



# GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

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**Newsletter**  
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**67**

**STUDY GROUP LEADER / EDITOR**  
Jo Hambrett

**TREASURER / MEMBERSHIP**  
Jeff Howes

email: [tudortalisman@optusnet.com.au](mailto:tudortalisman@optusnet.com.au)

email: [gdsghmembership@yahoo.com.au](mailto:gdsghmembership@yahoo.com.au)

Website: <http://asgap.org.au/design.html> or Google 'Australian Garden Design'

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Dear Members,

By some organisational and inspirational magic this newsletter (also coincidentally, a bumper edition!) consists almost entirely of articles on DESIGN... it's a veritable design feast.

As well, two articles on the much watched TV series "Around the World in 80 Gardens" by two of our members eminently qualified to comment.

The question of Formality is again discussed in Diana's article and in the handout prepared for the SE Coast APS garden design weekend. For details of that weekend please see Michele Pymble's article in Correspondence and the report in the Design section. It was such a successful format that I wondered whether other APS groups would be interested in participating in similar workshops. They locate the gardens & GDSG members take part in the weekend workshop as well. Definitely worth thinking about! Whilst on matters South Coast, please members do try and support our November meeting – Sydney School landscape architect & indigenous plant guru, Bruce Mackenzie, (see article "Conversation with Barbara Buchanan" in Design section) will be talking exclusively to us and taking questions in his own rainforest "paradise" garden.

We are well on the way with the process of Indexing the Newsletters – I have found an indexer who lives relatively close and is patiently cooperative as we try to decide the best and most cost effective ways of gathering all the wonderful material published over the years in these Newsletters and making it easily accessible for future research.

As you will read in the Melb. meetings section, Chris Larkin is having a well earned break as Vic. leader – hopefully there will be people queuing to take her job on – our Group is only as strong as the good will and preparedness of its members to share the (mostly enjoyable) workload that running it well entails. Still on SG matters please check out what Philip Robinson has to say in the Correspondence section. Also there, are details if any of our members are going to the Geelong Conference and would like to organise the GDSG display.

I shall be most interested in readers' response to the Conversation with Barbara Buchanan article especially the suggestion that nostalgia was a main factor contributing to the emergence of the Bush Garden

And lastly could our professional members let me know if they are happy to have their details on our website? If so, send them to me and I shall ask Brian to put them in.

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*Gardening is an art of which I know little or nothing save that the most beautiful gardens have a lifetime's growth.*  
William Hardy Wilson

## CORRESPONDENCE

The Correspondence section of the May Newsletter was great, with lots of good comments, ideas and suggestions. I like Peter and Wilma's suggestion for a colour magazine, focussing on a specific topic for each issue. I do think it would need professional guidance and even to do just two editions a year would mean a lot of extra work. There'd probably need to be a skilled person on the committee dedicated to that project.

Margaret raises some of the problems with planning another book (and this would apply equally to a magazine). I remember with the first book how difficult it was to get information or pictures from regions where we have no or few members. Then however much material we might get, some areas would be left out. So we do have to concentrate on the design principles and illustrate them as widely we can. Nowadays in many areas there's a lot of information available about local plants. We could define the plants required in a design by type (eg a large shrub) and design character (eg a framework plant), with just a few examples, then leave the reader to investigate suitable plants from local sources. (There are just so many variables in plants too - form, foliage & flower colour, leaf size, etc.)

Following Jeff's comment, a great book "Sustainable Gardening" has come out recently, written by Rob Cross and Roger Spencer and published by the CSIRO. It's extremely thorough, dealing with every aspect I could think of to do with sustainability. There are 13 chapters including (as examples): Energy and emissions; Water; Materials; Biodiversity and ecology; Designing low impact gardens. I've only just begun reading it (and it's not a quick read) but already I'd recommend it to anyone who's interested in pursuing this subject in a serious way.

A good starting point for new members like Jan Baillie could be "The Australian Garden", the book we published based on the first 10 years' work of the GDSG.

**Diana Snape Vic.**

My Holy Grail is to find Australian native plants, suitable for small yards, that grow dense foliage in shady corners.

**Roslyn Nataprawara Vic.**

To me, a keen gardener, the best present one can be given is a house sitting on a block of land with no garden at all. This happened to me in December 2002 and I haven't stopped gardening since. The block of land is extremely steep and we are opposite a reserve above the Bega River. The house stood out like a sore toe when viewed from the street and I wanted to make the house look less obtrusive in the landscape whilst conserving our view of the river. I also wanted to bring the garden into the house, not an easy task when the living area is 3m above ground level. Creating habitat and a haven for native birds and animals was another aim.

I have recently learnt never to close my mind to the beauty of exotic plants and although I never use them in my garden, I borrow ideas from their beauty and seek out Australian plants that will create the same affect. A huge influence was a trip to North America in autumn that left me spell bound. I have never experienced anything so beautiful as the forests of

Minnesota and Wisconsin. I have used plants with contrasting foliage to try and create a tapestry of colour in our garden. The beauty of using Australian plants is that I have this effect all year long.

Being opposite a nature reserve I didn't want the garden to look out of place ( like a lolly shop as my good friend often comments!). To this end I have been very conscious of keeping colourful plants to the top of the block where they are not viewed from the street.

Here on the South Coast we are presented with a magnificent environment, views and an abundance of wildlife. We have a responsibility to not only care for it ourselves but help others in creating a harmonious relationship between the bush and residential living. Knowing a garden is never finished, I recently joined the GDSG hoping to benefit from their experiences and subsequently influence others to give more thought as to how to use native plants.

One of our Society's aims is to encourage more people to grow native plants. We need to put thought into how we present them in order to enlighten others of their spectacular effects.

### **Joy Cook NSW**

I am on the Sydney committee of the AOGS and have already received my copy of the AOGS handbook. I thought I would provide a few highlights, for native plant gardeners and some back ground into the scheme to interest you in visiting some great gardens. The spring 2009 to autumn 2010 season has an extraordinary diversity of gardens ranging from tiny inner city courtyards to grand garden estates open to the public. The national guide, has full details of these gardens as well as some great gardening articles and is available from newsagents and book stores from mid August for a modest cost of \$16.95. A great read! The number of gardens, described in the Guide as Australian Plants is as follows :NSW and ACT – 27, QLD – 12, SA – none, NT – 1, Tas – 9, WA – 13 and Vic – none (This is an editorial mistake as there are many). Australia's Open garden Scheme is a non profit organisation founded in 1987. It opens about 600 of the most inspiring gardens across Australia each year. There is a small charge to look at these gardens and this has allowed the Scheme, since 1987, to provide \$980,000 to community garden projects. As well, over \$4,300,000 has been donated to charities and local causes since 1987 by the garden owners. For more details of gardens and the scheme have a look at their web site: [www.opengarden.org.au](http://www.opengarden.org.au) This year there is some great special events in all states, those of interest **for native plant lovers** are:

- ❖ Thriving with Australian Plants: Myrtle Farm. At Tamworth on 3 and 4 Oct 2009 featuring Warren Sheather – more details in the guide.
- ❖ Success with Australian Plants. At the Shorthands Wetland Centre on 17 Oct 2009 featuring Carolyn Gillard and Paddy Lightfoot – more details in the guide.
- ❖ Dry Spell Gardening in Canberra, with Brendan Moar. At Hall on 13 and 14 March 2010 – more details in the guide.

