



"I AM NOT A NEATY-PEATY PERSON. I like natural beauty. Some plants should be flowing and remain uneven," Jacinth Byles told *MACO Caribbean Living*, while showing off the exquisite landscape of the Kingston abode she shares with her husband, who "prefers structure." Both Mr Byles and their gardener like to prune and keep everything in a straight line. Yet the couple clearly respect one another's horticultural vision, and have achieved a harmonious balance.

Executive Director in the Office of the Cabinet Jacinth Byles sheds her serious side as she drives through her gates. "I like to come home, relax, and not talk about work," she said. Something special does occur when you are met with a mix of modern Jamaican great house and another mark you can't quite put your finger on.

like bringing up baby

LIKE LOVING PARENTS, HUSBAND AND WIFE TEND JAMAICAN GARDEN WITH A BLEND OF FLUIDITY AND STRUCTURE

ABOVE Front entrance welcomes one into modern Great House

RIGHT Statuettes procured from Indonesia, and placed in the portico, befit the Asia-meets-Jamaican Great House beautifully. Mr Byles' favourite flower, bougainvillea, simply serves to tie the two together even more

Although Richard Byles, the president and CEO of Sagikor Group Jamaica, is the walking cliché of a workaholic, spending six days a week at work, he too switches off at home. "I like to go in the garden on Sundays, as it relaxes me, especially when it is in good shape." Described by his wife as disciplined, Byles sometimes sneaks into work on Sundays. So as not to mix the two? Yes, his wife told us. Ah, but MACO got Mr Byles to talk about his garden while in his office one morning, albeit for only half an hour. He spent much time praising his wife for having the horticultural hands. "I do the criticism," he said, cheekily, "and I buy the fertilizer. I like to go to the hardware and flower stores."

Jacinth Byles asserts that her husband has also been the brains behind the beautiful garden. For nearly three decades, this neat gentleman has got his hands





ABOVE The front lawn of the Byles' residence is a bird's paradise

ABOVE RIGHT The outdoor shower in the back of the property has been discreetly constructed under an ackee tree

BELOW RIGHT Old-English-style stone steps take you into a cosy niche where this wooden Indonesian bench, with wagon-wheel arms, becomes the perfect place for Mr Byles to enjoy the tranquillity of his garden

dirty in the yard. Starting out in Stony Hill, they grew a reputation for having a lovely garden. Seven years ago, they moved, along with many of their plants.

Jacinth practically grew up in a garden. "My parents had a gorgeous garden in Somerton, St James. I remember picking flowers, especially gerberas," she recalled. "But I can't grow them here." Four of her sisters are avid gardeners, as is one of Richard's sisters, Barbara Khouri. Apparently, the agronomical genes have been passed down from both sides. Indeed, the Byleses' son and his spouse often call for vegetation advice. A result of nature or nurture? Conceivably, a bit of both.

When they first acquired this Jack's Hill residence, it needed renovating. However, with a heap of help from their architect Elizabeth Newman, they produced a near-perfect place. From the top lawn, where their granddaughter plays and the "Bird Tree" resides, to the back of the property, where the gazebo, the outdoor shower under the ackee tree and the pond-like pool are situated, Newman managed to "interpret what we envisioned, without us being able to articulate clearly what we wanted," Richard said.

An element of Indonesia lingers in the lay of the land. But how?



Jacinth Byles acquired some key pieces which came from the Far East. Most noted are two crouched stone statuettes, one of which holds a potted plant atop its head, in front of the portico pillars, and the painted wooden bench, with wagon wheels for arms, that rests in a sequestered niche looking onto the front of the house. One immediately has mental freedom sitting there. "I used to use it often," Richard revealed, "but recently I walk through the door and up to my room. Rarely do I stop and take in everything. But I still feel relaxed." MACO suggested his subconscious draws in the obvious placidity of the place. He assured us that in future he would sit



Every morning Mrs Byles sits at the oak dining table on her veranda, looking out into her back garden, tending to her orchids, pool and many other splendid plants. She knows them all so well, that if someone stole or took one, she would indeed know

"I like to admire the plants I love most, like the Pride of Madeira, bougainvillea and ebonia flowers. I am particularly partial to bougainvillea, which are so beautiful. They even bloom when there is a drought."

The Byles garden is certainly hardy: the fruit trees—mango, cherry, purple guava, sweet sap, atahaiti guava, banana; the flowers—allamanda, heliconia, hibiscus, impatiens, lantana, heather; the foliage plants—purple Persian shield, and several different ferns. Despite the severe water shortage in summer 2014, almost everything returned to life when the rain fell. "The zoysia grass took the greatest beating," Mr Byles lamented. "It was depressing to see it under such stress, and to watch patches just die."

The garden is not just a product of the Byleses' gardening abilities, they claim. Stephen Jones from Stone Hall in Stony Hill, and landscaper Mr Daley, and the Byleses both played a part in the outcome. "The key was to start on a good foundation, so that you avoid fundamental mistakes," Richard told MACO. "It should be set up in an optimal manner, to look good and be functional. It's a lifelong appreciation, where you don't have to rip out this and change up that." Contrarily, Jacinth likes to constantly change things around. "Unlike Richard, who is an instant gardener, wanting things to bloom right away, I like to plant new things all the time, wait, and watch them grow. For instance, when I decided to put in the orchid garden for our son's wedding, he couldn't envision that it would be something special."

Her husband, while he appreciates the beauty these orchids bring, said "Orchids are too fickle for me, and need too much caring."

Jacinth continued, "I bought orchid plants, and got a professional gardener to pack the patch with river stones and black coal. When we have a function at home, I pay more attention to the garden. With a goal in my mind, I get the job done."



ABOVE Thanks to Elizabeth Newman, their talented architect, the Byleses' pool was naturally transformed into an exotic pond-like feature



LEFT The Byleses' back garden was the ideal setting for their son's wedding, and it lends itself to several lawn parties, which they host each year

BELOW Mrs Byles has placed each orchid in such a way that the true beauty is captured at every angle

When one looks out from the bucket rattan chairs on the veranda, towards the gazebo and pool deck, the majestic orchids stunningly befit the Jamaica-meets-Asia milieu. As do the Adirondack chairs and love seats under the gazebo. Jacinth had one of each painted pale cream, and the other two in brown and black with tribal-looking patterns on their arms. Then there is the memorable mural on the gazebo's back wall, and the matching copper coffee table, inlaid with a cream marble slab. To complete this living space, a low cut-stone wall was installed around the "room," and a bar and barbecue area positioned between it and the pool.

Jacinth has recently cultivated herbs within a secret garden which has arched wooden doors at either end. "I grow basil, cilantro, parsley, rosemary, arugula, scotch bonnet peppers, and callaloo, which I ate the other day for breakfast. It was delicious," she boasted. And healthy, MACO commented. "Well I use gardening as exercise," she continued. "I feel healthy going out in the fresh early morning air, and I find it therapeutic."

One goes green with jealousy chatting with Jacinth. She has support, but Richard Byles is right. His wife is the one waving the magic wand. "You should turn the plant, according to the sun's position, and know which side reveals its real beauty. Plants have a front and a back," she said.

Jacinth spends much time in her backyard. "Every day I have breakfast at the oak table on the veranda, looking out at the garden. I know it so well, that if someone took a plant, I would notice," she insisted. "You have to pay attention in order to have a garden. Just like with children. The Bible says bring up a child the way it should grow. If you look after it, it will be nice." M

