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LIVING IN DESIGN

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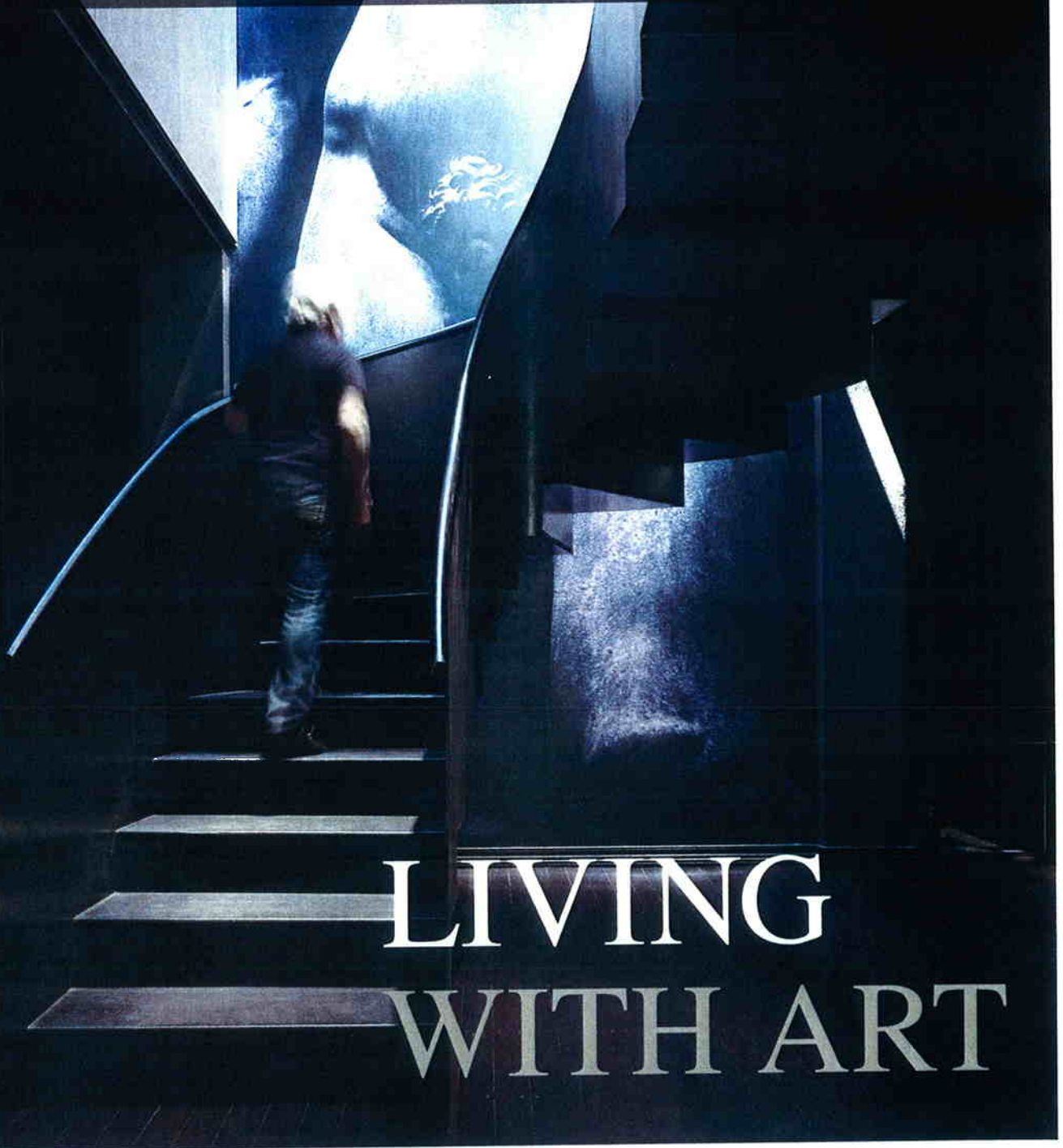
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# LIVING WITH ART

# PROWSE'S PARADISE



The tropical oases of landscape architect **Andrew Prowse** are defined by local climate, culture and site, and shaped by his distinct creative hand. **Tempe Macgowan** discovers the gardens of this Far North Queenslander.

## slow dissolve

*andrew prowse — QLD, australia*

Andrew Prowse's love of the exotic was evident early on, when he was a landscape architectural student at Canberra University (formerly College of Advanced Education). Now based in Cairns, Queensland, he's found his niche, and the residential gardens, resorts and public projects that he works on befit his exuberant imagination. This characteristic has always been tempered, though, by a strong sensitivity towards culture and place and a pragmatic, down-to-earth, country sensibility.

Author Michael Ondaatje, writes that "gardens, as we know, must follow all the rules of local climate and site and the visionary hand of the gardener and 'the needs of life at the time'". Ondaatje was writing about Sri Lankan landscape architect Geoffrey Bawa here, but the observation is just as applicable to the work of Andrew, who visited Bawa's home in the early 1980s, on travels throughout India and Sri Lanka.