Last but not least, I must mention two really great native plant gardens in Westleigh (a suburb of Sydney). They are open on 12 and 13 Sept 2009. I must confess one of these gardens is mine – Gum Blossom -- and open for the last time. If you know of a great garden

that would be suitable to open under the AOGS banner then contact me at [gdsghmembership@yahoo.com.au](mailto:gdsghmembership@yahoo.com.au) or phone me

**Jeff Howes NSW**

Congratulations to the South-East NSW APS Group for organising a very successful Garden Design weekend on the 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> July at the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens. This was organised in conjunction with our NSW Garden Design Study Group. Although there was a very large attendance the weekend activities were very well run and members provided delicious food.

Jo Hambrett was the guest speaker and gave an informative talk on Sunday followed by a workshopping of the four gardens we inspected on Saturday. The members were divided into four groups and each had a garden to discuss. The result was a very enthusiastic analysis of the gardens with helpful suggestions for the owners.

The four gardens posed very different design challenges.

Jean and Malcolm Pengilly have a newly purchased home on a small block. The front garden was already planted out with mostly natives and just needed a few softening touches. Other areas lent themselves to planting with chiefly rainforest plants. The garden of Jo Benyon has already been thoughtfully designed with the help of some of the volunteer workers from the E.R.B.Gardens and needed very little improvement. Lorraine and Jim Jackman purchased their large five acre property with extensive landscaping already carried out. They are successfully replanting with natives. The home of Carol and Laurie Ball commenced life as a holiday house and has now been extended as their permanent home. It was an outstanding achievement on a small block with sandy soil and very close to the beach. Two large *Eucalyptus Leucoxylon* were the main focus with interesting underplantings. Most outstanding was a very large and healthy *Adenanthos sericea*, 'Albany Woollybush' grown in a pot. The meeting finished with a talk by John Knight, Manager of the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens since its inception. He spoke of the implementation of the original concept plan and the gardens raison d'être which is to display only plants of the area. Although his talk was about the landscaping design of a large public garden, one thing which stood out for me was his point that a garden should have a 'meeting place' which I thought was a good suggestion for any garden. I am trying to decide on a good spot in our garden where my meandering paths can arrive at a 'meeting place', a sheltered spot with a few seats and perhaps a pond would be nice.

**Michele Pymble NSW**

## "Highlights from Recent Study Group Newsletters"

The Garden Design Study Group is extraordinarily active. One reason, perhaps, is that unlike some of the Species Study Groups, its activities are not so geographically restricted. Whatever the reason the involvement of members is fantastic, a fact to make the Leaders of some other Study Groups gnash their teeth with envy.

Newsletter 66 includes correspondence from no less than eleven members on all sorts of subjects relating to design. One letter that caught my eye particularly was from Noreen Jones from Manangatang (pop 350) where a group of local enthusiasts are establishing a Mallee garden in the town's main street. Good 'on 'em I say. Amongst other articles in this newsletter, Diana Snape meditates on Australian and Japanese gardens and Lawrie Smith considers the use of Rainforest plants in the garden.

**Philip Robinson Vic.** SG Coordinator ANPS

*I thought members may be interested in all the contents of a letter received recently from retiring SG coordinator Philip Robinson. Please read it through, paying particular attention to the boldened type. Discussion, ideas and opinions very welcome in the Nov NL.*

I'm sure that you'll be as pleased as I am to hear that Geoff Lay has volunteered to take over as Study Group Coordinator. I'll continue in the position until Conference, so effectively Geoff will take over on October 3rd. He'll be at Conference so those of you who are attending will have a chance to meet him.

Geoff is a Vice President of APS Maroondah in Victoria, an enthusiastic bushwalker and a plant identifier with a special interest in fungi. I'm delighted to hand over to someone with so much to give to the Study Groups.

### Study Group Displays at Conference

We have been allocated space upstairs in Costa Hall for displays. We can set up on Sunday September 27th. No one else will be using this space all week so displays can be left set up. However, it would be great if we could have them looking fresh on Wednesday when I will get a chance to speak about them..

Could you please speak to Ross Field about any equipment that you need. There will certainly be trestle tables available His email address Ross Field [rfield@warburtons.com.au](mailto:rfield@warburtons.com.au) He does not have a mobile number.

### Conference Matters

Victoria is to put the following motion. "That the Federal Executive appoint a sub-committee to consider the most appropriate ways to promote Study Groups both within ANSPA and also outside it."

A couple of ideas have been suggested.

1. That the Study Group Coordinator or someone appointed, make a note of the highlights of each SG newsletter and from time to time distribute these to the State Newsletter editors and anywhere else appropriate. (This is now being done)

2. That the Federal President contact Study Groups once or twice during the year. This could take the form of a letter to be inserted in SG newsletters. The thinking behind this is that it would help SG members to feel that the federal body takes an interest in them and that they are a valued part of ANSPA.

In some Study Groups in addition to the leader, there is a treasurer and a newsletter editor and there could also be an outings organizer to lighten the load for the leader. This depends, of course, on there being a sufficient number of SG members willing to undertake these roles. It seems worth exploring.

I have also had an idea for *increasing interest in native plants*, for what it's worth, here it is.

**In order to promote Australian native plants in general and the ANSPA and ANSPA Study Groups in particular, I think we need to spend some money. If the Federal body doesn't have the resources, we would have to ask the regions and perhaps the wealthier Study Groups to contribute to a publicity fund for a major campaign. What I have in mind is that in each capital city and elsewhere as appropriate, the Regional executive would organize a big display of native plants over a week-end in Spring (including where possible Study Group displays), and would organize substantial advertising of the event in major newspapers. We could perhaps offer an initial six months free subscription to ANPSA to those attending the display. We could also organize for a number of Native Gardens to be open over the weekend, preferably with either free entry or a gold coin donation to some good cause. We might call the campaign 'A Celebration of Australian Native Plants.**

**To coincide with this, and with (one hopes) the cooperation of the gardening editors of the major newspapers, and in conjunction with the advertising there would be a substantial article about ANSPA and its aims, and about the display written by someone such as Diana Snape. Perhaps one might also get the ABC's garden show to promote the event and the society.**

**My target for the event would be Spring of 2010, and there would need to be an overall coordinator of the event as well as regional coordinators.**

**It is quite possible that we might be able to attract some grant money from some Government body or other. There may well be someone in the Society who could investigate the possibility.**

**Probably the whole thing is just my fantasy but any comments would be welcome.**

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If any Study Group Leaders have ideas for promoting the Study Groups or improving the way they are run, please let me know so that I can take them to conference.

In case I don't get the chance to say it later, I would like to thank all Study Group leaders for their cooperation while I have been Study Group Coordinator and for their help in teaching me the Coordinator's job.

Philip Robinson  
ANSPA Study Group Coordinator

## DESIGN

### Natural, formal and the world in between

**Diana Snape Vic.**

I liked the perceptive comments on formality by Jeff, Michele and Jo in the last newsletter. It seems to me that it's largely a matter of degree (and definition). We are fortunate in Australia to have, at one end of the formality scale, completely natural landscapes that often have a beauty we only wish we could replicate in our gardens. In the GDSG we have called these 'natural gardens', as the only ones that truly are. (You could argue that these Australian landscapes have been affected by the actions of people over 50,000 or so years, but then without any gardening intention.)

At the formal end of the range are gardens with "straight lines, clipped hedges and manicured lawns", also symmetrical geometric shapes and symmetrically arranged plants. If there are trees, they're symmetrical in shape too - conifers for example - most eucalypts would never do! A few extreme cases of formal gardens were shown in the fascinating TV series 'Round the world in 80 gardens'. They displayed two things equally clearly - wealth and the control of man over nature. I don't know whether the ongoing popularity of formal gardens is due to these elements, or to people's love of tradition, symmetry and order.

