

before & after

# CLOSE TO THE COAST

Located on New Zealand's west coast, this garden's design is all about relaxed coastal living

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before & after



Before



Located on a seafront property in New Plymouth, this suburban garden epitomises relaxed coastal living in New Zealand and blends in nicely with the coastline and neighbouring reserve.

Homeowners Gerard and Jenny Wells approached Michael Mansvelt from Plantation, Gardens by Michael Mansvelt to design their garden after renovations on their house were completed. After focusing on the interior of the house, Gerard and Jenny decided it was time to invest in the exterior.

With no fixed idea on how they wanted their garden to be, it was quickly agreed that the entrance garden on the southward side of the house needed to pack some "serious punch" as there was no sea view from there and that side of the house was relatively devoid of any real architectural detail.

"It was important to me that visitors were surprised and delighted by the approach to the house," says Michael.

It was also established that the seaward side of the site needed to be beautiful but restrained so as to enhance the breathtaking 180-degree Tasman Sea view rather than compete with it. "Less was going to be more in this case," says Michael.

Plant materials needed to be extremely salt-tolerant given the garden's close proximity to the sea, however the high rainfall meant plants did not have to be too arid and a subtropical feel could be obtained.

"In addition, construction materials needed to stand the test of time in this environment, hence concrete walls and pavers were chosen for this reason," says Michael.

The original entrance garden consisted of some dilapidated fibro light fences and some slippery brick paving. The centrepiece of the entrance is now a 6x6 fish pond where the homeowners keep goldfish and turtles.

Construction of the garden was headed by Charles Dinnis from New Plymouth company Create A Scape. The sloping front yard was terraced, with retained and high plastered walls to provide privacy from the street.

Large exposed aggregate concrete slabs have been carefully constructed to appear as if they float over the pool as they guide visitors down from the 1.8m drop from street to house.

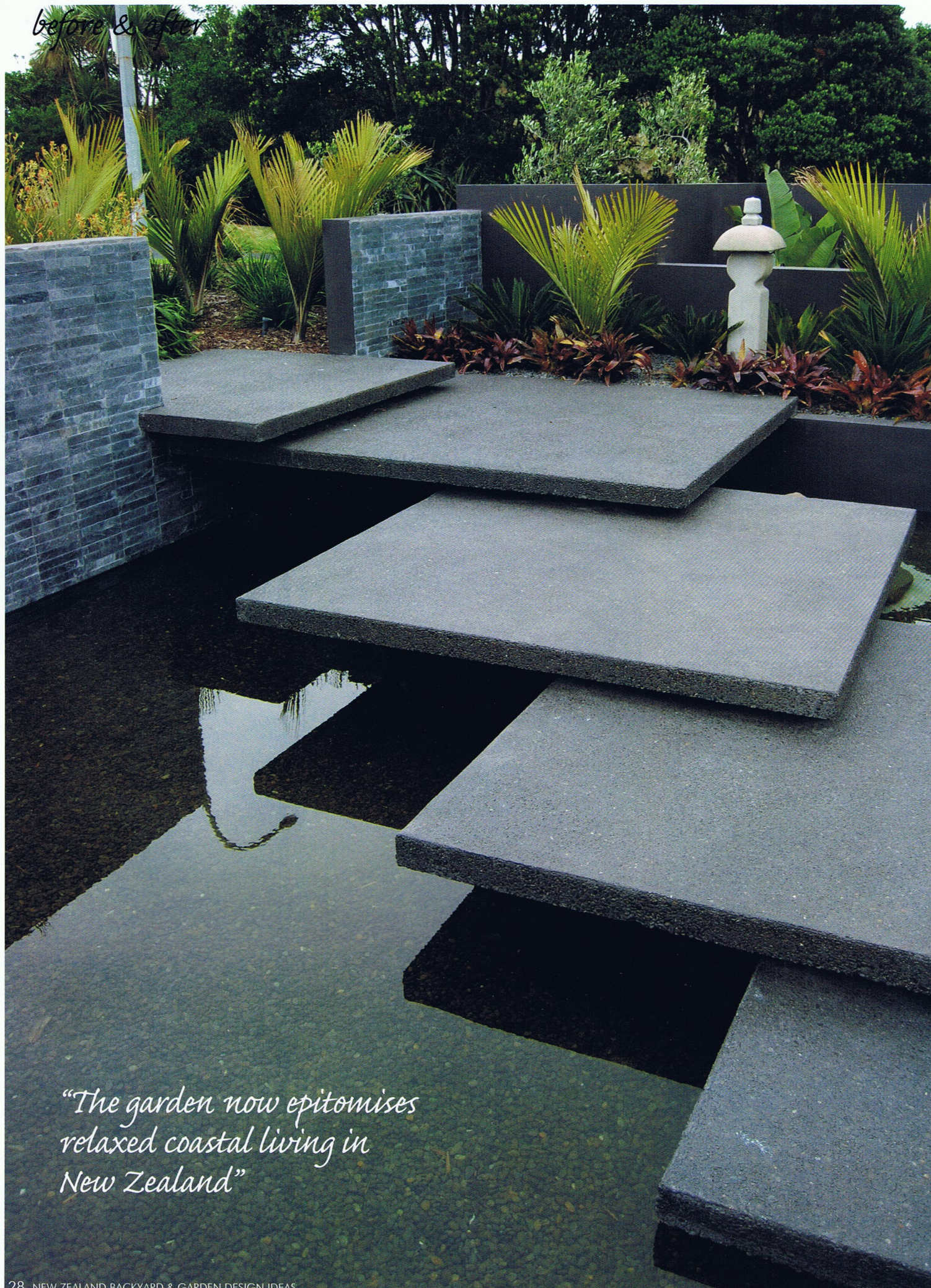
"There were no real obstacles with this garden, other than the fact that we wanted to construct the steppers to appear as if they were floating, which meant the support needed to be in place without being visible," says Charles. He adds that these concrete steppers are the garden's main structural element. "They look amazing when you view them from the bottom up."

