

WORKING THE ANGLES

Peaceful, private and pleasing to the eye, this small townhouse courtyard is now a place of repose and retreat



Himalayan weeping bamboo flanks the Buddha statue.

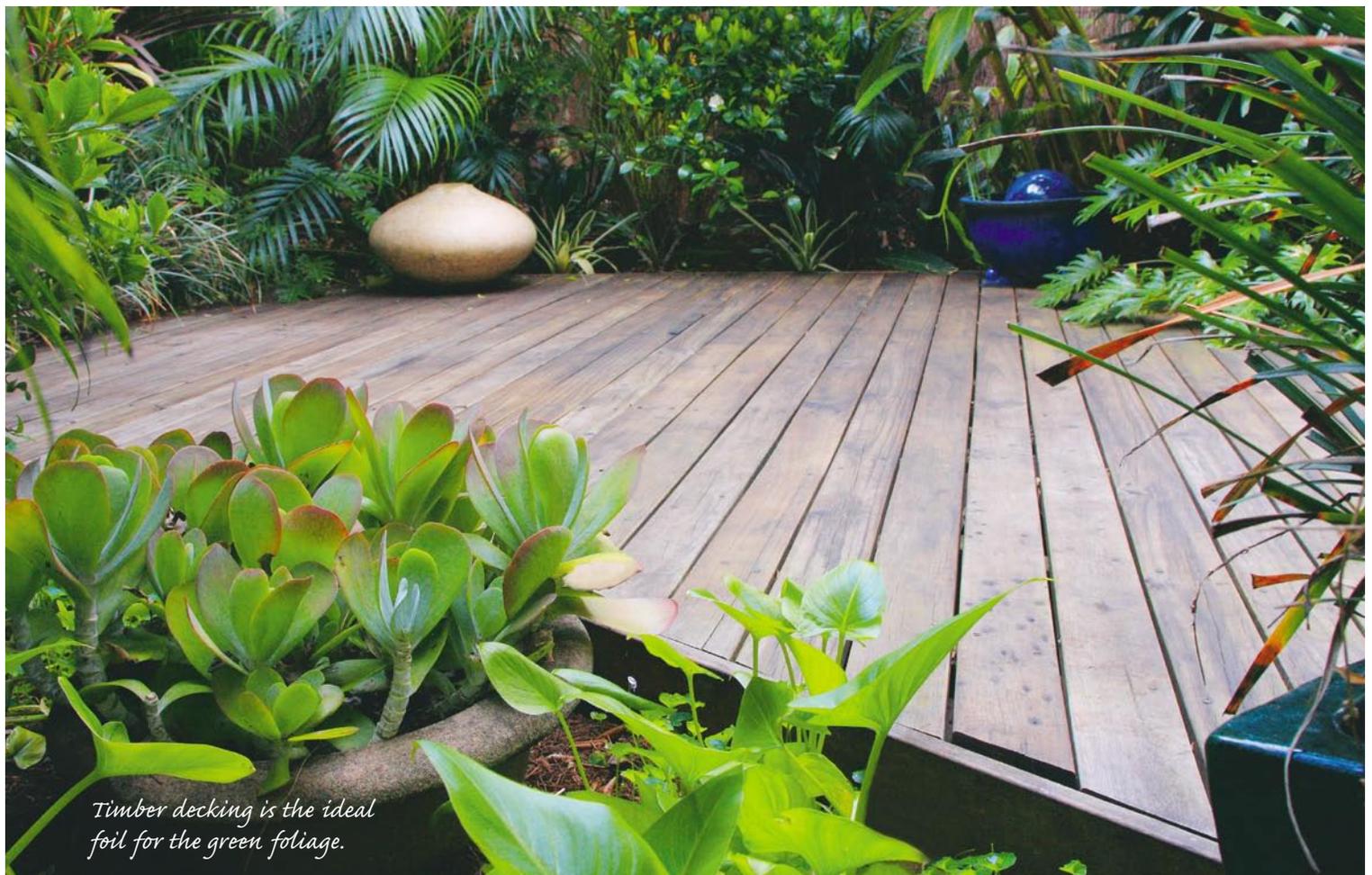


Designer: Helen Young
Garden: Marsfield, New South Wales
Photos: Peter Brennan

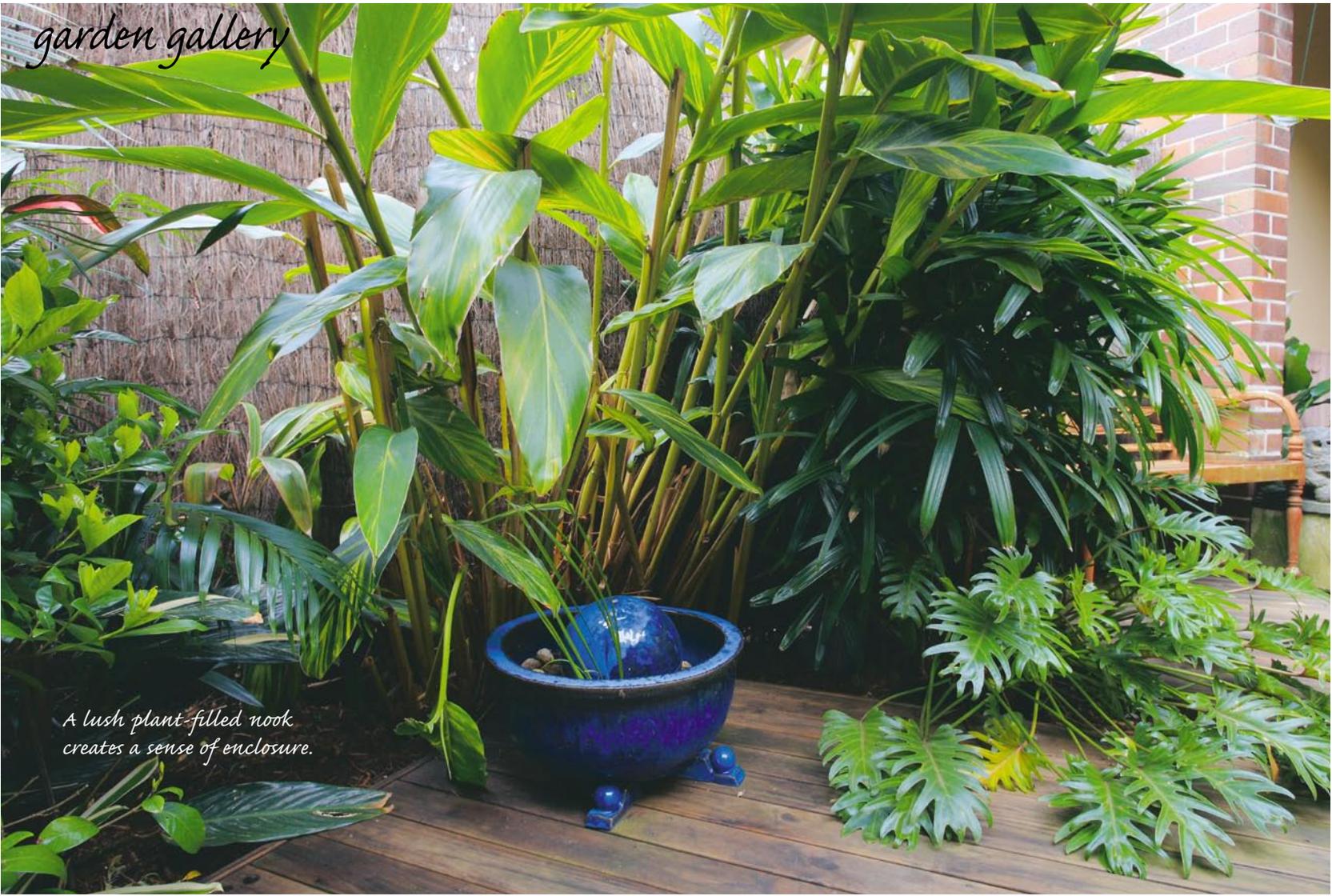
In the midst of the city jungle we all want our own sanctuary, but in medium-density developments comprising hundreds of occupants this can be hard to achieve. If your townhouse is one of dozens the same, how can you stamp your individuality on your precious outdoor space? How can you achieve that essential privacy? And how can you make a tiny space feel like a private oasis?

