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Designer and Director,
Outside Living



SENSE OF ARRIVAL

Offering a rich tapestry of texture, form and colour, this steep front garden simply oozes street appeal

Full of textural contrasts and variety, this informal front garden draws the eye and turns what seems an impossibly steep slope into a design masterpiece. "The goal was to create a garden that managed the steep slope. Nothing too formal; the owners wanted it to be a bit organic," explains garden designer Karen Staunton-Ross of Outside Living.

While the finished garden looks natural and has a genuine sense of place, this was quite a tricky project. "When we started, there was lawn growing on vertical faces and no opportunity for any gardens," says Karen. "This was an all-or-nothing project so we had to remove the lawn, introduce some walls and create places for plants.

"We avoided using clean, straight lines in favour of creating interesting shapes and connections, and we used materials that were of interest in their own right as well as being functional. It was also essential that we provided a way for visitors to negotiate the slope without feeling like they had hit a goat track."

Outside Living strove to avoid the over-use of hard surfaces and tried to work sympathetically with the site. The only hard surfaces are the steps and path. Keeping to the same route, the existing steps were replaced and consistency in step ratio and path grades established.

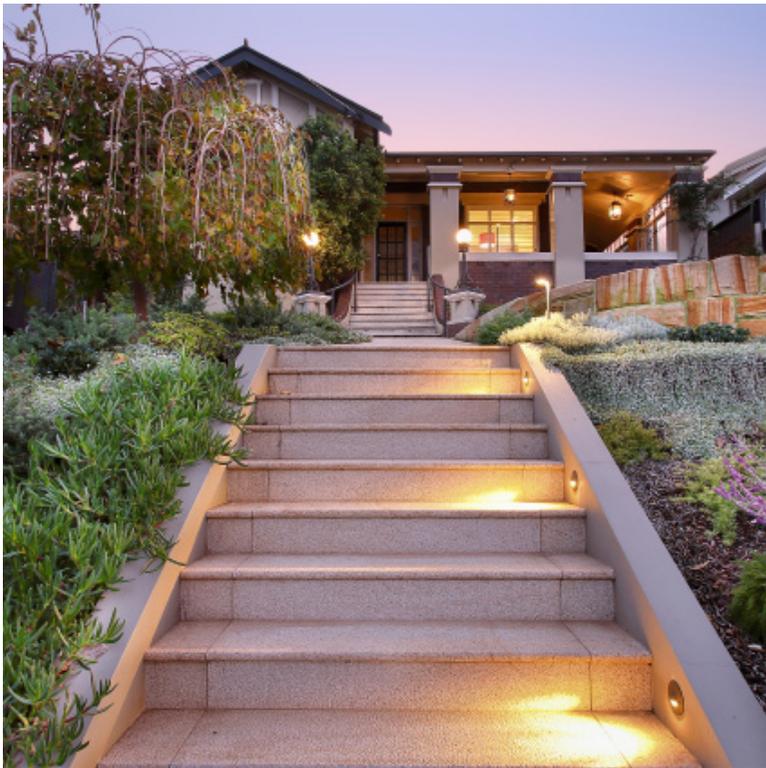
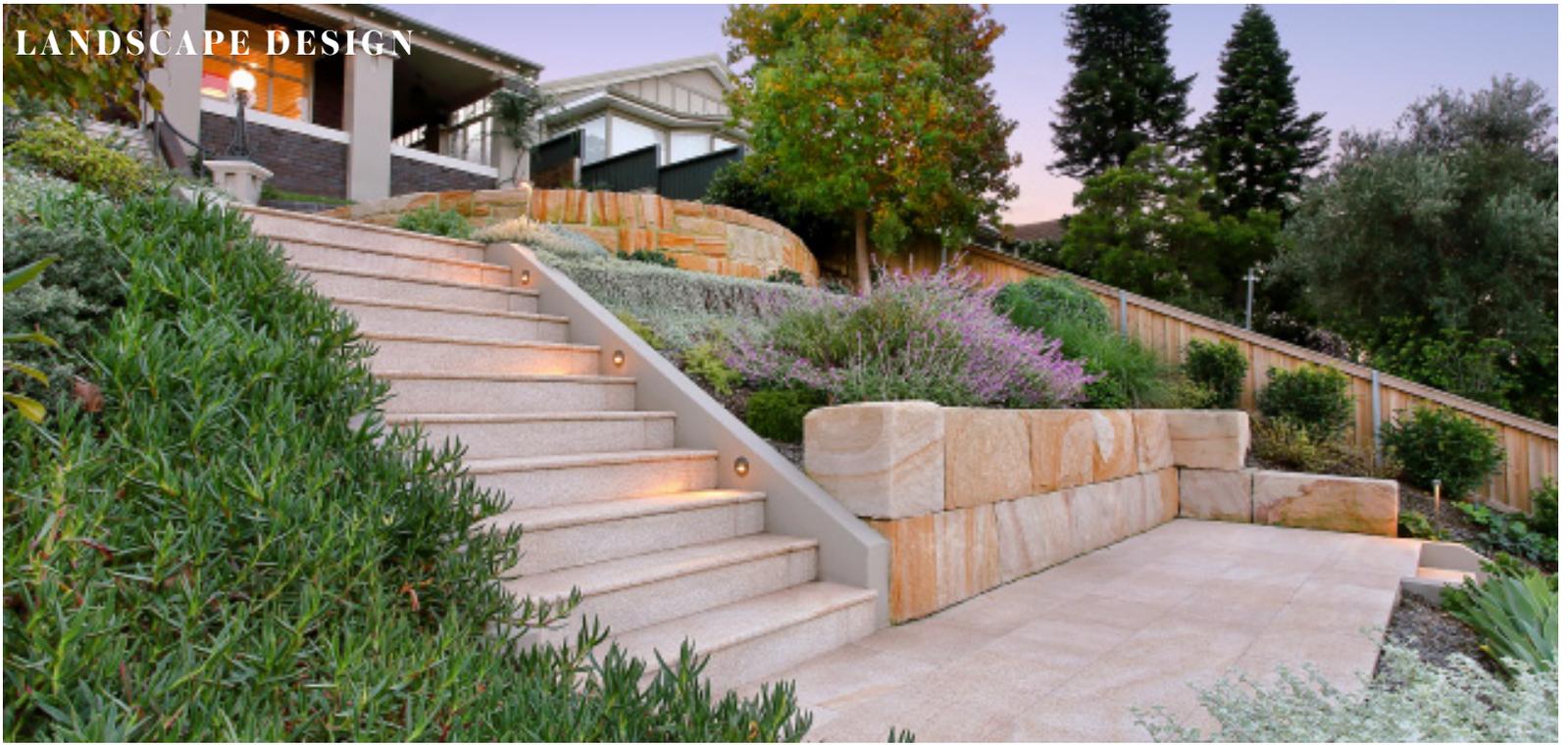
"We used gabion walls, Corten steel and natural sandstone on vertical faces with grasses and groundcovers holding

