



## true to form

*Boasting an authentic Japanese garden, this modern Australian home is a place of retreat*



When the call went out to Japanese garden specialist Moto Kihara of Kihara Landscapes, the home was nearing completion. Original landscaping plans had been prepared by Jack Merlo Design together with Orbis Constructions, but one of the homeowners is Japanese and wanted a genuine Japanese garden constructed by a Japanese garden professional.

The home includes a Japanese tea room, complete with imported tatami mats, which overlooks one section of the garden. It was here that Kihara Landscapes was asked to design and construct a very traditional Japanese garden, one the owner could look out on when enjoying the Japanese tea ceremony.

Kihara Landscapes was also charged with building the remaining outdoor areas. Other parts of the home are more contemporary so the adjacent garden spaces needed a more modern, yet still traditionally minimalist Japanese style. There were practical issues to address, too. As the owners are of retirement age, ease of access to all areas was vital — this included incorporating gradual steps to the front door. And as their grandchildren regularly come to play, soft fall spaces were needed.

The owners wanted a personal connection to the traditional Japanese garden area, so Moto incorporated some of their own outdoor collector's pieces, such as the large "daruma" rock ornament. The daruma is one of Japan's most famous good luck talismans and this

one, brought from Japan, weighs 400kg. Japanese gardens are designed to appeal to all of the senses, hence the inclusion of a traditional water feature, comprised of a granite water bowl and bamboo spout. The sound of water dropping is an essential element in a Japanese garden, one that stills the mind. Picking up on the colour of the water bowl, there is also a granite lantern and granite paving which has been used in various parts of the garden.

The merbau timber deck was intentionally left unstained to create a balance between new and old, which is typical of the Japanese aesthetic "wabi-sabi" found at the heart of traditional Japanese gardens.

Plant selection was an essential part of the process, with Moto striving to create a planting scheme as close as possible to what you would see in Japan, but using locally sourced plants. That wasn't the only consideration, however. One of the homeowners practises ikebana, so the garden needed to incorporate plants that could be used in arrangements. One distinctive part of the garden also features kangaroo paw, illustrating that Australian native plants are harmonious with a Japanese garden.

Moto's planting palette ensures the garden can be enjoyed throughout the seasons. *Bambusa textilis* 'Gracilis', a luscious upright non-clumping bamboo, adds greenery en masse. Also, the sound of wind flowing through bamboo is a crucial element of the Japanese garden.

Other traditional plants found in the garden include Japanese weeping maples, camellias and two kinds of Japanese cherry blossom trees — Fuji and Yoshino. As a non-weeping variety, the Yoshino was tricky to source, but well worth the effort. There is also Japanese box hedging, gardenias and Ginkgo biloba.

Lighting plays an integral role. Twenty-eight LED lights were placed throughout the Japanese garden and there is 12-volt LED lighting beneath the stairs approaching the impressive front door. This really sets off the entrance at night.

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