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Take the Party Outside

Designing an inspired exterior entertaining space

BY JENNIFER TZESES

For any homeowner, having ample (let alone any) outdoor space in which to entertain is the holy grail of daily living. Carving out that coveted nook—whether you have a tiny patio or sprawling terrace—is a chance to bring indoor living out.

“It’s an extension of the way we live inside our homes,” says Gioi Tran, founder and principal designer at Applegate Tran Interiors in San Francisco.

And there’s so much flexibility in the design.

“A backyard space is an opportunity for homeowners to showcase their personality,” says Jennifer Klaus, an Oaks, Pennsylvania-based marketing manager at Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery. “They can choose to bring their inside aesthetic into the outdoors or completely change up the design for a different feel.” Envisioning how you’ll use the space is your first step. Think about factors such as the size of gatherings you host, the aesthetic you’re drawn to, and the kind of vibe you gravitate toward (i.e., relaxed, formal, modern). You should also consider the weather in your area, as that can have an impact on the materials and fabrics you choose for furniture and decor, Ms. Klaus says.



Then use the following cues to help you set the tone for year-round living.

FIND THE RIGHT FLOW

The immediate area outside the house should flow with the indoor space it joins.

“Consider your outdoor space as a continuation of your interiors,” says Sarah Ward, creative director

for Ward & Co. design studio based in London. Paint is an easy way to seamlessly connect the two. Ms. Ward suggests using acrylic, water-based hues, that are the same or complementary to the interior shades, in a satin or eggshell finish for the best durability outdoors.

“Accent or feature walls create interest and can elevate the space

Marrying function with good form should be a top priority when designing an outdoor space, like this one by Ward & Co.

Courtesy of Ward & Co.

The terrace should flow with the indoor space it joins, like this one designed by Kendall Wilkinson.

beyond the norm. Incorporate a flush floor finish for a seamless transition from inside to out,” she says.

Marrying inside and out is also a matter of using doors that provide a visual connection. “The addition of wide-opening, bifold, or minimally framed glazed doors blur the line between inside and out, and work particularly well when the outdoor space is limited,” says Helen Westlake, creative director of Millier design studio based in London and Stockholm. Doors can also merge the two areas, so they feel like one large space.

And the same goes for designing the decking or patio surface—striving for seamless integration is key from a visual perspective, Mr. Tran says. “We typically focus on choosing materials that have a similar color and texture that will work cohesively together,” he says.

Grouping furniture helps define spaces, set specific zones (for relaxing, dining, and games), and create easy flow. “Specific areas of the patio or backyard may have designated needs—for outdoor grilling, sitting by the pool, or gathering around a fire pit. Each space needs to flow into the other, from one seating arrangement to the next,” Mr. Tran says.

Joe Fletcher



And depending on the way you arrange furniture, you can create contemplative moments or celebratory soirees, says interior designer John McClain of Los Angeles-based John McClain Design. “Quiet corners to read, sip tea, or snooze should include a single, comfortable chair or chaise, and provide the ability to put your feet up and rest a book or a cup of coffee close by. For festive gatherings, use lighter-weight, moveable furnishings that can face one another and provide ample clearances for free movement,” he says.

FIND FURNITURE THAT LASTS

In choosing outdoor furniture, Mr. Tran recommends options that will allow for flexibility.

“It’s important to have plenty of

seating for different activities, from family gatherings to entertaining small and large groups at your home. Select furniture with modular units that are easy to move around and reconfigure to accommodate your guests,” he says.

Consider factors like durability and heat retention, says Kendall Wilkinson of Kendall Wilkinson Interior Design in San Francisco. “I have seen some absolutely gorgeous metal outdoor chairs, and I was almost burned when I sat on them, as the designer never considered how hot the material would get during the day,” she says.

Marrying function with good form should be your top priority. “If you live in a hurricane- or high-wind-prone location, you need physically

heavier pieces to prevent them from flying away,” Ms. Wilkinson says. She also suggests using pieces made from natural or synthetic materials specifically graded and treated for water, wind, heat, cold, and infrared rays, which can all cause discoloration and wear.

