

PROVENCE REVISITED

Fond Mediterranean memories have been translated into an Australian coastal garden

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Photos: Patrick Redmond



garden profile



Extensive international travel, which included many happy days spent in the Provencal areas of France, was the catalyst for this Mediterranean-themed landscape on the Victorian coast.

The owners' strong appreciation and passion for the lifestyle and landscapes of Provence is especially evident throughout the garden. Provence is a region of France influenced both by the coast and the mountains; it is a place full of picturesque landscapes that have provided inspiration for famous artists such as Cezanne and Van Gogh and many subsequent generations of international travellers.

From the outset, the goal was to create a landscape that would thrive in the local Australian conditions yet have a distinctive and authentic Mediterranean look and feel. For the owners, achieving the elegant simplicity of

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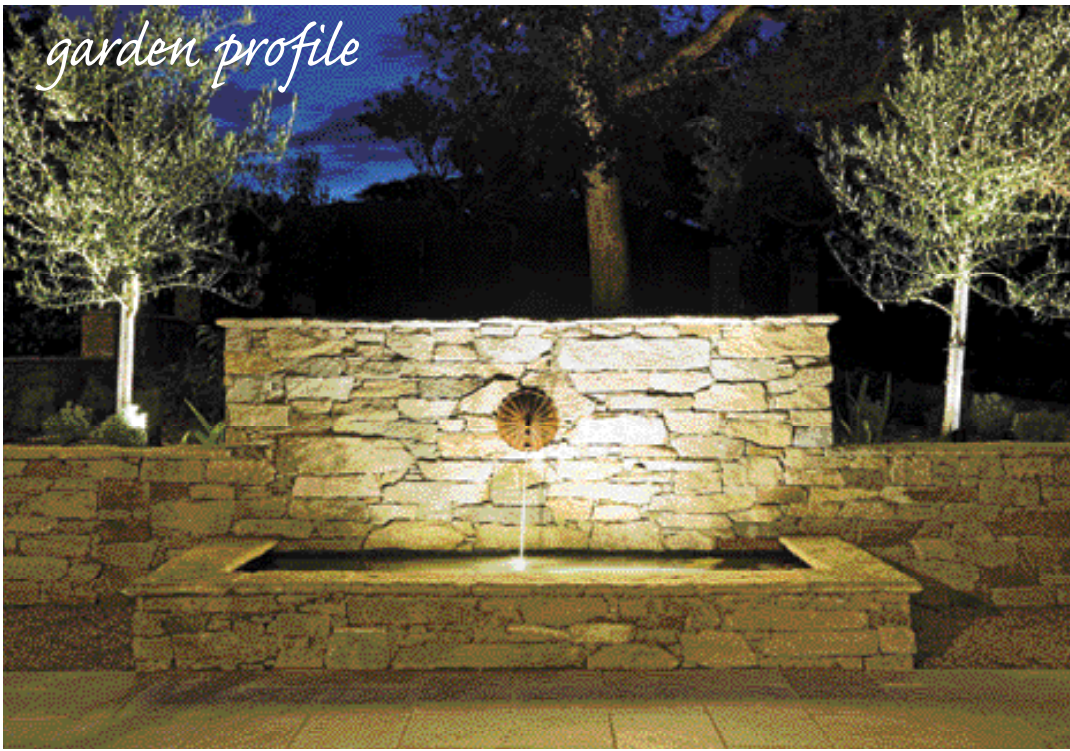
the French landscapes they had so admired was of paramount importance. To achieve this, we incorporated dry stone rock walls, natural stone paving, Mediterranean plant species and outdoor living/dining areas that are at the heart of the Mediterranean lifestyle. Somehow, any cuisine described as *a la Provencale* seems to taste even better when eaten alfresco.

Initially, the steep slope of the site presented challenges but we soon turned this into a wonderful opportunity to layer the garden with a series of dry-stone terraces. These inviting terraces conveniently hide a meandering driveway constructed of concrete Pebblemix bordered with granite cobbles and a row of ornamental pears (*Pyrus calleryana*) underplanted with a groundcover of prostrate rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus').

The driveway then disappears behind the →



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house, past a wall covered in Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) and through a hidden tunnel of Hill's weeping fig (*Ficus microcarpa* var. *hillii*), which forms one of three foliage borders on the property.

Extensive use of plant species typically found in Provence has added to the authenticity of the landscape while making the garden more sustainable. All the plants are hardy species; some of them drought tolerant. In addition to the prostrate rosemary you will find English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), Portugal laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*), bay trees (*Laurus nobilis*), and star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*).

In contrast to the driveway, which is discreetly tucked away amid the terraces, the main entrance is meant to be seen and sets the tone for the rest of the garden. Entering via the Corten steel gates, one progresses down a compacted granitic sand pathway into which has been set the occasional travertine



step, giving a taste of things to come. The Leyland cypress (*Leylandii x cupressocyparis*) hedge ensures privacy on the boundary yet allows ample space for the avenue of English lavender. Adjacent to the path, in the more formal setting created by the low Portugal laurel hedge, metallic flamingos rise up.

At the end of the path you pass through low bay tree hedges and an avenue of small olive (*Olea europaea*) trees where extensive areas of travertine paving are revealed and, finally, what the owners call "the terrace". This is the family's outdoor dining area and is accessed from the kitchen/dining/living area of the house through a series of French doors. The tasteful yellow rendered walls of the house beautifully complement the travertine paving and the dry-stone walls that border the terrace.

The terrace captures the rising morning sun from the east and remains bathed in sunlight until sunset. It is a warm and protected area in the winter while in the summer the adjacent

olive trees, large standard bay trees planted in Anduz pots and the recently established ornamental grape vines provide shade.

Sitting at the stone table in the outdoor dining area looking back towards the garden, the dry-stone terraces provide layers of foliage, starting with the avenue of olive trees and leading to the simple yet elegant water feature, an aged bronze spout gently dispersing water into a handcrafted stone trough. Your eye then rises up to the English lavender, the swathe of groundcover star jasmine and a carpet of grey cotton lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparis*) visible through the avenue of ornamental pear

trees traversing the hillside. Finally, your eye rests on a small lemon grove, underplanted with herbs, in the far reaches of the garden.

The creation of this piece of Provence successfully combines the elements you would expect to find in a Mediterranean garden with the needs of a modern Melbourne family and the climatic conditions of its coastal location. The result is a delightful landscape with the most amazing ambience. ■

Justine Carlile is a Melbourne-based landscape designer and founder of Justine Carlile LANDSCAPEdesign.

