

ON LOUIS SAUER SEE [>>](#)

4 November 2009

To Nino Saggio
From **Louis Sauer**
Reference Photos of the landscape sent by Email



Not an English Garden: a description of changes to my property at 89A Lawson Avenue, Frankston South, Victoria 3199 Australia

Note: Unfortunately my photos of the original property, before any changes were made, were eaten up by my computer. None are available,

The Property

Our Frankston property has an area about 2,500 m² and is a 'flag lot' – a property that has a very small street frontage - consisting only of a narrow driveway that leads to a very large area; thus a "flag lot" is a property that resembles a pole with a flag at its end. Therefore, our house's front yard faced the backyards of five houses that faced the street.

The land slopes down from the street to the Sweetwater Creek and a large Nature Reserve owned by the municipality. The front yard slopes down from the upper driveway about 1.7 m to the lower driveway and the house entry, continues down another 2.8 m to the backyard and then down another 3m to the Creek.

The property is surrounded by trees, very private, quiet and frequented by a multitude of birds. Their morning songs wake us up.



The house

To get to our house from the street, you either walked or drove 60 m down a hill to the front door. The front of our house is one story and the back of the house is two stories. The main floor is entered under a carport and consists of four bedrooms 2 baths, a kitchen with a separate eating area, a dining, living and lounge rooms. Below the main floor is a large room (with a bath and toilet)

that opens to the back garden. There are two back decks, one off the kitchen eating room and the other one story lower. The house area is 355 m²

The house exterior and yards before I changed them

Our house's exterior walls were white painted stucco over brick. Wood window trim and other house trim were painted a dark grey. The roof is corrugated metal with a pre-finished grey colour. The yards were completely landscaped in the fashion of an English garden - with large grass areas and plants - neither native to Australia nor indigenous to the property's locale. The entire property had an underground watering system.

My feelings about the house's exterior

I hated the entire exterior of both the building and the landscape. There are three reasons why I hated these:

- **I hated that the property radiated an English sense of place.** I had moved a great distance, all the way from North America, to a very different continent and the last thing I wanted was a conflicted, distorted and confused sense that I had somehow boarded the wrong plane and landed in England.. I wanted to have visual clues and symbols to reinforce the ideas of the existential and phenomenological qualities that I lived in Australia.
- I hated the landscape concept. It was replica of a middle class idea, of pretentious aspirational formality and a distortion of an English estate that is not untypical in Australia. It's a remnant of British colonialist attitudes still prevalent, which denies or is incapable of recognising the Australian landscape as authentic. It's a preference for the familiar British garden ideal as the only authentic expression of landscape. The overall effect was rather schizophrenic, with a strong sense of discord between the bush landscape of the creek and the back yards of the surrounding properties



I hated that the house and its landscape used the visual symbols of pretentious aspirational formality. Since the property was isolated from the street, and therefore isolated from a public identity and any association with the character of the neighbouring houses' street facades that represented various architectural styles designed to signify public formality, I wanted the front of the house to merge, to blend in with, the Nature Reserve's indigenous landscape.

Thus, I wanted my house's front facade to lose its distinctiveness as an object - a facade designed to the conventions of what the public expects to see while travelling along a street. Ideally, I wanted my house facade to be a landscape.

In turn, I wanted the house's landscape to consist of a series of places that would lead from the more informal to places formally designed as symbols that express to me uniqueness of the Australian continent – its flora and contrasts from verdant to desert landscapes. I wanted this landscape to consist of indigenous plants (e.g. plants unique to a specific locale) but, since our indigenous plants have few distinguishing flowers, I would use native plants, and perhaps the occasional exotic, as more colourful accents.

- **I hated the way the front yard set off house**

as a formal object for viewing. **I hated** its use of grass to that isolated the house and that required consistent watering in a drought prone country. **I hated** that the yard was car oriented with its lower driveway increasing the isolation of the house.

Other than the front yard providing for the entry functions, it inhibited any use as a place for relaxed outdoor to-day living functions that could be easily accessed at the same level as the main floor of the house.

