

EXPERT ADVICE

# MAKE MOST OF OUTDOORS

A bit of strategic planning can ensure you put your exterior spaces to maximum use and enjoy a laid-back lifestyle all year round



In the West, our relaxed lifestyle and climate encourage us to live, unwind and entertain outside and, at home, we strive to bring the outdoors in.

If you're going to spend money on adding or including an "outdoor room" in your renovation or build, you want it to be a useful and comfortable space you can enjoy anytime of the day throughout the year.

I often see an outdoor room with a solid roof tacked on to the house next to the windows of an internal living area. This results in the roof obstructing the flow of natural light to the inside, the outdoor space heating up in summer and both the indoor and outdoor spaces needing extra heat in winter thus increasing your energy bills and defeating the purpose of adding an extra room.

By employing some clever design techniques you can avoid these traps and create an outdoor room you can enjoy all year round. Using a house that I recently completed as an example, I give below my top five design considerations to help you.

**POSITIONING ROOMS**

Carefully consider the effect an outdoor room will have on your internal living spaces. Ideally, the outdoor room should flow seamlessly from your internal rooms.

At my client's home, pictured

PICTURE, LEFT: JUSTIN BENSON-COOPER

below, the outdoor terrace is positioned to enjoy views of the Swan River. It nestles within the "L" of the formal dining room to one side and the kitchen and meals on the other.

When the sliding doors are open fully, the internal and external areas join together seamlessly.

**LIGHT AND WEATHER**

The roof and walls of your outdoor room should not obstruct but allow natural light and air into internal living areas and also provide protection from the elements. During winter the sun should warm the indoor rooms, while in summer the shade and air draughts should help to cool the area.

In this example, we installed a glass roof over the terrace with an automated sunshade device below the glass. This provides necessary shade in summer and when retracted allows the winter sun to warm the terrace.

A wisteria vine has been planted that will soften the feel of the glass/steel structure and act as a buffer where it connects with the house. A built cover is not always required as nothing beats the space below the canopy of a large tree for a fantastic feeling of enclosure and belonging in the outdoor environment.

**CREATE A SEAMLESS TRANSITION**

External walls can fall away by using large retractable sliding doors, which open completely to integrate the indoor and outdoor areas.

The blurring of the indoor/outdoor boundary can be enhanced by using some of the external wall finishes on the inside, such as stone, wood and copper cladding. Though not always possible, it will add to the seamless effect if the internal and external floor levels can be at the same height. Enhance this further by using the same type of flooring across both areas. Note that, if this is achievable, you will need to address how rainwater will efficiently escape so as not to flood your home.

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

There is a real trend at the moment of including some expensive extras such as extravagant outdoor kitchens, often installed only metres away from an already lavish indoor kitchen. A barbecue, particularly in Australia, is probably a must-have, however, if you are building it in, does it need to take centrestage?

My advice is that barbecues should be adjacent to the outdoor area but not interrupt any views or clutter the available space. This also means that expensive and unsightly exhaust systems are not required. Lighting and music enhance entertaining and relaxation, but are often forgotten when planning, their omission sorely regretted when retrofitting wiring. Consider recessing light fittings into the beams over the outdoor room.

**FURNISHINGS**

In the early planning stages take time to think about the way you like to live and entertain and reflect this in the furnishings you choose. Make sure that the outdoor space allows for sensible furniture layouts. If you are installing permanent seating or tables, will they obstruct any views or traffic areas? A bench seat in this home's terrace allows a through-view of the Swan River, while at the same time doubling as a balustrade barrier to the drop on the lower side of the terrace. Outdoor furniture can be as comfortable as the furniture in the living room, including side tables, lamps, rugs and coffee tables.

An outdoor room should be a functional space that actually makes living outside enjoyable. It should not compromise the indoor space or duplicate it. There is nothing better than feeling comfortable and cozy in a place from which you can see the stars above while enjoying the comforts of your living room-style furniture surrounded by candlelight.

The featured Peppermint Grove residence is an entry in the 2013 AIA WA Architecture Awards. For more information about Neil's architectural practice and the homes he has designed, visit [www.neilcowniearchitect.com.au](http://www.neilcowniearchitect.com.au).



The outdoor terrace at this Peppermint Grove home, designed by Neil Cownie, is positioned to take in the river views.

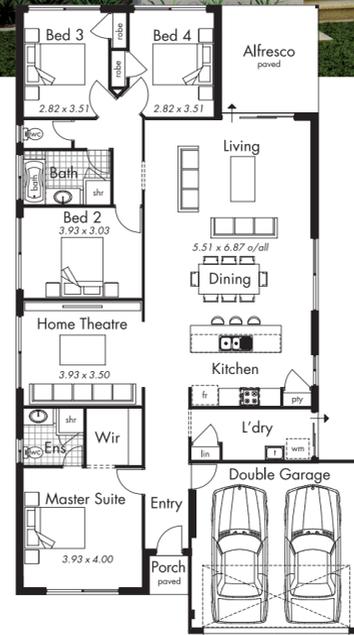


PICTURES: ROBERT FRITH, ACORN PHOTOGRAPHY

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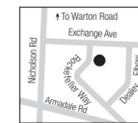
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Small frontage suitable for 13m lots

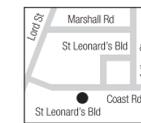
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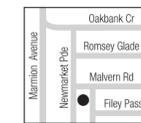
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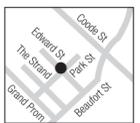
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