

CHAPTER 2: ITALIAN GARDENERS IN AUSTRALIA: FROM ESSENTIAL GARDENS TO PARADISE GARDENS

The Italian garden in Australia can be considered a post World War II phenomenon. Despite the long Italian association with Australia it was not until the post World War II period that large numbers of Italians started to live in Australian cities, creating gardens at the back of their inner city homes.

Italians knew of Australia long before 1788. Italian geographers in the 16th century referred to Australia as the 'fifth continent'; a knowledge gained by Italian mariners with the Spanish and Portuguese expeditions in the Southern Hemisphere. Italian missionaries were also aware of Australia, particularly those who were working in Malaysia. The Jesuits wrote to the Vatican about the Southern Continent as early as 1676.

Italians set foot on Australian soil soon after first European settlement. There were several Sicilian convicts and there were also a few Italians among the early free-settlers. Later, Jesuit missionaries came in the 1830s, but their evangelistic missions were thwarted by the strength of the Irish Catholic Church. Nevertheless, they wrote descriptions of the country in their reports back to Italy. In 1851, *'Storiche dell'Australia'*,¹ written by the missionary, Rosindo Salvado, was published in Italy. This was the first major Italian book about life in the young Australian colony and it survived in Italy, as the definitive work on Australia, well into the middle of the twentieth century.

These were the first tentative Italian contacts with Australia. It was not until the 1850s that the first significant group of Italians arrived. They came to work on the Victorian goldfields and there has been a continuous Italian migration to Australia ever since. The history of Italian migration to Australia is rich in stories, telling of the different reasons for migration and the way the Italians related to the land and to the towns and cities. There are stories about the Italians in the cane fields of Queensland, Italians on the goldfields in Victoria and Western Australia, the Italian fishing fleets in the port of Fremantle and Italian prisoners of war being transported to Australian POW camps and resident Italian internment camps. There are also stories about the role the Italians played in the great development projects which followed World War II, such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electricity Scheme and particularly the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme. All these places are of great significance as part of Italian heritage in Australia.

Italians have contributed much to Australian culture. Apart from the heritage of Italian high culture exemplified by opera and the fine arts and the great heritage of ancient Rome and the Renaissance, professional Italians have also brought their commitment to political activism and the scientific spirit of Marconi. All these influences richly imbue the way Italians maintain their cultural life within Australia, however Australian cultural life also draws from Italian traditions. From the earliest days Italians brought their artisan skills such as stonemasonry and fine tilework. It was the Italians who built 'Marvellous Melbourne' in the 1880s. Italian stonemasons worked on the fine public buildings and Italian tilers created the richly decorated private villas of the wealthy Melburnians. Along with the contribution to Australian cities, Italians made particular contributions to the rural landscape. They brought to

Australia their strong relationship to productive lands; the vineyards, the citrus orchards, and their highly productive gardens.

Migration was a way of life for rural Italians in the nineteenth century with seasonal workers following work in other European countries, usually returning home for the winter. Some adventurous migrants went beyond Europe to the New World. Vast numbers of people left Italy for United States and South America, but few chose to come to Australia. Migration to Australia must have been a daunting concept to people in Europe. Unlike the Americas little was known about the great southern land. People in rural Italy had not read the missionaries' reports and the few who had made the journey to Australia had not returned. It was a mythic place. The idea of travelling across unfamiliar oceans into another hemisphere of different seasons was formidable; particularly as Australia was thought to be a vast isolated continent with relatively few inhabitants. To justify such a severe separation from places which were familiar, migrants were either motivated by stories of how one could make a fortune in Australia or they were refugees driven from their homeland by war or politics.

In the Italian community, the early voluntary migrants to Australia were known as 'scouts'². They were single men who came to make their fortune. Many of the first group of Italian migrants were itinerant workers, moving around the gold fields or the cane fields or working with different fishing fleets. Later, a few of these men brought out Italian wives and settled in rural areas. Other Italian men married Irish Catholic girls whom they met in Australia through the church. By the end of the nineteenth century, Italians, though not large in number, lived all over Australia. Most were living in rural areas although there were small communities of Italians in the larger cities.

Those men who married and settled in rural areas were usually bonded through *paesani* - people from the same village in Italy. The connection with the village in Italy developed into chain migration and resulted in closely knit communities of Italians who owned farms outside Australian country towns. Both the men and the women worked on their farms, so there was little time for gardening. Despite this, most farmhouses had vegetable gardens and possibly a few roses close to the house; but they were not considered to be gardens. They were part of the farm, which produced vegetables for the home, nevertheless they were also places where extended family gatherings could occur on Sundays.

