

soothe the soul

Strategic use of screening plants and clever design create a private oasis in the midst of a subdivision

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



This page: Chelsea Lin enters the Millwater garden via a series of floating timber platforms that lead to the main deck. **Opposite top:** Henry wanted the sound of trickling water in the garden to create a sense of tranquillity so designer Kirsten Sach suggested this tall pot with water bubbling gently down the sides into a pebble-covered reservoir below. **Opposite bottom:** The main living areas open onto the large deck on the sunny, northwestern side of the house.



after living north of Auckland for about 10 years, Henry Lin and his wife, Coco Liang, decided to move to Millwater, a new housing development a little further north, near Orewa. As well as the glorious beaches along that stretch of the coast, another big plus for the family was the opportunity to have a new house and garden designed and built to their requirements. The couple moved into their 247-square-metre, two-storey stand-alone house in 2013, but as it was a new build there was no garden at all. They researched landscape designers on the internet and decided they liked the work of Kirsten Sach, an award-winning designer based in Auckland.

Design process

Henry and Coco had already done their homework on what kind of garden spaces they wanted before talking to Kirsten, so they had a well-thought-out view of what they felt the garden should look like and how it should function. "We wanted a tropical/contemporary-style garden with low maintenance requirements," says Henry. "All the plants had to be evergreen and tolerant of harsh weather as our house is in a high-wind zone. We also wanted all the fences and most of the retaining walls to be covered by plants within a couple of years for better privacy and a nice outlook from the house."

Kirsten was impressed with her clients' obvious appreciation of gardens and how they can enhance the design of a house. "Henry and Coco were very clear about how they wanted to use the spaces and the idea of linking areas with boardwalks really appealed to them. They liked the idea of having a few different areas to sit so built-in seating was created near the vegetable garden. And they also wanted the sound of trickling water to evoke a feeling of tranquillity in the garden."



This page, clockwise from left: Henry and Coco with Chelsea and Bush the dog relax on the deck; palms add vertical structure, their graceful fronds contrasting with the large glossy leaves of the tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*) used here and in the planter alongside the deck. **Opposite:** The couple have begun to add their own decorative touches to the garden; raised beds in the vegetable garden continue the structured look of the other areas while star jasmine, pohutukawa screen trees and *Diets bicolor* soften the tall fences.

The build

Bringing the vision to life was not a straightforward process, though. Kirsten says the site was “extremely challenging” with all the topsoil removed and only bare clay remaining, which is common with subdivisions. “There were drainage issues and this came to a head during construction when heavy rain sent run-off from the rear property cascading down in a massive waterfall over the retaining wall. It was an absolute shocker.”

It was clear that the drainage had to be fixed before any planting or major works could take place and landscape contractors Urbis Landscapes came in to sort it out.

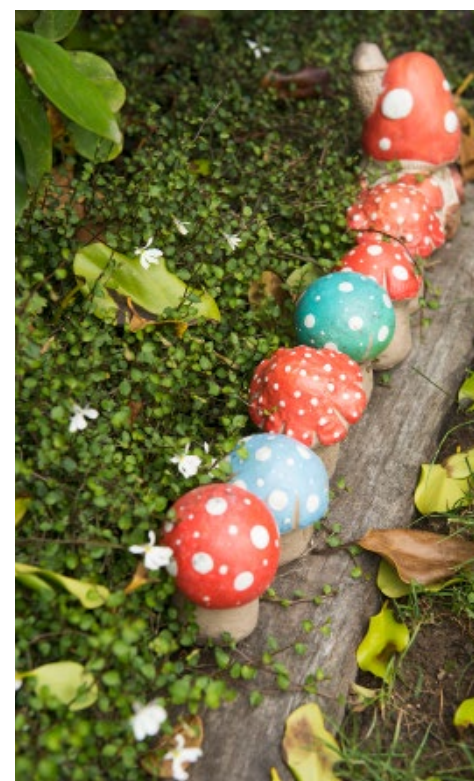
Once the garden beds were built they then had to be filled with large amounts of good-quality garden mix. Screening for privacy was also a major concern. “A lot of thought went into screening trees and palms and creating attractive cedar screens,” Kirsten explains.

Outdoor living

Like most gardens, particularly small ones like this one, indoor-outdoor flow is very important. To achieve this, Kirsten designed a large deck on the northwest side of the house for maximum sun.

“Two bifold doors in our living room and dining room connect our indoors and outdoors seamlessly,” says Henry.

“This is our favourite space in the garden to relax. We use the outdoor area a lot during summer and Chelsea enjoys playing on the lawn with the dog. We learned from our previous house to make sure the design and build of this garden would specifically match our family’s needs. The large decking area can host lots of friends for barbecues and is a good place for relaxing after work with a beer.”



Planting

As privacy was a major concern, screen plants were carefully selected. Strategically placed rows of palms block neighbouring houses without taking away light. Star jasmine greens up fences and its white flowers add fragrance to the deck area in early summer while the glossy leaved tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*) creates a dramatic subtropical effect. All three plant groups were planted in raised beds near the outdoor living area to add even more height and provide virtually instant privacy.

Other screening plants include the drought-tolerant natives *Metrosideros* ‘Vibrance’, a medium-height pohutukawa, along the boundary and griselinia for smaller hedges to disguise the retaining walls. For flower colour, Kirsten used cannas, *Diets grandiflora* and *Diets bicolor*.

“Planting was in drifts and layers and needed to be easy-care,” she explains. “Although fully irrigated for the dry summer months the plants still needed to be resilient to dry conditions.”

Edible garden

Raised beds were also used for the fruit and vegetable gardens behind the house. Coco likes to tend these gardens, growing a range of fruiting plants including flatto peaches, blueberries, strawberries, lemon and limes as well as seasonal vegetables. ●



Henry’s garden design tips

- ✦ **Do your own** research before talking to a landscape designer. It will save a lot of time if you know exactly what you want first.
- ✦ **Have a clear budget** before approaching a designer so they can design the garden as close as possible to what you want within your budget.
- ✦ **Be present.** The designer’s job is to bring your concept/dream to reality; they should not make all the decisions on your behalf.



in a nutshell

Who lives here? Henry Lin (director/head of consulting services for a dairy commodity consulting company), Coco Liang (retail banker), Chelsea, 5, and Bush, the Japanese Spitz.

Henry, what attracted you to the Millwater area? Good local communities, high quality education for my daughter, good lifestyle for the family (lots of outdoor activities, close to the beach, and expansion of local amenities).

What are some of your favourite attractions in the area? Orewa beach, Roberts Coffee Bar and the Mozaik Cafe, Millwater playground, and the 5.8km cycleway/walkway from Millwater to Orewa.