Such were the challenges I faced when Beverley Peken asked for assistance after moving into a brand-new townhouse development in Sydney's northwestern suburbs. The courtyard area measures just 6m x 7.5m, faces south and was corralled by unrelieved Colorbond fencing. A too-small, stencilled concrete slab and some sad, weedy kikuyu grass were all the double glass doors from the living areas looked onto. Beverley's brief was for privacy from the soon-to-be-built neighbouring development that would overlook her courtyard, and a garden that provided a peaceful oasis. It also needed to be easy to look after.

The plan that was developed, in consultation with Beverley, turns the boring square space on an angle, adding interest and giving the illusion of greater space. The timber decking, installed so it flows at the same level as the interior floor, is laid at 45 degrees to the townhouse and fences and has several angles designed into it. These provide natural focal points for →



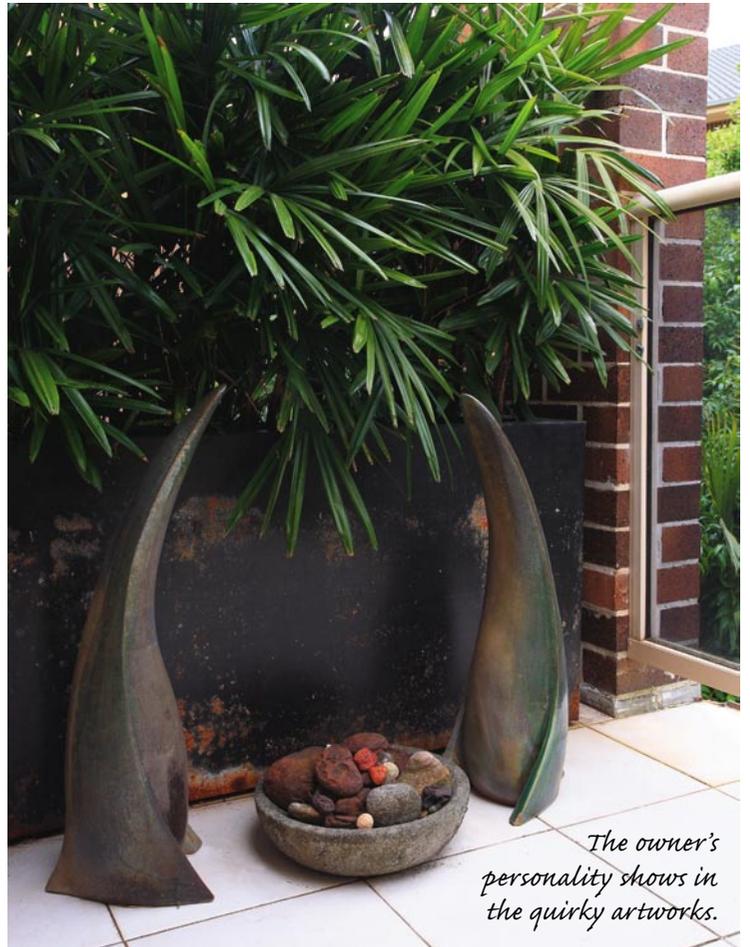
Timber decking is the ideal foil for the green foliage.



A lush plant-filled nook creates a sense of enclosure.



The use of angles enlivens a once boring space.



The owner's personality shows in the quirky artworks.

some of Beverley's quirky pots and sculptures, and also allow the garden and decking to interact in more interesting ways.

