

## The New Living Space

By Carol Lamkins, CID, CMKBD

One of the hottest trends today among American homeowners is to extend living spaces into the outdoors. The outdoor “room” can be an extension for entertaining or for a safe haven from life’s pressures. It incorporates the pleasures of nature with family designed living areas. The concept for the outdoor room has remained the same for centuries but new advances in architecture, lighting, and furniture have dramatically increased its functionality in the modern home. Thoughtful, creative planning can make the difference in creating a successful plan that will serve the homeowners as an outdoor retreat.



Landscape Architect, Bruce Meeks

Building small water ponds and water gardens, fountains or water features can also create attractive, natural-looking, soothing spaces. These lend themselves to meditation areas. Listening and seeing moving water is both relaxing and enchanting. The birds are also drawn to water.

Use of regional and seasonal landscaping offers attractive accents around the perimeter of your outdoor living space. Plants with berries also attract birds, providing hours of enjoyment. Spring flowering trees, summer blooming shrubs and

perennials, plants with spectacular fall color such as Liquid Amber trees can all be added to the landscape design for enjoyment throughout all seasons.

Outdoor kitchens have made entertaining more convenient as well as luxurious and are now popular all over the country. Today's outdoor kitchen designs can include such items as sinks, cutting boards, cabinets, grills, pizza ovens, refrigerators, beer taps, dishwashers, islands and wet bars. They can make entertaining easy by including a covered serving bar and buffet area. Grilling islands with masonry and weather-resistant



Design Build, William E. Carter

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cabinetry are very popular and give the outdoor kitchen an upscale look. These islands can be custom or prefabricated with a variety of configurations and exterior finishes.



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### Planning the space:

The size of the property and the budget are both important considerations. Outdoor rooms can be large and spacious or small and intimate. Defining spaces that have definite borders gives an area a sense of functionality. Choices include fences, low walls, hedges, arbors and flower gardens to define borders, or keep the design open and free flowing. Consider the view and the surrounding landscaping. While the average size area of a deck is usually 300 to 400 square feet, patio areas are only limited by the size of the yard.



**Landscape Designer, Dan Berger**

When considering the location of the space, consider natural factors such as amount of sunlight and prevailing winds. Also important may be access to power and water. Check out the location at the same time of day or night for environmental issues such as noise and unwanted light when the space will most often be used.

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Interior Designer, Erinn Valencich

Identify the activities that will be served by the outdoor space. Zone each area for the activity such as cooking, conversation and/or use of a hot tub or jetted spa. Water features add to the relaxation element of the space.

Even though steps up or down give the allusion of dividing the space into functioning areas, keep in mind it may limit the universal design aspect of the plan. A barrier-free idea to distinguish areas in a deck is to change the deck board direction using angles or patterns that visually separate

the space such as an octagon under the table that creates a “deck” rug. This can also be accomplished with tiles and color on concrete.

Traffic flow affects the usability of your outdoor space. For example, grilling should be close to the kitchen for transfer of food and dishes. Counter space for sitting can be incorporated near the grilling area. Dining space should be expandable or contractible depending upon the number of diners. Conversation or gathering areas, especially around a fireplace, need to have enough room to move for people to walk around safely and comfortably.



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Landscape Designer, Joan Gabel

Weather conditions can also impact layout. Protection from the beating rays of the sun or protection from the wind may require a sheltered spot under a canopy of trees, an umbrella, an arbor or roof over the area to create more of an indoor feeling and a transition to the outdoor setting.

Outdoor fireplaces, fire pits and heating units add to the comfort as the sun sets and the temperatures cool down.

When choosing a grilling area location, consider the prevailing winds and select a spot where the smoke blows away from the guests and cook. Try not to isolate the grill, as this is a common gathering area for pre-meal conversations.

Adding audio/visual components into the space involves a protected location from weather issues. Considerations for adding a television include a comfortable viewing height and glare reduction on the screen.



Landscape Designer, Scott Cohen

### Next plan the lighting:

Effective lighting can change and improve the overall feel of your outdoor living space. There are many types of lighting to choose from including ambient lighting using soft white to colored lamps that may be enhance dining and conversation areas. Task lighting is critical for the food prep and grilling areas.

General lighting, ceiling fan combinations, accent fixtures to highlight greenery and architectural elements, specialty lighting to provide safety along pathways, and even portable lamps are made just for outdoor use. Solar light fixtures may be a good option

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as they charge with the proper sun exposure during the day and turn on automatically as it gets dark.



Backyard America

Overhead structures such as retractable awnings, gazebos and pergolas not only define the outdoor room but provide opportunities for sun control and if permanent, for positioning lighting fixtures. Vines and other plants around posts and lattices add a natural, outdoor feel to the area.

### **And last but not least, consider the décor and material selection:**

The continuity of living space can be seamless by using the same color or materials that transition from inside to outside such as flooring tile or pavers (be sure they are slip resistant) or stains for concrete and decking material. Another option is the bypass flooring altogether and set up the space on grass. However this might not be the most convenient choice due to watering and maintenance.

Placing some furniture just outside the main deck entrance provides a smooth segway between spaces and invites guests to move freely between the indoors and outdoors. Choose cushioned fabrics to visually tie the interior and exterior together for a cohesive look. Comfortable chairs and sofas are available with stylish, stain- and mildew-resistant fabrics.

Built-in benches add both style and function to the deck. They create a great way to capitalize on longer stretches of decking and patio with unobstructed views.

Sturdy and durable polymer materials for outdoor cabinetry and structures withstand outdoor climate changes by not absorbing moisture unlike wood, concrete or stucco. Polymer is a solid material not a laminate or layered material and it will not warp, crack, or split. Recommended countertop and furniture surfaces range from ceramic tile,

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acrylic solid surface, granite, marble, slate to other natural stones. The client should be aware of countertop maintenance issues before making a selection.



Interior Designer, Luis Caicedo

Manufacturers have addressed this growing trend of outdoor living spaces by offering lighting, furnishings and fabrics that can be used both inside and out. Comfort and the desire for low-maintenance options are important considerations behind these design evolutions. For coffee tables and end tables, materials are important, as glass-topped tables are joined by those with tumbled marble, tile, stone, slate, and metal. The choices are endless.

Winterizing furniture, usually by covering, before bad weather arrives is very important. Wooden structures are especially vulnerable to bad weather, since they can rot, warp and crack in the cold. Clean any wet spots on benches, decks and patios, as moisture and standing water in cold weather can promote mold, mildew and unappealing stains in wood. Sweeping up leaves and dirt and safely cleaning with bleach can keep everything clean and enjoyable for the season of use.

By giving thought to how the client would like to use the outdoor living space, the designer can create a truly unique and enjoyable outdoor living environment. Not only can the client take advantage of usable square footage to add to their home, but they can also enjoy nature at her very best throughout the year.



Baylor Anne Bone, Allied ASID