What I did to change the landscape

Throughout the property, I dug up and composted all grass. I removed all planting



with the exception of some mature birch trees and a clump of 60 year old Eucalyptus.

The lower driveway's asphalt paving extended completely to the front façade. This prevented the building from having an intermediate scale to the greater outdoor and to soften the building's abrupt edge. Next to the façade, I dug up a 600 mm strip of asphalt and gravel to a depth of 500 mm and filled it with a mixture of mushroom and topsoil.

At the sloping front yard, I hand dug and redistributed approximately 100 m³ of earth with a wheelbarrow. I removed all underground irrigation (because of Australia's +7 year drought, I did not want to continuously have to water plants; my new plants would be drought resistant and what survived would survive) and installed underground electrical lines for lighting.

Then, I constructed (from 200 x 50 mm impregnated water resistant timber) a series of planting terraces; a pond, walls, a waterfall, steps, pergolas and sculptures and paved with brick, a patio, paths and steps. One sculpture, that I call the Totem, is used to hold up a large dark green sail that hangs over the patio to shield it from the intense summer sun.

Other than the two major places - the front Patio and backyard Ode to Australia sculpture – the others are designed as transitions.

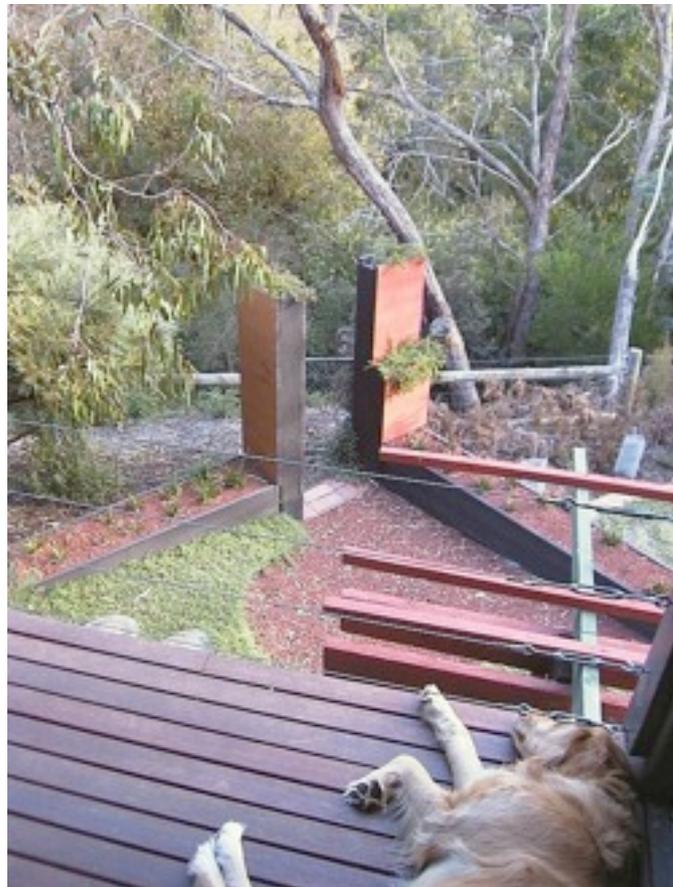
I found a local botanist and learned from her the plants indigenous to my property, where to purchase them and methods of growing plants from seeds and cuttings. I built an automatically misting propagation table and grew some of my planting stock. I have no record of the quantity of plants I used but it must be over several thousand plants, shrubs and trees.

