



finding a newly renovated house in inner-city Auckland six years ago couldn't have come at a better time for Claire Foggo and husband Damon Green. Both were working full time with a baby on the way, so the thought of taking on building works was too scary to contemplate. The only drawback to the Freemans Bay property was its tiny garden, which consisted of a sloping muddy patch of grass bordered by a rusty corrugated-iron fence.

"We already lived in the Freemans Bay area and wanted to stay local," says Claire. "We love bungalows and this place didn't really need anything done to it except for the garden, so making it usable and enjoyable was a priority. Because the space is small and we are not really gardeners, we thought we should seek advice early on rather than just getting stuck in."

Google came to her aid and eventually her search for Auckland-based garden designers led Claire to the website of Kirsten Sach. "I liked the look of the work that Kirsten had done – much of it seemed in keeping with our aesthetic. I also used the internet to get ideas on the kind of look we wanted so I had a whole folio to show Kirsten when we met. I was surprised to hear from her that what we wanted was very modern."

The couple's brief to their designer was concise: built-in seating and a lot of green screens using plants that weren't going to take up too much room but would provide a lot of wall cover. Lack of privacy from the neighbours was a big issue and they liked Kirsten's suggestion of planting more star jasmine along the



Clockwise from left Claire and the children love to sit and read in the courtyard; the cerise of the canna flowers provides a visual link to the bold red of the neighbour's bougainvillea that climbs the fence; the designer suggested adding more star jasmine to create rapid coverage of the fence; the white and mauve flowers of the *Dietes grandiflora* planted along the bottom of the fence and along the path is picked up again in the white blooms of the star jasmine.



city sanctuary

A small inner-city garden is redesigned for modern living with built-in seating and walls of green for privacy

Text by **Carol Bucknell**.
Photography by **Helen Bankers**.

Above In the courtyard, which receives lots of sun throughout the summer, the built-in seating is cantilevered to increase the sense of space. Black and white pebbles were selected to create texture and interest for the floor and for the path leading from the front gate.

western wall. "It has grown so well and so high and now blocks out the neighbour's shed. We have trained it on wires to grow much higher than the fence itself," says Claire.

Built-in seating facing north along the southern boundary resolved another key requirement: a place to sit in the sun. With very little space left in the garden, doing without a lawn seemed the only logical solution. "We ummed and aahed about keeping some sort of grass there, particularly for the kids to play on, but it was always going to be a tricky space to grow grass well as it gets quite damp in winter," says Claire. "We do have a strip of grass at the front, though, where we bowl cricket balls and so forth."

They finally opted to cover the problematic patch in stones. "They give good drainage," says Claire, "and we purposely went for stones that are not too hard on your feet."





in a nutshell

Who lives here? Damon Green (accountant), Claire Foggo (lawyer), Thomas, 6, Molly, 3, and George Thunder the cat.

Claire, what do you love about the area? We can walk to work in the city and only have to run one car. We do love the cafes around here but don't seem to get out to bars and restaurants like we used to. Plenty of great takeaways close by, though.

What's the best thing about using a landscape designer?

Kirsten came up with ideas we hadn't considered. I didn't really know about layering plants, which helps achieve the lushness I was after. I also didn't realise how many plants we would need. Kirsten suggested tripling the amount of star jasmine we had planted. I also love some of the plants she specified that I wasn't aware of – the ligularia, the flowering cherry-blossom specimen tree and the rain lilies.

Although space in the tiny courtyard garden is very tight it's amazing how many plants are growing there, each carefully selected to give colour throughout the year. Claire loves flowers and gave Kirsten a long list of her favourites. "We couldn't incorporate them all and some of them wouldn't be right for the space but I adore the rain lilies, the hot pink canna lilies, the cherry blossom in spring, and we have also planted freesia bulbs among the bamboo. I also love our dear neighbour's bougainvillea, which she kindly lets us borrow and train over our side of the fence – it is stunning in the height of summer."

With a budget as tight as the space, Kirsten suggested the landscaping work be carried out in stages. First, Damon and Claire's brother John (together with the neighbour's sons-in-law) built a new fence one weekend. The lawn level was then raised

"I adore rain lilies, hot pink canna lilies, cherry blossom in spring and freesia bulbs among the bamboo"

Above left A great all-rounder for covering walls and as a groundcover, star jasmine has highly scented flowers and glossy green evergreen leaves. **Above right** Claire, Thomas and Molly love the luscious leaves of the ligularia and canna.

and some of the plants put in. "It stayed like that for a couple of years until we could afford to put in the built-in seating, planter boxes and the rest of the planting," says Claire.

As the garden has matured it has fulfilled the couple's wishes in every way. There's very little maintenance apart from pruning the bamboo and watering. They use it most days in summer, opening the French doors to the lush planting that embraces all the interior living spaces. The flow from the house to the deck and out into the courtyard is wonderful, says Claire, who will often sit outside on the bench seats with a book and a coffee. "Our garden is definitely more of a space for relaxing than playing cricket or running about. Playing happens more around the front of the house or at one of the local parks – it's inner-city living." ●