Italian communities in the cane growing areas of Queensland, the irrigation areas of New South Wales and the fishing ports of Western Australia lived in relative peace, largely ignored by the Australian communities. Those few Italian families who lived in the cities were not in distinct areas or enclaves and were casually accepted by the Australian community. Italian community life was focussed around the church and the social clubs and the extended family life in the home. The most obvious expressions of difference were the clubs. These were gathering places for the men and were often strongly political. So one could describe the Italians in Australia as small immigrant groups who were bonded by membership to political clubs, the loyalty among *paesani* and their working ties.

It was not until World War II that dramatic changes occurred to Italian communities in Australia. Italians who had lived peacefully in rural communities since the 1880s

found themselves rounded up and placed in internment camps along with Italians who had been taken as prisoners of war in Europe. The perception of being Italian in Australia changed both for the Italians and for Australians.

After the war, a new wave of immigrants came to Australia from Italy. The nature of this period of migration was quite different from the earlier trickle of people who had slowly drifted into Australia over one hundred years. The new group had been actively solicited by the Australian government and had been encouraged to come and participate in the building of a nation! When they arrived, they found the existing Italian communities were wary of Australian loyalties and the mainstream Australian community did not appear to echo the welcoming sentiments of the politicians. However the new immigrants were large in number, high in expectations and were not going to be subdued. Apart from the communities which established market gardens on the fringes of Australian cities, most post World War II Italian migrants formed communities in inner city areas and began working in the large industrial complexes. This was the beginning of the urban Italian centres which were characterised by close proximity to the Catholic Church, neighbourhoods of small terrace housing, shops selling Italian food, restaurants and clubs. All of this occurred along side existing inner city Australian working class communities who were unsure about the sudden influx of Mediterranean people with different ways of life, which contrasted so strongly with the British colonial culture of Australian cities.

Australia in the 1950s had an immigration policy, which expected migrants to blend into the Australian way of life; to assimilate. Italians became self-conscious about their Italianness. In this atmosphere the homes and gardens of the Italian migrants became havens in which they could relax and be Italian away from the judgemental eyes of the prevailing Australian community. They were places of cultural refuge, particularly the back garden where migrants had the privacy to continue an Italian way of life.

Italian village life, so evocatively portrayed on tourist brochures with people conducted their colourful community life in the streets, was now transposed into the Australian backyard. It was here that people could gather together. They could listen to music while speaking Italian, drinking their own wine and eating the rich produce of their gardens - olive oil, tomatoes made into paste, baskets of mandarins and walnuts, herbs of oregano, basil and garlic, vegetables such as zucchini, fennel, and the colourful cannelloni beans. This was in strong contrast to Australia where street life was quiet and restrained, olive oil could only be bought in small phials in pharmacies and it was difficult to buy garlic at all.

The typical Australian backyard at this time was surrounded by a wooden paling fence. The laundry was attached to the house and opened onto a grass area in which stood the ubiquitous Hills Clothes Hoist. This Australian invention was launched onto the market in 1945 and by the 1950s most Australian homes had replaced the long rope clothes-line, held up by a forked stick, with a 'Hills Hoist'. The typical 'Aussie' backyard had a tap near the outhouse laundry dripping into old saucepans in which grew mint and parsley. There was always a lemon tree in the garden and often a vegetable garden with neat rows of peas, beans, cabbages, lettuces and rhubarb. The Australian backyard was a functional place, often the domain of the 'man of the house'; whereas the Italian back garden in Australia, was a place for the large

extended family. Everybody worked in the garden and everyone relaxed in the garden - not on a sward of fine turf but on a slab of concrete with chairs and tables under trellises supporting bountiful grape vines.

Since the 1950s the Italian garden in Australia has gone through its own evolution from the first gardens which were places of essential production to the luxurious tropical gardens evoking Mediterranean villas and finally to new gardens which blend Australian and Italian high culture.

The First Gardens - The Essential Gardens of Seasonal Produce

Before we came there was nothing in the Australian gardens, just flowers and grass.

We planted many vegetables. Italians did a lot when they arrived. Before that there was nothing...now they copy us.

[Italian women at the bingo club] ³

The Italian women at the bingo club were not aware of the vegetable gardens at the back of the Australian houses of the 1950s, because the Australian front garden consisted of closely mown grass surrounded by neat flowerbeds. For the new migrants, their first gardens were considered to be an urgent necessity. The garden was needed to provide familiar food, which was so essential to the process of settling in. The Italian migrants came from a culture where there had been a long history of rural farms providing fresh produce every day for the daily markets; whereas Australians at that time bought their food from corner grocery stores and vegetable shops. The daily movement of fresh produce into the town square had never been part of the Australian culture. It was thus necessary for the migrants to create gardens as quickly as they could. They dug up the grass areas of the back garden and turned every part of the garden into productive use. Some even dug up the front garden to grow vegetables, but this was generally frowned upon by Australians at the time who believed migrants should behave like Australians. As one Italian migrant, who was a young girl in the 1950s, said

If you grew vegetables in your front garden as well as the back you were considered to be a real wog. [Lia]⁴

In Italy there would have been interesting regional differences in the produce on the farms, whereas in Australia the main differences in the gardens were between North and South Italian practices. All Italian migrants gardened, but the Northern Italians also brought their artisan skills while the Southern Italians brought their particular ability to grow a rich variety of vegetables and other productive plants. The following gardeners, Mario and the Mule family, and their gardens reveal how the process of making a garden and the way the garden changes over time is the story of the experience of migration.

