



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

## Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

# ETRE

Saturday & Sunday, 27 - 28 April, 2024

10 Delaney Avenue, Willunga

### **2024 OPENING - A POSTSCRIPT TO NOV 2021 (see below for original notes and postscripts)**

Etre garden was begun in June 2014 on a completely bare 660 sq. m block, and first opened in January 2017. Ten years on it has become its own entity, with developed natural processes creating an interconnected web, a self-renewing ecology with its own wild aesthetic. You can access earlier notes from 2017 and 2021 outlining the establishment process and its evolution.

“Wild” means abundant, diverse micro climates, plants finding their own niches or arriving uninvited from elsewhere- seeding down in their own good time, multiplying by running and clumping, intertwining with others, forming colonies. The original design is softening, mainly because the trees have grown to forest this space with an upper canopy structure- a summer air conditioning effect. The ground is now covered with a living plant mulch and the soil has greatly improved. Prunings are chopped on the spot and tucked under the plants- the worms come up for a feed, leaving their droppings and aerating the soil. All kinds of insects and birds have moved in. Airspace beneath the trees has become more humid and even temperatured, with condensation rehydrating leaves and repeatedly recycling water. The garden has developed resilience.

I turned 75 last year so the issue of sustainable maintenance is on my mind. A major restoration of all wooden structures has just been completed, paths widened and plantings thinned. The garden keeps me fit- a natural yoga – bending, kneeling and squatting, twisting and reaching, carrying weights. But a succession plan is called for.

I have begun to open up and simplify areas under the trees, creating self-regulating and self-sowing flower meadows. Under the uplifted olive, a Mondo grass non-mow lawn; under the kaffir lime and avocado trees a floor of mixed violets; for the peach, perennial cyclamen, white daffodil and summer Bidens. Unproductive, poor doers and problem plants like bamboo are being taken out (did you know clumping bamboo has round stems whereas running has flat faces at alternate leaf nodes?).

Funds are being slowly put aside for the time when it's become too hard to prune and net the fruit trees by myself. Also a growing “barter bank”- there are always interested young ones to mentor- my design ideas and advice for their help as they learn on the job.

The garden is not only my sanctuary home. It's also a sculptor's outdoor studio, a craft workshop full of resources, a food bowl, a destination on the travelling wildlife corridor, a habitat, a propagation nursery for our neighbourhood planting projects on the street reserve. It earns its keep, and I am grateful for the sustenance, beauty and wonders brought to me by the plant world. My role as design controller and maintainer has changed to one of partnership and collaboration as I slow down and review life here. As change is welcomed for new opportunities to create differently.

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**Open Gardens South Australia Inc:** is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

Web page: <http://opengardensa.org.au/>

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Original Garden Notes (2017)



Number 10, just 630 square metres of compacted clay, was home to a mechanic's workshop in a shed with lots of driveway and a thick thatch of wall to wall Kikuyu, when I bought it in the winter of 2012 and planted the first six of 23 fruit and nut trees. By late autumn 2014 a little house had been built, on a budget of \$100K, including rainwater tanks and PV panels.

Bit by bit over the last two and a half years, the shed was transformed into a studio, worn out fences rebuilt and landscaping achieved, working from back yard to front verge (quite new), and reusing every last scrap of saved/ scrounged/ gifted building material. The stepping stone paths for example came from the demolition of a friend's old garage floor, with the concrete slabs laid upside down and interplanted with *Dymondia*/ *Bacopa*/ *Silene* and *Thymes* for that stony Greek hillside look.

People often ask how the garden could grow so well and so fast from nothing. I think it was three things: preparation for the dream to arrive, gratitude when it did, and not being afraid to use "common" plants like *Gazania*s/ succulents/ *Myoporum* if they worked well for my eclectic scheme of a gently organised and integrated wild abundance in every season.

Before the house was started I had a bobcat strip off 12 tonnes of Kikuyu and cross-rip to

30cms deep. Then we sprayed Bio Dynamic 500 and covered thickly with a local BD mulch including pig manure/ rock dust/ gypsum. So all during the building phase rains were soaking in, worms hard at work. After a Land Blessing the place felt homely; not only inspired with intention but lively, and protected too.

