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The Home Designer Interior Style Just Steps Outside

By Brandon Neff



Vintage meets modern: reclaimed brick, French pavers, durable fabrics and an antique ceiling pendant come to life in this outdoor living room. Photo Brandon Neff Design

It's official! Summer is almost here. And with the season comes the joy of taking life outside. Somebody hand me a frozen cocktail! If you're like me, you love the longer days, the warmer nights and the prospect of savoring more outdoor time with friends and family.

In recent years, I've seen a trend in clients asking for my help to create more comfort and luxury in their backyards, patios and poolside. In fact, I just finished designing an outdoor room for a client complete with a reclaimed brick fireplace, antique Castle stone paver floor and a roof enclosure inspired by a Hawaiian lanai. He's thrilled to have an outdoor space for casual entertaining while adding valuable square footage to his home's equity. Once just an eyesore dividing his family room from his pool, his new enclosed patio is a feature that stands alone as a focal point drawing guests year-round.

Exterior room enclosures, for example, have come a long way since those corrugated plastic lean-tos and jerry-rigged solariums that littered every home throughout the last half of the last century. Today, enclosures, and even patio covers come in a wide variety of options including either full coverage or lattice styles, French doors, electrical raceways for lights and ceiling fans, insulation, skylights and even low-E vinyl windows. The key is to assess your space and budget, and to be clear about how you want to use the new room.

An enclosed sunroom went from ho-hum to holy cow! with the addition of a custom banquette, sisal rug, window treatments and a wrought iron chandelier. Now my client, in her lovely Lafayette cottage with views to the creek, has a glamorous space to entertain rain or shine, or to simply relax in with a good book.

Given that we're bathed in good weather more days than not this time of year, I'm surprised more people aren't living large outside. The biggest reasons most homeowners don't take advantage of their existing outside living space are that they're either poorly designed, don't offer protection from the sun or don't incorporate any of the standard creature comforts abundant inside. I'm here to tell you that a well-planned sunroom, enclosed porch or patio cover will change how you live in your home. When choosing what type of enclosure or addition would work best for you, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Maintenance. Do you want low, or no maintenance? There are many types of building supplies out there - reclaimed wood, synthetic and recycled materials, as well as embossed aluminum styles that offer long-lasting durability. Some products even come with a limited lifetime warranty. Additionally, find out which options are best at lowering your energy costs and if any qualify for home energy efficiency improvement tax credits.

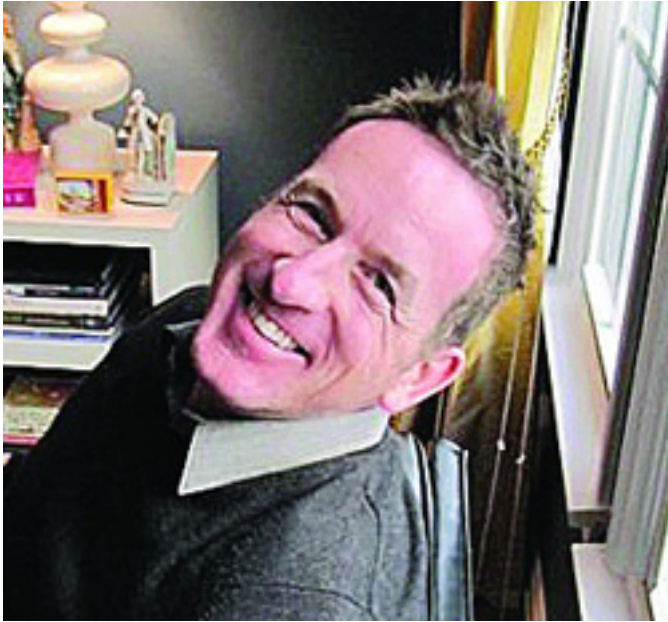
Climate Control. Whether you're looking for an open-air or an enclosed space think about ambient room air and how you'll control the temperature. A simple ceiling fan will afford you, and your guests, a cool breeze even on those hottest of days. Additionally, if you're looking to create an environment for entertaining large groups within an enclosed solarium, perhaps consider adding functional skylights that serve to add both natural light, and venting.

Hardware & Software. Never before have there been more choices in easy-to-care-for furniture, fabrics and upholstery designed specifically for outdoor use. Furniture made from sustainably harvested teak or all-weather wicker offer maximum style with minimal care. Also, look for exciting fabrics this summer from dozens of manufacturers offering sun resistant, mildew hampering and stain repellent choices in more colors and patterns than you can imagine. Innovations in decking materials make it easier than ever to extend your living space. Vinyl, recycled, composite, pressure treated and Ipe are leading the way in providing lower cost, higher performing

products for homeowners across the county. Never heard of Ipe? I suggest you check it out. Ipe is a hardwood harvested in South America that offers long-wearing beauty with minimal maintenance - a simple power washing can restore its natural good looks, and it has been awarded a Class A product rating.

Hit The Deck. Gone are the days of having to re-seal and re-stain your deck. Today, we have synthetic materials made to look like wood that offer the homeowner year-round function with minimal headache. These products are great for the environment and great for the pocketbook. With everything you need to create a custom look from railings, balusters, stairs and posts, modern decking can be a great do-it-yourself project.

Truly, living well outside is one of the great pleasures of life in California, so customizing your outdoor room is key to making the most of it. Now, where's that cocktail?



Brandon Neff is a Bay Area based Interior Designer. He can be reached at BrandonNeffDesign.com or at brandonneffdesign@yahoo.com.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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