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Laying down the lawn

The drought is over and spring is almost here, so it's time to replant the much-loved patch of green, writes **Jim Fogarty**.

WITH above-average rainfall and the weather warming up, it is time to think about having a lawn again. In recent years, drought and water restrictions discouraged many gardeners and synthetic grass was seen as a short-term solution for some. Thinking long-term, it is time we invested in Melbourne's green lawns again.

Lawns have many well-documented benefits. They cool the urban environment, help keep pollution and dust under control, and help to control erosion and runoff. In home gardens, they are the perfect surface for children and pets to play on, they reduce glare and have a positive impact on house prices.

Under stage-two guidelines, it is prohibited to water a lawn with

Soft-leaf buffalo is better for shady areas and large backyards.

drinking water. But a 28-day exemption to restrictions applies when laying new warm-season grass. An optimist might argue that rainfall will provide enough water to maintain a lawn and, interestingly, the biggest problem once the lawn is established is overwatering.

The push for using warm-season grasses such as buffalo, couch and kikuyu in Melbourne is obvious, given their ability to survive dry periods. Make sure you use a lawn edge to prevent grass spreading into garden beds.

Soft-leaf buffalo is better for shady areas and large backyards. Kikuyu is tough but needs regular mowing to control it. For a native seed option, try weeping grass



Too much water can damage an established lawn.

PICTURE: JIM FOGARTY

(*Microloaena stipoides*; see nativeseeds.com).

There is an incorrect assumption that lawns need massive amounts of water. Water only when the lawn needs it and monitor rainfall, which can provide enough

water for most of the year. Let the lawn dry out between watering, it promotes better air movement to the roots and stimulates deeper root growth. In warmer months, a deep watering once or twice a week should be enough.

Humbug full of sweet surprises

A collaborative residential project blurs the line between art and architecture, writes **Jenny Brown**.

BOTH New Zealanders, artist Peter Adsett and architect Sam Kebbell could presume at least one common language. Aye?

When they collaborated on the design of a house for Adsett and his family at Shoreham on the Mornington Peninsula, they worked through an intense, esoteric and prolonged three-year dialogue that resulted in some pretty original design strategies but also a building Wellington-based Kebbell says reiterates the historic manner in which "painting and architecture fold back into each other".

The house that was christened "Humbug" for the lolly that has the same bold black-and-white stripes as the house's exterior, "argues that we have collapsed the difference" between the two disciplines, Adsett says. "Where does the painting end

and the architecture begin?" the abstract painter asks.

This creative alliance that stretched and stimulated both — "I learnt a lot and suspect he learnt a lot, too," 38-year-old Kebbell says — took some very odd approaches for some unusual results.

Discussing the block he bought because it was sunny, Adsett says the design exercise started with the siting of a 12 metre by 12 metre area of turf.

Establishing this front lawn pushed the long, narrow (4.8 metre wide by 16.8 metre long) house to the back of the block, meaning "the house just frames the square", Adsett says.

The two-level residence is full of similarly subverting ideas. Aside from the door to the one small bathroom-laundry, the house — shared by two adults and two



teenagers — has no other internal doors. But there is a large sliding black felt piece that creates a hint of privacy for a modest bedroom Adsett calls "a boy's cave".

At a superficial take, it all looks simple enough. "It's essentially a one-room house with a skillion roof," Adsett says. But, on examination, there are strange details that make it so very different. For instance, Adsett's upstairs studio is also the main bedroom, which is not weird to a painter used to working in kitchens and hallways.

Part of the floor of that studio-bedroom is laid as open decking, so that what takes place in the studio is clearly heard in the kitchen downstairs and visa versa.

Light filters between the rooms with an interesting shattered effect. This is all very deliberate, Adsett says. "There is no hiding away in this house. Everything is transparent and it's just fantastic," he says. "It's changed the way we live as a family because we live and interact as one unit. We're together."

The one room width affords wonderful cross-ventilation and excellent light — so important for the studio application of the house. Kebbell says the light quality has to do with the two long facades that "moderate light before it enters the room".

"On the street side, this happens through the tall [6.1 metre] columns and the canvas seats," he says. "On the other side it happens through the deep sun-shading devices on the upper level."

The facades embody further inversions. The rear eastern facade is architecturally the stronger statement yet is appreciated by one neighbouring property. The black-and-white canvas awnings — the ostensible shades on the western front that are low slung rather than high set — actually function as verandah seats.

(Clockwise from far left) there are no internal doors; deep sun-shading devices are on the top level; the black-and-white striped exterior; partial decking.

As Adsett says, "all is ambiguous".

This is the first Australian house for Kebbell and the architect and the artist intend that it will not be their last local collaboration. They plan to work together on seven buildings as if they were building an exhibition of artworks rather than architecture.

"We are very excited about exploring the ideas of painting and architecture together in a finite series of buildings," Kebbell says. "One down, six to go."

contact

Kebbell Daish
Phone 64 4 384 5866 (Wellington)
9099 0283 (Melbourne)
kebbelldaish.co.nz



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