things together, then shrubs and small trees for interest and to control the way the height was experienced. We also used large rocks/boulders rather than walls in some spots. These provided better places to incorporate plants and added interest."

Given the sandy soil and exposed aspect, the plants needed to be robust. "Not only did they need to grow well, they had to contribute to an interesting garden with colour, texture and contrast in form and foliage," says Karen. "We chose *Salvia*, *Nepeta* and *Erigeron* 'Sea Breeze' for their long flowering seasons and *Aloe* 'Erik the Red' and *Echium* for seasonal colour. For movement there is *Miscanthus transmorriensis* and spilling over the walls you'll find *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls', prostrate rosemary and *Russelia*.

"To pick up on the earthy tones of the Corten steel and stone, we incorporated both *Kalanchoe* 'Copper Spoons' and *Trachelospermum* 'Tricolor', and to create some unity through repetition, a serpentine line of *Carissa* 'Desert Star' extends from the front entry through all the levels right up to the patch of lawn





near the house. To help bind the soil, we used grasses and groundcovers, and we strategically placed a few taller shrubs to cover some adjoining structures, but nothing to ruin the great view.”

Given the steepness of the slope, jute matting was used in some sections for its stabilising effect. To improve the sandy soil, organic soil conditioner was added and a layer of organic mulch applied.

“Exposure was a real problem. The garden takes full sun for most of the day

so there is nowhere for plants to hide,” adds Karen. “The garden was planted in spring 2019 so was thrust into a hot, dry summer with water restrictions. Not only did it survive, it thrived.”

Ultimately, this front garden, which was built by EJM Paving and Landscaping, is all about creating a sense of arrival. The slope is still steep but the look is soft and appealing, beckoning visitors to begin their ascent and enjoy the rich interplay of colour, form and texture along the way.

NSW

PROJECT DETAILS

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