



SCULPTED GARDEN: Strong forms contain "chaos". PICTURES / GLENN JEFFREY



ROSE THODEY ■ GARDENING

my new garden

One happy side effect of having to extend our old villa to better accommodate our four growing children was the chance to make a new garden.

When it became obvious that our planned bedrooms would look out on a brick wall — rather like a basement flat in London — it was time to let the diggers do their worst.

But not even the most pessimistic of us realised then that we were destined to look out on mud and trenches worthy of the First World War for more than a year.

Only one part of the old garden kept hope alive: a narrow strip on the shady south side of the house that managed to escape unscathed. Full of native trees, shrubs and ferns, nikau palms and a large kentia that once graced our living room in Wellington, plus broad-leaved clivias edged with Liriope muscari, it stayed lush and green throughout.

Later, another bright spot appeared in the form of a cheerful patch of wildflowers sown by Hattie, daughter number three, as soon as the first bit of topsoil was laid.

A trailer-load of plants spent the duration residing grandly under the shade of an oak tree in a corner of my sister's vegetable garden. The box hedging proved the most movable. When the sad air of refugee status clung to many of the others, I hardened my heart and decided it was time for a fresh new look.

Like building from scratch, we had an opportunity to tie the landscaping in with the architectural designs for renovating the house. Enter Lucy Treep, an architect like her husband, Graeme Burgess, who did the house, but one who prefers landscape design.

I knew I wanted a strong structure that would remain attractive throughout the seasons and contain my somewhat chaotic planting within firm limits, especially now that we were to have a grandstand view of the garden from three levels. Dreams of Rosemary Verey's intricate knot gardens and Isabelle Greene's abstract patterns filled my head but I knew they would never work for a plantaholic like me.

Treep's excitement over her second plan told me at once that we had the answer. A bold oval lawn for bowling cricket balls and practising goal kicking, moving out to what eventually metamorphosed into a rectangular pool, calmly reflecting the mass of plants that were soon to sway above it. After much debate we moved the carport to make more room for garden beds and eventually its roof will be hidden by Michelia yunnanensis Velvet and Cream, if the rose on the far end doesn't beat it to the task.

Visitors always comment on the entrance we share with our neighbours, the perfect solution to a narrow pathway originally divided by a rickety old fence. Now an upright copper beech growing in the middle of a broad path behaves itself



CRICKET OVAL: The lawn is planted in a bold elliptical shape.



MIRROR IMAGE: A rectangular pool reflects the plants swaying above it.

with suitable decorum and our copy of their garden gate provides a gentle echo.

A bed of Heuchera "Amethyst" on one side adds more deep burgundy to the scene, further enriched by the dark red new growth and flowers of Camellia "Night Rider". Iris-like Dietes iridioides lightens the scene.

A large new pergola through the garden gate is being gradually covered by the Australian climbing rose "Nancy Hayward" — it has gigantea in its bloodline. Plain old Chinese Wisteria (sinensis) is being trained to grow forward where it will eventually form a fringe of lilac and green foliage right along the front. Star jasmine (Trachelospermum jasminoides) is

smothering Treep's intricate Japanese screen pattern at the back in the interests of privacy, while the more unusual and creamier asiaticum is doing its best to help.

A line of feathery evergreen, blue-flowering Corydalis elata softens the front of this brick wall, offset with a few yellow ones (lutea) around a wooden seat. True blue, forget me not look-alike, Omphalodes cappadocica, provides a twinkling groundcover throughout. And my hydrangea love affair has seen the delicious new lacy white variety "Trophy" replace a row of ill-chosen gardenias. (Varieties with smaller, narrower leaves seem to do better in Auckland.)

Terry Hatch's hellebores or winter roses

IT'S ONLY NATURAL: Dreams of intricate, abstract designs "would never work for a plantaholic like me". Below, a climbing rose is taking over the new pergola.



see us through the cooler months.

The chimney pot from our old kitchen range provides a focal point from the seat and Hattie and I copied its heart-patterned cut-outs, simplified to more of a tear drop shape, for a rose bed edged with the new stronger-growing Alchemilla mollis "Thriller". The shape disappears for most of the year but provides an essential mental block when I get carried away planting new roses in winter.

Garden designer Kevin Tonks tracked down some Thuja occidentalis "Smaragd" for a formal backdrop and added to the natives behind a skateboard ramp that will, in my dreams, one day become a glade of trees hiding a tiny potting shed.

And there ends my feeble attempts at control. Always a fan of Mirabel Osler's *A Gentle Plea for Chaos*, and with a passion for experimenting with new plants and the bright colours that bask in our clear light, I buried myself in catalogues and ordered with gay abandon.

Hattie filled the early gaps with seeds from her vast collection and the result is a mad, merry, scented mix that doesn't draw breath until late autumn.

