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NZ OUTDOOR LIVING AND GARDEN DESIGN

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WHEN THEY BOUGHT their unrenovated 1920s bungalow in Hamilton East, Annie and Dave had in mind nothing short of an ambitious eco-retro-fitting using state-of-the-art green technologies.

Having met Clare Jackson, the lead designer at Green Footprint through mutual friends, this little green space soon became their new home and reality.

She had but one simple task: transform this flat, basic yard dominated by a square house and straight lines of the fences, giving a boxed-in impression, into a clean, green, energy saving and pleasant work environment.

"Part of the vision was landscaping featuring edible plants, eco-sourced natives, water harvesting and sustainable use of materials," Clare says. "Annie's work [also] includes sustainable agriculture education and she planned to use the premises to demonstrate sustainable renovations and native plantings, and also as a 'green' venue for meetings and training."

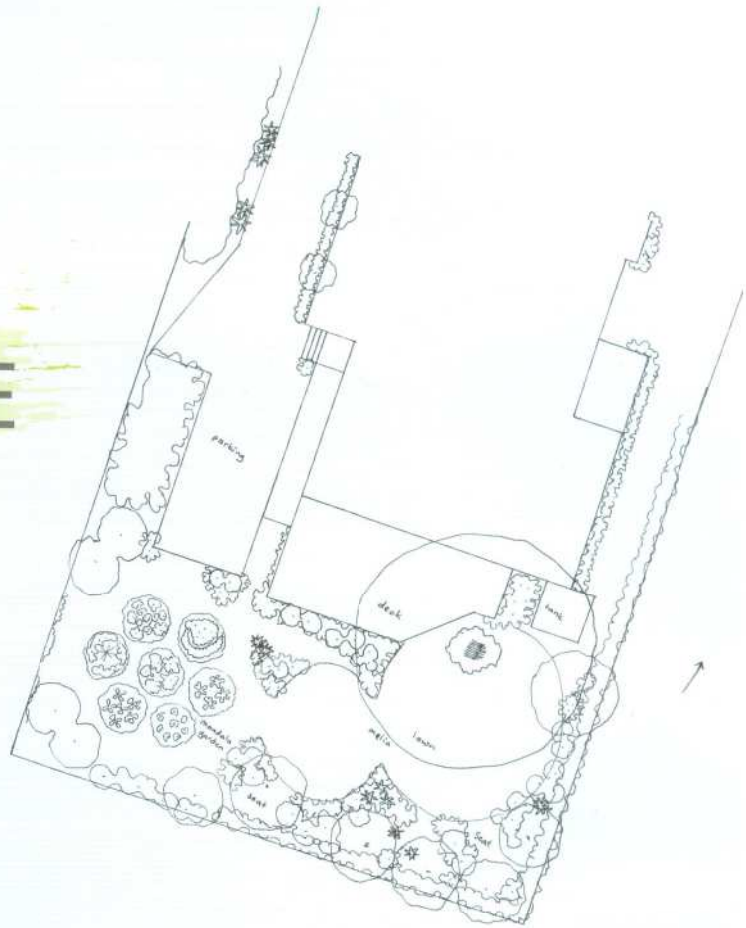
After looking at a couple of alternative concepts, the trio settled on a circular concept for the lawn to balance the straight lines of the oblong section and house.

"A generously-sized circle brings a spacious feeling and also a sense of completeness and rest," says the designer. "A circle also works well to bring the different elements of a garden together as a unified whole."

As the property was surrounded by other backyards separated by a traditional corrugated iron fence, Clare decided to retain some camellias to maintain structure and planted a border of taller natives to disguise the boundary and make the area seem larger.

"As with any small site in a densely built neighbourhood, the challenge was to create interest and views within the garden space," she says.

The next step was to remove the huge bamboos and murky overgrown camellias in the north-facing corner of the garden that



were dominating the backyard, to make way for a seating area in the winter sun.

Paths made from soft woodchippings which merge into the gardens and soak up water after heavy rain were then incorporated along with a whole lot of eco-sourced native plants specially grown from seeds collected in the native bush areas where their block was located.

"This [means that] you help maintain the unique local characteristics of the native plants in your area," says Clare. "And eco-sourced plants have a greater chance of growing successfully because they are obviously well adapted to local conditions."

The design also incorporates a palette of edible plants from guavas and citrus to boysenberries, cranberries and blackcurrants, planted along paths and edges for easy picking.

Main features of the garden that were left alone included a mature Melia (bead tree), a small apple tree and a well established evergreen hedge at the front.

"Annie and Dave were keen to retain the large Melia tree and this became a focal point of the outdoor space, shading both the indoor and the outdoor living areas, something that isn't taken for granted in Hamilton and can take years to establish."

The rustic old garage was demolished but lives on as recycled furniture in the office. With the extra space Annie, a keen gardener, was able to plant a vegetable mandala on the open, sunny side of the connecting lawn.

The result is a simple and sustainable little garden which Clare was happy to design in close collaboration with her clients.

CLARE JACKSON

Clare Jackson has a BSc in horticulture and plant science and is now the lead designer at Green Footprint, as well as a trustee of the Hamilton Permaculture Trust. Green Footprint has been designing gardens for more than 20 years and their latest twist is a focus on permaculture design, organic growing and the restoration of native ecosystems, often combining all three. www.greenfootprint.co.nz

