



# great outdoors

*Expand Your Living Space by Creating Exterior Rooms*

by Bruce Giffin

Imagine sitting outside one sunny morning on a warm patio, drinking coffee and orange juice while smelling the fragrance of jasmine blossoms. Or having a few friends over on a cool, misty June night, relaxing under a sheltering roof with a glass of wine and an outdoor fire taking the chill off the air. Or one August evening, savoring the greenery of a north facing shade garden with a trickling fountain tucked into the corner and a view of the mountains in the distance.

Creating moments like these add to our quality of life. A little imagination and clever planning and you can turn your outside areas into garden and patio havens.

### **North, East, South And West:**

#### **The Orientation of Your Outdoor Space**

To begin with, survey the direction your outdoor living space faces. Northern exposures may be a little chilly in the winter, but can be wonderful meditative and cool spaces at other times of the year. Eastern exposures are great in the mornings and nice in the afternoons on hot days. If your patio or garden is south facing, it will be sunny and warm in the winter. Yet, without some sort of shaded area provided by either trees or constructed shelter, (such as a pergola) the area can get too hot for comfortable outdoor respite. Western exposures offer great sunsets, but can also fall prey to the summer sun unless some sort of shelter is provided, such as a large umbrella or shade tree.

### **Access and Design**

To get the most of outdoor living spaces, build them right outside your home's current main living areas. Putting them adjacent to your living room, family room, dining room or kitchen ensures that this new additional space will be used daily. If access to your new outdoor space is nonexistent or difficult, you might consider replacing windows or opening up a wall space by installing French doors. Before doing this, take a look at how your outdoor furniture will be arranged. Imagine the new doors in place and make sure that you can get in and out easily without bumping into anything. Designing around a good furniture layout, both inside and out, is one of the most important first steps. Ideally, for easy circulation, there should be at least 42" between furnishings. If you need help with this aspect, a good architect or interior designer can provide advice on design layout.

### **Saving on Surfaces**

Choosing your exterior walking surface is one of the fun parts of this process and the choices are many. If your home's exterior surfaces are close in level to the finish floor height, consider using decorative concrete or stone or pavers for longevity and low maintenance. However, if your home is on a hillside or the floor level is much higher than outside, decks and wood porches of redwood or cedar are a more adaptable solution. Yet, after considering the expense of wood combined with the

ongoing maintenance, you may prefer to use masonry for your hardscaping surfaces. Many local concrete masons can create the look of sandstone pavers at a fraction of the cost by using colored concrete with a stone texture and grouted joints.

### **Gimme Shelter**

Shelter from the elements comes in the form of a trellis, or a broad verandah porch roof or even a lanai. With the often-misty Santa Barbara nights, a verandah provides protection so you and your guests can enjoy outdoor entertaining. Keep in mind that much of our region is zoned as a high fire area which means that there are building code requirements for outdoor roofed areas. Most relate to using larger timber sizes for posts, beams and rafters. A good architect can help ensure that your sheltered space is appropriate for your home as well as attractive and legal.

### **Focal Points**

Your outdoor living space should have a focal point for you and your guests to enjoy and admire. It could be a view to the sea or the mountains or to a well-tended garden. An outdoor fireplace or a water element, such as fountain, are other possibilities. Is there a visual connection to your yard and garden beyond your outdoor living space? Do some of the same themes, palettes and materials reappear? Consult a good landscape architect who will help pull these elements together for you.

### **Amenities**

Outdoor fireplaces, fire pits, chiminias and heaters chase away the evening chill. Cooking and eating outside in summer is an important part of their California lifestyle. Pay attention to how a barbecue fits into the design, along with a surface to prepare food and drinks. Make sure there's a place to arrange platters of food for serving. Outdoor wood-burning ovens produce great tasting food as well as a wonderful theme for a pizza party. Comfortable chairs and lounges play a big part in how we feel in an outdoor space. Splurge a little on the seating and cushions. Lastly, a warm, bubbly hot tub discretely tucked into a patio or garden is a great way to unwind.

Gracious outdoor living is a key ingredient to our quality of life. The nice thing about creating these spaces is that you don't have to do it all at once. You can do it one step at a time. Get some expert advice, formulate a master plan and start now!

---

*Bruce Giffin, of Giffin & Crane, is a Santa Barbara native who has been building and remodeling homes in Santa Barbara since 1978.*