

## Through the Garden Gate –

### **Aspects of garden design – a case study – Inverleigh Public Hall**

The Inverleigh Public Hall consists of a bluestone Mechanics Institute building attached to a 1950s cream brick hall and recently added community room, back verandah and front verandah over the footpath. This year I convened a sub-committee of the Hall Committee with seconded community members with backgrounds in design, gardening and heritage buildings. The task was to design a garden for the Hall. We imagined there were no financial limits to free us up to think of all the possibilities.

First we established a brief which we put to the Hall Committee. The main items in the brief were:

1. To bring the bluestone building to prominence and to enhance its heritage aspects
2. For all gardens at the Hall to be sustainable and tough, requiring little maintenance.
3. To streamline mowing so it can all be done easily by ride on mowers
4. To retain wide open spaces in the back yard for big events
5. To increase shade and seating
6. To consult with users of the Hall and neighbours
7. To soften and visually unify the different building materials and sections

Next we walked the gardens together talking about eyesores, throwing up ideas and thinking about practicalities. A hard to mow area could be changed to an exploratory garden for the playgroup children with a living cubby house of a weeping cherry at the end, the splotchy back fence could be sprayed charcoal, a gazebo could be built for shade. The big list was brought down to a tentative plan which was then taken to meetings of the Hall Committee, the Playgroup and the Senior Citizens for ideas and feedback. More perspectives raised different ideas and issues. The expensive gazebo went, to be replaced by a shade tree and seats under an existing tree in the meantime, stepping stones in the garden in front of the bluestone building became a paved path for safe walking for brides in long dresses and access for wheelie walkers, wheelchairs and prams.

Our design for the garden in front of the Mechanics Institute building harked back to historic photos which showed a picket fence with a garden behind it. Purposes for the garden were: to showcase the building, to provide an area of beauty in which to sit and relax for passers-by, for people waiting for the bus or the Hall to be open and for people wanting photos with the building and garden as a backdrop. Each purpose informed decisions, hence the selection of tough plants flowering at different times of the year and a little table as well as seats. The height of the new fence and gate had to enable the windows of the building to be seen from the road. The fence was set back from the path so that plants could be viewed both from the road and from inside the fence. We will attach heritage trims to the verandah posts and paint them, the barge board and the picket fence the same creamy mustard colour to create a link between the new bluestone building garden and the recently added front verandah.

Of course there always are financial constraints and, in the home situation, you would have to consider them. By now though, we all shared a grand vision and didn't want to settle for less. We wrote to Bunnings to see if they could help us create the garden in front of the bluestone building as part of their community program. Our proposal was pegged out and adjusted on the site so we could 'try it out' before I drew a plan to scale. The Hall Committee voted finances towards the project. Bunnings came to the party with materials, plants and four workers for the day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September and the community provided catering and six workers on the day, workers before the day levelling and putting in fence posts and ongoing volunteer labour to complete the task. The Hall Committee thanks everyone who worked on the project.

While not finished in one day, the new garden is well on the way. In addition, all the trees in our larger plan have been planted so they can start growing. Everything else on the grand plan – seats, tables, herb garden, screening plants, flag pole, fence spraying and corner and exploratory gardens - will be worked on in due course. The long time spent planning and consulting was well worth it because we have an overall vision and know why and how we are going to do each aspect. We will be able to prioritise and work on parts over time without compromising our plan.

I hope this case study has helped you in thinking about your own garden. Just substitute yourselves for the committee and include children, pets, wildlife and visitors as users to think about as you create a brief and a plan. It has been interesting talking to customers at our nursery about their garden designs and helping them to select plants that will thrive and serve the purpose in their contexts.

*Until next time, happy gardening.*

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