A

B

C

A stone moon gate

Our master plan at Moongate Studios has always included garden walls that incorporate moon gates as portals to another view; a very eastern influence that has been a major inspiration in our life and artwork. An added benefit of any build in stone and brick is increased protection against radiant heat and ember attack in the event of wildfire, particularly relevant as we live on a bush block on the surf coast of Victoria.

The project was put firmly on the agenda over the summer of 2014/15. We had sourced two sections of concrete pipe (approximately 1500mm in diameter) before the house build began nearly

BY JAN AND GEO FRANCIS

35 years ago, plus had gathered eclectic lots of local stone, bricks and tiles for creative building projects, continuously stockpiling and using materials from this resource centre over the years.

After clearing the wall site of topsoil, tree roots and over-hanging branches, Geo positioned and stabilised a pipe section. Dry stone footings were placed the length of both the proposed freestanding and retaining wall sections. Geo's muscle and intuitive eye worked steadily in tandem

to create the fluid organic ribbons of stone and brick over several months, to the amusement of our local resident echidna.

Time was generously given to select and set each stone and brick while long broad stones were set across the wall wherever possible to further strengthen

A. *Muscle + intuitive eye = fine finish!*
B. *Topping with recycled reds before tiling.*
C. *Detail near the gate.*
D. *Concrete pipe placed in situ.*
E. *Various materials were used for infill.*
F. *The finished moon gate frames the view to the studio beyond and welcomes visitors.*

D

E

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F

Moon gate

A moon gate is a circular opening in a garden wall that acts as a pedestrian passageway, and a traditional architectural element in Chinese gardens. Moon Gates have many different spiritual meanings for every piece of tile on the gate and on the shape of it. The sloping roofs of the gate represent the half moon of the Chinese Summers and the tips of the tiles of the roof have talismans on the ends of them.

Source: en.wikipedia.org

PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / © OKTAY ORTAKCIOGLU

G

G. *Mortar preparation was done close by the wall for convenience.*

H. *Bemused local resident inspects progress.*

I. *Tractor brings in the stones.*

J. *Stonework begins over the top of the pipe.*

H

the build. Infill included broken bricks, small rocks and gravel up to finish level and topped off with red bricks for a neat aesthetic finish. Rescued from a family member's kitchen renovation, ceramic tiles were mortared in to seal and cap the wall with an elegant result.

Having the right tools always makes a job go smoothly. Our small tractor with its front-end bucket lifted and carried the stone to the wall and many of Geo's sculpting stone-working chisels and

I

J

K

hammers helped shape some of the stones to fit with minimum fuss.

An end pillar was formed to iconise a ceramic ball that Geo had made in our pottery studio many years ago and also signals the beginning of the retaining wall section towards the woodshed station project. But that will be another story of inspiration and perspiration...

The mortared work was bagged at each day's end and minimum landscaping settled the wall timelessly into its surrounds. The moon gate now gently guides visitors from the car park to the house and studios and beautifully augments our business signature here at Moongate Studios. ◆

Geo and Jan run Moongate Studios in the bush near the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. www.jangeoart2.com.

Links & resources

◆ *The Forgotten Art of Building a Stone Wall:* An Illustrated Guide to Dry Wall Construction by Curtis P Fields. Yankee Books (1971).
◆ *Craftsmen of Necessity* by Christopher Williams. Random House (1974).

K. *An impressive feat! Topping with a ceramic ball forms an end pillar.*

L. *Starting to lay out the tile capping.*

M. *Geo bagging the mortar to a fine finish.*

N. *Neatly completed tiling protects the top surface of the wall.*

L

M

N