Mario's Garden

Mario came from Veneto in Northern Italy to work on the Snowy River Scheme in the 1950s. He named his two-storey terrace in an inner Sydney suburb 'Villa San Vito' after his town near Venice called Villa San Vito Tagliamento. For over thirty years he worked on his house gradually changing it from an Australian terrace,

characteristic of Sydney in the nineteenth century, to a highly personal expression of his Italianness in Australia.

The front garden is typically a small terrace garden consisting of a neat arrangement of clipped privet hedges, planted along the path, the sides and across the front of the garden. A richly ornamented front garden wall, covered with white marble chip panels defines the garden. While pointing to the details of the wall, Mario explained,

*I did these twenty six to twenty seven years ago, these are panels. I did them separately and then stuck them on.... I worked for Pioneer Concrete with terrazzo and marble and over the years I collected the pebbles that I have used in the mosaic. [Mario]*⁵

On the upper storey, the old cast iron balcony rail has been replaced with similar mosaic panels on which Villa San Vito is laid out in dark grey pebbles. The path leading up to the front door is also thickly covered with fine marble chips. Yet despite this rich detailing the overall effect is restrained. This is in complete contrast to the lush productive garden Mario has created in the back.

Walking around the narrow side passage adjoining the house, one is suddenly greeted by tropical banana palms, macadamias, and mangos; all of which are growing close to the back of the house. Beyond the grove of tropical trees stretches an intricate productive vegetable garden, over which is layered an orchard of figs, citrus and chestnut and a vineyard of grapes along fences and on trellises.

Every space is skilfully manipulated so that full sun falls on layers of vegetables; tomatoes over lettuce, cannelloni beans against the fence with the grape vines above and interspersed within the beds are fig trees, citrus trees and plums. All of this is contained in a narrow Sydney terrace garden.

The back garden is also a place for traditional Italian festivals. In December, Mario celebrates the Festival of Madonna in his summery garden. The ancient traditions of working with the seasons have to be reversed in Australia. Now old festivals related to harvests are held at times of the year different from those held in Italy and the saint days are also occur in inappropriate seasons. Over one hundred people gather in the garden drinking wine from last year's harvest and enjoying bread and pizzas from the large wood fired oven which forms the end wall of the garden.

Although such events imply that the garden is always full of people, Mario, in fact, is a quiet and very private man who has a deep love of gardening. Many of the trees in the garden have been propagated from the seeds of fruit he has eaten - mangos and avocados. The intuitive response to growing things that can be potential food and the ability to do experimental grafting is second nature to Mario. His words reveal the pleasure he gets from his garden.

...yes, I make the wine...oh and here are the flowers - the geraniums...and here I grafted this one by myself. Before it was a different tree. It was a wild plum - quite bitter - not sweet like this one....Oh yes, here is the sage and the rugola...[Mario]

This is Mario's guide tour. The plants are old friends. The garden is Mario's first and only garden and it reflects the blending of tropical fruit trees, which grow well in Australia with the trees and vegetables of his native Veneto. Mario keeps the tradition of Italian gardening in an intuitive and unselfconscious way. He is an individualistic gardener, so it is interesting to contrast his garden with the continuous gardening over three generations of one Italian family in Australia.

The Mule Family Gardens

The story of the Mule family's gardens is described by the grandson, Sam, who is a landscape architect and is interested in understanding how an Australian-Italian garden changes through different generations.

Sam's grandparents, Salvatore and Rosa, arrived from Calabria in the late 1940s bringing with them the village gardening tradition which enabled families to be self sufficient. They came from a mountainous village, Bombile, where the population of a mere three hundred lived on the slopes beneath a monastery. They lived in family houses with gardens terraced down the hillside. The gardens, which were established to sustain the family, characteristically contained rows of olive trees, some fig and orange trees and sometimes a pomegranate tree. Interspersed with the trees were vegetable gardens and at the base of the garden were housed chickens, pigs and a donkey.

The villagers sustained annual customs, which were related to harvesting garden produce. In late summer, tomatoes were picked and boiled in order to create a rich tomato sauce, which was bottled and sterilised in a large drum. In early autumn, olives were pickled and in late autumn, the grapes were harvested, crushed and the juice allowed to mature into wine in large barrels. Finally in the winter, salami was prepared after one of the pigs was killed. The salamis were then smoked and hung in the cellar.