Between these two extremes, we have the vast majority of the world's gardens (all informal)! So definitions don't take us very far. The term 'naturalistic', meaning 'influenced by nature', can indicate the aim of the gardener and/or the impression the garden makes on other people. However a 'naturalistic' garden is never entirely 'natural'. I agree with Jo that all person-made gardens make some concession to formality. Even putting a winding path through a garden means a greater formality than having no defined path. It would be possible (if one ever wanted to) to devise a scale for comparing the formality of different gardens by rating different aspects (eg:- Paths: none, score 0; winding, 1; straight, 2. Conspicuous pruning: none, 0; some, 1; lots, 2. etc.), then adding up the score (so many hairs to split!).

Michele's dictionary gives a more general definition of a formal garden, having "a sense of form", and I expect our gardens would generally demonstrate that. We certainly need a sense of form to create asymmetric gardens that are pleasing to the eye, satisfying design requirements like proportion, balance and harmony. Not all gardens do - for example we could have a "colourful garden" (maybe a cottage garden) without it.

Australia has its own unique landscapes and plants. If a naturalistic garden is based on a particular landscape type, eg a shrubby woodland or a heathland, we can say so and it helps us picture the garden. However most of our gardens aren't naturalistic in a restricted sense, more in general terms. So how do we describe them and how do we indicate the degree of formality they include? Photos can help but they never give the whole picture.

I fear we haven't yet made much progress in communicating the nature of our great range of Australian gardens. Is the old-world garden language adequate, or do we need a new language - new words - to help us describe our gardens and give an idea of their different qualities? Could this also help us picture more clearly what we're trying to achieve in our gardens?

## **S.E. Coast NSW APS**

## **Garden Design Workshop Weekend**

In July I had the great pleasure of joining the South Coast branch of APS NSW at the Eurobodalla Botanic gardens at Batemans bay for a garden Design workshop weekend.. The branch, stretching from Batemans bay to the Victorian border, takes in some of the most beautiful country in NSW.

It was great (as always) to catch up with some of our southern GDSG members there too: Suellen and Brian Harris, Michele and Brian Pymble, Maureen and Norm Webb and Joy Cook. Unfortunately information on the weekend just missed our May newsletter otherwise there would have been a greater GDSG representation.

It was a wonderful weekend, superbly organised by an exceptionally able Committee. The turn up was astounding – what us state SG leaders can only dream of! Well over 50 very keen individuals rolled up both days. The day began at 12 noon Saturday – with lunch at the Eurobodalla Gardens café, and afterwards we visited 4 gardens owned by members of the group. The gardens were quite different and each had its own challenges which the owners wanted addressing. Two of the gardens were back from the coastal frontline on suburban building blocks, one was 5 acres further inland and the other was a frontline coastal garden.

The owners of the first garden had been there for 12 months – they had cleared the debris and now wanted to know what to do about specific areas of the garden – problems such as a steeply sloping block, shade, privacy issues, a huge gum in the small front yard, which got most of the sun, maximising their views etc.

Following the Sunday workshop suggestions included, living fences and walls ( especially suited to large house/small block scenario) and the use of light airy screening plants to “lift the energy” ( a wonderful phrase I thought) of the small spaces available for planting.

The second garden is 6 yrs old and is in a newly built residential area, high up with sweeping filtered views –with great soil and a wonderful climate its owner's problem was that of overly luxuriant growth Maintenance of the garden following multiple hip replacements was a consideration needing attention which some raised beds below the front verandah have begun to address. Another question was how to beautify, but keep fairly low maintenance, a large sunny courtyard area viewed from various rooms in the house as well as opening out into the driveway and garage areas. She wanted some imaginative easy care suggestions. The group had some lovely ideas - break up the spaces of the large courtyard so it is pleasing to the eye, remove some of the pavers to grow grasses or herbs. Install a large waterbowl for the birds ( she had previously found an running water feature very water inefficient and did not want to use it) and a small weeping tree for shade and habitat for birds. A partial low barrier at the entrance would to add more intrigue by breaking up the large square space.

The third garden was a 13 yr. old 5 acre garden previously used for spelling horses. Its owners have been there for 7 years and are landscaping using native plants though keeping choice exotics which have withstood the test of time and are in keeping with the house and its history. It was a very rural site. A weatherboard house with a wide verandah built across

the sloping block with views of the large dam. I was struck by the success of the *Acacia cognata* Green Mist lining the front path to the central front door – they were huge, their abundant cascading bulk gave the front entrance a wow factor and a gravitas with which the adjoining buxus hedge (a legacy from the previous owners) could not compete. One of the owners complained of poor soil - I saw absolutely nothing in that garden which supported her claim! Ideas to link their various garden areas were asked for and the Sunday suggestions were: garden furniture and ornamentation, hard landscaping such as pathways, blending the bush areas into the garden areas, more massed planting which reduces the lawn and therefore automatically links the garden areas. The group also suggested the owners make a focal point of the large dam at the front of the property.

The 4th garden could not have been more different again (an example of the excellent planning that went into the weekend). On a frontline seaside suburban block, previously a holiday house and now, for the last 6 years, a permanent residence. The garden has evolved over the years accommodating enlarging the house and other building practicalities. The soil is 100% beach sand until 10 ft down, when it becomes pumice stone. The freshwater table is approximately 11ft down. Every single green and living thing on the block has been planted by the owners and we had no cause to doubt this as we drove along the road - the only trees in the street belonged to this garden! The vast majority of the houses in the neighbourhood had no gardens - just a house in the middle of a square or rectangular grassed block of land. The owners said they had initially struggled as new gardeners to establish a garden on this fairly difficult site until they found 2 books which helped them to understand the type of plants which grew successfully in their conditions - "Growing Silver and Grey Foliage Plants" by Roger Spencer and "Seaside Gardening" by Marcelle Montfries. This small garden is immensely satisfying. Privacy, protection and a sense of enclosure were ensured with artful plantings. The simplicity of pavers and pebbles matched the seaside feel, keeping it unfussy and practical. Wooden terraces, containing grass trees and taller plantings (which looked wonderful and hid the entertainment areas), provided a place to sit and enjoy the tracery of eucalyptus branches on the sky. The owners didn't have any specific questions however the Sunday group suggested the possibilities of a curved rather than a straight path to the front porch and wider paths around the house and through the garden.

The second half of the weekend was on Sunday from 9 – 12. We gathered in the E B Gardens in chairs under a large awning – people quickly deciding to move outside as the day warmed up along with the birdsong! I handed out a summary of Garden Design followed by the, as I see it, absolute essence... the page you take with you as you wander round the garden! (both reprinted below) The workshopers were asked to read it and then split into 4 roughly equal groups and assigned a garden each with half an hour to address its individual problems and provide suggestions.

A spokesperson was assigned from each group and at the end of the session these individuals summarised the recommendations to us all. What a fantastic job they all did – it showed not only a keen interest amongst this group on garden design but also a very knowledgeable base. I am sure all the garden owners as well as the participants were enriched by the experience.

Following this John Knight the manager of ERBG spoke to the group about both the history and the design of the Gardens.

Begun in 1985, they are unique in that they are the only Botanic Gardens in the world to consist of and feature purely indigenous plants. They were created on a part of the buffer zone around the catchment of the main water supply for the area which is at the confluence of 3 local rivers. A lot of the soil on the site had been removed to build the dam and replaced with rocky clay. From the very beginning the gardens have been the result of a collaborative effort with Council, John, his committee and Friends. Events are held regularly in the

gardens in order make the local community aware that this asset exists and to encourage them to use it.

Important considerations from the beginning were - fire mitigation plans ,maintenance access, disability access and the importance of recognising that visitors age!

