

Backyard

CREATIVE AUSTRALIAN LIVING

MEET THE MAKERS
Innovative people and their amazing outdoor spaces

Modern Makeovers

Add some style to your outdoors

LET'S PLAY

Create a kid-friendly backyard in no time

PLUS

- Propagate your own plants
- Install an outside structure
- Grow bok choy
- Plants for shady gardens

WEEKEND PROJECTS

- Protect your tree trunks
- Set up a drip-irrigation system

ISSUE 13.6
AUS \$8.95*
NZ \$9.99
(INCL. GST)



completehome.com.au

INTERNATIONAL HARMONY

A beautiful lakeside Geneva garden where French, Italian, Mediterranean and English styles unite effortlessly

The subtle pink colour of these roses is simply divine.

Get and shady place to escape by life.





A French-style garden surrounds the swimming pool.



WORDS: DANIELLE TOWNSEND
PHOTOS: CHRISTIAN PRÉAUD

The garden design philosophy of Christian Préaud, of Atelier Jardins in Paris, is "to bring some poetry and harmony to our brutal world". There is perhaps no finer example of this line of thought than here, in the Swiss city of Collonge-Bellerive, south-east of Geneva on the lake's shore, where he has beautifully and harmoniously merged four different styles of garden in one space.

"My first impression was that the surrounding landscape was as important for the project as the garden itself," says Christian. "I was very impressed by the quality of the location — a gentle slope of about 6000m² ending up at Lake Geneva, bordered by beautiful ancient oak trees which face the ridgeline of the Jura Mountains above the opposite bank of the lake."

The design concept was to emphasise the feeling that the garden does not have visible limits, that it is part of the greater surrounding landscape and allows fusion between the plot of land and nature. However, the garden would remain a cosy haven for its

owners, even though it gives the impression of being part of something much bigger.

The greatest challenge was, as always, understanding the clients' aspirations, needs, style and wishes, which were often not crystal clear to them either. "I always say that the most important part of my job is to 'give birth' to the real desire of my clients, to what the garden really means for them," says Christian. "They will be the ones who live in it and hopefully enjoy it. So it is essential that I give them a garden that is theirs. In this case, they commissioned another landscaping firm to lay out a garden which, once finished, they could not relate to. So they asked me to figure out a way to redesign it into something that would fit them better."

The garden that Christian designed is organised into four different areas: an English garden on the west (left) side that leads down to the lake; an Italian garden at the west wing of the house; a Mediterranean garden at the east wing and a French-style garden that surrounds the swimming pool.

"The key design element is the overall harmony we managed to achieve," says Christian. Developing four different

atmospheres on such a large plot was a challenge and it could only work and feel right if the four gardens were properly linked. "I had to pay a lot of attention to and work on the transitions so one could walk from one ambience to another almost without noticing it," says Christian. "This was very interesting work, a little like the fusion between garden and landscape. The transition between the different atmospheres was also achieved by blending them together within a very small space, like a soft cut between takes in movie editing."

The existing infrastructures of the house and underground technical rooms for the pool, as well as other underground facilities such as a gym and a full spa, added to the project's complexity.

The pool was already built and sat in the middle of a wide lawn, appearing somewhat lost. The challenge was to create an inviting, comfortable-looking area, intimate and cosy enough for one not to feel exposed while at the same time playing a prominent role in the middle of the property.

Several metre-thick boxwood tables, including a large swath of lavender in their

ABOVE The perfectly manicured hedges create interesting shapes and dramatic lines in this superb European garden.

"Every space is thought of so it is at the same time recognisable and different during every season of the year" — Christian Préaud

RIGHT The location is a gentle slope of about 6000m² ending up at Lake Geneva, bordered by beautiful ancient oak trees which face the ridgeline of the Jura Mountains.





An Italian garden was created at the west wing of the house; while a Mediterranean garden features at the east wing.



The garden does not have visible limits, there's a feeling that it is part of the greater surrounding landscape and allows fusion between the plot of land and nature.



DESIGNER GARDENS

The challenge with the pool was to create an inviting, comfortable-looking area, intimate and cosy.

centre, create a frame in which the pool is set. A window in the boxwood table in the lake's direction, framed with another lower table arranged in the slope of the land, drives the eye of the swimmer directly from the pool water to the lake.

The Atelier Jardins team took a very green approach to the design and construction of the garden to preserve the natural environment as much as possible. "We banned the use of chemical phyto-products, fertilisers and treatments," says Christian. "Only organic fertiliser and soil amendments are allowed. Leaves are left to decompose under the trees and bushes. We accept illness and eventually death as being part of dealing with living organisms — plants that is. But rather than trying to fix the symptoms we prefer prevention, mostly through very careful and ongoing attention to soil quality, which is key to 99 per cent of a garden's good health."

The quality of the soil was not very good, partly because of the remains of the construction project and also because there is a lot of blue, very acid compact clay on the shore of Lake Geneva. "We had to bring a lot of appropriate, different and good types of soil

to ensure the plants would succeed as much in the English garden that required a more acid soil, as in the Mediterranean one where plants do not like acidity at all," says Christian. "Shaping the grounds was a very big and fascinating part of the project."

A lot of exceptional adult trees from Domaine des Rochettes plant nursery were planted, for which preparation of the ground was absolutely key.

"Part of every client's brief is to have an 'as-low-maintenance-as-possible' garden," says Christian. "The best way to achieve that is to choose plants with the same needs in terms of exposition, soil and water and arrange them together in a harmonious composition, mixing structure and decor. Mixing together plants that have the same cultural requirements allows phyto-sanitary problems to be diminished significantly. In a properly balanced and harmonious 'community' where the individuals are complementary, the group is happier and stronger."

The proximity of the lake creates a very temperate environment where almost any type of vegetation can grow as long as the soil is carefully adjusted. As it is covered with snow in

the winter, the structure is very important. All the large trees and evergreen bushes are there to design this structure and make sure it is readable, even under a foot of snow.

The flowering plants are organised in patches of white and blue. An olive tree among the lavender makes a vertical transition in the foreground of the hundred-year-old oak grove by the lake, at the foot of which lies a sea of white daffodils in May, followed by white Annabelle hydrangeas for summer.

The rose garden that makes the transition between the Italian and Mediterranean garden is mostly in shades of light pink, salmon and apricot yellow.

A large grove of azaleas and rhododendrons flowers early in spring and gives shade to a covered walkway that leads to the lake. The tall grasses that grow by the lake emerge out of the ground in spring, hide a trail in their summer greenery and become gold in autumn.

"Every space is thought of so it is at the same time recognisable and different during every season of the year," says Christian. Not only does the design of this garden cleverly address numerous garden styles, but the space changes according to the seasons as well.



The flowering plants are organised in patches of white and blue.



All the large trees ensure the structure of the garden is readable, even under a foot of snow.