Timber decking offers a more natural feel than hard paving and is the ideal foil for the lush planting. It also solved some issues with differing levels that were causing problems in the original space. The metal fences were clad with inexpensive rolls of brush, which instantly changed the feel of the space from bland to exotic and makes a lovely backdrop for the plants.

The planting scheme is varied in texture, form and colour and plants are layered to create tropical lushness and interest at every level. For screening and privacy, Helen used a mix of several fast-growing, tall shrubs, including dwarf lilly pillies, sweet viburnum, and *Xylosma senticosum*. Tall palms such as majestic palm and Kentia palm provide a leafy canopy, while clumping palms such as lady finger palm, cascade palm and golden cane palm add generous foliage and texture.

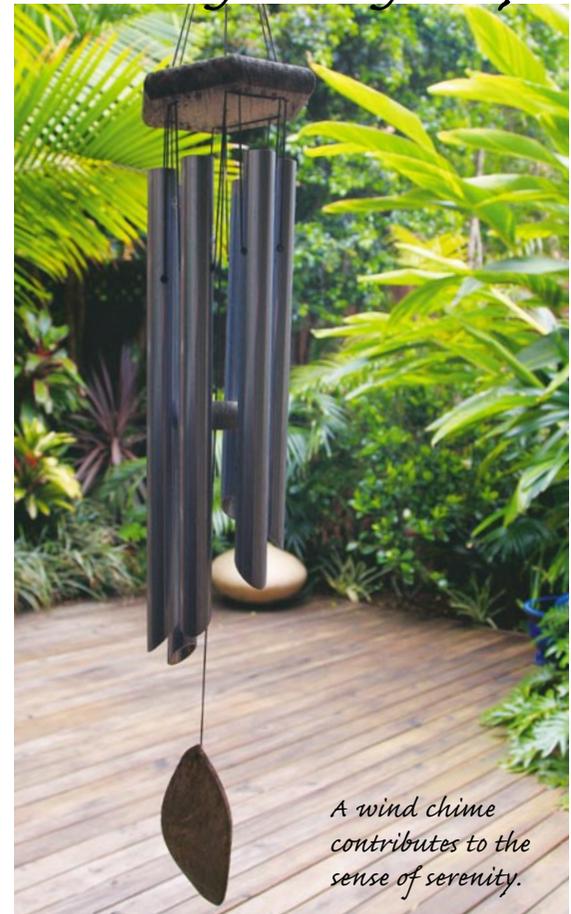
Coloured foliage is provided by various forms of cordylines, bronze New Zealand flax, variegated shell ginger, purple trad (*Tradescantia pallida*) and bromeliads. A couple of gardenias were added for their fragrance and for sentimental value. Other plants that fill the lower levels include variegated mondo grass, *Philodendron*

'Xanadu', parlour palm, *Liriope* 'Evergreen Giant', dwarf arum lily and clivia.

Outside the lounge room window, a difficult and dark little space squeezed between the side wall and the air-conditioning unit was transformed using a cycad as a central feature, surrounded by a square pattern of stepping stones. Sacred bamboo and clivia provide screening and softening with virtually no maintenance. A generous blanket of tea-tree mulch completed the garden.

A small balcony off the main bedroom that overlooks the garden was also given treatment to provide privacy and enhance the outlook from the bedroom. Here, rhapsis palms in tall troughs form a screen at one end, while the opposite end wall became the setting for Beverley's Buddha statue, delicately framed by pots of Himalayan weeping bamboo with *Liriope* 'Evergreen Giant' in front.

The transformation of this compact courtyard is complete now that the plants completely obscure the fence lines and the screening shrubs are tall enough to provide absolute privacy. Living in the townhouse is a different experience with an enticing outlook through the sliding glass doors onto lush greenery and an outdoor room that provides pleasure day and night. Neighbours might be physically close but they are worlds away from this tranquil space. ■



A wind chime contributes to the sense of serenity.



"An outdoor room that provides endless pleasure day and night"

From all viewing angles this private oasis is stunning.