A bushfire swept through the gardens in the 1994 and the very attractive Visitors Centre, designed by local architect Stuart Whitelaw, with its pull down shutters and rules governing its surrounding plantings (such as, height restrictions, "*prune and keep pruning*", and limiting plantings of oil -full plants) reflect the awareness of the ever present possibility of bush fires.

The site has temperatures ranging from -5 - +45 deg C and it is difficult but necessary to grow some coastal specimens. In order to reflect the full palette of plants that locals can grow in their gardens.

Each volunteer / Friend adopts a garden bed or propagates or does non horticultural but equally as important maintenance duties ( all under John's watchful eye) and this has made management much easier. Friends also fundraise for the garden, helped considerably by their extensive nursery on site.

### The design

John has very definite ideas about the function and design of paths in a large public garden. The main paths were to be wide – wider than normal as people like to walk together 2 or 3 abreast, discussing their journey as they go. He wants to encourage people to explore the bush (rather than go to the beach – an option in this geographically blessed part of the world) but not feel threatened – hence the wide paths which give a feeling of security. For the more adventurous there are secondary, smaller, unmade paths which meander deeper into the bush.

The Arboretum area ( est. 2003, also called the eucalypt and angophora lawn) consists of clean trunked (therefore fire resitant) species - *Euc rubina*, *Ang costata*, *Euc pilularis* ( only bark is at the bottom) and *Euc. maculata*. This is a very restful area, the trunks like so many totems, inviting children to play amongst the trunks whilst remaining visible to their parents; some seats are flanked by eucs planted closely on either side and then encircling the seat - one feels securely protected by some strong and attractive friends!

Sadly there wasn't time to explore the remaining 3 areas, consisting of Water area ( brings birds animals and insects – *a tree with a bird is better than a tree!*); and the Lake & coastal dune complex garden and the Open Grassland areas

These gardens are a testament to the knowledge, hard work, dedicated community spirit, foresight and optimism of John and his band of volunteers and Friends – it must be the envy of many Botanic Gardens in Australia.

Some plants that caught my eye

*Euc cypellocarpa* - mountain grey gum, beautiful bark      *Correa lawninciana*

*Isotoma axillaris* - prostrate, pale mauve starry flowers

*Nepateltis squameum* ( was *Phebalium*) or satinwood, tall shrub.

*Pomaderris aspera*      *Grevillea mucromilata x baueri*

*Beakia imbricata* ( wonderful hedge)      *Aotus ericoides* ( spiky form, abundant yellow flowers) one of the *Fabaceae* family.

The S.E. Coast Garden Design Workshop Handout July 09

**SOME GARDEN DESIGN FUNDAMENTALS**

*Design must have a sense of purpose, clarity and always be in context.*

Paul Thomson.

1. Form follows Function

Practicality v Aesthetics (visual beauty, character & mood)

The functional requirements (of the site) come first.

2. Formality and the degrees thereof!

*“Formality starts with the removal of a branch, the cutting of a grassy area, the planting of something that wasn’t naturally there.”*

I have purposely chosen not to use the word Informal here. It is nearly always used in conjunction with the word Formal – to mean the opposite of Formal –to my mind it is unnecessary and clouds an already complicated issue. Gardens are simply more, or less, formal. Given any garden is an artificial construct and a designed garden probably even more so I would suggest that all gardens, especially designed ones, have at least some degree of formality, no matter how miniscule, in their DNA.

Over the years the Formal/Informal debate has well and truly occupied members of the GDSG. !

It is very important to try and understand the basic tenets of Formal design; and here is a particularly good example where the understanding of historical context illuminates.

Formal garden design originated in Renaissance Italy and was imitated over centuries in all the courts of Europe (in England’s case until the 18<sup>th</sup> C. when it was ousted by the English landscape school). Here Man was at centre stage and the space was ordered according to the classic principles of geometry, proportion and symmetry. This vision of order, stamped firmly on the landscape, expressed garden design’s ultimate construct.

Supreme among all the gardens are the creations of Andre Le Notre. His feel for unity, balance and proportion, his insistence on sunlit spaces and unimpeded vistas brought the French garden to a peak of classical perfection. Formal gardens suggested status, power, control, order, domination and the elegance associated with refinement and discipline.

The controlled, repetitive and predictable nature of key shapes in the design is an indication of Formality; as is regimentation, repetition of forms, balancing or mirroring of space, symmetrical construction and regular proportions of design components.

Note also that formality can be structured on asymmetry with converging and diverging lines and curvilinear shapes as in Japanese gardens and naturalistic gardens.

The strength of pattern and purity of line with a continuity of direction is the key to the timeless appeal of the formal garden.

The principles of Formality work as design structures for any size of garden.

### 3. Change

A garden, unlike any other other work of art, is a living breathing organic system made up of many, many interdependent parts - both plant and animal. It exists in 4 dimensions (height, width, depth and time) growing and changing over time. A garden is best when it is designed to accommodate change but even so regular maintenance must be in place in order to maintain the integrity of the design and the health of the plants and soil.

*“ the art of the gardener has been compared to the art of the lion tamer – there is the elemental power of nature in both cases and the price of discipline is eternal vigilance.”*

Paul Thompson

## SOME PRINCIPLES OF GARDEN DESIGN

### Mass Void Line

### Balance Proportion Harmony

The relationship of the soft (plantings) and hard landscaping elements (driveways, parking, access routes and utilities, storage, irrigation systems, walls, steps, paths, man made ponds &lakes, outdoor entertainment areas, pool, bbq, pets, paving, lighting, compost area garden furniture and ornaments) to one other is fundamental to the success of the garden' design.

Initially try to understand the garden as simply a series of abstract shapes and to be aware of the importance of the relationship between shape and line.

There must be a balanced composition between the positive masses (plantings) and the negative spaces (grass or paving).

These shapes (masses and spaces) should evolve from and be proportionate to the house and its surrounding landscape in order to further emphasise the sense of balance and harmony.

### The Spirit of the Place

Use of local materials and indigenous plants will reinforce the genius loci (the spirit of the place) still further.

“Applying the age old principles of design and proportion is fine; reproducing a Tuscan landscape setting in Australia is culturally unimaginative, out of context and depletes the natural essence of the place.” Paul Thompson

It is important though, to realise that that a site may have its own intrinsic aesthetic and cultural values which are not indigenous. Often there are layers of non indigenous history, represented by old and usually exotic, plantings and/or buildings on the site – these are a part of our collective history – do we keep or remove? And what about historical memory plantings in one’s garden?

### Visual Devices

*“In all kinds of gardening the very best effects are made by the simplest means.”*

Gertrude Jekyll

Success in governing how the eye travels around a garden relies not only on the design’s linear, or ground, patterning, but devices such as -

Focal points (such as vistas, a specimen tree, a clipped shrub, a gate, bench or pots);

Framing and/or partial Screening

and

Repeat plantings( or using different plants but similar in form, texture or colour)linking the various parts of the garden.

- all of the above will help control and maintain the eye’s journey through the garden whilst enriching the visual experience. .

### PLANTS

Before planting out the garden it is most important to do a site assessment whereby such fundamentally important factors as -

soil, climate and microclimates, orientation, topography, elevation, prevailing winds, boundaries, view, drainage, utilities, microclimates and sun/shade ratio throughout the seasons

- are plotted , researched and notated.

By affecting not only the plants that will grow on the site but also the way the spaces within the garden will be used, they exert (or should!) an enormous influence on the design.