These were the customs that Salvatore and Rosa Mule brought to Australia. Salvatore came to Australia in 1949 looking for work. Like Mario he worked on the Snowy River Scheme, giving eight years to Australia's post war industrial dream. He then came to Sydney and bought a house in Leichhardt where a number of Italians settled because the Capuchin priests were associated with the Catholic Church in Leichhardt. The pattern for most migrants has been to seek guidance about work and where to live from the priests or other spiritual leaders. For the Italians in Australia, the Catholic Church became a focus for spiritual solace and community support. The story is the same for other Italians in Australia, whether they settled in Carlton in Melbourne or Fremantle in Western Australia.

Salvatore bought a small Federation house, with an intricate facade of polychrome brickwork, in a narrow street in Leichhardt and this was the home to which he brought his wife and four sons. His first task, once the family had settled in, was to convert the lawn in the back of the house into a complete vegetable garden including grape vines and olive trees. The entire space behind the house became productive. The family planted the same vegetables they had grown in Italy and although their garden did not spill down a dramatic hillside, they were able to create a sense of familiarity with the chicken coop at the back fence and a sense of self sufficiency as the vines

grew and enclosed the space. Interestingly the only plants from the former Australian back garden which Salvatore kept were a fig tree and a passionfruit vine; but as Sam found out when speaking to his grandparents, *'they never ate the passionfruit'* [Sam]. All the same traditions they had practiced in Italy were now followed in the Leichhardt garden. As with most migrant gardens, the neat Australian front garden stayed exactly as it was when they had bought the house. Meanwhile behind the apparently Australian facade, wine-making, soap making, tomato bottling and olive pickling were annual rituals in the back garden.

In 1972 Salvatore and Rosa moved into a house in North Ryde. This house, built in the 1960s, was set on a double block of land which, resulted in a generous front garden and a large back garden. At last Salvatore had the space to create a 'proper' Italian garden. There were, however, a few things in the garden that were not seen as useful, in particular the in-ground swimming pool and the large brick barbecue. Once again Salvatore converted the entire lawn area into a vegetable garden, working around the swimming pool and the barbecue. After a few years, the pool was drained and then ignored, as was the barbecue. The pool became a concrete hole, empty apart from a long pole used to harvest the pears from a healthy stand of prickly pear trees which occupied the space formerly used for sun umbrellas and deck chairs. The barbecue became a useful bench for pots and garden tools.

Gradually the garden was subdivided into different productive units in much the same way that Mario's garden was divided. Salvatore and Rosa were now able to grow vegetables all year round. There was room for an orchard, a chicken coop, garden sheds and a cellar. The Mules also had room for small sheds to house the soap making equipment and to provide a smokehouse for the salami. The orchard was large enough to include persimmon and pomegranate as well as almond trees, plums, cumquat, lemon, mandarin, and the essential olive and fig trees.

The front garden remained unaltered. It continued to be characteristic of many gardens in North Ryde with tall camellia and rhododendron shrubs and neat beds of roses and summer dahlias. The large concrete driveway housed the cars while the garage was converted into a bakery with a bread and pizza oven and a storage area for the bottles of tomato sauce and pickled olives.

The elevated front balcony was the only part of the front garden that changed. This became the place where Salvatore and Rosa spent a number of hours a day relaxing. The balcony floor was tiled in highly glazed tiles laid in an intricate pattern. Inside the cast iron balustrade, a rich display of orchids provided a sense of elevated seclusion, reinforced by a luxurious screen of bougainvillea. This part of the garden provided an outdoor living space where Salvatore and Rosa could watch the activities in the street. The rest of the garden is either productive or for display.

Their grandson, Sam thinking as a landscape designer, mused about the way he described the garden. He said

It may sound as if I think the garden is ugly, though never in my life have I thought of it as ugly. It has always been a special place for me; a place where the traditions of our culture have been taught to me and also a place where many fun times have been spent. [Sam Mule] ⁶

The Next Generation: Paradise Gardens in the Land of Opportunity

Salvatore's sons married and established their own gardens. Bruno, Salvatore's eldest son, bought a house in the Sydney suburb of Eastwood in 1972. He and his wife, Caterina, continued the Calabrian gardening traditions in the same manner as Salvatore and Rosa. They doubled the size of the existing vegetable garden in the back and added a chicken shed. Even today, Caterina and the family bottle tomato sauce in the late summer. She also pickles olives and eggplants. In the winter the family make salami, again following the same traditions of their native Calabria.

