

THE GETAWAY

Landscape architect Hamish Moorhead creates a low-maintenance formal garden for a weekend home in Martinborough.

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The creation of prestigious housing subdivisions in verdant rural settings is a relatively new trend in this country, but it's one that that seems to be readily embraced. The recently built, 34-hectare Martinborough Estate near Wellington offers all the attractions one expects of such developments.

Nestled on the broad plains of southern Wairarapa and next door to the town's 100-year-old 18-hole golf course, Martinborough Estate is flanked by the Ruamahunga River and about an hour's drive from downtown Wellington. Martinborough's art galleries, cafes and restaurants are just minutes away, as are the some of the Wairarapa's world-renowned wineries and award-winning wines. The site accommodates 55 individual lifestyle lots. For those who plan to develop the lots, there are obligatory design covenants that each house must conform to in order to preserve the estate's 'rural character'.

Landscape architect Hamish Moorhead of Wellington's NMLA had to deal with several of these covenants when designing this contemporary formal garden for a house on the Martinborough Estate. One of the key restrictions was on the amount of perimeter fencing, another on planting or building on a large space to the east of the house that was designated as a reserve area.

A crucial factor influencing the design of this house and garden was the site's exposure to "the notorious and prevailing" northwest wind. The house was built as a weekender and the client's brief was to create outdoor living spaces that were sheltered from this wind. "The buildings were positioned on the site to minimise the effects of the wind, achieve privacy from other

house sites and to maximise the outlook from the house and connect its users to the wider landscape,” Hamish explains.

Wellington’s Accent Architects had created a minimalist aesthetic for the design of the house and the client wanted the landscape architecture to complement this. Hamish’s response was to create a series of tightly controlled courtyard spaces, keeping his palette lean and simple for both hard and soft landscaping materials. Concrete and gravel paving softened by areas of lawn is used for the ground plane,



while clipped evergreen shrubs and trees reinforce the crisp, geometric lines of the architecture.

As the Martinborough Estate had only recently been developed, the site had very little existing planting, with the exception of broad-scale shelter planting near the site boundaries. The neighbouring Martinborough Golf Course did, however, provide an eastern aspect of mature exotic trees, says Hamish.

A stand of existing oak trees that were part of the original estate provide a soft

framework as you approach the site from the street, their bright green leaves the perfect foil for the charcoal walls of the house. A simple massed planting of buxus clipped into a flat plane of green surrounds the recessed front entry on the south side of the house, continuing around the base of the building. Above the plane of buxus, three pleached hornbeam trees form a green vertical wall directing visitors to the front door.

The central space in the garden is a courtyard area between the main house and pool house, which has its own



guest bedroom. “This area incorporates a swimming pool, which was positioned as close as possible to the living rooms so the views of the water could be enjoyed from inside,” Hamish says. Paving connects the rooms that open out to the north and leads to the pool enclosure where the hard surfaces are softened by areas of manicured grass.

At the western end of the house concrete pavers broken up with gravel paving lead the eye to the tennis court on the far side of a large front-lawn area. At the eastern side, a small paving area leads directly to lawns that blend

seamlessly into the reserve and golf course beyond.

Hamish’s repeated use of structural planting throughout the garden works well on a practical as well as decorative level, providing screening and privacy without the need for fencing, and disguising those fences that are necessary, such as those around the pool enclosure. And with clipping the main maintenance requirement, the structural planting is a good low-maintenance option for holiday homes. Plants were selected for their tolerance of Martinborough’s hot, dry



summers and cold winters, as well as their suitability for clipping.

“I’ve been really pleased with how well the planting has developed over the last five years,” Hamish says. “When you are using a limited range of plants it’s crucial that they are successful, and the combination of greens and seasonal change that the exotic trees provide has a restful park-like quality, which is important for a property that is largely used as a weekender. It is difficult to relax if you’re looking at a garden that constantly looks in need of care.” •

A series of neat courtyard spaces is offset by soft lawn and evergreen shrubs (this page). Designed to be used mainly as a ‘weekender’, the property had to comply to strict guidelines in order to preserve the site’s ‘rural character’ (opposite page). The chairs around the pool are by Jerszy Seymour for Magis from ECC Lighting + Furniture.