

GARDEN
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MODERN CONTEMPORARY

THE BIG SPLASH



After 15 years in the swimming pool business, this couple finally designed and built the pool area – and tropical garden – of their dreams

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Photography by Helen Bankers.

As the site slopes downwards, the concrete pool is raised above the ground on two sides. The dive platform gives Stella and Roman hours of fun and cleverly conceals the pump and filtration equipment. A cabana and fencing screen the pool from cold southerly winds.



When you own a swimming pool maintenance and renovation business, it's a no-brainer that your own pool should be something pretty special. That's precisely what Christie and Karmela Flint thought when they decided to install a pool at their Oratia property in the foothills of the Waitakere ranges, west of Auckland. They've owned and operated The Pool Man for 15 years and it's obvious when you look at their beautiful pool, with its elegant cabana and spacious dive platform, that they've learned a thing or two over the years.

"The pool was built primarily as a display pool so we had something to show our clients," says Karmela. "But we also built it with the kids [Stella, 10, and Roman, 7] in mind, so it has a diving platform which gets constant use during the summer. There's a shallow ledge on the western side which is ideal for lounging with a [plastic] glass of wine, just far enough away from the splashes at the other end of the pool."

THE SITE Once famous for its orchards, Oratia is now primarily a mix of small farming

and lifestyle blocks. Karmela and Christie bought their property 12 years ago when it was mostly unused pasture. They started renovating the existing 1950s weatherboard house first, extending it by 130 square metres, and working on it in stages over a period of seven years as finances allowed. Then they started on the pool. "The pool finally came in 2015. We joke about it only taking 12 years for the Pool Man to get his own pool. The irony of that!" laughs Karmela.

THE DESIGN Privacy was one of the biggest issues when choosing a position for the pool, as the house is built right next to the road and the land slopes down away from it, putting both the pool and the family's outdoor living space in clear view of people driving past. Another factor was the wind. "Because of our position in the valley, we get howling southerlies, which can make even sunny summer days cold. Hence the wooden pool fencing and cabana wall, which block the winds out completely," Karmela explains.

However, the biggest hurdle, as so often is the case, was obtaining resource consent

for both the house extension and pool build, particularly as the area is covered by the Oratia Structure Plan, designed to protect the Waitakere foothills. They got there in the end, helped by designer Andrew McKissock (The Concept Guy). “We loved his ideas for the house so we used him again a few years later for the design of the pool area and deck. He suggested the position of the pool, and designed the flow from the house and the dive platform.”

THE LANDSCAPING The build took 12 months as Karmela and Christie didn’t want to rush the project. As the ground slopes away from the house, the pool is raised on two sides. The couple opted for a 10m x 5m sprayed concrete pool with pebble glass bead plaster finish and Bisazza glass waterline tiles. It’s filtered by a salt chlorinator and UV sanitation system, as well as an integrated chemical dosing system.

“The filtration, hot-water heat pump, lights and a sheer-descent fountain all run off an automated unit. We can control it all from our phones anywhere in the world,” says Karmela.

THE PLANTING Once the pool and hard landscaping were completed, the couple chose local landscape designer Kirsten Sach to give them a planting plan that would create a resort feel for the garden and screen the pool area from the road. “We gave her a heap of photos of plants that we wanted, none of which would grow in our subtropical and sometimes frosty backyard, but she came back with great alternatives that give us height, depth and that Fiji feel,” says Karmela.

“The garden desperately needed planting to tie all the elements (house, driveway and pool area) together,” says Kirsten. “It was a blank canvas with absolutely no planting and located in Oratia, which is known for its hard frosts. But because this property was set a bit higher up on slopes, I was willing to risk the subtropical planting design that my clients really wanted, as long as they were prepared to cover some of the more soft, tender plants like bromeliads, palms and cycads if there was a warning for impending frost. Plants often harden off as they mature and fill out so this wouldn’t be such a problem long-term.”

Kirsten’s planting palette included canna lilies, shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*), tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*), cycads, *Philodendron xanadu*, sweet flag (*Acorus gramineus*) and a variety of palms. “I wanted to create lots of layering and a feeling of lushness with bright bursts of colour to create impact and interest,” she explains. “Because the soil was clay and wet, mounding up the garden areas was crucial to improve drainage. Urbis Landscapes did all the prep work and planting for this project, which got the plants off to the best start possible.” ●



Landscape designer Kirsten Sach selected plants such as canna, cycads, irisene, lomandra and ligularia to create a resort-style garden that could cope with the frosts prevalent in Oratia. Protecting the plants while they established was key, says the designer.