Caterina's tomato sauce requires tomatoes fully ripened by the summer sun, not the sleek unblemished tomatoes found in the shops. Until recently all the tomatoes were grown in the garden, now, in late summer, Bruno goes to the vegetable markets to collect boxes of ripe tomatoes which have been picked from the vine when dark red. The ritual of making the tomato sauce involves the whole family. They gather together in Caterina's kitchen and follow a process that has centuries of tradition behind it.

Amid laughter and chatter, the children are shown how to wash the tomatoes so that any blemishes or mould are removed. Caterina and the older children cut the tomatoes in half and remove the seeds and watery flesh. A large pot is on the stove ready to boil the tomatoes quickly. Then Caterina and Bruno lift the heavy pot and pour the mixture through a special sieve, which separates the skin from the flesh. The children help clean glass jars which they set out in a row. The sieved tomato is poured into the cleaned jars and sealed. The family carries the jars filled with the deep red tomato sauce out into the garden where Bruno has lit the barbecue. The bottles are stacked in a large open drum, which is placed on top of the hot barbecue. The bottles of tomato sauce are boiled until they are cooked and sterilised, then they are stored in the cellar under the house. Throughout the year, the tomato sauce is used for pasta, particularly on Sundays when the extended family gathers for lunch.

CATERINA'S TOMATO SAUCE

In late January, go to the markets and buy very ripe tomatoes.

Wash the tomatoes and cut out any blemishes.

Cut tomatoes in halves, remove seeds and discard.

Boil tomato shells for five minutes.

Sieve tomatoes to separate skins.

Put sieved tomatoes in clean bottles and seal with beer bottle tops.

Boil filled bottles in large kettle of water on open fire outside.

Store in cellar and use for spaghetti sauce.

In autumn Bruno harvests olives from the trees in the garden. Again the family gathers in the kitchen to wash the olives in baskets in the sink. Caterina half fills

clean jars with the green olives, adding on top garlic, whole chillies which are home grown, slices of lemon, oregano and the flower heads of fennel. At this point she adds the salt - one cup per jar - and then fills the jar with the remaining olives, topping up with water. Caterina says the most important part of the pickling is to add the right amount of salt. She has taught her daughter the family secret of how to measure the salt. The jars of olives and herbs are sealed and allowed to mature for at least six months.

Caterina's Picked Olives

Buy fresh green olives from the markets in Autumn.

Wash olives in a basket in the sink.

Half fill clean glass jars with olives.

Add whole cloves of garlic, whole chillies (home Grown),

Add slices of lemon, oregano, sprigs of fennel flowers

Add one cup of salt for each jar. Pack in the rest of the olives and fill jar with water.

Seal and leave for six months.

Finally in winter Bruno brings home a pig carcass to make the salami. This is a complicated process and involves the whole family for a couple of days. Firstly the pig carcass has to be cut up so that the meat can be separated from the bones and placed in different baskets. Again a collection of large baskets is brought up from the cellar. The bones and the trotters go into one basket, the flesh and the skin in another basket and the head in a third basket. Nothing is wasted. The bones and trotters are used for soup. The skin and fat are separated from the meat, and the fat is put aside to be made into soap. The head is used for delicacies such as 'pig's cheek'. Finally the meat is minced finely with either an old hand-turned mincer. Recently Caterina has started to use an electric mincer. The minced pork is then divided into balls of meat each as large as two cupped hands. The meat balls are arranged in a circle in a basket and on top of each is placed a half of a fist of salt. Caterina says this is very important and it is the only measure she knows that guarantees success. This is another family tradition that Caterina has taught her daughter. The balls of meat and salt are combined and kneaded with ground pepper, fennel seeds, some red wine made by the family. Caterina also adds some special capsicum sauce that Rosa makes. This is a family speciality and gives the salami its red colour.

When everything is completely mixed, Caterina's daughter watches as a small amount of meat mixture is placed under the griller and cooked. Everyone tastes the mixture to check that the flavours are right. Now the meat mixture is ready to be put into the skin. This has been collected from the abattoir and washed with vinegar and lemon to disinfect it, both inside and outside. The meat mixture is placed in the sausage machine, which is a modified meat mincer with the skin of the sausage placed over one end. As the meat comes out it fills the skin and Caterina deftly ties it off in segments about the length of her hand. Caterina's hands are the measures for quantities and lengths.

Now the salami are ready for smoking. The salami are tied to rafters in the room the family uses for the smoking and an open brazier is lit in the centre of the floor. Every day for two weeks the fire is lit and the salami are smoked for about two hours a day. When the smoking is finished the salami are stored in the cellar. Some are hung but

most are curled into large jars of olive oil until they are used. The oil ensures that the salami remain moist, ready to be cut into thin slices for antipasto.

