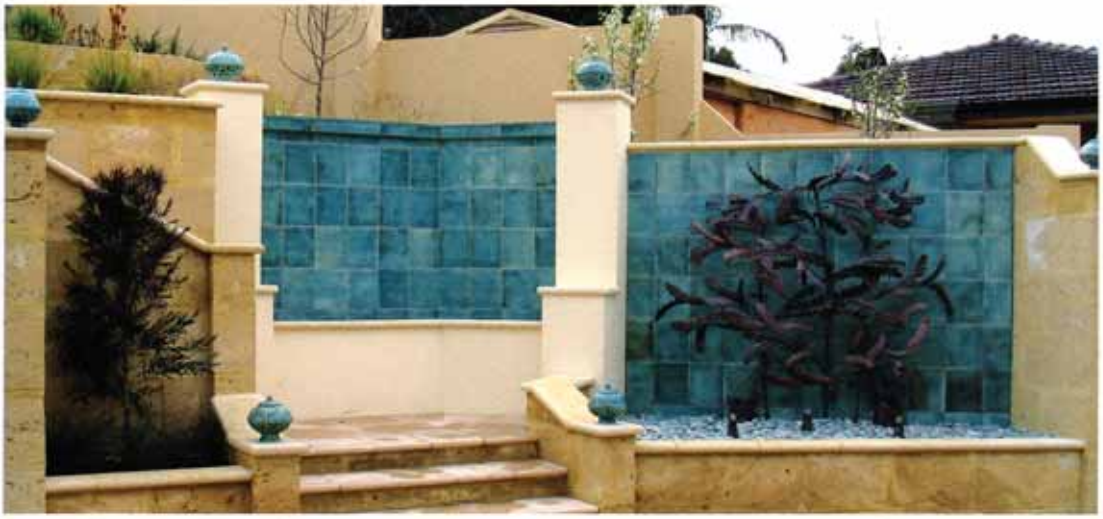
ceramics for residential development



Sorrento Residence Water Feature

Sorrento residence water feature by Garry and Jan Zeck

Changes over the last decade, particularly the demise of the locally produced domestic ceramic market, have driven Western Australian potters to find new avenues for expression. The difficulty as usual is finding relevance. The urban adoption of a more Mediterranean lifestyle has provided an opportunity to turn the skills once developed for making domestic wares into creating specialty tiles and features. Homeowners now have the opportunity to have purpose-designed ceramics that are unique and tailor made for their situation.

When we were introduced to this project we decided we had a fantastic opportunity to do something different. There were some major constraints: the area was fairly confined by a steep slope from the rear of the property down to the outside entertainment area and there wasn't a lot of area to play with, the neighbours looked down on the site, and the majority of the existing adjacent buildings were decades old and not pleasant to look at.

A two metre high retaining wall spread across the rear of the site from one side boundary to the other. Constructed of large limestone blocks it was very regimented and dictated the feel of the space. There was a recess in the retaining wall where the client suggested putting a waterwall.

We felt we needed to create a focal point that would encourage the viewer to visually move around the site without being drawn to the surrounding buildings on the boundary. As we were engaged early on in the design process we were able to design other elements to support and enhance our work. This was very important as it ensured technical issues such as water supply and power could be built in.

The client was keen to plant natives in the garden and this gave us the chance to incorporate one of our most recognisable studio motifs, the banksia.

The concept was to create a waterwall and a water feature at different levels that would climb the site, away from the neighbouring buildings. Both features would have hand-made tiles on the rear walls, with the banksia motif providing the texture as an incised pattern for the waterwall and embossed for the water feature. We also designed the lanterns as design elements rather than as light sources and manipulated

building the surrounding structures of walls and stairs to integrate the feature into the existing retaining wall. This work brought the design elements together and the tempo of the project became evident.

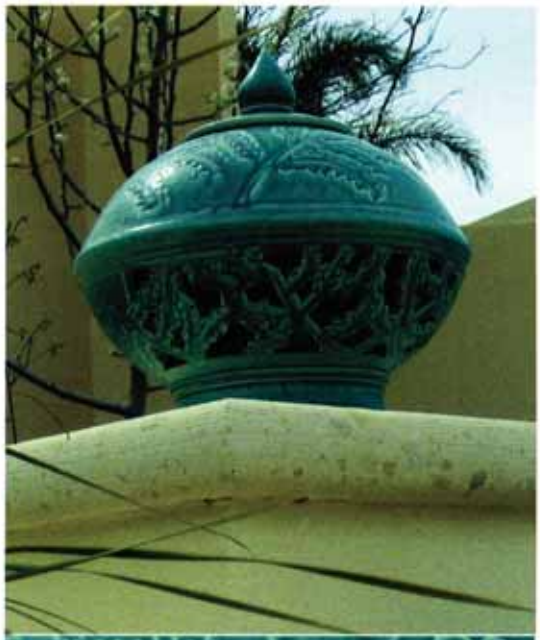
As previously mentioned lighting was perceived as a design element to change the mood of the features from day to night and provide movement. The waterwall has two underwater lights in the trough to illuminate the wall. The water falling down the wall creates ripples which result in the light shimmering up the wall.