According to Michael, "The concrete slabs are so beautifully constructed and the supports for these are not visible at any point on the journey to the front door."

The concrete slabs have also been sealed to give the look of volcanic stone, which ties in well with the lush plantings of Nikau Palms, Bromeliads and tropical Philodendrons. This →



before & after



*"The garden now epitomises relaxed coastal living in New Zealand"*

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part of the garden is very sheltered because of the walls and as such, plantings have flourished quickly despite the harsh salt winds.

The seaward garden was a myriad of levels, paths, rockeries and lawns. Earth-moving machinery was brought in to clear the area and create a large central lawn.

"With decks upstairs coming off the main living areas, no real outdoor living space was needed on this level so the lawn could take up the whole area of flat space," says Michael.

The lawn has been framed with polished concrete pavers, with the rest of the areas re-contoured — creating a nice contrast to the flat, framed green lawn.

Plantings consist of groves of salt-hardy kentia palms and dragon trees, and lush under plantings of protea, hibiscus, elegia, ligularia reniformis and strelitzia, to name a few.

Hand-made green antique urns from Burma give a sculptural feel to the garden and add colour, without detracting from the neutral scheme.

The garden is best described as being both formal and informal, says Charles. "The garden is very structured as well as very relaxed. Although a lot of concrete has been used with the steppers, the overall design makes the use of concrete not so obvious."

According to Michael, "The garden now epitomises relaxed coastal living in New Zealand and looks at home with the coastline and neighbouring reserve. The boulders on

Before



the beach are repeated throughout the garden and the iconic west coast black sand translates well in the volcanic pavers. The vibrant colours from pohutukawas and roadside agapanthus are repeated in the subtropical plantings, and there's an overall sense of balance and harmony in the garden." ■

**Michael Mansvelt** has over 18 years experience in the landscaping arena. In addition to his work through Plantation, Michael is also known for his role as the landscape designer on the TV series Back to Basics and Mucking In. [www.michaelmansvelt.com](http://www.michaelmansvelt.com)