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A stunning backyard is created with well-defined outdoor lighting and furniture placement (facing page) Designed with balanced structure, this resort-style outdoor area features poolside dining

REINVENTING *the Outdoor Room*

BY DEIDRA DARSA

The freezing winds of winter have ceased and the sun warms the spirit as the final thaw begins. Slowly, the native fauna spring to life and with it the eventual return of the summer season and the opportunity to revitalize your outdoor living area.

"A simple, no-nonsense approach to reinventing the outdoor area for a new summer look should begin by creating a focal point to every angle of the landscape," suggests Marcia Blake, president and creative director of Outdoor Interiors in Laguna Niguel. "Whether it be a water feature, pergola, fireplace, entertainment center or kitchen, you should set the scene visually to draw the eye to these different locations."

Using colorful fabrics or unique seating with clever lighting can help define those places.

"The first thing I would do is identify a style and then create a color palette that will coordinate nicely with colors and fabrics inside but are uniquely their own for the outside," said Blake. "I think it's important to pay particular attention to details, and having more than one color really adds a lot to a setting. You can make a striking impression with the different fabrics and colors that are out there."

From lime greens to hot reds, careful fabric selection can be the pizzazz in any outdoor room. "My advice is: don't get scared by the indoor look of today's outdoor furniture fabrics," said Harold Hudson of Summer Classics, Montevallo, AL. "The new fabrics are bold and exciting and they're made for outdoors."

Many of these wonderful new fabrics and colors can be found on the latest in overstuffed deep seating arrangements, action pieces such as swivel chairs and gliders, and double chaise loungers and outdoor beds that have become a very popular component in outdoor room design. "Summer Classics has two double chaise lounges in its catalog and they sell very well," said Hudson, noting that earth tone furniture frames are still the most sought after color.

At the Outdoor GreatRoom Company in Burnsville, MN, designers provide structure in the way of pergola great rooms for homeowners looking to create a backyard oasis. "People are looking for some sort of building structure around them," says Ross Johnson, vice president of sales. "They don't want the limitations of a wall, but they do





Adding a pergola and path lighting is an effective way to visually define an outdoor room

like the sense of protection that a pergola provides.”

Before diving into an outdoor room project, it's best to consider your lifestyle and needs, said Johnson, whose firm offers an *Exterior Designer's Check List*. There designers and homeowners will find important tips such as solidifying their outdoor room vision: will it be a casual or elegant setting; will there be room to entertain large or small groups; will it include a fireplace or firepit; or, will it include an outdoor kitchen. The size and layout of the backyard must also be considered: will it catch the morning or afternoon sun; what's the wind direction; and will there be an adjoining garden.

For Johnson, placing a pergola on the 12x16' deck that attaches to his house made for a cozy family gathering place. “We extended our indoors to the outdoors,” he said. The pergola roof lattice system added shade and hanging plants added color while a grill, new chairs and table/fire pit with accent outdoor lighting made for a cozy experience.

“We had friends over and they were amazed how it changed the deck,” he said. “It's a place where kids can have their friends over or a place where parents can get away from their kids and enjoy a crackling fire with their friends.”

And, no matter your budget or available space, there's an outdoor great room to fit your outdoor plans including a garden. “In areas with small backyards, pergolas provide a place where plants and vines can intertwine and combine garden and sitting area.”

Recent technologies have allowed for an array of exciting new products that enhance the outdoor living experience, according to Roger Sanders, owner of Bend, OR, retailer, Fireside.

“There are a number of important details, new concepts and new products that will make the finished outdoor living area much more enjoyable,” he said.

Installing grilling islands that face guest



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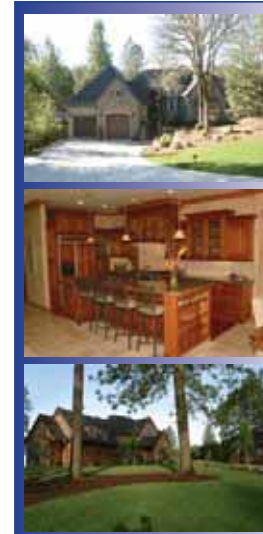


Designed for poolside dining and fireplace relaxation, this backyard oasis is prime for entertaining

activities and include wet bars, refrigerators, warming drawers and more, make for a happy grill chef. Instead of purchasing a traditional dining set with an umbrella in the middle of the table, consider a side-mounted umbrella that can be adjusted to ward off direct sunlight and wind.

"Many times the dining table-mounted umbrella cannot provide the shade needed for a relaxing meal," says Sanders. "A side-mounted umbrella is much more effective in providing shade for a broader range of sun locations and is esthetically pleasing. These kinds of umbrellas also eliminate the visual blockage in the center of the table that traditional umbrellas create," he said.

Creative outdoor lighting will add to the outdoor experience but should not shine up or on a neighbor's property. "Pathway lighting is very important to consider," says Sanders, "particularly when it's a route that guests use to leave in the evening."



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Vivid fabric colors and corresponding accents bring this defined outdoor space to life


For those who can't do without, there are outdoor televisions and audio systems to round out an outdoor bar or entertainment center. Just remember to install those in an area where the volume will not exceed zoning restrictions, said Sanders.

As homeowners renew their commitment to expand the backyard living area, they will uncover numerous products that will enhance their comfort and enjoyment. From colorful fabric selections and stylish furniture to pergolas and layout design, the options for outdoor living are endless. ❧


Article and photography courtesy of Deidra Darsa of Hearth, Patio & Barbeque Association, www.hpba.com or 703.522.0086. For more information on enhancing outdoor rooms contact Mountain Home Center at 530.587.6681 or visit mountainhomecenter.com.

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