Ms. Westlake prefers using teak furniture, “which is strong and durable, almost immune to decay, and contains an oil that is resistant to insects. It also ages in a very beautiful way and turns taupe under the elements, ending up looking even better as time goes by,” she says. Brands including Summit, Gervasoni, Indian Ocean, Ethimo, and Coco Wolf are a few of her favorites. Waterproof cushions and covers are another must, such as those from companies including Perennials and Sunbrella, she says.

LOOK TO LOGGIAS AND TERRACES

If you’re designing a loggia or terrace in particular, it’s important to consider that these spaces are truly an extension of the house. A loggia, which is a covered exterior gallery, is often part of the house, with the outer walls open to the elements.

“Create a cohesive look. Incorporate colors and materials that mirror the feel of the room that these spaces are coming off of,” Ms. Klaus says.

The overall design should flow from the adjoining interior rooms, Ms. Wilkinson says, “so the rooms play nicely with one another.”

Defining parameters on loggias or terraces through elements like artificial green walls, large plantings,

Accents can elevate a space beyond the norm, such as the throw pillows in this seating area by Applegate Tran Interiors.



Christopher Stark, courtesy of Applegate Tran Interiors

and exterior dividers helps to add interest. “Keep furnishings to a minimum to maintain ease of movement through the space,” Mr. McClain says.

LIGHT IT RIGHT

Lighting can instantly set the tone, particularly if you’re entertaining. Mr. McClain suggests bistro string lighting overhead for adding quick and easy atmosphere, and small battery-powered outdoor lamps on flat surfaces, such as tables and flooring, to create beautiful ambient lighting. “Up-lighting creates a dramatic effect when shining into trees or shrubbery, and candles are the final flickering touch to a beautiful and comfortable outdoor-lighting setup,” he says.

Consider the interplay between function and form, Ms. Westlake says. “Deciding what to illuminate is key to achieving drama and interest in a lighting scheme. Sculptural or dramatic planting and textured surfaces can be highlighted with discreet floor up-lights, spotlights, garden post lights, or contemporary wall-wash fittings,” she says.

Apart from the practical considerations of focused task lighting for an outdoor bar or grill, Ms. Westlake recommends adding to the outdoor ambience by providing indirect lighting for evening entertaining on a terrace or balcony. “Moody, flickering light creates atmosphere, so we are always keen to add lanterns and candle features to outdoor seating areas. Feature lighting out in the garden also expands the visual space of a terrace or patio,” she says.

From top: Paul Dyer; Courtesy of Ward & Co.



The indoor flows seamlessly outside to the terrace in this home, top, designed by Kendall Wilkinson Interior Design in San Francisco. Interesting plantings in the garden, meanwhile, help expand the visual space, such as in this North London patio by Ward & Co.

CONSIDER FORM AND FUNCTION

Maintenance is a big issue for most homeowners, so it’s best to start with materials that wear well against the elements and are easy to clean.

“Nothing requires less maintenance and is more durable than natural stone,” Ms. Wilkinson says. “If you prefer the look and feel of wood, carefully consider if the space will be covered or open to the weather, and ensure the wood is treated and sealed to prevent mold, mildew, and staining,” she says.

Keep your lifestyle in mind when choosing materials. If you plan on heavy foot traffic, forgiving surfaces or fescue, a grass needing little water, are better suited, Mr. McClain says. “If fine dining and glamorous gatherings are more your style, large-format solid surfaces such as travertine, slate, or limestone are a solid choice,” he says.

Depending on the climate, heating and cooling essentials are important for homeowners who want to tap into their outdoor spaces year-round, Ms. Klaus says. “For those colder days, homeowners can use outdoor fireplaces, patio heaters, and fire pits, and on warmer days, misting systems can help keep your guests stay cool, while also adding a spa-like atmosphere to the space,” she says.

As a finishing touch, decorate as you would any other room in your home. Add area rugs, cozy throw blankets and comfy poufs or ottomans, so that it truly feels like an extension of your living space. ■