

GARDENS

A mix of 'lush but tough' plants was chosen for this atmospheric Melbourne garden by landscape designer Amanda Oliver. Here, striking agaves and strappy *Phormium* 'Bronze Baby' mingle with 'Little Gem' magnolias and pretty *Plectranthus oertendahlii*. To see more, turn the page...

A trial and error garden story with a happy ending.

Agents of CHANGE

This Melbourne garden has evolved as its family has grown – unearthing some salient planting truths along the way.

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Moroccan-style furniture is encircled by balls of native rosemary (*Westringia*) in the rear courtyard. A row of 'Little Gem' magnolias, underplanted with *Plectranthus oertendahlii*, screens the dining zone. The custom-made table, topped with zellige tiles (Moroccan glazed-clay tiles with a pearlescent finish), sits on a platform of concrete pavers cut to varying sizes and laid with gravel in between. The area gains shade from the twisted branches of a nearby birch (*Betula pendula* 'Fastigiata').



KEY PLANTS

Plectranthus oertendahlii

Echium

White crepe myrtle

(*Lagerstroemia* 'Natchez')

Fastigate silver birch

(*Betula pendula* 'Fastigiata')

SUCCULENTS

Euphorbia trigona

Dragon tree

(*Dracaena draco*)

ACCENT PLANTS

Flax (*Phormium* 'Bronze Baby')

Agave attenuata



Gardens are dynamic places. If there was time-lapse footage of Antra Lanskis' garden, it would reveal a constant state of metamorphosis over the past 18 years, reflecting the journey of her family's life in their inner-city Melbourne home.

"The garden has evolved with each stage of our children's lives," says Antra, an interior designer who runs her business, Taupeology, from the home she shares with her husband, Andy, and children Maxime, 22, and Mia, 19. A cubbyhouse, trampoline and innumerable soccer balls have all had their place here. "Then, when both kids were in their teens, about six years ago, we were ready for a change," says Antra.

Antra's original idea was to create zones that could accommodate two generations. "We wanted a fire pit zone, a barbecue area, an outdoor dining space and a lounge area," she says. "Different spaces so young people and adults could enjoy the garden at same time, separately." Antra turned to Amanda Oliver Gardens to help with the spatial planning. ►

'I have a strong sense of line, shape, proportion and colour. If I'm sitting inside and I see a tree branch pulling the whole look out of balance, I'm straight outside, styling with secateurs.' Antra Lanskis

ABOVE LEFT The side path is fringed by pretty *Stachys byzantina* (lamb's ears) and *Agave attenuata*. The white trunk of a silver birch pops against the charcoal fence.
ABOVE RIGHT A climbing fig, *Ficus pumila*, carpets the brick wall at the entrance and appears to emerge from a weathered pot.
OPPOSITE clockwise from top left *Plectranthus oertendahlii*, a shade-loving groundcover. At the front gate, a hedge of lilly pilli has been clipped into an archway. The beautiful foliage colours of Boston ivy. Berries on a crepe myrtle. Antra revamped the top of this old steel table with iridescent mosaic tiles. A hammock swings between the mature Seville orange tree and a jacaranda. Delicate *Echium* spires. Grey-green *Stachys* leaves.





"I'm a serial vignettist, so I often repaint and regroup pots and furniture. It's my creative outlet on weekends." Antra

◀ The garden is unusual in its configuration, consisting of a 20x10m section that runs alongside the Lanskis' Edwardian home, as well as a 12x12m area at the rear, together forming an L-shape. Antra's brief for the side garden was to "keep it traditional", and to retain the lawn and existing trees. To ensure privacy, Amanda installed a grove of birch trees. Existing clivias were padded out with mass plantings of *Echium* in order to create a thick boundary.

For the rear section, Antra envisaged a Moroccan-themed courtyard. Her initial brief for this area was to create a xeriscape, or dry-climate garden, an idea inspired by a trip to the famed Majorelle Garden in Marrakech. "I came home obsessed with that garden. I loved the sculptural, spiky plants, the succulents and the gravel," says Antra. But the reality didn't work with sporty teenagers and a waimaraner called Eiffy. "I was too ambitious," says Antra. "So, every time they trampled on a succulent, I planted a *Westringia* in its place." At Amanda's suggestion,

the *Westringia* was clipped into balls and these hardy sculptural plants have become the indispensable heroes of the garden.

Antra now has 16 *Westringia* plants in the courtyard, all clipped into spheres of varying size. Planted in clusters, they demarcate zones and provide textural contrast with other key plants such as *Agave attenuata*, *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem', white-trunked upright birch trees, box and the strappy *Phormium* 'Bronze Baby'. Her beloved succulents, including cactus-like *Euphorbia trigona* and *Dracaena draco*, have all been transferred to pots.

While her vision has refined over time, the legacy of the Majorelle Garden remains alive in Antra's garden. "That garden was a revelation. It taught me that gardens can shift your mood. We all need those special places where we can disappear, even momentarily," she says. "I feel we've achieved a sense of that here, in the middle of the city. At any time of day we can come out here and catch a special moment."

H&G



BELOW Eiffy enjoys some downtime in a patch of sunlight. Amanda used a mix of screening and accent plants to differentiate spatial zones and create both private pockets and dramatic points of intersection. Here, a crepe myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* 'Natchez') is underplanted with purple *Phormium* 'Bronze Baby' and spiky *Euphorbia wulfenii*. Fragrant thyme (*Thymus serpyllum* 'Alba') is planted between the steppers. **OPPOSITE** Antra's designer eye is evident in the barbecue area, which features a picturesquely rusted iron bench and casual seating. A layered hedge features mock orange (*Murraya paniculata*) and box (*Buxus microphylla japonica*). Large-leafed *Plectranthus Ecklonii* extends along the fence, while *Stachys byzantina* (lamb's ears) forms a luscious groundcover. Taupeology.com.