These are the joys of Bruno and Catarina's back garden, where most of Salvatore and Rosa's traditions have continued. Changes are occurring, however. As food shops in Sydney now supply a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, often as a result of the years of Italian market gardening, the need to supply one's own vegetables has decreased. Other changes are also occurring. Sam's parents have reduced their vegetable garden in the back garden and have created an outdoor living area, designed by Sam, to reflect their family's changing lifestyles. Despite such changes, the garden sustains the sense of being a productive co-operative where neighbours share their back gardens across a few remaining palings of the traditional Australian back fence.

Unlike Salvatore and Rosa, Bruno and Catarina changed the front garden. They converted the 'Australian' garden consisting of a simple straight path flanked by closely mown lawn into an intricate rockery behind a low front wall with brickwork detailing characteristic of many Italian homes in Australia. The rockery is planted with a wide variety of culinary herbs, flowering shrubs and small trees including some palms. Bruno and Caterina's front garden is an early version of the second generation of Italian suburban gardens in Australia with their palms and ornate textured brick walls.

Salvatore's younger sons, Vince and Leo, have gardens which are characteristic of second-generation Italian-Australian gardens – the 'paradise garden'. Both sons built houses in a northern beach suburb of Sydney. Vince built his house in the late 1970s when the Italian 'paradise garden' was just starting to be a feature in some suburbs of Sydney. Leo built his house in the early 1980s and the house and garden show a later development of the Italian-Australian house and garden style.

The second-generation houses and gardens are characteristically bigger⁸. They are frequently two-storey houses and the garden is often bordered by elaborate walls of cast iron lacework panels and concrete balustrading. Palm trees in dense groves, creating a luxurious tropical effect, usually dominate the planting in the front gardens. There are frequently examples of Italianate statuary and birdbaths placed in the large front gardens. They exhibit a sense of opulence in a tropical environment.

Both the house and the garden reflect a combination of a modern Italian villa and an Australian house of the 1980s. Although there are strong Italian references, often very exuberant references, there are also, in the back garden, distinctly Australian elements such as the Hills Hoist clothesline and the way the back garden is now used for outdoor living, with a pool in paved surrounds. Both Vince and Leo have a terrace containing a large pool bordered by an Italianate balustrade. Unlike Salvatore and Rosa, their sons use their pools and surrounds as pleasant outdoor living spaces. The vegetable garden still exists, but now it is hidden in an area behind and below the pool and the olive trees and citrus trees now grow in elegant terra-cotta pots near the pool.

Despite the changing nature of the gardens belonging to Salvatore's sons, there are still Italian cultural elements, in particular the cellars stocked with homemade wine, tomato sauce and pickled olives, even if most of the produce still comes from Salvatore's garden or Catarina's kitchen. This is the paradise garden created by

second generation migrants. One of Salvatore's sons has thirty five different palms in his garden; whereas Salvatore would have had thirty five different food producing plants.

The Mule family now has a third generation of gardens in Australia. Salvatore's grandson, Leo, has a house and garden near his parents in a northern beach suburb. Leo and his wife Maria spend a lot of time in their garden, which has many tropical features. Despite this, there are no indicators that Leo and Maria have an Italian background. There are no figs, or olives but there is a small lemon tree. Also the cellar full of homemade produce is missing. Leo and Maria's garden is used for recreation. There is a paved outdoor eating area under a timber pergola; there is an aviary and a neat garden shed and there is a Hills Hoist clothesline. Leo and Maria's garden is characteristic of any young Australian family in a northern beach suburb of Sydney.

Perhaps the migrant garden can last only two generations. The traditions become diluted and changed. Maybe there will be a fourth generation of Italian gardeners who will create yet another version of the Italian -Australian garden. Already there is an interesting garden, which reflects three generations of gardening in an Italo-Australian settlement - the Griffith/Leeton area in New South Wales - combined with the Italian skills of fine tilework brought directly from the Southern Italian region of Calabria. All these traditions come together in the garden of a restored sandstone mansion of the 1870s in its Sydney setting.

The Nino and Merlina's Garden - A Sophisticated Italo-Australian Villa.

The Italian stonemasons have played a vital role in creating the great public buildings in Australian cities of the nineteenth century. They have been fundamental to the maintenance of Sydney's heritage of fine sandstone buildings. The stonemasons who restored the gargoyles at Sydney University have grown into weathered gargoyles themselves as they have laboured painstakingly for forty to fifty years replacing stonework and restoring weathered statuary.

The elaborate stonework on Sydney's General Post Office has been maintained by Italian stonemasons. Cathedrals and the fine sandstone public buildings have all been sustained by the skills of the Italian immigrants. The interiors of many of these buildings have floors of fine tilework and walls of intricate mosaics, again installed by skilled Italian artisans. This is true of Sydney because of its heritage of sandstone buildings but it is also true of other Australian towns and cities, which have fine stone buildings of the nineteenth century.