*“There is much discussion about the Australian garden, the Australian style. It is as yet- and may always be – impossible to describe a single Australian garden style.*

*Australian plants rare perhaps the only element or content that is particular to this country. In Australia gardens that have exotic plants are alien gardens in both content and philosophy. They satisfy imported cultural perceptions and needs and ...have little positive effect on the raising of awareness of the nature or care of our land.*

*Perhaps the most useful interpretation of an Australian style is a sustainable garden designed to thrive with minimal water and maintenance; planned for stable and steady growth with potential for regeneration and incorporating the site adapted indigenous flora that is able to survive, thrive and support itself along with its reliant creatures large and small.”*

Paul Thompson

Plants contribute form colour texture and fragrance to the garden; some would add sound and taste to that list as well.

COLOUR:

green is the most important colour in the garden,

should complement the overall design not over ride it

choice of colours depends on the surrounding landscape and the intensity of the light and the size of the garden

the creation of single colour arrangements in parts of the garden is good design practice

“The Australian Garden” breaks down the Role of Plants in garden design into :

1.Trees 2. Framework 3. Feature 4. Ornamental 5.Infill 6. Groundcover

DESIGN BIBLES & Bibliography:

“The Australian Garden” Diana Snape,; “ The Book of Garden Design” John Brook; “ Australian Planting Design” Paul Thompson“; The Education of a Gardener” Russell Page; “ The Natural Australian Garden” Gordon Ford“; The Garden as a Fine Art” F. R. Cowell.



## FOCAL POINTS

On our gardening pilgrimage towards our own vision of Eden we progress through various stages. Many of us start by wanting to provide a garden for birds, most of us have a phase where colour is all, then maybe the collecting urge takes hold. Whatever our particular path, sooner or later an awareness of the role of design creeps in. Good design must include the best locations for the paths, the clothesline, the garbage bins, but goes way beyond these mundane particulars to an overall whole, which is instinctively satisfying to the senses. Some people achieve this result instinctively, others, like myself, benefit from basic guidelines to avoid the worst mistakes and get better results sooner. These design principles are universal and not restricted to gardening, but there will be different emphases for each purpose, say designing tools or houses etc. Within the gardening area the same principles apply whatever the garden style and whatever the size of the garden. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but there are some underlying common features which neuroscience is beginning to explore. In any scene it is the unfamiliar which engages our interest, hence the quest for the new and different. So our gardens need a restful background of the expected with a dash of the excitement of the unexpected which holds our attention. Through the seasons different plants and areas can change from background to focus and back again, but especially in smaller areas more permanent focal points make for more interesting gardens.

There is a comparative dearth of design literature specifically relating to gardens of Australian plants but this is not a great handicap because of the universal nature of the fundamentals. The real handicap is the comparative lack of knowledge on the behaviour of Australian plants and their variability, hence some unpredictability of results. So there is much to be gained from overseas books and articles outlining the principles and a challenge to interpret solutions with our plants. One area which illustrates this well is the use and choice of features for focal points. I find it especially challenging because I feel our 'bush gardens' can so easily become diffuse and undifferentiated without highlights as exemplified by the difficulty of obtaining satisfactory photographs of garden scenes. Classical formal gardens with well defined lines and contrasts are easier subjects. Such gardens used statues and urns at the end of a vista to draw the eye and tempt the feet to explore. The Landscape Movement in England built follies and lakes to provide points of interest, cottagey gardens bred garden gnomes and of course fountains, elaborate or simple, were used widely in all garden styles. These built structures survive longer than most of the plants, but Capability Brown also used clumps of trees in the landscape many of which endure and these give us a clue for our own focal points. In our suburban gardens it is hard to devise long vistas but clever planning can produce shorter versions. Even a view from a side window quite close to the fence benefits from having a centre of interest.

Alongside urns and small water features in garden supply outlets there is now a variety of specifically Australian ornaments, birds and animals from mammals to reptiles to insects available. These are generally small and non-intrusive and can fit well into a background of our plants and small suburban yards. Gardeners are resourceful people and I have seen

many ingenious home grown features. Each time I think "I could do something like that", say a nest on the ground built of twigs with banksia cones for eggs, or a serpent made from collected twigs. So far nothing has actually happened bar the odd planted rock to collect moss but I have good intentions aplenty. I think I lack the creative spark to conceive of and build these things. Other examples include cairns of small stones, which can be reassembled in different ways if the original is knocked over, but our rock doesn't seem to be the right type. Excuses, excuses.

The focal points most suited to our type of garden are pots and feature plants. Pots are a great solution for a small space, giving the chance to grow favourites which are fussy in their needs but also to switch them around as their season of interest comes and goes. Few plants are high lights all year round. The content of the pot does not have to be a standout rarity, a pot of annual daisies can be a winner. The pots don't all have to be large, several modest ones grouped together with some raised on bricks or logs can lead to all sorts of interesting combinations. I am not yet very expert at managing plants in pots but it is something I look forward to if/when we move to Benalla. The collection has started especially of plants which dislike wet foliage as these can be grown under the eaves. These include Kangaroo paws, lots of Eremophilas and grey woolly foliaged plants generally. Then there are frost sensitive ones, mainly the rainforest species with beautiful foliage often having brilliant red flushes of new growth, the Lillypilly group is a good example and otherwise tough. There are many other species now becoming available.

Then there are special feature plants that are permanently placed. These may be brilliant in flower but the prime requirement is to hold the eye by their form and texture through out the year. One can't go past the Grass trees for drama as long as there is sufficient clear space to set them off. *Xanthorrea quadrangulata* is one which flowers every year here, something the indigenous larger *X. australis* is reluctant to do. *X. minor* which grows in abundance in our paddocks has not yet come into the garden. It would flower every year I think but the cattle eat the flower heads first. In the aftermath of the fires of 07 when the cattle were excluded while the fences were being rebuilt each clump of *X. minor* had multiple flower spikes, the highest count was around 40! Now if we could reproduce that in the garden reliably what a triumph that would be. Nurserymen have been active in other areas and selecting special forms of species such as *Acacia cognata* for their shape. I love spheres and circles and collect as many of these as I find. *Leptospermum* 'Little Bun', *Melaleuca armillaris* 'Green Globe' and *M. incana* spring to mind. These need little attention to provide the roundness, but I have also been very taken by Westringias and Salt bushes clipped into tight balls, just like the clipped box of exotic gardens. The contrast of the tight smooth clipped surface and looser natural adjacent shapes is as effective as a stone or marble sphere and more apt for our type of garden. The situation is important, an occasional perfect sphere can be a real highlight in a more relaxed setting, one per view is all it takes and it is essential not to overdo them.

If we have satisfying round balls, then something flat and something upright, spiky, will make the most of them. Depending on the scale the flat can be low grasses, groundcovers or a flat topped bush such as *Homoranthus flavescens* or *Melaleuca violacea*. I have a lovely flat unnamed Correa. The uprights are harder to come by. At the smallest scale taller grasses, Lomandras, Dianellas and Kangaroo Paws start off spiky but often finish up rounded shapes

as they age. There is one form of *Micromyrtus ciliata* collected by David Sheills which is slowly climbing to 2m while still only 30cm across. I recently found a form of *M. decussata* labelled fastigate but it is too early to say how it will grow here. For trees, I have yet to find the equivalent of the Italian Cypresses which punctuate Mediterranean skies so dramatically, although there are some large shrubs which maybe will develop a mutant with the right form given sufficient years of cultivation and selection. There's plenty still to do in our chosen garden world.

**Barbara Buchanan Vic.**

## **MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION**

Years ago, when writing for the Garden Design Study Group Book (The Australian Garden) in the chapter on large gardens, I stressed the importance of making a good first impression with the entry area, fully aware that I did not practice what I preached.

