

## Small and beautiful

THIS COMPACT PARNELL GARDEN IS A HAVEN OF RELAXATION IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE



A FEW YEARS AGO, the owners of a stylish apartment in Parnell, Auckland, presented Damian Wendelborn of Urbanite with the challenge of creating a sanctuary outside their new home. In typical contemporary fashion, it doubles as a workplace, with the bottom floor containing the consulting rooms for an interactive healing practice.

The brief was to “create a pleasant area both to look out on from the consulting rooms and somewhere clients could relax as they waited”. Wendelborn’s first reaction to the site was delight at the degree of shade afforded by the magnificent oaks and puriris balancing the height of the modern building.

“As a designer you develop a plant palette you know will work,” he says. Here, a mixture of natives and shade-tolerant subtropicals has been extremely successful. Taller pongas or tree ferns together with bamboo palms give vertical accents, while the lush, heart-shaped leaves of the pepper tree or kawakawa soften the boundaries.

Advancing steadily up the trunk of the oak is the strappy-leaved native vine, keikei, while the clients’ stag horn ferns look as if they’ve been there for ever. Ferns like *Blechnum pennamarina* and massed bromeliads fill the ground plane, underplanted with dwarf mondo grass.

However, it is the hard landscaping that reveals where Wendelborn’s heart lies. Flat, smoothly polished stepping stones lead through the garden to a solid block – the focal point.

Dark, rounded stones, used in the shared driveway aggregate, blend with a taupe or biscuit tone that has been introduced to the concrete mix. This is used in a variety of ways on the initial retaining wall, seat and pavers to provide a subtle contrast between the treatment of different areas.

Subdued lighting enhances the soothing atmosphere of this tiny (five by eight metres) garden. As Wendelborn says: “Being confined in terms of design parameters often results in a more pleasing solution.”

– ROSE THODEY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARNIE NICOLSON