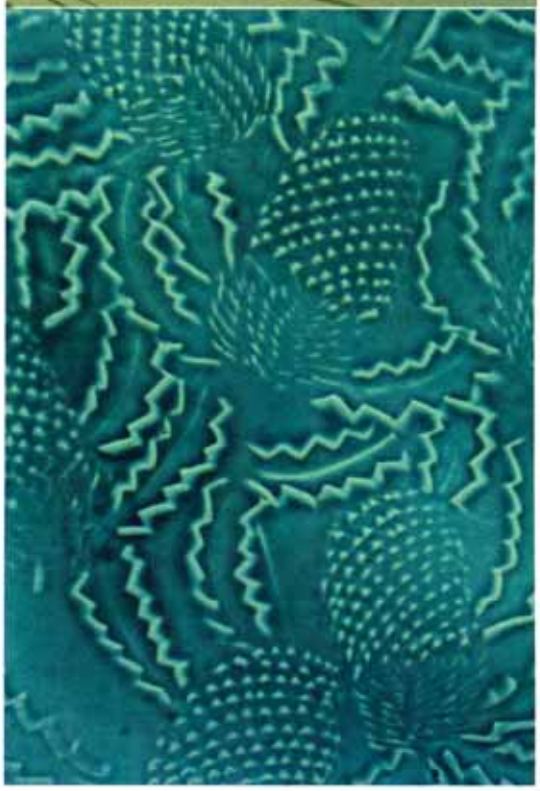
The water feature has two floodlights behind copper hoods, which direct the light up the wall behind the copper tree. The light bounces off the tiled surface and illuminates the silhouette of the tree. The three conical fountains in the foreground also have a small light incorporated into them, to illuminate the water.

It is possible to have nearly total recovery of tiles from production. Almost without exception, failure comes from firing the tiles on thick shelves where differential heating results. Mid-fire is the answer, on 12mm shelves! Firing Cone 6 with a white ware body overcomes all the problems.

The tiles were raw glazed on a clay body which has approximately 50% clay content; the non-plastics allow water to enter and dry with minimal heave. The addition of bentonite is an advantage for adhesion of the glaze where clay content is very low.

The wonderful thing about tile making is that the glaze has almost nowhere to go but down into the tile surface.





Top: Water Feature Upper Lantern
Bottom: Incised Banksia Pattern, Water Wall

Sorrento Residence Water Feature Copper Banksia Tree

the motif again by cutting away some of the background to form pierced areas for the light to come through.

In front of the water feature wall, Garry designed and made a copper banksia tree as the final expression of this motif.

The glaze chosen was a high-lime matt green, a glaze the studio often uses in combination with the banksia pattern. The glaze is most intriguing; it is rich and strong without being dominant. The glaze is also variable in its response to light levels. In low light it takes on a luminous quality that gives the work a different character. Once the tiles were applied to the wall, they immediately took on a settled appearance as though they belonged.

The banksia has visual energy and movement. The design was carved, celadon-style, into a partially stiffened slab of clay. The original for the tiles was cut from this with the edges slightly bevelled to allow easy release from the mould and the first plaster was poured. A master was then made and working moulds were produced off the master for production.

As the tiles were released from the moulds, they were laid off onto welded mesh racks, allowing them to dry from both sides evenly and flat. Once dry they were laid out in the spray booth and sprayed to 'flooding', left for a minute or two and then set in the kiln.

The lanterns were thrown shapes, two bowls bonded rim to rim. Once stiff enough to handle, both bases were removed and one end was footed and the other had a lid made for it. This provided access for the light fitting and to change globes.

With the tile production underway, a start was made on the copper banksia tree, which was to stand in front of the dry wall of the water feature. Several site visits by then had the plumbing items installed in the brickwork, including a fibreglass trough and delivery system to the head of the wet wall.

When the tiles were made and installed, the copper tree was set and anchored to the wall. Next step was placing a set of three fountain heads, spraying a cone-shaped profile, in front of the tree. Water was circulated from a reservoir outside the water feature area.

With this work completed, a mason began