Andrew grew up amongst big landscapes on a property at Quirindi, NSW, and his mother's background in the fashion and design industry was also influential. He recalls visiting Florence Broadhurst's studio in Paddington when he was young and the silver foil wallpaper she selected for their country home.

After College, Andrew's design ethic was refined whilst working at Sydney City Council with Leonard Lynch (now with landscape architects, Clouston Associates in Sydney) who he says, "encouraged a sense of place and how it is important to be comfortable in an environment".

In the 1990s, Andrew moved to Cairns in Far North Queensland with Andrew Pawsey, who he met at Sydney City Council. Together they formed landscape design firm Pawsey & Prowse. Whilst Pawsey has since moved on, Andrew has stayed with the practice. As the northernmost city on the east coast, the tropical climate of Cairns contrasts with the rest



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## slow dissolve

andrew prowse — QLD, australia



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of Australia, with only two real seasons. Here, the flora is more similar to that in Papua New Guinea, where Andrews also works (he also has projects further north, into China).

Andrew's own house, at Holloways Beach in Cairns, is a vernacular Queenslander with a difference designed by architect, David Langston-Jones. The house is especially compact and efficient, with a central stairwell around which rooms pivot out at different levels.

"It was built well before 'green' houses and sustainable design became the fashion," says Andrew. "It was built as an example of a low energy house when I was working on a manual for appropriate design in the wet tropics." As such, no air-conditioning is necessary, and the house takes advantage of local sea breezes and utilises louvres and vents throughout.

In his tropical garden, Andrew can name and describe each individual plant and has a fond story or personal connection with each species. "The tree in the backyard is the Sausage Tree from tropical Africa which I've seen growing in the wild in the Serengeti where leopards lie in the branches," he says. "There's the yellowish sword-shaped plants which are a Bromeliad from Colombia and Brazil – I love the glowing translucent foliage. There are lots of bamboos in the garden too, for the contrast of fine foliage seen against the broad leaves of the Heliconias, Gingers and Elephant Ears."

In much of Andrew's work, this play of contrasts between minimalist architecture and the garden itself is more measured. He collaborates closely on many projects with award-winning local architect, Roger Mainwood, Architect and Principal Director of Total Project Group. "He involves us early in the design process, in the design of pools and the landscape, to create flowing indoor/outdoor spaces," explains Andrew.

Two such projects by Roger and Andrew are the Gilbert and Struthers residences – neighbouring, award-winning vacation homes in Port Douglas that were designed and built consecutively.

Andrew describes Roger's brief for the two projects as "two homes distinct in personality but of complementary prestige and architectural interest. Each home had to respond to and embrace the tropical climate of hot, wet summers and warm, dry winters. Environmental sustainability was a key component with the homes to be comfortable year round without reliance on air-conditioning."

Each residence is starkly different, yet the same hand is evident in both designs. In the Gilbert residence, the experience is that of entering an oasis within an oasis and there is an overall sense of light, whiteness and space that flows outside to the terrace and pool. The scale of the doors onto the terrace, the Vietnamese white marble and the seamless transition with the pool is dream-like.



01 View from entry courtyard to the bedroom of Struthers residence, by architect Roger Mainwood.

02 Andrew Prowse at his home at Holloways Beach in Cairns.

03, 05 The pool at the Struthers residence with black interior and granite walls becomes a mirrored platform reflecting the house and garden.

04 View across putting green to pergola, tennis court, croquet lawn and orchard at Struthers residence.

06 White Vietnamese marble extends the living areas onto the garden and pool terraces, where cobalt blue glass mosaics accent the green and white garden scheme of the Gilbert residence.



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“...it is important to be *comfortable* in an environment.”

—  
ANDREW

## slow dissolve

andrew prowse — QLD, australia

In the Struthers residence, black granite is used throughout, edging the terrace and pool, and floor-to-ceiling doors let the outside garden belong to every room. The main swimming pool merges with the house on an upper level terrace in a double block, with a lower terrace formed by a rolling lawn edged with a framing pergola. A tropical fruit orchard, cactus garden and rainforest sits behind, providing a unifying backdrop to the home.

"The inspiration for the concept of contrasting white marble and black granite came from the Taj Mahal where it had been thought that the Mughal emperor had planned for a matching black granite mausoleum for himself to be built opposite the white marble one constructed for his wife," says Andrew.

The designs of these two homes, like the work of Bawa, follow all the rules of local climate and site, with Andrew's distinct hand directing and shaping the design. The tangled mass of a tropical rainforest may be distilled down to its essence or selected to play a particular role in a design. It is this ability to be selective in a way that balances imagination with pragmatism defines Andrew's work.

*Pawsey & Prowse, pawseyprowse.com*

The *tangled mass* of a tropical rainforest may be distilled down to its *essence* or selected to play a particular role.

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Prowse House (right) plays a part in forming a new tropical streetscape by maintaining a feeling of transparency while acting as a gatehouse to the private garden beyond (photography by Trevor Mein).



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