I collect plants from everywhere and propagate many myself. First a drip system goes down. Plants go in directly next to the lines, into loose soil with aged manure or mushroom compost mixed through, and a pressure compensating 4l/hr dripper is put in close to each stem. The damp soil and irrigation system is covered over asap with 10 layers of wet newspaper, well overlapped, and a 150-200mm layer of coarse, rain penetratable arborist's mulch is placed on top. The weed seed bank soon germinates under the paper and dies for lack of light. Worms love to come up and eat the news print over about a year, leaving their castings and well-aerated soil to further boost the young plants.

From then on the roots forage deeply, and all they might need is seaweed pellets put out in winter with the rain. Fruit and nut trees get pigeon manure in autumn, and I mostly sheet compost the veggie garden with a little old manure, or green manures planted in winter and turned in when 50mm high.

As time permits, a one-day cubic metre of BD compost gets made with the herbal preparations of yarrow/ comfrey/ chamomile/ dandelion and valerian tea. This is used like gold.

I notice that dense plantings keep the surface shaded, cool and moist with a living and/or continually rotting ground cover, allowing that top 3mm of precious micro-organisms to proliferate, enliven and deepen the soil which

improves by itself, as it does in a well balanced forest ecosystem. Standing and observing a plant for some time until answers to questions about its health and needs arise naturally in me, particularly when pruning, is also part of my gardening method.

I've chosen a combination of native and exotic plants- tough, reliable and generous, with similar water/ soil requirements and special attributes to bring (like bird-attracting Kangaroo Paws, the Gaura "beehive", Oregano for butterflies, Tagetes and Rue to repel mosquitoes).

In summer the garden is mains watered deeply once weekly, using app. 5,000 litres. The house is all on rainwater, with also 30,000l for 4 weeks of peak summer time in the garden, as chloraminated mains water doesn't seem the best for plants in the heat. This means each year I am producing most of my food and preserves, with plenty to share around, plus a nurturing habitat for me and other creatures, using an average 215 l/day. That's 75-190 litres less than the average 290-405 litres/day used by a one person household on 600 square metres of what is often sparsely planted land.

There are many elements woven together here. In Japan and Bali I fell in love with the way gardens are designed to seamlessly integrate indoor and outdoor living with a variety of transitional spaces and courtyards, giving nature centre stage and absolute respect. I also admire French ditches where you can see a charming froth of closely growing weeds, herbs and flowers giving each other vigour and support. I like the natural balance between wildness and formality of SA Eyre Peninsula beachscapes- the way weather and necessity, sand and salt, rigorously edit and construct Zen compositions of white limestone, reeds, hang-in-there windblown shrubs and gnarled black Sheoak trunks against a vivid blue sky.

Oriented due East to the reserve, the land here feels spacious with a tall copse of old blue gums close by and a far view to the hills. My house has a small footprint of 56 square metres, placed centrally so that all sides can be really useful areas. It's like a tree house with its elevated decks- you can see right through on all sides from one, light filled multifunctional space topped by a roof for canopy. I prefer to plant more trees than to take up land for seldom used, empty bedrooms.

Right at the beginning I set about changing the flat terrain by raising soil from the house-cut into mounds, and carving a seasonal creek bed with rills as surface drainage. This sculpting of the land created micro-climate pockets and spaces which have now been formalised into places or destinations, in response to what each site offered in soil, moisture, aspect, light and scale.

You can explore a sequence of interconnected spaces here- like beads on a necklace, each with its own sensory attributes and ambience, its built structure and features.

The garden is designed to be a comfortable environment of multi-use, shady and sheltered opportunities for living, work and play. The deck and interactive raked crush brick area, for example, can be a meditation space, a potential kids' theatre or the band's stage at a party, the winter fire circle or a star watching swag spot. If you are dreaming into a quiet session of playing with raked patterns, the Ti-tree and Native Rosemary "boat" (my children's baby cradle) might suggest a narrative concept; or the "Tiger-eye" local quarry rocks of ancient folded molten slate and seabed, marooned in the sea of crushed brick, might seed a story line.