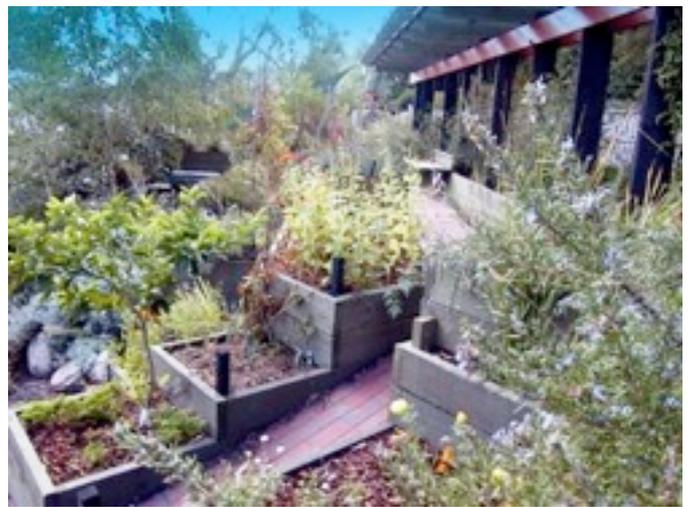
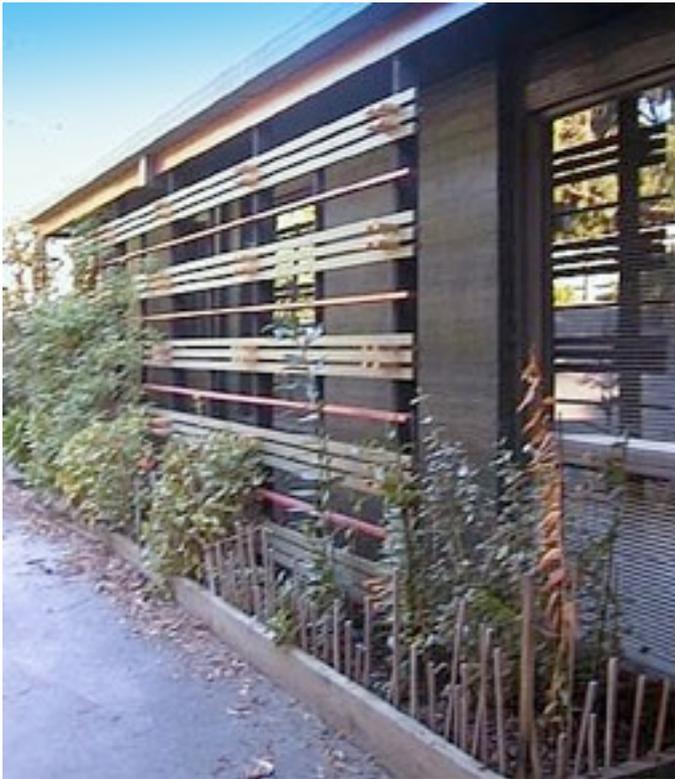
What I did to change the front facade

The house was white with grey trim. I painted over the white stucco front facade with a dark green colour, painted the grey fascia terra cotta and left the window trim a dark grey. Then I built a trellis extending from the bottom of the fascia to the ground and painted the rails with alternating grey-green and terra cotta with ochre coloured rail spacers. In front of the two-car garage door, I constructed a pergola that acts to both minimize the scale of the large span and to merge the facade into the landscape.

