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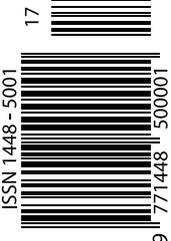
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asian style

Exuding a strong sense of calm and place, the Asian-inspired garden continues to find favour

Story: Dean Boone, MAILDM

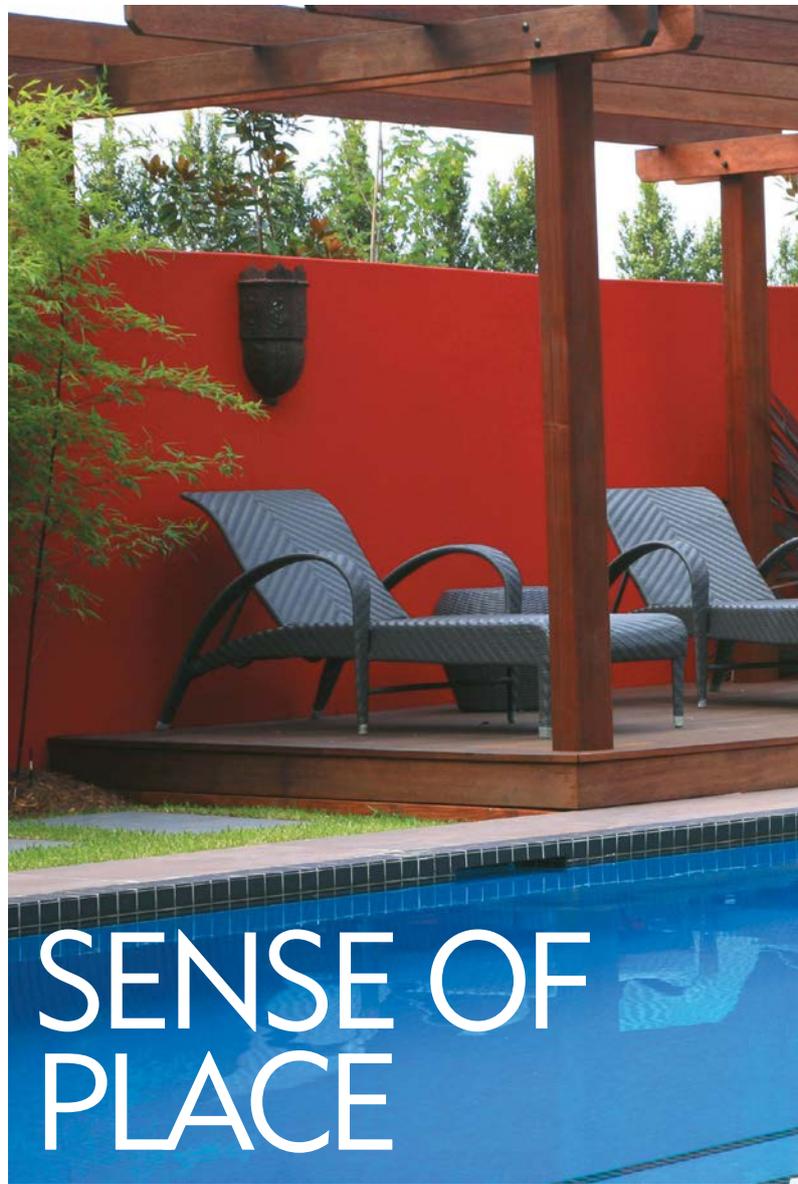
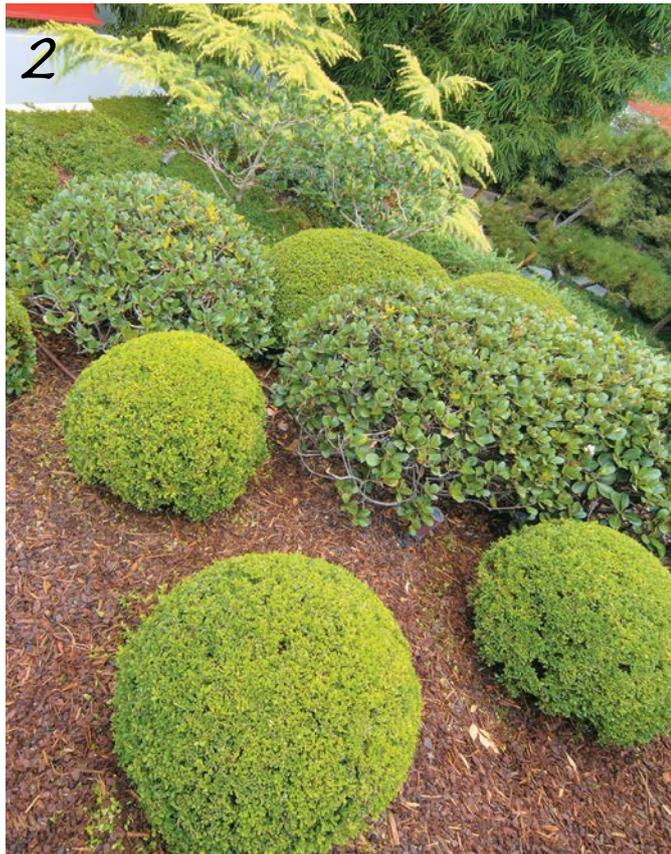
Anyone who has travelled in Asia will be aware of the distinct, unique and sublime feel of it. There is something captivating about that wonderfully evocative collection of nations that make up Asia, especially their gardens, that keeps us Australians coming back for more. So what is it about Asian garden design that is so inviting and sensual? After all, Asia is a very, very big region and takes in cultural and design influences from countries as diverse as China, Japan, India, Thailand and the Indonesian island of Bali.

