



DETAILS OF LANDSCAPING

This is an edited copy of the report submitted by Ken Lamb, principal of *Imperial Gardens Landscape Pty. Ltd*, prominent garden designers and landscaping specialists, to the Register of the National Estate in 2000. It formed part of the Fishwick house listing process.

* * * * *

Imperial Gardens was appointed by the owners to plan and supervise the landscaping of the Fishwick house. The adopted strategy was initially to work close to the building then move progressively to the lower terraces. This project was to be tightly integrated with the bushland regeneration planned for Griffin's contiguous Buttress Reserve, which forms a natural valley below the house.

An appropriate style of garden was sought for each stage of the development, aiming to adhere closely to Griffin's concept of integrating the house, the existing landscape, the gardens and the natural bushland. Essentially, this meant that formal areas close to the house could accommodate some degree of mixing native and exotic species but progressively, with increasing distance from the house, these should give way to Australian native plants and then to natives indigenous to the local area.

Front courtyard. The project started with the design and construction of the enclosed courtyard adjacent to the kitchen. A small pond was built from sandstone blocks to enliven the area and stepped garden walls were developed containing planting beds to create a formal, geometric planting scheme. This effectively extended the existing sandstone walls of the house into the courtyard itself. All the new sandstone work was dimensioned and aged to closely match the existing stonework in the house. A stainless steel water sculpture by Victorian sculptor and artist Rudi Jass was commissioned for the pond.

North terrace and stepped gardens. The northern side of the house was then developed. This was a difficult area which required the design of a complex stone stairway climbing through planter beds to reach the entrance to the maid's quarters off a small terrace. Extensive weed growth and a very poor quality rockery had to be removed. The design of the stairway followed the circular shape of the house's northern wall, linking it to and emphasising the exposed rock ledges upon which the house was built. Once again, the sandstone blocks were matched to the house.

This phase also included the development of a large paved terrace accessed from the lounge which was to function as an entertaining and leisure area. It was adjacent to the strong, geometric, symmetrical layout of lounge's outer wall, so an extension of that design treatment was adopted. A large sandstone wall was built to retain the new paved area. The existing proportions of the house determined the size of the wall, with care being taken to neither diminish nor accentuate the relationship between the house and the nearby small escarpment. Native plants to a height of one metre were selected to ensure that the profile of the house on the land was maintained. Rudi Jass was again commissioned to design a stainless steel and glass birdbath for the terrace.

The valley. The four levels of the block below the formal terrace area were extremely steep and overgrown with bamboo and other introduced weeds. The first stage of the restoration of this area was the removal of all unwanted growth from both the Fishwick house block and the adjacent Buttress Reserve. This work unexpectedly revealed some existing dry sandstone walls, sandstone steps, large natural rock formations and dramatic sandstone boulders. Preserving and enhancing the view to the north-east from the house then became very important, as clearing had revealed the dramatic rock escarpment and the “buttresses” - enormous leaning rocks - after which Griffin had named the reserve.

Viewing the house from the newly cleared valley then revealed the harmonious way in which the house related to the sandstone ledges and how these had, to a large extent, located and shaped its very design. Griffin had created an outstanding organic relationship between the house and the landscape. There were no abrupt protrusions above the ridgeline and the house was now seen to “grow out of” its sandstone site.

The valley area contained remnants of old dry sandstone walls which supported the terraces and several gullies which carried stormwater from several higher blocks. These were repaired and, in keeping with Griffin’s concept for Castlecrag, a series of serpentine rock walls and pathways were constructed to accentuate the valley lines and create winding planting beds for the lower sections of the property.

The clearing and excavation of deep surface soils revealed a natural pond amongst rock outcrops and boulders immediately beneath the main picture window of the lounge. Griffin clearly intended the view from this room to be the most important in the house, so this area was developed further. The pond was waterproofed, a recirculating water system built and aquatic plants introduced. The shape of the pond was determined by the position of pre-existing boulders. A bronze sculpture, “*Concordia*”, by Gaye Porter was designed for the pond. It appears to float on its surface and is equally pleasing when viewed from the lounge’s picture window above.

Integration with Buttress Reserve. With the landscaping and some initial plantings of the lower-level gardens complete, the work passed into the hands of a specialist native gardener who had extensive experience in bush regeneration and in designing, developing and maintaining Castlecrag bush gardens. The owners gained the permission of the local council to have the gardener regenerate the Buttress Reserve at the same time. This very fortunate arrangement ensured that the lower gardens of the house merged into the neighbouring bushland, thus integrating its garden and the reserve into one seamless bushland site.

A vast amount of work was required over three years to kill the bamboo and remove the bamboo rhizomes from the site. The soil had been degraded and become very disturbed by the eradication work. Large amounts of new soil, mulch and tube stocks of many hundreds of indigenous plants were used in this process. A fortunate consequence was that the rhizome removal surfaced many attractive natural sandstone rocks and boulders. These were used decoratively and to create a dry stone creek bed to carry flash floods through the property following torrential rain.