

ENCHANTED SPIRIT

The escape and romance of a much-loved garden served as verdant inspiration to reimagine a northern Sydney home, and the result hits the ball out of the park.





THESE PAGES the new rear extension of this Sydney home includes a living area, dining area and a main bedroom; landscaping by Thomas Ellicott from Concept Green. *Details, last pages.*

By Joanne Gambale
Photographed by Anson Smart

If it was a viable option, Ewan Morton and Margo Harbison would have invested in a luxury tent, such is their passion for the 2400-square-metre garden they share with their daughters in Sydney. Instead they embraced a more metaphorical approach.

On family holidays Margo's sister, architect Polly Harbison, would sketch ideas for an extension to replace the 1950s lean-to on their Federation house. The unusually long garden was everything to the couple, and they wanted to feel as if they were living in it. So was born the Garden Room, a space more suited to a Luca Guadagnino film set than here among the battle-axe blocks of Sydney's North Shore.

"The garden has a grove of trees in the middle and a heady mix of flowers in every shape and colour," says Harbison. "They wanted their house to have a similar combination of rich colours and textures yet with the same feeling of calmness."

Colour, texture and calm are collectively what interiors studio Arent&Pyke do best, and so the firm was engaged to collaborate with Polly. "Collaboration as a concept and word is so heavily overused today," says the studio's co-founder Juliette Arent Squadrito, "but this project really had a wonderful collaborative spirit to it that felt so natural, so joyous." Builder Stefan Zandt and Arent&Pyke's Genevieve Hromas and Sarah-Jane Pyke were much involved in the project, but none quite like Ewan and Margo, herself a painter so especially intrigued with the questions of colour. "Stefan balked a little at the short list of 38 colours for brush-outs," says Harbison, "but Margo, being an artist, completely understood the importance of the smallest variations in shade and tone."

Her sister, meanwhile, conceived a single storey that would connect the home to the garden by way of spatial manipulation. "A sequence of increasing scales create this sort of warped perspective effect to really draw the garden into the house," she explains. The floors are stepped down to the garden level and culminate in a four-metre-high space, increasing in width as well as height. "During construction," says Harbison, "as the drama of these heights revealed themselves, Ewan — who is six foot six — felt short for the first time in his life."

Daughters Emma, Alice, and Eloise have all inherited Dad's tall genes. Now they have the original house to themselves, but stay connected via a communal meeting place. "We wanted the kitchen in the middle to connect the family," says Morton. It also finds connection to the garden via a north-facing courtyard, and the area forms a sort of threshold between the old and the new. >>



THESE PAGES in the kitchen designed by Arent&Pyke and produced by Zandt Building, BassamFellows Tractor stools in White Oak from Living Edge; splashback, benchtop and island in arabascato vagli marble from Granite & Marble Works; custom Arent&Pyke stippled finish island insets in Dulux Nimrod; Perrin & Rowe tapware from The English Tapware Company; Bacman Berglund Line handles from Casson; Santa Margherita terrazzo floor tiles from Classic Tiles.



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THIS PAGE in the living area, vintage **coffee table**, tapestry **armchair** and vintage leather **screen**, all from The Vault Sydney; custom paisley **cushion** with fringe detail and Akari Light Sculpture UF3-DL **floor lamp** by Isamu Noguchi from Arent&Pyke.
OPPOSITE PAGE in another view of the kitchen, pantry **joinery** by Arent&Pyke; decorative **vessels** from Curatorial+Co.; Casa handmade **tiles** (on recessed cavity splashback) from Onsite Supply + Design; artwork by artist unknown.



« This transition is poetic; the moment the timber floors morph into green terrazzo tiles is akin to Dorothy's arrival in Oz. "There was something missing," says Arent Squadrito when asked about the bold floor tiles, "the romance or spirit we were after. I showed Margo a reference image of an Italian loggia with bordered and checkerboard terrazzo floors. Her beaming smile showed me we were on the right track."

Larger tiles are laid in bigger areas and the whole achieves an Italian-summer-house feel. "The volumes are overwhelmingly beautiful and the floors immediately add a tapestry or legacy," says Arent Squadrito. "Polly is so wonderfully open. She always delighted in our suggestions as it allowed her to view the house in a different light."

The warm, rich palette continues in the joinery, the cabinetry and on the walls. "We wanted rough rendered walls that were absolutely not white but sludgy grey-green," says Arent Squadrito. Tones of tourmaline and emerald lead to the dramatic outdoor shower — Morton's only specific request. External sliding screens and doors protect the space or are recessed into the metre-thick walls for full immersion in the garden.

"I have just bought 270 liliun bulbs that I'm about to plant for summer display," says Morton about his passion. "I have pretty much every gardening book ever published."

Alongside those are his *World of Interiors* magazines, and its grand eccentricity was the first bullet point on the brief — much to the delight of the Arent&Pyke team, which was able to stay true to these aspirations because priorities and compromises were balanced.


"Many of the ideas we presented to Ewan and Margo were highly conceptual and may have been challenging for some clients," says Arent Squadrito, "but they had such trust in the process and our vision. Ewan encouraged us to push him more, and as the build progressed and budgets got tight, they knew how to pause on some components so as not to skimp on others — such as the solid rosso levanto marble stairs." Morton's reservation about the expensive calacatta over a Carrara marble benchtop didn't last long. "I decided I'd rather do it well and sit on milk crates," he says. "The big thing is trust." Harbison agrees: "This is the core success of the project: everyone shared the aspiration to make the house an artwork. The spaces are really a series of compositions."

And how is this collaborative installation to live in? "I am happy to go out of here in a box," says Morton. Until then, he and Margo will keep delighting in the never-ending gardening tasks and the daily joys their new home brings. **VL** arentpyke.com pollyharbison.com.au

THESE PAGES in another view of the living area overlooking the garden, De Padova Raffles sofa by Vico Magistretti from Boffi; Margherita chairs by Franco Albini for Vittorio Bonacina from Arent&Pyke.







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THESE PAGES in the dining area, De La Espada Elliot dining table by Jason Miller from Spence & Lyda; Thonet S 32 cantilever chairs by Marcel Breuer from Anibou; terracotta urn from MCM House; walls painted in Dulux Water Rock.





THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, **bed linen** and **bolster cushion** from Ise; **Tizio lamps** by Richard Sapper from Artemide; **walls** painted in Dulux Pebble; vintage **tapestry** from Arent&Pyke. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the bathroom, custom **joinery** by Arent&Pyke; **vanity bench** in Verde Tinos marble from Granite & Marble Works; **basin** from Candana; Perrin & Rowe **basin set** from The English Tapware Company; high-gloss finish **vanity drawers** in Dulux Nimrod; **walls** painted in Taubmans Jandakot (seen in cabinet reflection). *Details, last pages.*