This critical space here had been partly planted in the very early days and we didn't want to lose the shade provided. Other garden areas demanded energy and attention, the entrance had to wait. A few years back the fejoia, a foreigner which blends well with natives simply had to be put back in its box. A major pruning effort cleared a nice strip along the drive into which I planted loads of small daisies, *Brachyscomes*, *Bracteanthas*, *Olearias*, *Helichrysums*, which I expected to be fillers while more permanent plantings established.

I fed and watered heavily and it has been a resounding success. The daisies still predominate, but *Swainsona galegifolia*, *Linum marginale*, *Derwentia perfoliata* and *Dichondra repens*, all regional locals, with the last a volunteer, are the fillers when the daisies need to be trimmed back. It is only a small space taking very little annual effort but gives a most cheery greeting when we return home, and our visitors a warm welcome.

On the other side of the drive is the turning circle. When we moved up permanently this had a group of three well established callistemons, a young seedling crab apple underplanted with bulbs and the sole survivor of a group of Eucalyptus 'Silver Princess'. This put on a great flower show the first year we were here, which also was its last. However while it lasted it proved the truth of the importance of a striking feature at the arrival point as it invariably drew visitors' attention. Over the years the effects of planting being too close led to the demise of two of the callistemons leaving only a very tall *Callistemon salignus*. The crab apple spread prodigiously and merged with the callistemon so we had a spring blossom show and seasonal flushes of fresh pink growth followed by cream bottlebrushes providing a focus as one comes up the drive. There was the added autumn sound and movement as the King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas arrived to feast on the fruit. Nothing was left for crab apple jelly after the first few years.

It hardly added up to a grand triumphant entrance, an exciting foretaste of splendours to come, inviting exploration of the rest of the garden. Maybe such drama is not quite appropriate here, but it need not have been so dull. So there were no tears when, after

looking increasingly seedy for several years, the crab apple finally failed this spring and was removed when our son arrived for Xmas. Part of the callistemon was so intertwined that it had to be shaved off on one side too.

All this lovely new space....how best to use it? The turning circle receives the water from the double carport roof, in winter it can even receive a flow as a frost melts, so if we return to something like previous rainfalls it could potentially be winter wet. I suspect a Chinese elm on the far side of the turning circle contributed to the demise of the crab apple as its roots are certainly just underground in the circle, which means there will be root competition keeping the ground dry in summer. The years of falling leaves have created a crumbly soil which seems to have potential. My first thought was to use small Myrtaceae, such as babingtonias, (baeckeas), melaleucas, callistemons and etc., because they would handle the alternate wet and dry conditions and could be clipped to prevent any intrusion over the drive. There are several which form small natural spheres and I have a thing for balls and circles. They would not be a dramatic planting, but hopefully softly green and always reliable.

The next idea was to reflect the daisy/swainsona etc. mix on the other side of the drive. Yes, certainly that should brighten the impression and be easy enough to achieve. Then I asked our son what he would do. Neil has a small town garden where every square inch is precious and is quite selective in his plants, using a lot of grafts. I had introduced him to John Barry of South Australia last May and he has been seduced by the verticordias John produces. They were an eye opener to me too. Four or five years ago I had made a small verticordia bed with plants on their own roots that I bought at the Adelaide plant sale. I dug over an old veggie bed which receives full sun most of the year that had been used for storing wood for many years and begged a load of sand from a kind neighbour. I specially chose species for summer flowering and started planting. Some lived, some died, with just enough success to keep me persevering, adding a few new purchases each autumn. A few *Leschenaultia formosa* and *L. superba* with a ground cover of *Kennedia prostrata* W.A. form (known to our group as Running Postman on steroids) contribute. The verticordias that survive are becoming rounded sturdy plants and this year have been spectacular in flower. As I can't easily reach the bed with the hose and only water to establish, I now find a fresh flowering response to rain, which we have seen a little more of this season to date. This bed has captivated and excited my resident photographer, heavy duty gardener and odd job man like no other in recent times.

It must be obvious where all this is leading, a new, better verticordia bed is on its way. The turning 'circle' is really a tear drop, with the big callistemon nearly half way from the point, that end is left grassed with a *Callistemon* 'Pink Champagne' already growing in it. The rounded end is roughly halved by the crab apple stump and a narrow access path beside it separating two sort of oval beds. A metre wide grass strip beside the drive allows access to parked vehicles and some of the bulbs will go back there to take their chance. The top bed next to the arrival drive has been built up with layers of ground limestone, hay and red soil and left to settle until the autumn, when I hope to visit Adelaide for the plant sale and stock up.

Somewhere along the line a topping of sand and a mulch layer of gravel is planned. This bed is in full sun all day at the moment, the lower one is partly shaded by the callistemon to the north and the shade trees on the western side. An inch of rain from a thunderstorm two days ago has enabled me to dig this over and remove many of the bulbs. A good layer of

limestone, whatever I can find as mulch and another load of red soil will lift this bed a bit too, but not as high as the first one. We appreciate the extended view on arrival and other areas are now providing the shade which was formerly a priority so new plantings will be kept low.

The aim will be to have a spot of colour there all year round, the problem to fit in everything I want to grow. Banksias, grevilleas and hakeas are the highlights for autumn and winter here, but usually they need space, as well as well drained soil. Maybe there are sufficient competing roots in the area to prevent waterlogging, it certainly wasn't a problem while the crab apple was there. It seems I have an aim for my reading in the hot summer afternoons and a subject for more lists. The planning stage is such fun, I always start with completely unrealistic schemes and gradually let common sense take over but just for a while my new bed is ablaze with colour with incompatible neighbours cheek by jowl. Finally plant availability is a major determinant of what goes in, but dreams can sometimes take substance.

**Barbara Buchanan Vic.**

## **Modernism, the Sydney School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture and the Bush Garden:**

### **A Conversation with Barbara Buchanan from *Bio-Design***

In the course of researching the handout for my recent trip to Japan I had the pleasure of speaking to Barbara Buchanan. Not our very own GDSG Victorian Barbara (see above!) but the NSW Barbara Buchanan, landscape architect and the principle of Bio design. Barbara worked with Harry Howard on both the National Gallery and High Court precincts in Canberra. Bio Design's focus is on environmental design, the use of indigenous plants and harvesting and recycling water. She is working on her PhD "*Modernism meets the Bush: Harry Howard and the Sydney School of Landscape Architecture.*"

The Sydney Bush School (1969 – 77) consisted of the architects and landscape architects Harry Howard, Bruce Mackenzie, Bruce Rickard and Alan Corrie. It was a non-elitist movement, passionate about the natural environment and giving the public natural landscaping in urban spaces. Much of their work exists in the public domain.

I knew that Western architects have been influenced by Japan since the late 19<sup>th</sup> C., (from Frank Lloyd Wright and our own William Hardy Wilson) and beyond into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. I was interested in how much, if any, influence the Japanese garden had had on both Australian architecture, landscape architecture and gardens in the modernist period. The Sydney Bush School was one of the modernist movements in Australian architecture at the time and I wondered if it and the Bush garden (which arose 20 years earlier) had any connection – and if so would this prove a Japanese link to the Bush garden?

Not so was Barbara's advice.

The SBS was influenced by Japanese architecture NOT Japanese gardens. The movement was not especially interested in gardens as such; happy to link the buildings with nature, expose a pre-existing rock or feature a large pre-existing tree. "they wouldn't be caught

dead importing rocks or planting a rose garden!” Designed outdoor entertaining areas provided walls and other rectilinear forms for looking through or over to the revered *natural landscape* beyond.

The only commonality of the Sydney Bush School with both the Bush Garden and Japanese gardens was in their celebration of Nature.