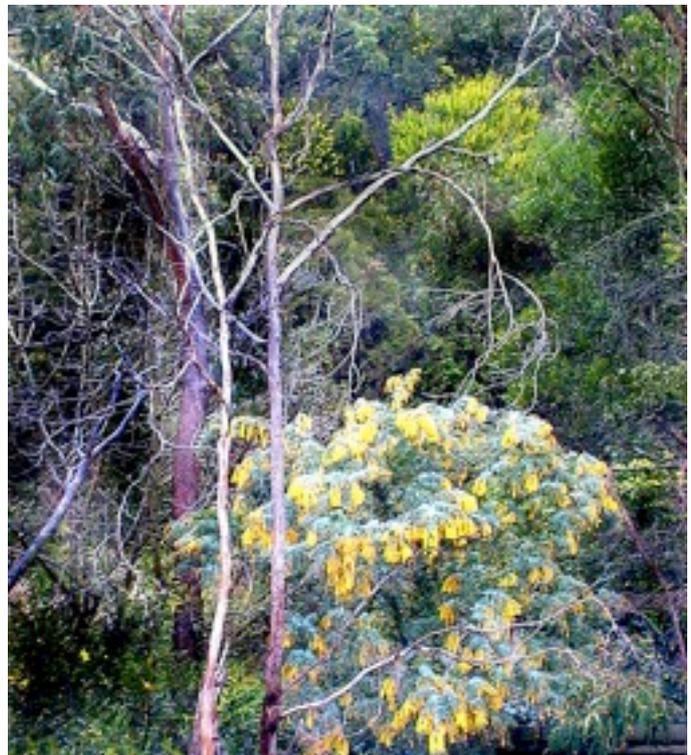
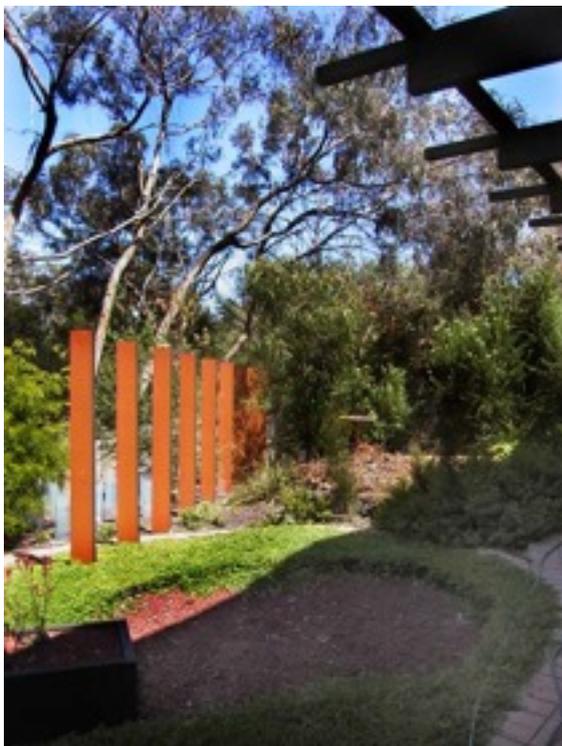
The dates for the changes

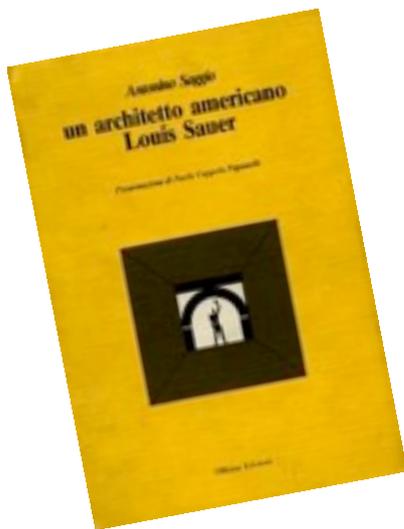
I started work digging up the front yard in 2001, at the end of our first year living in the house and the work was completed in 2005. I did all work except for the landscape electric, the digging and removal of the asphalt driveway and the brick paving of the driveway, the patio, steps and paths.





Not an English Garden, Louis Sauer, 2008/3/30





Writings by Antonino Sagio on Louis sauer

[Un architetto americano. Louis Sauer](#)

Officina, Roma 1988 (pp-208).

Collana "Il Progetto" Direttore Paola Coppola Pignatelli.

[Absorbing Venice. Low-rise high density housing by Louis Sauer](#)

"Assorbire Venezia. Case basse ad alta densità di Louis Sauer" (Testo bilingue) in: G. De Carlo, C. Occhialini a cura di Ilaud, *Territory & Identity*, Comune di Venezia-Maggioli editore, Santarcangelo Romagna, 1998 pp. 74-79.

[Cinque Lavori di Louis Sauer. Relazione con il contesto e ricerca](#)

espressiva di un architetto americano fuori dalle mode

L'Architettura cronache e storia, n. 407, settembre 1989 (pp. 612-636).

L'intervento nella città edificata. Residenze di Louis Sauer

Edilizia Popolare, maggio-giugno 1991 (pp. 44-65).

Louis Sauer, Rinnovo urbano a Philadelphia

Costruire in Laterizio, n.8, marzo-aprile 1989 (pp. 93-100).

Web Links

[Link 1](#)

[Link 2](#)