

quiet retreat

a quiet retreat

Balancing the different needs of each client may present opportunities not at first considered. A challenge arose when I was asked to create a garden that respected the traditional period design, yet had some aspect of the modern. The owners did not feel comfortable with a recently constructed cottage garden, though there was an excellent and somewhat romantic example in the front that provided a perfectly resolved setting for this well-preserved 1920s house.

The existing rear garden to the north was not inviting nor in any way pleasing. There was nowhere to look, nowhere to sit and no invitation to switch off from the demands of everyday life, especially as two-storey flats to the east and west overlooked it, offering little feeling of personal space and comfort. Moreover, some of the worst garden weeds abounded, such as *Ehrharta erecta* (Veldt Grass), *Allium triquetrum* (Angled Onion), *Oxalis pes-capri* (Oxalis or Soursob) and *Tradescantia fluminensis* (Wandering Jew), which might dampen any enthusiasm for gardening.

A given in this project was the large liquidambar in the middle of the foreground view from the glass-walled family room that allowed total

vision of the garden 2 metres below. This compromise, both aesthetic and horticultural, remains an issue.

The new design began by allocating large spaces for entertaining, for parking a car and for sitting, either alone or in groups. At this stage it was important to consider the privacy aspect to maximise screening potential. Other elements of the site entered the equation – rapid run-off from surface drainage, noise from a nearby arterial road, plus the vexed question of the weeds.

It is always difficult to determine a budget range at the outset when acting as a designer/contractor. The budget becomes very much a negotiated figure. For this project what was needed initially was a design solution with broad ideas for organising the space, and an idea for the character of the garden, its maintenance and what built elements were proposed. The budget became realised as the final scheme was evolving and was influential in making these final choices.

Discussing basic ideas along with a few possible options produced a better understanding of the project and an improved appreciation of the clients' needs and sensitivities. This is not always