

Designing an Outdoor Living Space

By Joan Ziegler



Increase your personal living space and extend the comforts of your home by expanding to the outdoors. Outdoor living space can provide additional room for dining, entertaining, playing, and growing, and can be carved from a tiny niche in a concrete jungle, or separated from expansive suburban or rural landscapes. To make it work, think about how it is going to be used and how it interfaces with the indoors.

Determining the use of your outdoor living space is the key to making it functional. Begin with an inventory of your needs and wants by asking yourself what you're planning to do outside. Do you want a place to eat and entertain? A place to sit and meditate? Or is it more important to have a place to play ball? Will you be mainly using the space in the evening, or are you more likely to read the morning paper, drink coffee, and listen to the

birds there? This thought process will help you determine whether you want a spot in the sun for a small bistro table or a large patio with outdoor lighting. If you decide you want a place for active play, then you need to keep a level area open. Even when the allocation of



space is designed to meet your needs, it may end up not being used. The question then becomes, what else is it missing?

A successful outdoor living space draws you in with the glimpse you catch as you approach; what keeps you there is the comfort the space affords. When designing, look at how you view and access the space—do you see it from the inside or as you approach the house? Is it easy to get to, and are paths wide enough, and steps comfortable to walk up and down? Are dining spaces adjacent or near food preparation? Are furnishings adequate? Do you feel comfortable? These are the questions you need to answer to make it inviting and comfortable.

Privacy and protection are also important. To feel comfortable, you need protection from the elements,



and separation from the neighbors. Enclosures may also be needed to keep children and pets safe. Trellises, fences, trees, and shrubs can create walls that shelter, enclose, and protect. Paths, decks, and lawns provide flooring to increase accessibility and function. All of these elements work together to create your space, and to separate it from the world outside.

But, there may still be a missing component. Gardens and flowers are living artwork that can connect you with the beauty of nature. My sister says that even when it is nice out, she doesn't use her deck until she decorates it with pots of flowers. Flowers add to your enjoyment; their brilliant colors attract your attention and draw you outside, and they stimulate your senses and create a feeling of well-being.

What makes the outdoor living space effective is the planning you do for it. Planning that combines beauty with function, privacy, and protection creates a space that is loved and used.

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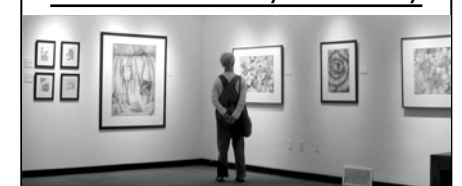
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