



## How to:

# prune a camellia

WORDS AND PICTURES: **ROBIN POWELL**

**K**en Lamb, Australia's master of Japanese pruning techniques, took to a historic, mature camellia at Retford Park as part of a three-day, hands-on workshop on creative pruning, held at the Southern Highlands National Trust property last winter. The camellia, an old japonica with a

pendulous habit and flowers in both solid and variegated pink, had only ever been pruned to stop it intruding onto the driveway, and it now formed a solid wall of dark green, shutting off views to the house.

Ken and the Retford gardeners, with assistance from willing workshop attendees, including yours truly, aimed to

reduce the size of the tree and open it up to give it a three-dimensional form.

A few hours later, when the ladder and tools were packed away and the prunings had been carted off to a huge mound in the bottom paddock, the tree had a whole new character, its smooth grey trunks were visible, as was a hint of the apricot walls of the house behind it. Light fell through the branches and dappled the ground underneath it. But no one seeing it fresh would have thought it had been pruned at all, as all the cuts were invisible. Standing back to take it all in, we felt we had witnessed a magic trick.

### HERE'S HOW IT HAPPENED:

**1** Ken first took a good look at the tree to assess its character. Does it want to be upright, or drooping? Where



Before



After



does most of the growth come from? How does it fit into the larger picture of the garden?

**2** Having decided to reduce the height and width of the tree, we began by taking a quarter off the front and sides, removing branches that were weak or ones that were performing the same job as their neighbors but not quite as well.

**3** The key to invisible pruning is that all cuts must be made at the junction of one branch with another. Cutting a branch straight across encourages lots of shoots from the cut. The new growth is dense and straight - perfect if you want a hedge, but no good

for an interesting tree.

**4** Next we took a third off the height of the tree, again removing branches at their intersection with a shorter branch.

**5** Out came the dead wood from inside the tree, along with branches that were sticking out or sticking up in ways that didn't fit the form of the tree. These became clearer to see as the tree opened up.

**6** The skirt of the tree was lifted by removing the

lowest growing branches to create air and space underneath and to allow a better view of the multiple trunks of the tree.

**7** The final touch was to emphasise the tree's three-dimensionality, giving it a foreground and a background. Foliage was preserved at the back of the tree to give it a backdrop, while foliage at the front was selectively and subtly removed to allow views through the tree. 🌿

The gardens at *Retford Park* are open on the first weekend of the month. For information on events and open days go to [www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/retford-park/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/retford-park/)