The Bush garden quite probably had its beginnings in Victoria (and to my mind has reached its apotheosis there. Ed.). There is a school of thought that says sandstone Sydney with its wealth of natural beauty, both botanical and geological had not the same need to create such a garden which is an idealized view of the Bush. This may be seen as typical Sydney grandstanding - of course we would say that wouldn't we - responses from the other states most welcome – also information on the original bush gardens and gardeners in each state would be wonderful.

If the Bush garden (wanting to recreate the feel of the bush in the garden) is seen as a nostalgic movement, it is, by definition, anti modernist. Broadly speaking, Modernism had no dialogue with that which had gone before.

Barbara's last point raised another question : is the Bush Garden a nostalgic movement ?

I am not sure that I have ever thought of it as such – rather, as a very forward looking one. Certainly it tried to recreate the feeling of the bush in the backyard but I think for far more important reasons than nostalgia alone.

Reasons such as, an appreciation of native flora's suitability to its immediate environment and (logically following from that) its properties of water and energy conservation and provision of wildlife habitat. Sustainability and biodiversity – local Council catch phrases now but the importance of which there is no doubt the early Bush Gardeners were well aware of.

That said, from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C. the ongoing, rapid destruction of bushland and the interconnected environmental disasters which followed were contributing factors for like minded people to plant out their space around the house as though living amongst “the bush”, no doubt also seeking the peace and seclusion to which Prof. Sadler refers to below. Whether that is nostalgic or personal taste is a moot point.

Was an underlying thought that by so doing it validated our indigenous flora and elevated its stature amongst the general public? Clearly the Bush Garden, although so different to its peers, was also tended and cared for by its owners who did not view their chosen interior world as a messy threatening environment needing to be slashed, burnt and reassuringly turfed.

They wanted to escape indeed, not backwards to nostalgia but forwards, bypassing in a rush, as they did so, the well documented dreariness ( see below) and horrifying unsustainability of the inter and post war Australian suburban garden.

*“...the surroundings of an Australian home are nothing but horticulture, and far from any inclination to suggest an atmosphere of seclusion or reticence, the dominating principle seems to be a desire that nothing shall be concealed from the passer by. If there is a fountain or something of the sort, usually called a feature, I believe, it is sure to be stuck out right by the road, while all the trees, if any existed, are cut down to make room for the charms of a bare lawn, with its symmetrical flower-beds and painfully dull neatness.”*

Prof. Arthur Sadler ( Professor of Oriental Studies, Sydney University ) 1934

as the French say (in English)...*the more things change the more they stay the same* .

## BOOK & TV SERIES REVIEWS

### AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 GARDENS

Monty Don BBC with Weidenfeld and Nicholson 2008

No doubt quite a few AGDSG members watched this program recently on ABCTV. I didn't see all the programs including the one on Australia and New Zealand because we had a power blackout! I really enjoyed the episodes which I saw. I found the choice of gardens refreshing as it was a good mix of old and new, grand and modest, traditional and idiosyncratic gardens. So I was rather pleased when I picked up the book of the series at my local library recently. I actually think it would have been better to have read the book before seeing the series. I had read the chapter on Northern European gardens before seeing that episode which was really rewarding.

One of the appealing features about the series as seen on TV was how Monty Don's commentary was based on his own reactions to each garden rather than a more academic and theoretical approach to garden design. His personal reactions come through even more in the book including some charming revelations of the difficulties and hardships of filming the series.

I have heard several criticisms of the Australian episode. It would be interesting to know who suggested the gardens which could be featured. I am sure residents of every country included or excluded from the series would question the choice of gardens from their area. I imagine Monty Don would have made the final selection himself.

Friends have told me that he did not seem to warm to the Australian gardens. The aim of the series was to investigate the extent to which gardens reflected the culture of each country. He no doubt picked up the Australian ambivalence to our native flora and the yearning for an English style garden which is still present here after 200 years. He was not impressed by the nostalgic English style of Kennerton Green but he was enthusiastic about the Mornington Peninsula Garden which had progressed from an English style garden to one which used native Australian plants. I was surprised that he first came across the idea of a waterwise garden in South Africa after he had visited Australia in the middle of a drought!

Here are some of the ideas and thoughts which really resonated with me from the TV series and the book.

- \* The gardens which were most appealing relied on the plants for form. The fashion for flowers came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rousham created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and "the greatest masterpiece of English gardening" is notable for the absence of flowers. Instead the design relies on green of every shade. Dutch designer Piet Oudolf chooses plants for form as much as for flowers. He prefers flowering plants with small flowers to large bloomed hybrids

- \* An extension of the plants as form idea was the extent to which pruned and clipped plants featured in gardens all over the world. I had never seen cloud pruned hedges before nor read an explanation of how it is done. It is a softer style than square cut hedges, which could be successful with some Australian natives or groups of native plants.
- \* The inspiration for traditional Chinese gardens comes from the paintings of the landscape of the Yellow Mountains. Naturally bonsaied trees grow in the limestone outcrops. Imagine paintings of angophoras growing out of the Sydney sandstone providing similar inspiration.
- \* Great gardens are never complete. Successful gardens are constantly changing and evolving. "Try and hold it still and it slips like sand through your fingers" (Jacques Wirtz Antwerp). On the other hand sometimes the real skill is knowing when to do nothing
- \* Context is everything. A garden should be tied to the context of its maker, the climate, geology, language, history, flora and culture even history of the place. "Increasingly I find themed gardens based upon plants that are not comfortable there and have to be mollycoddled just to survive an absurdity".(Monty Don).This is the dilemma for Australian gardeners. We have inherited the great English gardening tradition from our forebears but we are gardening in an Australian context which using Monty Don's definition is usually incompatible with an English style garden.
- \* There are gardeners in other parts of the world trying to create gardens from the indigenous flora. Two of the gardens which I really liked were in New Zealand and Chile created from native plants. They were not the only ones, there were others as well in Mexico and Norway.

**Jennifer Farrer NSW**

## **AROUND THE GARDENING WORLD WITH MONTY DON**

It is difficult to know where to start in discussing the BBC program 'Around the world in 80 gardens' which screened on the ABC in the months of May and June. Monty Don has an enthusiasm and open-mindedness for his subject –gardens of the world - which led him through travelling to challenge his notion of what a garden is. I suspect the program has challenged many people's notions including my own. It has been a wonderfully thought provoking series because Monty is exploring and sharing his thoughts and reactions with us rather than lecturing. We are sharing the journey rather than being the recipients of his accumulated wisdom. This has not been a program showcasing the most beautiful gardens of the world, although there have been a number that would fall easily into that category. Similarly its aim has not been to showcase the best landscaped gardens, although the majority of them have been designed gardens –some to within an inch of their clipped parterres. Indeed Monty took the opportunity to visit the home and garden of a number of landscape professionals. The gardens he visited ranged from house-boat gardens in pots in Sth America, stone gardens in Japan, community and school vegetable gardens; grand

gardens and small; gardens of Europe, the New Worlds (Australia, New Zealand, South America, South Africa), SE Asia and countries around the Mediterranean.

Monty's boundless enthusiasm – not completely unqualified – left me wondering on occasions where he was coming from. Criteria he used to assess the gardens in Australia and New Zealand – the use of the indigenous plants of those countries - didn't seem to figure to the same extent as his assessment of the gardens of England and Europe. Is he feckless? I'm not sure. Monty travelled the world to experience cultural difference through horticulture – mainly – as not all gardens were plant gardens. But the other thing he was concerned with was tracking the history of gardening in many cultures. And there I suggest lies the difference. In Europe his emphasis was on talking about gardening history, styles and influences rather than the cultural appropriateness of gardens to the indigenous landscape and plants.

