



PERMACULTURE DESIGN PROCESS

Words by Hannah Maloney Designs by Hannah Maloney and Jane Hilliard

For us at Good Life Permaculture, permaculture design incites deep excitement of what's possible, but it also humbles us: landscapes and people-scapes are vast, complex, ever-changing and unique. I think that's why we hold onto permaculture so strongly. Permaculture is the best tool I've found to date (I'm always open and looking) which: helps navigate not just landscapes, but life; grounds you in a solid ethical framework; but still allows you to be responsive, and work in any context.

We design from urban to small farm properties, and offer a sliding scale of design options which allow everything from a one-off site visit for a casual chat, through to detailed concept designs with fat, written reports. In recent months we've started collaborating with Tasmanian building designer Jane Hilliard, from Designful. Together we design both the house and landscape to develop the ultimate, integrated package for clients to work with. Combining the house and landscape allows us to design holistically, something that any permaculturalist craves. The following steps through a recent collaborative process for a property in central Hobart.

FIRST CONTACT AND LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

Once people find us (generally through the internet) we have an initial conversation to see if we're a good fit. We send our clients some questions to answer and return to us before our first meeting, which helps us to get a feel for the clients' house and land, and gives us a head start before we

visit the property. The types of questions we ask about the landscape include:

- Do you know the history of the property?
- How much time do you have available to maintain your garden on a weekly basis?
- What type of aesthetic 'look' are you aiming for, for example formal or wild style?
- What do you most love about your property?
- Who's likely to implement this design?

And our favourite questions: Imagine your design has been implemented and it's ten years down the track. What does your property look and feel like? How would you describe it to someone who's never been there before? This leads to the creation of the 'vision statement', later.

Before we meet our clients, we make a base map of the site which we take to the meeting to use as a canvas to record information on. We make our base maps using free online software called Inkscape. Details of the base mapping process are available on our website at www.goodlifepermaculture.com.au/make-basemap/.

FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

Connecting

The next step is to visit the client. Jane and I spend the time to go over any information we'd like to flesh out, ask more questions and, most importantly, connect with our clients. Connecting is best done over tea and cake. During this conversation we're listening really hard, reading between the

lines and making sure we pick up the 'vibe': if you can nail the vibe, you will nail the design. A good design is one that is true to the client and not our own preferences, which should be left at the door, mostly.

Vision statement

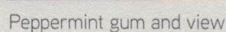
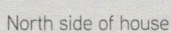
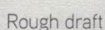
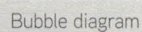
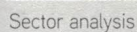
Towards the end of the meeting we'll start to summarise what we're hearing from our clients into a rough vision statement, and bounce this off them to make sure we're on the right track. The vision statement is a short paragraph, written in present tense, which encapsulates the design. This helps makes the design 'real' for the clients, and allows them to think about and feel into what they're about to embark on. It's a way of testing the design's focus, and provides a reference point for us as designers.

The vision statement for this example design is: 'Our home connects us to the beautiful views and natural bushiness. We have space to play, socialise, relax and be together with family and friends. We love the fresh air, sun, comfort and productive food patches. We feel like we have the best of everything.'

It's a broad statement which doesn't provide specific design ideas; it creates a simple framework.

Site analysis and assessment

Once tea, cake and people analysis have finished we start the site analysis and assessment process, both inside and outside. For outside, I map the sectors – the external energies affecting the site – including elements such as sun, wind and water, and the unique attributes of the region. Views, bushland and wonderful neighbours were important to this site.



A GOOD DESIGN IS ONE THAT IS TRUE TO THE CLIENT



I do laps of the property with and without the clients to get a good feel for the space. The first time I go around I try not to do much except notice things. The second, third and fourth times I go around design ideas and solutions pop into my mind. While we'll discuss some of them and take note of them, I'm not attached to any of them at this stage as I'm still in the analysis stage: simply seeing what's there. Back at home I'll start to assess these options, and determine what strategies and techniques are appropriate.

Before we leave the property we do some very rough sketches on paper of possibilities, and make sure the clients are happy with the direction we're heading in. We don't go into specific detail yet, but make broad sketches outlining potential social spaces, key access paths and food production zones. The detail comes later.

BACK AT HOME

Jane and I go our separate ways to consolidate information and get our concepts down on paper, in solitude. Here's what I do to process information about the landscape.

Before diving into detail, I'll make bubble diagrams of the property, dividing it according to its functions or feeling such as main social space, access paths, microclimates (e.g. shady, cold, wet, hot, dry). Once these large bubbles are in place I'll include the fixed elements, which can be determined by client or landscape. For example, bushland may have a covenant on it – meaning it can't be removed or tampered with – or the clients may love a particular tree which they want to keep.

The bubble diagram technique is a great way to prevent yourself from diving into detailed design straight away. I find this incredibly useful to form the pattern of the landscape, which I can then map

functions to, for example identifying that the sunny section of the property would be best used for food production. It's a really basic and accurate way of reading a landscape. I'll also use it to place the zones for the property. On the example urban block there are only two zones, focused around the kitchen garden, and the home orchard with small animals. However, the existing bush and native shrubs could slot into zone four as windbreaks and a source of wood for fireplaces.

After that I can start to design: the messy process of scribbles and loose thoughts slowly becomes solid. In any design there will be some defining elements which you will need to base your design around, in this example access paths, sun and slope were critical.

ROUGH DRAFT

At this stage, Jane and I start to talk about how best to integrate the house and landscape, and work with each other to maximise the opportunities that present themselves. In this example it meant the proposed house renovation wouldn't affect some of the best growing spaces, but would help to create a hot microclimate (important in our cool temperate climate). We were also able to integrate food production onto the northern deck of the house, making the most of one of the hottest spots on the property.

The rough draft is put together and shown to the clients for feedback. This draft is still nice and loose, with just enough detail for the clients to understand what we're proposing. We provide an overall plan plus additional sketches and notes to make everything clear.

FEEDBACK AND TWEAKS

Depending on where our clients live, we do a feedback session on the rough draft

via email, Skype, phone or a face-to-face catch-up, where we drink more tea and hopefully eat more cake. We're also tweaking the draft vision statement we've provided to make sure it rings entirely true with the clients: if their eyes don't light up when they read it, it's wrong. We've noticed that the better we get at the initial face-to-face meeting (where we're reading the people), the fewer changes are required at this stage. Usually changes made now are 'tweaks' rather than complete overhauls.

FINAL DESIGN

Once we've got all the feedback, we make changes as needed and go deeper into detail with everything. We do hand-rendered designs to scale, and provide a report expanding on key elements; basically we create a manual for the client's property so that they know how to move forward by themselves or with contractors. I do my designs with pen and watercolour, scan them in Photoshop and then type text.

And at the end of the design job, it's always a bonus to get some kind words: 'Thanks for amazing listening, and capturing the essence of what we are after' or 'It's been a great process'.

This design process has been heavily informed by Dave Jacke who I was lucky enough to work with in his 2013 trip to Australia.

For more information see: Good Life Permaculture at www.goodlifepermaculture.com.au and Designful at www.designful.com.au



Intermediate House + Garden Design
Scale: 1:125 @ A2 / May 2015
Hannah Mooney & Jane Hilliard

DESIGNFUL
CREATIVE MINDFUL RESOURCEFUL

Good Life
PRACTICABLE

Whole Property Vision Statement
Our home connects us to the beautiful views and natural bushness. We have space to play, socialise, relax and be together with family and friends. We love the fresh air, sun, comfort and productive food patches. We feel like we have the best of everything.



Direction of slope

