anyone else who wants to reach the raised area without getting their feet – or paws – wet. In spring, the 25cm-deep pool is strewn with blossoms from the white wisteria that covers the outside dining area. Colin (above) is content to curl up on the sun-warmed concrete beside a huge tub filled with *Pelargonium* and herbs. Behind him, the garden bed contains green *Aeonium arboreum* and its black-leaved ‘Zwartkop’ cultivar.