

# BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

Award-winning architect **Neil Cownie** on how to make the most of your outdoor room by employing some forward-thinking and clever design techniques.



**IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**, our relaxed lifestyle and climate encourages us to live, relax and entertain outside, and at home we want to bring the outside inside.

If you are 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 that you can enjoy any time of day and in any season.

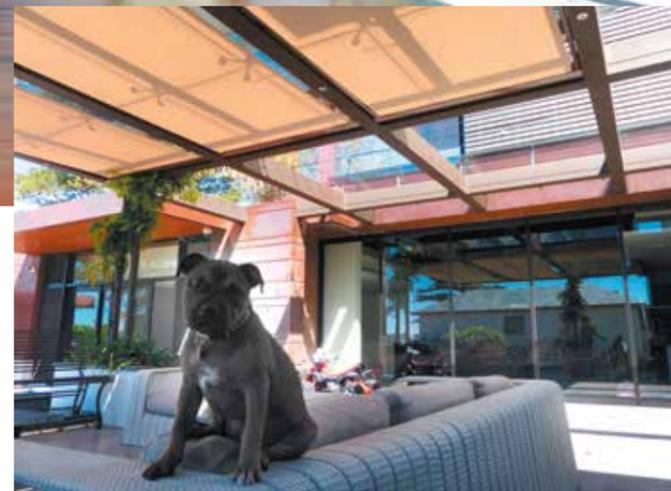
I often see an outdoor room with a solid roof tacked onto a house next to the windows of an internal living area. The roof obstructs the flow of natural light to the inside, the outdoor space heats up in summer and both indoor and outdoor

spaces need extra heat in winter - thus increasing your energy bill 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 to enjoy all year round. Using a house that I recently completed as an example, these are my top five tips on how to achieve this.

## POSITION AND PROPORTION - ROOM RELATIONS

Carefully consider the effect that the 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, the outdoor terrace is positioned to enjoy views of the Swan River. It nestles within the 'L' of the formal dining room on one side and the kitchen and meals on the other. When the sliding doors are fully



**FRESH AIR VIEWS** The joy of living in such a warm climate is that we can make the most of plenty of time out of doors - especially in a specially designed outdoor room like those above.

open the internal/external areas join together and one space flows into the next.

## LIGHT AND WEATHER

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

At my client's home, 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.

In another house the living, dining and deck spaces face north and the deck area has a glass roof, allowing the inside dining room to enjoy the winter sunshine. A mature grapevine grows beneath the glass, its deciduous leaves providing seasonal shade to the deck during the hot summer months. The vine is thriving there, as if it was in a green house.

A built enclosure 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

Although 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. (It's worth noting that if this is achievable, you will need to address how rainwater will efficiently escape so as not to flood your house).

## OPTIONAL EXTRAS

There is a fashion at the moment of including some expensive extras such as extravagant outdoor kitchens, often installed only metres away from an already lavish indoor kitchen. Ask yourself - do you really need a second kitchen? A barbecue, particularly in Australia, is probably a definite, however, if you are building it in, does it need to take centre stage?

My advice is that barbecues should be adjacent to the outdoor area but should not interrupt the view 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. Candlelight and a portable music system will, of course, suffice, but if you are going the whole distance, consider recessing light fittings into the steel beams over your 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. As a result make sure that the proportions of the outdoor space allow for sensible furniture layouts.

If you are installing permanent seating or tables, will they obstruct any views or traffic areas? A bench seat on my client'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, outdoor rugs and coffee tables.

An outdoor room should be a functional space that actually makes living outside enjoyable, at home. It should not compromise the indoor space or duplicate it.

There is nothing better than feeling comfortable and cozy in your outdoor room, a place from which you can see the stars above while enjoying the comforts of your living room style furniture surrounded by candlelight. **PL**

For more information about Neil's architecture practice and the homes he has designed, visit [neilcowniearchitect.com.au](http://neilcowniearchitect.com.au)

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 the beautiful stone, wood and copper cladding, as shown at my client's home.