Gardens in Australia and New Zealand figured in the first episode. At Cruden Farm in Victoria Monty noted the imitative gardening style so evident in Australia which is typified by Dame Elizabeth Murdock's much loved garden. In the next garden he visited (not far from Cruden Farm) Monty sensed a slight generational shift towards the use of Australian plants. In this garden a few Australian plants are used alongside exotic plants in formal ways - clipped and managed by the mother. But beyond the formal garden rooms the daughter of the house has established some garden beds using Australian plants that are left to grow free from the restraining snip of the hedge clipper. This garden is a convenient example of how Australian gardens may be struggling to come of age. The 'wild' Australian garden is tucked down the back – a tack-on quite unrelated to the European style garden but maybe it is the garden of the future. Monty certainly seems to hope so as he would like to see the gardens of the New Worlds embody a sense of place. Monty did find a good example of a suburban size New Zealand plant garden but I thought it was a shame he didn't find a good example of an Australian plant garden like Elspeth Jacob's wonderful garden at Montrose (Vic).

I found the gardens of the New Worlds much easier to relate to than the gardens of Europe as a generalisation and the ones that impressed me the most were the few that used local indigenous plants. Who could forget the cliff-top garden in Sth America where the garden blended seamlessly with the natural vegetation of the rocky site whose plant communities it shared? Could there be a greater contrast to the formal gardens of Europe or the landscape traditions of Capability Brown! It was interesting how Monty didn't showcase an ordinary garden in his own country – we were only shown the large gardens of the wealthy. It is so much harder to be objective about your own patch! As I watched this episode on the gardens of England and France – with at least one too many parterre gardens - and listened to Monty effuse particularly about his favourite garden I started to wonder what sense he must make of it all and whether his experiences would in any way influence his thinking and in turn his actions in his own garden. It would have been interesting to hear him deliver a post-mortem, pulling the threads together of what was to some extent at least a personal journey. What does his own garden look like, what is his personal vision, philosophy and ethic and how has it been challenged or changed!



### Wanted - Melbourne Meeting Leader

At the last Melbourne meeting I mentioned that I intend to step aside from leading the Group so we do need to cast around for new leadership. This Newsletter is therefore a good time to broadcast this more broadly in the hope that someone might step forward to fill the role and provide direction. If you are interested in this role then please ring me (Chris Larkin)

### **SYDNEY MEETING** Nov 21/22 Foxground/ Gerringong Sth. Coast.

Another weekend garden extravaganza awaits. On the beautiful south coast we will visit two gardens at Foxground Sat 21 and one at Gerringong, *a delightful seaside village just across the road from Foxground* on Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> am.

Sat AM:

Bruce Mackenzie's (see article Conversation with Barbara Buchanan) garden which originally belonged to the Longs and which some of our long serving members will have seen many years ago. Bruce is very happy to speak to us about the garden and other aspects pertinent to design with native plants - a wonderful opportunity and not to be missed.

Sat PM:

Just up the road to Bolwarra where we will have our BYO picnic lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon there. : please come prepared for leeches - just in case .Ann advises they can be ordered online.

*Since the last visit of the Garden Design Group to Bolwarra, about 5 years ago, the forest has grown happily without its coat of lantana, and with most of the carpet of weeds gone. The old grazing paddock is now a forest wood lot, and difficult weed infested areas are healthy regenerating forest. There are bush paths throughout the 22 hectares that provide experience of four very different rain forest types – the dryer small leafed myrtle forest- Backhousia myrtifolia, coach wood forest – Ceratopetalum apetalum, temperate and subtropical rainforests. Two rare and endangered species are now flourishing. One in particular - Daphnandra johnsonii (Vol. 2 Flora of Australia 2007) is probably the largest known stand extant. The bird population appears to be increasing, especially the lyre birds. We now see the king parrot once or twice a year. The gazebo, perched discreetly on the cliff edge, made from one of the eucalypts on the property, provides the ideal place for meditation and contemplation- if you can find the time! Plant lists (300 species) will be available. Suggest that the group arrives here for lunch at 12 – 12.30 so that they can take off about 1.30pm. When you come doesn't really matter, but it is about having enough time and light to walk slowly in forest and garden around house*

*The walk down the valley and return to cars can be made in 2 hours but two and half hours allows time for pauses. The group could take in a special addition if it was three hours. So 1.30 to 4.00 or 4.30 means can get to B&B by 5.00 if in Gerringong. It is fine by us if the group leaves later. Up to you and the energy people have. Daylight saving will have started and there will be good light till about 7.30pm. (In 2008 on 22nd Nov sunset was 7.43pm! )*

*For those who think they can't manage the walk into and out of the valley, we have a flatter circuit – interesting but the valley walk is more dramatic.*

*The "Australian Traveller" website for accommodation won't be functioning again until beginning September – they are revamping it. But try Google Gerringong Accommodation if you need ideas now. Bellachiara (resort) is on it as well as Tumblegum Inn Gerringong village.*

*We can go somewhere even in bad weather.*

**Ann Long NSW**

We are in the midst of making dinner arrangements for our group and looking into accommodation as well – more details in the Nov NL, please ring me with any questions or feel free make your own accommodation arrangements. JH

Sun AM:

the garden of Glennis & Warwick Dix

*We came here to a suburban block about 18 months ago and the conversion of the grass and agapanthus weed to natives is continuing. It is thus by no means yet an exhibition piece. The property presents the usual problems of ugly neighbouring walls, tree roots, shaded areas and so on. Planning is incomplete, particularly in the front yard.*

*Recently we joined a design study group visit to Batemans Bay. Glennis and I were impressed with the inspections of 4 properties and the subsequent discussions which demonstrated how much considered thought had been given by members of the group to the problems presented and to some of the solutions manifested.*

*If your group has in mind such an approach, a visit to our partially developed garden could be rewarding. We can put on facilities for morning tea ( hot water, some cups or disposable cups, a few chairs for those of us in need and a covered veranda area should the weather go nasty).*

**Warwick & Glennis Dix**

## TREASURER'S REPORT

### YOUR 09/10 FINANCIAL YEAR MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE NOW DUE

The membership form is attached to this NL. In completing the form can you please write clearly, especially your email address – this makes my job a lot easier. Cheques will be banked promptly. There will be no direct debit arrangement this financial year.

Members who are financial for the 09/10 Financial Year (FY) are:

Surname	First name
Adler	Ingrid
APS Blue Mountains	C/- Charles Farrugia
APS SA	Ligita Bligzna
APS SA	E. Handreck
Cox	Ian & Tamara
Farrer	Jennifer
Forbes	Ken & Elizabeth
Gunter	Caroline
Hall	Cheree
Hambrett	Jo
Harris	Suellen & Brian #
Herrmann	Monika
Houseman	Annette & John
Howes	Jeffery
Johnston	Wendy # #
Larkin	Chris

Main	Win
Marriott	Neil & Wendy
McColl	Sue
McIver	Doug & Margaret
Mills	Ann & Ray
Morris	Gillian
Morton	Deidre # #
Nataprawira	Roslyn
Neild	Anne
Pymble	Michele
Rigg/Leggatt	Martin/Diana
Russell	Andrew & Janet
Sanders	Gwen
Snape	Diana & Brian
Van Reit	Helen
Verbeeten	Rosemary
Webb	Maureen & Norman
Zouliou	Aliki

Please note if you see # after your name you are financial for the FY 10/11 as well AND if you see # # after your name you are financial for the FY 11/12 as well.

Also a warm welcome to the following new members:

Roslyn Nataprawira

and

Ken and Elizabeth Forbes