An oasis of calm amidst the mayhem is a quiet native corner, centred on a venerable cabbage tree saved from the digger's best attempts at murder. Mossy mounds of Scleranthus biflorus have already softened the huge rocks around its base and large hebes, with glossy Griselinia lucidas, are slowly gaining height at the back.

Gossamer grass (Anamanthele lessoniana) waves through the mass.

Tuscan sandstone took months to arrive from India — where else — but it balances the old brick paths and walls. And once we had it sealed has been easy to keep, despite its light colouring. Ralf Krone laid all the bricks and stone as well as the lawn, and prepared the soil for planting. When Treep had the brainwave of smoothing off the top of the brick walls with curved clay tiles, Krone drastically reduced the cost by cutting lengths of clay pipe in half.

Dense planting in broad swathes has the advantage of keeping weeds vaguely under control and this kind of intensive gardening is easy to manage if it's on a small scale.

How to survive as a lover of nearly every plant and style of gardening on earth and still hold my head up in a minimalist world? Describe my passion as a modern take on the early colonial idea of a promiscuous garden — a bit of everything.

■ Rose Thodey is taking a break for a while.

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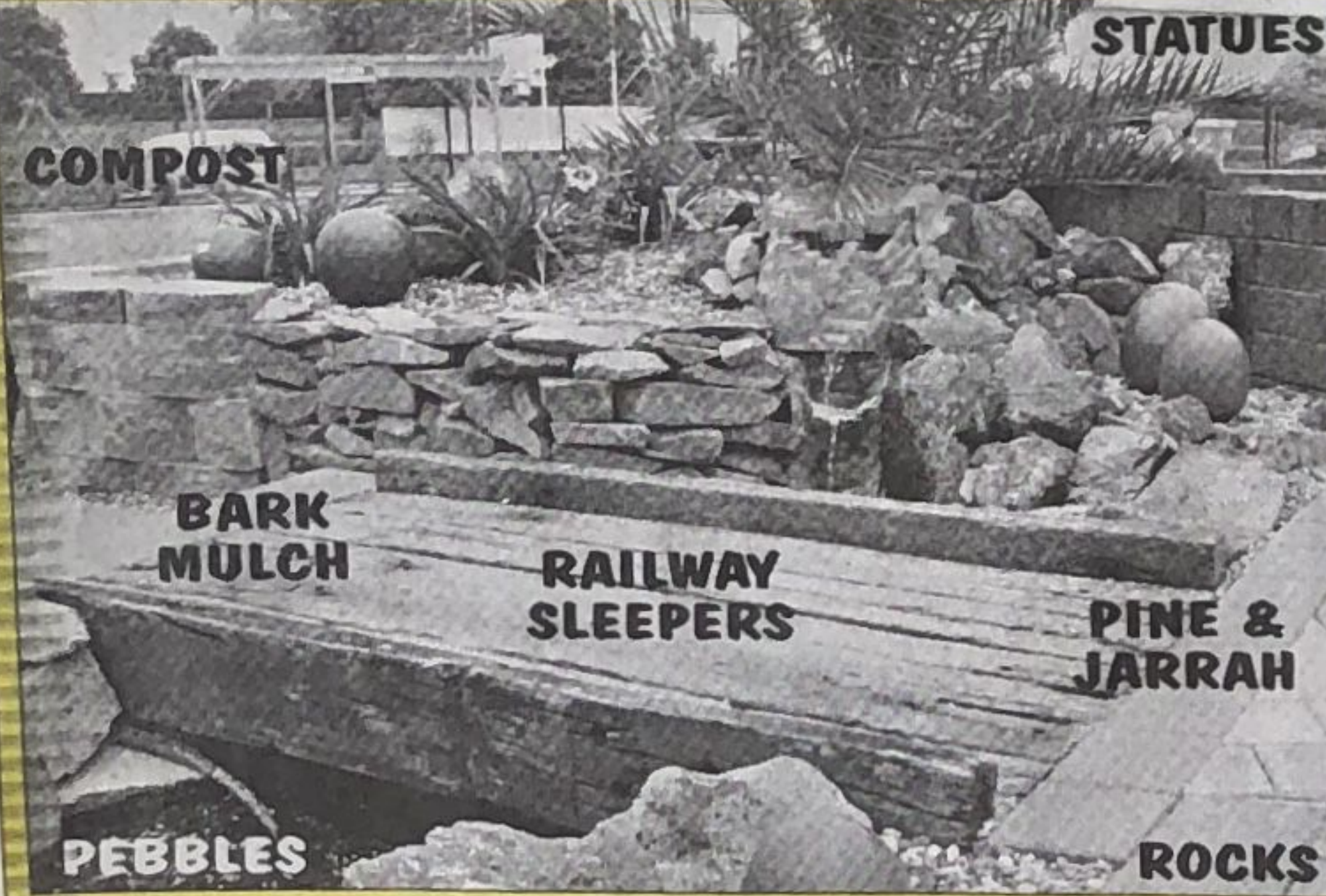


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