

Zigzag pavers and tall hedging along the border give the illusion of more space in this courtyard created by Outhouse Design.

MAKING BIG IDEAS WORK IN TINY SPACES

Landscapers, architects and display home builders have come to together to inspire good design in small areas, writes **Catherine Nikas-Boulos**

Good things do come in small packages, but living in a small house is not top on everyone's list. Land is at a premium, and lot sizes are shrinking, but that doesn't mean you have to sacrifice quality of life.

Smart design solutions around small homes, studio spaces and courtyards mean we no longer have to put up with cramped living quarters as architects find ways to maximise vertical space and built-in storage in the least likely of places.

Outside chance

If you're building a family home on a small block, it stands to reason that the backyard will be squeezed too. While that might be the reality, a small yard, even one the size of a parking spot, can be transformed into a usable and comfortable place to entertain.

Outhouse Design senior landscape architect Katrine Mardini has plenty of experience transforming tight inner-city backyards into alfresco wonderlands.

The award-winning company recently worked on a Leichhardt backyard that was only 3m by 5m.

"In that situation, the first thing you do is think about how you can play around with that space to give the illusion that it's bigger than it actually is," she says.

"We looked at ways of stretching the garden visually."

Katrine says that was achieved by laying the pavers on the diagonal, instead of lines parallel with the edge. Not only does that distract the eye, but it creates pockets on either side for deep garden beds.

"You can now meander through the garden, and looking out the kitchen window, you can't see where it ends," she says.

"Our client works really hard and is always on the go, so she wanted a space to come home to, unwind or entertain friends. We wanted to create a space for her that has a sense of calm about it."

In its original state, the yard was uninviting and overgrown with lawn. It was only used by the owner to walk from the house to the rear laneway. The kitchen and dining area overlook this space, so the Outhouse Design team took care to create a low maintenance garden that is not only visually appealing, but useful, with thyme, blueberry bush and rosemary. Other easy-to-grow shrubs included in the redesign were viola banksia, westringia fruticosa (coastal rosemary) and hardenbergia, which has a climbing habit.

"Our client doesn't have a lot of time to spend maintaining the garden, so we had to look at plants that are hardy," says Katrine.

"Bi-fold doors look out to the garden from the living areas, and there is now a greater connection from the house to the garden."

"From a visual perspective it just works and from a lifestyle perspective, it works."

A bespoke timber chaise lounge completes the transformation from drab to fab.

Small surprise

While most homeowners would simply choose to flatten their small parcel of backyard and not over-complicate the space by adding anything other than grass, Katrine suggests doing the opposite.

Creating interest with foliage is the first step in creating a more user-friendly backyard that you want to spend time in.

"A small backyard can seem so much more difficult than a big one," she says. "You might need that space for off-street parking or a space to put entertainment seating or a clothes line, so you have to create some space by using the vertical plane," she says.

"Get some height in there by planting tall hedging on the perimeter and leave the middle ground plain for other uses."

Outdoor seating will also encourage guests to spend time in the backyard. Add an edible garden to give the space a dual purpose. **More** Outside Design, outhousedesign.com.au



The new Belden display home by McDonald Jones Homes is only 7.5m wide.

THE FUTURE IS SLIM AND BRIGHT

Building a new home on a narrow block doesn't have to be a struggle. Display home builders, including McDonald Jones Homes, are designing family homes that are only 7.5m wide. The single-storey Belden is one of the newest designs on the market, offering three bedrooms, a single-car garage and multiple living areas.

McDonald Jones Homes sales director Phil Haigh says one-car homes make sense.

"Clients are not missing out anything, we have just been smarter with design, with a small hallway and the kids' bedrooms upfront," says Phil. "The parents still have

peace and privacy with a master bedroom at the back. It's all about affordability and the main cost in buying a house is in the land. Developers are now making blocks smaller and builders are accommodating this change."

This design has two bathrooms, but there's no home theatre or second garage.

"But there are beautiful homes in Paddington with no garages at all," says Phil. "Everything is changing. Soon we'll move to designs that are smaller with two bedrooms, I have no doubt about it."

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