It would seem very easy to make wild generalisations about "Asian" gardens, but what I'm looking for is the essence of all of those design styles. What makes them synonymous with a feeling of calm and spirituality, and what gives them that something special that makes us want them in our own homes — wherever they originate?

Asian gardens can be interpreted in many ways, but I have managed to uncover what I think makes them what they are and, therefore, how we can then transport their very essence into our own gardens, large or small.

From a design perspective, Asian gardens generally represent perfect asymmetry. They have a well-defined sense of proportion, shape and form, but are not evenly divided down the middle like European gardens, which is something that sets them apart from the traditional, formal gardens so many of us are used to. The Taj Mahal would be the exception to the rule, of course, but generally speaking, perfect asymmetry is a cornerstone of Asian garden design.

They also have a strong connection to nature. The selection of materials has a profound effect on this. Often earthy in colour, these materials allow both home and garden to integrate and contribute



1. Entry into the Asian-style outdoor entertaining area is gained through roofed gateways, complete with imported carved wooden Balinese doors. This lush oasis, designed by Urban Revolutions, has everything you could dream of, including a lap pool and spa, a timber lounging deck, a tropical Asian planting scheme and oriental sculptures. For more information: www.urbanrevolutions.com.

2. A Japanese garden is the perfect complement to modern architecture. Contemporary home design tends to have clean lines with minimal decoration and this lends itself to the clipped shapes and restrained use of plant material so typical of Japanese gardens, as can be seen in this design by Imperial Gardens. For more information: www.imperialgardens.com.au.

3. One way to add an Asian touch to an outdoor space is to introduce a work of art or a decorative element, such as this elegantly simple Buddha wall plaque. A well-placed feature, be it a stone statue or a water bowl, will infuse a courtyard, patio or poolside pavilion with the authentic flavour of Asia without dominating the space.



to the relaxing ambience that is so often found in an Asian garden setting. Of course, another reason for the soothing ambience of many Asian gardens is the integration of water, whether a tranquil pond or a carved stone fountain.

The next key element of an Asian garden is texture. Asian gardens are synonymous with layers of lush green plants — loads and loads of

foliage texture, in fact — which is then complemented by the texture of gravel, stone and wood throughout the garden. Again, the effect is to connect us to nature so we experience it rather than merely view it.

Plant colour in an Asian garden mainly comes from foliage and is used subtly, as opposed to the massive drifts of colour seen in many European gardens. By using splashes of colour in moderation, these gardens have a sense of energy that is both uplifting and exciting. When a lot of colour is present, it's typically because of the change in season, highlighting once again the strong connection with nature. Autumn and spring are always something to behold in a cooler-climate Asian garden.

The sense of place tends to be very strong in an Asian garden and I believe this comes from the long-standing tradition of spirituality that underlies the different cultures. The prevailing ethos is one of achieving union with nature to retain a sense of who we are and how we relate to the world around us. This translates to a design layout that works with nature, not against it.

The planting selections reflect this, too, aiming to stimulate the senses, reflect the seasons and give a strong feeling of belonging. The result is, of course, a garden that truly exudes calm, serenity and a sense of living energy. Is it any wonder we find them so uplifting and want them in our own little corner of the world? ■

** Dean Boone is a landscape designer and presenter of the television program, The Garden Gurus.*