Nino and Melina's house and garden draw from this heritage. Nino came to Australia in the 1970s as a skilled tiler. In his Calabrian village, San Ferdinando, he had been apprenticed to become a tiler when he was eleven years old and by the age of fourteen, he was a fully qualified tiler/builder.

He worked as a tiler in Australia until he was approached by the owners of Curzon Hall in Eastwood to do all the tessellated tilework. Curzon Hall had been a large sandstone monastery for the Vincentian Fathers but in the early 1980s it was sold and ultimately developed into a reception centre. Nino realised that there was not an appropriate source of tiles in Australia for the building restoration and in keeping with

the enterprising spirit that migrants bring to Australia, he decided to start his own tile factory. As a result, he restored the tilework of Curzon Hall, while at the same time building up a highly successful business, which supplied the tiles required for many of the restoration projects undertaken in the 1980s. One of these projects was his own home on the lower North Shore of Sydney. The house was constructed in the 1870s according to Edmund Blackett's⁹ plans, now in the archives of the State Library. The house had gone through a chequered history and by the time Nino and his wife, Melina, bought it, the house had been converted into four flats and the garden was overgrown with weeds. Only a camphor laurel and an old *Magnolia grandiflora* remained from the original garden.

Melina was particularly interested in remaking the garden. Her grandfather had been one of the first Calabrians to settle in Leeton and Melina had grown up in the strong Italian traditions characteristic of the Griffith/Leeton area in western New South Wales. Melina's parents had a large farm in the area and she remembers Leeton fondly as a place where Australian-Italians practiced all the old Calabrian traditions including maintaining highly productive vegetable gardens.

Nino and Melina bought their sandstone house in the mid 1980s. When Melina was faced with the daunting task of remaking the garden in keeping with the restoration of the two-storey sandstone mansion, she engaged a professional landscape architect. The garden respects the heritage of the house but it is not a restoration garden. It is a series of elegant outdoor rooms reflecting the high design of contemporary Italy as much as it reflects Australian garden design of the late nineteenth century. But it also reveals aspects of Nino and Melina's Calabrian heritage.

The front boundary of the property consists of the magnificent original sandstone wall, supporting an elegant cast iron gate. This opens onto a sweeping red gravel drive. The two-storey house sits above a grand flight of stairs, all of which creates an imposing entry characteristic of a nineteenth century Sydney mansion. The nineteenth century character is continued into a side terrace of fine turf and pastel coloured flowers and shrubs, designed to evoke Gertrude Jekyll's English garden sensibilities¹⁰.

It is not until one passes through a walled side terrace that a sense of difference emerges. A gate in the wall opens onto a highly sophisticated pool and gazebo which brings together the design talents of everyone - the landscape architect, Nino's Italian design awareness and ability to do fine tilework and Melina's desire to create a tropical paradise around the swimming pool.

The family refers to the area as 'the barbecue'. It consists of an elongated flagged sandstone area at the centre of which is the gazebo. The gazebo is an outdoor room with a barbecue and bar under an intricately tiled roof. Beyond the gazebo is an enclosed pool tiled in rich blues. On the other side of the central gazebo is a long timber pergola, which is at a subtle oblique angle to the stone flagging. This elegant structure, festooned with white wisteria, supports a long swinging seat. The sandstone flagging, the tiled floor and roof in the gazebo and the rich detailing of the pool are all Nino and Melina's ideas. The area is used by the extended family for many of their family events. There are coloured light globes amongst the pendulous

heads of white wisteria bringing together the vibrant Mediterranean lifestyle with the pastels of Gertrude Jekyll's England.

Despite the urbane elegance of the pool area, Nino also maintains his Calabrian heritage. At the back of the house there is a small vegetable garden. It has neat rows of vegetables and salad greens. Productive plants, however, are not confined to the vegetable garden. Scattered throughout the whole garden are Nino's fruit trees; figs, almonds and citrus. Melina laughs as she explains that he tries to grow everything that was growing in his village in Calabria, much of which cannot grow in Sydney let alone in their garden crowded with large trees and tall shrubs. Melina points out that although he is a successful businessman he still makes time to look after the vegetable garden and to make wine.

Melina also works in the business as well as looking after their five children. Despite this, she does all the cooking. She has a small herb garden, which provides the essential flavours for her traditional Italian dishes. Melina makes her own tomato sauce but like Caterina Mule she now uses tomatoes from the market or buys them directly from the market gardeners. She talks wistfully of the bottling that her mother did in Leeton

In Leeton, my mother planted the tomatoes and on the farms she grew all sorts of things - we had peaches, apricots. oranges - Mum used to make all the jams and all the preserved fruit - oh, everything - she used to pickle vegetables - everything. I would love to be able to do that ...but up here I don't have access to freshly picked fruit and vegetables... maybe we are just used to taking the fruit off the plants ourselves [Melina]

Adjoining the vegetable garden is a large pizza oven, made of textures bricks. This becomes the focus of their entertainment area during the winter. Melina points out

When we invite guests over, we rarely sit in the formal dining room in the house. We either come out here and have a pizza or we are over in the barbecue area.