There is a strong aesthetic impulse behind my design. Although it's a practical garden- a collection of craft and floristry resources, a food

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bowl with nearly 100 edible fruits, nuts, berries, herbs and vegetables- I don't see why intensive food production and work areas can't be beautiful too. It's so satisfying to plant out veggies as if they were a flower garden. A stellar fruit tree like Persimmon Fuji can't be relegated to orchard rows when it could be gracing my lounge room scene with its lush summer shade, those stunning autumn leaf colours, and the plump lacquer-red fruits that hang on well into winters' grey days.

The garden colour palette is carefully calibrated and specific- stimulating and strong, in the red and blue range only, picked out with white flowers for freshness and moonlight viewing, plus foliage contrasts in bronze, lime green and silver. There's a "blues hill" of Salvias to set off the featured

bronze leaved Cotinus Cogyria; a fragrant golden area out the back with Dwarf bamboo, Gardenia, and the fine yellow grass Graminus Acorus Aurea; while next to the front deck is a sunken checker board of tea herbs and medicinals, framed by one dozen lime green Tree Euphorbias, which will grow to three metres high with their geometric umbrella-like structure.

My shed-studio is also important as a garden work hub and venue for processing the harvest. Here we will carve the New Guinea Bean gourds; make Kasoundi from the Chilli glut; weave baskets or make string from Iris, Red-hot-poker, Red Willow, Black Dogwood; dry tea herbs for special mixes and tastings; propagate from slips and cuttings. If you come back in each season there will be plenty going on, plenty to see.

ETRE (French for "To be")

SHIYINE (in Tibet "To be well within one's skin")

NIMETO (Gaelic meaning "Sacred grove of trees")

These three naming words sum up the intentions behind the making of my garden. That is, to create a beautiful, nourishing and inspiring haven to share. A healthy and sustainable forest community of plants. And not least, somewhere to rest and listen in, soaking one's interior world with the sensory qualities and soothing balm of nature's ever-changing connectivity. All that life-filled activity around and in us, whispering knowledge throughout the seasons, giving us peace.

## POSTSCRIPT- MID 2019

Etire garden is maturing and changing. Most of it is about 5 years old, with some barely three months- I recreate those sections which have not been working well.

One Southwest corner is thriving as the new medicinal herb garden. It used to be poorly due to the hungry roots of encircling trees and contrasting conditions of either intense heat or deep shade at different times of day. In other places ground covers have headed for the sun, rooting themselves out from under the increasing shade of trees now up to five meters tall. Bulbs like Tradescanthus are seeding themselves across the garden into charming bee loving clumps by the gate, along the creek, in the veggie garden. I leave Rocket, Parsley, red Carrot, Lettuce, Celery, Mizuna, Cosmos, Tomatoes and Hollyhocks to seed themselves down in their preferred pockets. Self sown succession plantings of Euphorbia Lambii are thinned to take over as their parents begin to die off; I accept the variations in height and spacings which soften my original boxlike design framing the tea garden.

It all requires me to let go of fixed ideas and become receptive to the creative potential in how plants need to organise themselves. I am enjoying how much more integrated, tender and natural it is all starting to look and feel, as groundcovers like Native Violet and Bacopa grow through each other, small shrubs like Thyme spread themselves around in drifts, or a vine like Clematis Montana climbs up into the Native Frangipani and cascades down in scented veils. A few plants have died without explanation, leaving room for rare finds or a friend's gift of red stemmed Dogwood (good for basketry).

Anticipated resources are coming to fruition- like the Chilean Willow, coppiced yearly for woven fences, or Red Hot Poker and Iris leaves for string making.

For the last three years the garden has kept me provided with 80% of my veggie needs and all my quality organic fruit year round, with plenty to swap barter or gift out- vastly offsetting the cost of water. There is a profusion of root runners and clumps to divide if I, or others, need more plants.

