



THE ROAD AHEAD

Garden designer Franchesca Watson on how to create a sense of anticipation with meandering driveways flanked by lush sweeps of planting

DRIVEWAYS can be quite an experience – positive or negative. Estate agents tell me that a long lovely driveway can add considerable value to a property – I suppose it's the feeling of luxurious space and corresponding expense. But I'm quite partial to them. Security issues aside, for me, a garage should either be on the road to conserve internal space or at the end of a beautifully planted driveway.

The best ones are planted so as not to allow full views of where you are going to end up, which results in an entrancing sense of anticipation. One is usually moving in a car, faster than walking, so detail planting is wasted – rather plant in big bold sweeps or rhythmically, repeating your planting in largish groups. Or go the classic route by planting majestic trees to give an avenue effect, underplanted if you wish or allowing glimpses of the property between the trees. The Mount Nelson Hotel has a fabulously glam driveway planted this way, with beautiful old Canary Island palms and views of rolling lawns before you round the corner to the entrance of the hotel.

My favourite driveway at the moment belongs to Massimo and Nicci Negra in Southbroom. As you can see from the photographs, it has great indigenous trees, such as flat crowns and red milkwoods, underplanted with clumps of *Strelitzia nicolai*, ferns and lush ground cover – a glorious mix of indigenous and exotic. The driveway has such a wonderful sense of un-suburban vibrancy, it feels just cut out of a jungle. The trees meet overhead in parts and one just wants it to go on forever.

My worst driveways are dead spaces, squeezed up against a side

boundary wall, straight, narrow and dismal, with no space for planting. It's very difficult to redeem these other than to get some sort of creeper to cover the wall completely, although I did manage to turn one into a tunnel with beautiful arched ironwork and creepers overhead.

I prefer a driveway to bend slowly even if the planting is formal. The only time one really gets away with a straight driveway is when it's very long.

Surfacing can be challenging and expensive. If cobbling, I tend to use a larger cobble than the average run-of-the-mill type and will choose one with a camber. Concrete aggregate is useful as the surface seems continuous and is very practical, while being softer on the eye than paving. I think brick driveways can be great if designed carefully, with care being taken with the colour and patterning

of the brickwork – my favourite is herringbone. Try using old paving bricks set on their side, which is more glamorous than it sounds.

I particularly hate tilted edgings but sometimes this is necessary to guide the surface water runoff, so I keep any tilting to a minimum. There is also a move

to more permeable surfaces, like laterite, or strips to minimise runoff and allow the rainwater to benefit the ground. To this end, I have specified a number of 'middelmannetje' driveways recently with grass or planting between the tracks.

■ Franchesca Watson ☎ 082 808 1287



Driveways are part of your garden and set the tone for the entire experience of your home. With a little thought they can be beautiful, as well as practical