The pizza oven is behind a large garage, which contains the entry to an extensive cellar under the house where Nino makes his wine. At Easter, Nino has grapes delivered from a South Australian vineyard. He makes his wine in a fully equipped cellar and stores it in two large casks. Nino has his own label and prefers to drink his own wine.

Melina and Nino are keen to keep their Italian traditions alive. They speak both Italian and English to their children at home where they follow both Italian and Australian rituals. Christmas is observed in a traditional Italian way - traditional pastas, turkey, chicken and pork, chestnuts, hazelnuts, panettone, figs, panforte, but it also includes many aspects of a traditional Australian/ English Christmas - Christmas pudding, Christmas cake and so on.

Doing everything - all the Italian Christmas dishes and the Australian - Sometimes it gets a bit much. But we believe in our Italian -Australian heritage. [Melina]

Nino and Melina's Christmas dinner, like their house and garden, represent an interesting combination of Australian heritage and Italian traditions.

Melina's Christmas Day Menu	
<i>Breakfast</i>	<i>coffee and panettone</i>
<i>Lunch</i>	
<i>entree</i>	<i>lasagne and olives</i>
<i>main course</i>	<i>roast chicken and turkey peas, potatoes, green salad from the garden,</i>
<i>Dessert</i>	<i>Italian bread and homemade wine Christmas pudding panfortenuts and figs Italian Coffe</i>
<i>Dinner</i>	<i>barbecued leg of ham and salad</i>

Italian-Australian Gardens.

Like many aspects of Australian culture, the garden is an intriguing example of cultural pluralism. The soil, the rainfall and the seasons all supply a primed canvas on which gardeners create changing artworks. The Italian community has a long history of contributions to Australian culture and much of this heritage exists in rural centres and the urban houses and gardens belonging to Italian-Australians.

The Italian gardens are an important aspect of Australia's gardening culture. The different gardens described here are all examples of gardens with Italian influences and yet they also show the way the Italian-Australian garden is changing. The early gardens were developed as a reaction to Australia's assimilation policies and the need to sustain an Italian way of life. The later gardens have become living testimonies to the Australian immigrants' dream. They are opulent places that are the rewards of years of hard work and clear examples of migrant success in Australia. As the Italian-Australian community continues to change one can but wonder what the Italian-Australian gardens will be like in Australia's culturally diverse future where endless combinations of culture are possible?

Endnotes

1. Salvado, R. 1851. 'Storiche dell'Australia' as cited in Jupp, J. 1988. *The People of Australia*. Angus & Robertson: Sydney.
2. The story of the different stages of Italian migration is explained by Robert Pascoe in his chapter 'Place and Community: the Construction of an Italo-Australian Space' in Castles, S. Calcorso, I., Rando, G., Vasta, E. 1992. *Australia's Italians, Culture and Community in a Changing Society*. Allen & Unwin: Sydney.

3. The meaning of the garden in North American cities has become a focus of interest in the 1990s. In Boston, community gardeners of many ethnic backgrounds have developed into political action groups. Sam Bass Warner Jr describes the Boston Urban Gardeners (B.U.G.) in *To Dwell is to Garden*, published in 1987 by Northeastern University Press.
4. Kate Mitchell, one of my former students, organised an invitation to meet a group of retired Italian men and women who met to play bingo on Friday mornings at St Brigids Church, Marrickville. We discussed the Italian garden in Australia. Another of my former students, Marie Stucci, translated the discussions for me.
5. The Italian bingo gardeners all agreed that Mario had the best Italian garden. After much hesitation he agreed to show me and Marie Stucci his garden.
6. Lia was one of the community workers at St Peters Community Neighbourhood Centre in Sydney who assisted me to meet different migrant groups. She migrated to Australia in the 1950s as a child and can remember Australians commenting about migrant gardens.
7. Sam Mule was a third year student in landscape architecture when I started to write this book. He agreed to introduce me to his family and enabled me to gain insights into the fundamental importance gardening has played for Italian families.
8. Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds refer to a particular category of architecture called 'Late Twentieth century Immigrants' Nostalgic' in their comprehensive survey of Australian architectural styles called *Identifying Australian Architecture*, published by Angus and Robertson in Sydney in 1989.
9. Edmund Blackett was a renowned Sydney architect of the nineteenth century. He designed many fine sandstone churches and public buildings in Sydney.
10. Gertude Jekyll was a British landscape designer who worked with the architect, Edward Lutyens in the late nineteenth century. Her gardens were noted for their apparently wild herbaceous borders and feature pergolas covered with vines. Her gardens characteristically contained pastel coloured flowers.