

A Suburban Bush Lodge Home

'A game lodge feel' was the spec given to Durban landscaper Myles Steenhuisen; a space in which suburbia disappears. No view of road nor rooftop.

The entrance then is not your traditional suburban design; stone-filled gabions gather you in towards beautifully constructed stone pillars off which the gate hangs. Simple, and rather stark, but it introduces natural, earthy elements that continue throughout the garden – duzi gravel, small boulders, large rocks, wooden deck, aggregate stone paving – and plants.

It is a garden of rooms, providing the hideaways, or bomas (meaning Kraal in Swahili) the owners wanted, though without the traditional lathe fence and wide vistas of an African landscape. Rather, it is an impression of seclusion, each area designed without the substantial barriers that would have closed up this space.

Through the gate, a wildlife pond, set in the centre of a curving cobbled driveway, provides the entrance feature. Thorn trees evoke Bushveld country, and game lodges and the species of choice here are two gleaming Fever trees, perfect water-side plants. The velvety lime green trunks support light canopies heavy with bird nests. Water bubbles from a central source that cascades into a few small ponds of various depths filled with Tilapia. Rocks and boulders flesh out the imitation rock structure creating nooks and crannies for plants and aquatic wildlife. Elegant stems of *Cyperus textilis* and *Encephalartos natalensis* are part of a dense cover that obscures the garden behind – *Aloes*, *Leonotis leonurus*, *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, *Chlorophytum saundersiae*.

From this vantage point, with brief glimpses of the garden beyond, options entice you to choose your path. A left turn leads you to a firepit boma beneath a tall *Erythrina caffra*, screened from the house and driveway by groups of shrubs. A floor of hard-wearing aggregate stone provides a secure surface for chairs and a safe fire -surround. The dappled mid-morning spring light here is soft and luminous, and in the heat of summer, this shaded boma provides a cool retreat. "The cobbled edging here is dated", suggests Myles, who'd prefer to let the gravel integrate seamlessly with the plant material. "Compare it to the new section close by; it is a lot more attractive without an edge to break the flow".

As the driveway curls around behind the pond, you meet the heart of the family garden. It is a beautiful space. To the right, close to the pond, a recently installed walnut- brown deck and pool patio dominates. In time, the height of the *Erythrina lysistemon* in the foreground will reduce the impact of the expanse of deck. A broken off limb from the original tree, planted directly into the ground, sprouts fresh spring leaves. This Coral tree species has outstanding form; elephant-like ears, a rough and fissured bark, and soft, furry flowers in bright red-orange. A slim-trunked *Cussonia sphaerocephala* grows alongside it.

The access path from the deck is an intricate mosaic of square pavers, small boulders, dried wood features, and plants, with the neat, silver-green groundcover, *Dymondia margaretae*,

knitting them together. The attention to detail is impressive, myriad tiny points of interest tucked in everywhere. The mosaic provides a fascinating interplay between hard and soft, inorganic and living.

Duzi gravel and repetition of plant species create a discernible flow through the various rooms, interrupted by changes in flooring that mark a change in room. There is little lawn in this section of the garden, and, although the spread of hard flooring appears at first glance to be extensive, plants cover much of the ground. Together with rocks, dried wood, and the gaps in the gum pole wall, they provide quick refuge for garden wildlife throughout the garden.

Raised beds are held in check by a 3-tier gum pole wall and strategically placed rocks. It runs the length of the property boundary, interrupted only by the seating area in the teen pad, and forms an attractive buffer between garden and perimeter. The added height allows for the plants to provide an adequate screen while still young.

Circular designs:

The use of circles is a strong theme in Myles's design, and here, circles of lawn divide the space outside the home office. Attractive bamboo panels provide extra screening behind a layer of plants. Their strong colour defines the boundaries of this room, providing a contrasting backdrop to nature's greens.

Pathway interests:

- A straight paved path is made more interesting by off-setting some single pavers. Neat plants soften and blur the hard lines between building and paving – *Dracaena alectrifomis*, *Asparagus densiflorus 'Meyersii'*, and *Dietes bicolor*. A line of Cats Tail Fern helps to stretch the length of the path and defines the edge of the lawn.
- A zigzag line leading to a paved patio in the far corner encourages a slow meander rather than a hurried and purposeful walk.
- Change in floor cover suggests a doorway threshold into the teen pad.
- A quick line from the house to the fire pit boma, or the long way round when you have time on your side.

Focal Points:

- Glazed pots stand out from the surrounding sand-coloured gravel, grey pavers, and green foliage. The still-red leaves of the Octopus Aloe, *A. vanbalenii*, drape over the lip, enhanced by the bright green paddle-shaped leaves of the *Cotyledon* and spiky fronds of the *Asparagus*. *Delosperma rogersii* hugs the base of both, keeping the eye moving the circle to where the same vygie shares space with small boulders.
- *Aloe ferox*, *A. arborescens*, the odd light-canopied *Indigofera jucunda*, *Freylinia tropica* and yellow Honeysuckle create screening height in the narrow beds that

flank the lawn. *Cycads*, *Cotyledon orbiculata*, *Dietes bicolor*, *Aloe marlothii*, *A. vanbalenii*, and *Crassula ovata* fill the layers between the taller species and groundcovers. *Lampranthus*, *Aptenia*, *Delosperma*, and *Agapanthus* species complete the palette.

- A young baobab sits at the junction where cover shifts from gravel to paving. Its position, and how the surrounding design will change as it grows, is intriguing.
- Use of Cats Tail Fern: Myles use of the Cat's Tail Fern gives gardeners new impetus to try this popular species in a variety of different ways. In particular, the plant helps to define the shape of beds, lawn, gum pole walls and pathways. Often confined to lightly shaded beds, the leaves are a lush, emerald green in the sun; the random direction of leaf growth softens precise edges.

Quirky interest:

- The owner cut rough shapes out of stone boulders to create these unusual 'pots'. Rocks absorb heat on a sunny day, and *Gasteria* and *Haworthia* cope well while filling the space neatly, and they tuck into channels of worn wooden structures as well.
- Bits of bark, old branches, and tree trunks become beautiful works of art, and insect's homes, as they dry out. Myles has named them Lizard Hotels. They tell a story of nature's cycles and the need for urban gardens to enable the recycling of nutrients back into the system. The garden is a poison-free zone. For the most part, the natural pest and predator balance maintains control, but for seasonal outbreaks, Myles recommends a simple mixture of Sunlight liquid and water in a spray bottle. For Rust on aloes, he makes a paste of the same mixture to spread on the affected areas.
- Bird baths are scattered about; an elegant heart-shaped bird bath sits just off the wooden deck, and two large grinding stones provide a ground-level for lizards and ground-foraging birds.

Although the design provides the owners with their game lodge bomas, it is a disciplined garden that suits the busy lifestyle of the family. Clever design fits a number of functional areas into a limited space, and materials, both plant and hardscaping, are easy to maintain. The majority of species do not overstep their boundaries requiring little work beyond mulching, feeding and clipping. *Leonotis*, Honeysuckle and *Plectranthus* need yearly pruning; grasses are cut back as spring starts; aloes are monitored for pests and diseases, and weeds are controlled. And with humans and nature sharing a tight space, there are plenty of shelters for wildlife should things get a little crowded.