The soil everywhere has become deep, dark and friable, holding moisture well. It has started to maintain its own balance and fertility levels. I bring in yearly about half a trailer load only of different animal manures, and the same in rough cut arbourists' unscreened mulch, or found mulches like russet colored winter pine needles. Otherwise everything is recycled within the garden into leaf compost, or pruning mulch chopped straight onto the beds, or with hard twigs laying them into decorative short term borders to frustrate the Blackbirds destructive scratching.

Now I contemplate and sit more, observing and listening closely for those unbidden ideas and imperatives to make their way into my awareness. A greater diversity of creatures is moving in to the lively, evolving ecosystem- insects, birds carving out territories and three blue tongue lizards. I am less a mistress of my patch and more an equal occupant, working out interspecies and holistic responses.

With climate change and an integrated, sustainable community in mind, our neighbourhood is turning its attention past our private fences to the health and diversity of the reserve that we surround. So far we've established colourful deciduous shade trees, a pocket forest and plantings along the road verge, with the help of a grant and the blessing of our collaborative minded Onkaparinga Council. I am feeling fully "landed" in this place, truly come home to earth.

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## NOVEMBER 2021 POSTSCRIPT

Etre garden was begun in June 2014 and first opened in January 2017. Now at nearly eight years old it has become its own entity, with developed natural processes creating an interconnected web, a self-renewing ecology with its own wild aesthetic.

“Wild” means abundant, diverse micro climates, plants finding their own niches or arriving uninvited from elsewhere- seeding down in their own good time, multiplying by running and clumping, intertwining with others, forming colonies. The rooftop garden seeded itself to a meadow of Kangaroo grass and also drop-planted one Bronze Carex which we now negotiate in the middle of the path below. Should I move it? No, visitors pause in their tracks, to drink in the colours and atmosphere of the garden before going on, slower, with more attention; they have been greeted by a guardian.

The original design is softening and evolving, mainly because the mature trees have partly forested this space with an upper canopy structure, creating dappled shade for a summer air conditioning effect, and wind protection which reduces evaporation and promotes better fruit set. The ground is now covered with plants [far better than dry mulch for moisture retention], and the soil has greatly improved. Prunings are chopped on the spot and tucked under the plants- the worms come up for a feed, leaving their droppings and aerating the soil. All kinds of insects move in to do the work of grating the rotting material, followed by an increasing range of forest floor scratching birds who feed on them in turn. As the plants transpire, the trapped air space beneath the trees becomes more humid and even temperatured. The warm air rising up condenses in the lower tree canopy and cycles back down, keeping leaves from drying out. Water is not lost into open air but is reused over and over. The garden has developed resilience.

My role as design controller and maintainer has changed to one of partnership and collaboration as change is welcomed. I think twice before intervening with my bright ideas at any old time that suits me. My job now is to garden for balance and health- tweaking and sharpening after much observation and working with the energies of the moon and weather, the seasons and daily movement of the sun.

I do delete plants that don't work here for the space taken up e.g. Silk Mulberry tree [cut at the base and turned upside down to make a big teepee trellis for berries]. Due to Pam Hailstones mentoring by example I'm getting more particular about foliage texture and plant combinations, also introducing specific plants to increase creature diversity e.g. for butterflies, bees and my favourite the Eastern Spine Bill bird. I protect and encourage smaller and more delicate plants by thinning and pruning over-vigorous ones like pigface, recycling them as a mulch resource. The only things sent away in a green bin are super thorny rose and Bougainvillea prunings. The fruit trees are the most size-controlled, because they have to be netted here- I really do want it all for eating, drying, making sauces and Kasoundi, bartering and gifts. The productive crops supply me year round. The main veggie garden came along wonderfully after it became a netted room keeping out over-zealous blackbirds who destroyed the natural seeding down process.

Everything connects up. Ravens are nesting in the big gum next door, thinning far too many baby possums eating the fruit flowers. Bushy habitat supports small birds nesting who eat the paper wasps and chase away Noisy Minors who greedily hogged the space before. You can see how a gardener might become wiser about the wider world just from watching it all.

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