

living outside the box

Beautiful, functional
outdoor living spaces

By Leah Macpherson
Photography by Bill Milne

When we purchased our midtown Toronto home,

there was no question that the outdoor space needed work: the backyard could only be accessed through an old warped door with one stingy little window, and the deck itself was in an advanced state of pockmarked rot. It was ugly and unsafe, but where others saw deck disaster we saw opportunity. Light years beyond patio slabs and a picnic table, we envisioned a functional and comfortable space that reflected the character and style of our home. And we're not alone – the latest decor trends and renovation fever have Canadians thinking outside the box and applying the same love of design and desire for comfortable, beautiful surroundings to our outdoor living spaces.

Nathalie Bely, principal at Toronto-based Lieux Architects, says that the way we approach outdoor spaces has changed: "We live differently than people did 20 years ago, when the backyard was just the property attached to the house. People are opening up the back of their homes and transforming decks and backyards into an extension of their living space, making it an expression of personality and style."

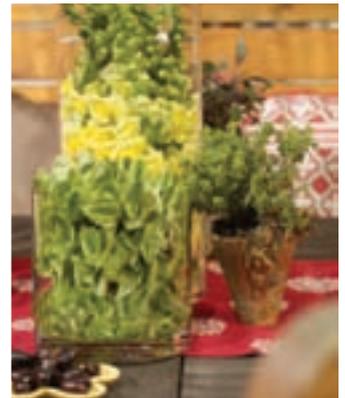
But how you access your outdoor space – making the transition between indoor and outdoor – can be as important as what you find when you step outside, says Bely. For example, are you walking from your kitchen through a dank, gloomy mud room to get to the deck? If so, it may be worth installing a new door or generous windows to connect the two spaces. (See "Functional Spaces" for more tips on creating the ideal outdoor oasis.)

Once your deck or patio has been built, it's time to make the transition from the wooden or stone surface to a personalized, welcoming outdoor haven. For exterior decorating, Lukas James of Toronto store Indoors & Out recommends moving from large to small: begin with large furnishings, then select smaller decorative details that add colour, pattern and style to the space. "Start with the furniture that is framed with neutral, grounding colours, like grey or black, then select upholstery and decor elements – fabrics, lighting and art – that harmonize with your indoor decor to create a sense of continuity. Create an outdoor room that is a natural extension of your home, your taste and style."

CREATURE COMFORTS

Designs that mirror luxe indoor furnishing, such as deep, cushioned love seats and plush armchairs, have been recreated for outdoor living using materials like man-made resin, exotic hardwoods and all-weather aluminum. Sunbrella fabrics, used for upholstery and decorative pillows, are water repellent, mildew resistant and can remain outdoors for four seasons.

Small details, both pretty and practical, give an outdoor space a finished look: a mosaic-topped occasional table lends both beauty and function to a room, for example, and offers an ideal spot to set down a glass of wine or display pots of lush greens. Outdoor mirrors made of iron, wood or rubber can create the illusion of more space, and a cleverly hung mirror can bring more light onto your deck. Use a neutral, textured outdoor carpet to tie the whole look together.



OPPOSITE, TOP AND ABOVE LEFT: Runners, napkins, Pottery Barn; black wicker tray, pillows on benches, lanterns, tote bag, towel (on chair), all Restoration Hardware; mini white bowl, William Ashley; scroll stand, rug, candelabra, all Fresh Home & Garden; cedar in pot, fern plant, Sheridan Nurseries. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Mini herb pots, Fresh Home & Garden; potted herbs, Sheridan Nurseries; daisy appetizer dishes, William Ashley

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LET THERE BE LIGHT

Just as you would inside, carefully consider your outdoor lighting needs: a table lamp makes curling up to read in an armchair more appealing, and a floor lamp can bring light, colour and a glowing ambience to your outdoor living room. And don't worry about having to bring your lights inside at the end of the day, says James. The new generation of outdoor lamps can stay outside all season long. To light up your living space, pair an aluminum base – treated to resemble wood or bamboo – with a coloured or patterned lampshade that complements your decor.

WATER MUSIC

In addition to masking unpleasant urban noise like traffic, air conditioners and boisterous neighbours, water features like ponds, fountains or waterfalls can help create a calming, tranquil atmosphere. Tabletop fountains are ideal for small spaces: if you've got room to showcase something special, add soothing visual

WILCORP CEILING FANS



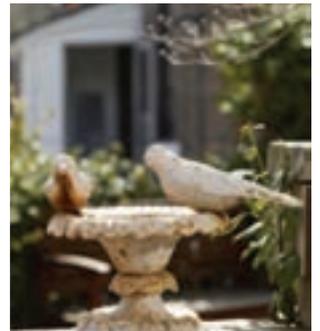
appeal with a large water feature, such as a sleek, slate-backed waterfall. For a gurgle and bubble that blends seamlessly with your decor, James suggests converting a favourite pot or urn into a water feature with an easy-to-install water pump, widely available at hardware stores.

OBJETS D'ART

Strategically placed statuary can be used to highlight a particular area, as a frame for climbing plants or simply as an *objet* to be admired. Select a statue that reflects your personality or sense of humour, suggests James. "Buddhas and Grecian statues continue to be popular, but the hot items for this year are mythical creatures – trolls, gargoyles and goblins." Larger structures, like obelisks, can be lovely stand-alone pieces: add a dash of sylvan charm with a lush layer of ivy or other climbing vines.

SOOTHING SOUNDS

Air feature, like wind chimes, can add colour, sound and movement to your deck, and are available in a myriad of styles, from modern and industrial to country rustic. Try a delicate, tinkling wind chime to complement the serenity of your space or a riot of clanging colour to mask neighbourhood noise. Add a touch of bright, whimsical beauty to your backyard retreat with a suncatcher, strings of tiny mirrors that catch the sun and reflect prisms of sparkling light. [home]



TOP: Armchairs with striped cushions, outdoor floor lamp, terra cotta pots, decorative wall art, statuary, terra cotta planter with hens and chicks, rug, all Fresh Home & Garden; pillows on chairs, Restoration Hardware; all other plants, herbs, Sheridan Nurseries. **ABOVE (LEFT):** pigeon, pineapple and acorn statuary, terra cotta pot, all Fresh Home & Garden; floral plant, Sheridan Nurseries; straw hat, sandals, Winners; towel, Restoration Hardware; (right) mini bird bath, citronella tea lights, Fresh Home & Garden

functional spaces

Whether you're redesigning an old, tired deck or starting from scratch, Nathalie Bely of Lieux Architects offers these tips for designing an outdoor living space that's both functional and fabulous.

DESIGN BUILT-INS:

Custom features, such as furnishings – chaises, benches and banquettes – and built-in barbecues, make efficient use of space and can be tailored to unique styles and design requirements.

CREATE BUILT-IN STORAGE SOLUTIONS:

Add hinged tops to built-in seating to tuck away gardening tools, citronella candles and seasonal decorations.

INCLUDE OUTDOOR POWER OUTLETS:

Determine the number and location of outlets – consider outlets for lamps, water fountains and speakers.

CREATE SHADE:

Whether it's an awning, roof or a pergola covered with lush foliage, plan a way to stay cool in hot weather. Select a material that complements your design: fabric, textured glass, plastic or wood.

INSTALL AN OUTDOOR GAS LINE:

Have an exterior propane or natural gas line installed for your barbecue or outdoor fireplace.



Pillows, tote bag, towels, Restoration Hardware; straw hats, sandals, both Winners; baskets, HomeSense



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