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Bringing The Outside In

How to design seasonally inviting, open-air living rooms

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Images by BLUE OCEAN PHOTOGRAPHY

GOOD DESIGN doesn't have to stop at your backdoor. The great outdoors is not just what you see from the other side of your windows anymore thanks to a growing trend to make outside rooms like patios, porches, pool houses and decks part of your everyday living space! These outdoor living rooms are the perfect lifestyle additions for cooking, relaxing and entertaining and can be decorated to pamper and please just like the rooms inside your home. Almost any outdoor space can be turned into another room and just because it's outside, it doesn't mean it can't reflect your inner style. It can be lavish with lots of luxury amenities like appliances, flat-screen TVs and full sound systems or understated and simple, with a few pieces of well-chosen outdoor furniture that create a thoughtful design statement. Of course, here in Miami where the weather is great year-round, taking advantage of endless patio living possibilities is a must!

Space planning al fresco is very similar to what you would do inside your rooms, and the same principles apply. Outdoor spaces are places that bring people together so you'll want to make them comfortably inviting and visually irresistible! Eclectic Elements suggests using

the same attention to detail to enhance both the aesthetics and function of these outdoor living rooms. Before you know it, you could be spending more of your down time outside of your four walls, than in!

Just like the rooms inside, those on the outside can easily reflect your own personal style. What you want to create is a seamless

impression, a form of continuity where your back patio, deck or porch truly becomes an extension of your home. Bringing elements from your indoor rooms out not only makes the space seem bigger but it can easily double as a second living or dining room.

Before you begin decorating, you must first consider how you'll use your outdoor





space. Whether it will be used for entertaining, relaxing or dining, do take note of weather changes and if the spot you've chosen will be exposed to a lot of sunlight, is shady or is in a windy area. Adverse weather conditions can wreak havoc on furnishings and materials so you will need to assess their potential impact before investing in the design and décor of the space.

It is very important to choose the right materials for long lasting durability. You might need waterproof and sun-resistant materials so make sure you pay attention to these important details before choosing fabric for your porch furniture. There are a variety of techniques used by Eclectic Elements designers that can help make your back patio look like an extension of your home. Some are more architecturally inspired, others are more decorative. Used together they will visually integrate the inside and outside of the home creating a seamless flow between the two.

Once you've decided on the basics, you're ready to create your own special paradise. With a little effort, attention to detail, and a bit of care, your favorite room might turn out to be the one



decked out in green outside the patio door!

Weather permitting, a well-designed outdoor living space can often times be the most utilized area for a family. An attractive outdoor living area is also a great selling point for a home and can significantly raise your home's value.

Outdoor furniture is an important component of your outdoor living space and is available in all styles and for all budgets. Weatherproof furniture comes in a variety of materials such as wicker, plastic, metal, wrought iron, aluminum, or wood. Another thing to consider is whether your outdoor living area will be covered or not. Some people choose to enclose their outdoor area, while others have only solid roofs or open pergola type coverings.

If you need shade or perhaps an umbrella, awnings can be another good option as they are available in a wide variety of fabrics and sizes, and can be attached directly to your home. They offer a very unique look and also add to the home's value.

If you plan to use your outdoor living area at night, keep in mind you might also want to add outdoor lighting. Windproof, fire-safe and attractive, hurricane candles can be used as a natural light source. They add a romantic mood to any setting and create an intimate feel for all atmospheres. Solar lighting is also a growing trend for outdoor areas. The ease of not having to run electrical wiring makes this an easy option for everyone and is also very eco-friendly. At Eclectic Elements we use low voltage and solar lights that come in a variety of styles to compliment your space.

If your space doesn't allow for a pool, the trickling sound of a water feature will be soothing and add a natural element of relaxation. Outdoor fire pits and fireplaces add warmth and coziness at night, while enhancing the ambiance when the sun goes down and the stars come out.

Even the landscaping plays a big part in creating that picture perfect outside living area.

Rows of trees and bushes provide privacy – and shade. Flowers add natural fragrance and color. And greenery of all kinds adds a freshness and dimension that can't be duplicated inside.

Most importantly, be sure your outdoor living space is safe and works well for your needs and budget. With a little bit of planning, anyone can create an outdoor living space that can provide years of enjoyment and recreation for their family. □

CHECK LIST FOR OUTDOOR ROOMS

Fabrics: Durability and maintenance are top considerations in choosing materials for outdoor living spaces. Many fabric materials designed for outdoor use resist fading and water. But if they get dirty or get soaking wet from time to time, they will be prone to mildew problems. Keep covers on your upholstered furniture to keep it looking good longer.

Counters: Granite is a great choice for outdoor counters. It is good looking, is impervious to water and is easy to maintain. Leathered and wood surfaces tend to attract dirt and mildew.

Backsplash: Tile backsplashes are the preference of choice because they are so easy to keep clean. Stucco, while it is often cheaper, is difficult to clean when it gets dirty, which it does, quickly!

Cabinets: Unlike wood, stainless cabinets will hold up to the elements and deter animals from trying to open cabinet doors.

Lighting: Good lighting is key to adding ambiance and atmosphere to your outdoor space. Layer the light, shine it up in trees and down from branches on to your open seating areas. Be sure to choose UL-rated lighting fixtures approved for outdoor use. Even in a protected area, the fixture will be exposed to wind, dust, and moisture.