


Indoor Outdoor Living

Bold and beautiful spaces all year-round

BY VANESSA SALVIA

A large, covered outdoor living space with a stone fireplace, wooden beams, and a dining table. A man and a woman are sitting on a sofa, and a dining table with a wooden top and metal base is visible. The space is covered by a wooden pergola structure with a stone fireplace on the left. The background shows a lush green garden with a wooden fence.

AS SOON AS THE SUN STARTS TO peak out from behind the clouds, Oregonians start peeking out too. We want to start feeling the sun on our bare arms. Cooking on the grill, dining al fresco, playing outside with the kids and dogs, inviting friends over — all of those things are more fun when

we have access to great yards that connect our indoor and outdoor living spaces in a way that is useful and makes sense for the way we live. Here, we talked to two experts at Rainbow Valley Design & Construction to find out some key things to think about if you're considering enhancing your outdoor area.



Jon Clark is Rainbow Valley's project manager for their outdoor spaces department, and Ali McQueen is their outdoor spaces designer. Clark has a landscape contractor's license with a background in outdoor structures, masonry, and hardscape installation. McQueen's background is in architecture and landscape architecture from the University of Oregon. The two work hand in hand on outdoor space design. The foundations of a good outdoor space are that you are protected from sun and rain and the space is usable. When Clark and McQueen are helping design a space, the most important thing is not protection from the elements, but how the space will actually be used. "A good outdoor space is one that gets used," says Clark with simplicity. "It's one that meets the client's goals and can be built and can be used often."

HOW WILL YOU USE THE SPACE?

"People frequently have a sense of how they might want to use their space but often don't feel they know how to realize their vision," McQueen says. "It's my job to help people hone and develop these ideas further and maybe uncover additional opportunities for their space. We weigh this list of goals against the existing context and parameters of a site and somewhere in the mingling of these things, a design arises. We are a very client driven company, so we work closely with each individual to create an outdoor space that works for their goals and is reflective of their tastes."

Yes, protection from sun and rain is important, but people often think about it only in a vertical sense. Rain is often blown into a slant, and the sun's position changes as the day goes on — an umbrella may work for a lunchtime coffee break outside but for evening entertaining, the sun



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may be shining through in a completely different spot. “This means you could have a hot spot right on your patio at the end of the day in the peak time that you want to use it,” Clark says.

The owners of the Longtin Covered Patio home had a prefabricated metal structure over their patio before the remodel. While it provided protection, it was also situated at an awkward elevation of two feet below the finished floor, blocking the view from inside the home. At the time, their son worked at a steel fabrication shop, which opened up the opportunity to focus on custom bracketry. “They really needed a more permanent coverage solution, and they hosted large parties fairly often and definitely wanted a fireplace they could throw logs into with gusto and enthusiasm,” says McQueen. The fireplace is now a major focal point, and they have protection from all sides with a pull-down blind, as well as good lighting and plenty of seating.

Clark says many people first start to enhance their outdoor area by adding a cover to protect them from rain and

allow them to enjoy the “shoulder seasons” a little more comfortably. Clark says in his experience, escaping the sun is usually more important to people than getting out of the rain — “I’ve never met a client who actually wanted to have Christmas dinner outside just because their patio was big and covered,” he says with a laugh.

Many places have good southern exposure and an uncovered concrete patio area, which means the patio absorbs so much heat in the summer that no one wants to be out there, even on a nice day, because it’s so hot. “We work to uncover the balance of what is possible for the particular site and what the particular goals are,” Clark says.

SEAMLESS CONNECTION & ACCESS

An enjoyable outdoor area is likely to be one you can access easily. Unfortunately, in many older homes, access to the outdoors could be through a bedroom. Or around the side of the house farthest from the kitchen, which makes outdoor cooking and dining more difficult.

McQueen says that creating a seamless connection between





the indoor and outdoor areas is something Rainbow Valley definitely focuses on. “Circulation and connection are a huge thing,” she says. “Access to outdoor spaces is rarely thought through in many residential projects. Just having a door to walk through might not be enough if you’re walking down stairs and around the corner to get to the picnic table or grill. Our goal is to improve and clarify these connections and do so in a safe and creative way.”

McQueen says increasing connection from indoors to the outdoors means also thinking about the usages of the adjacent areas in a way that makes the space usable for anything. “When the connection is really there, the indoor and outdoor spaces become extensions of one another, whether physically, visually, or both,” she says.

One way to do that is to build the outdoor area at floor level, as was done with the Schull Covered Patio project. This couple likes to entertain friends and family in the summer and host Duck football watch parties, which meant they needed a crowd-pleasing space that could go from day into night with ease. With the patio built at floor level, the transitional space has no steps so there is an easy flow between the indoor and outdoor spaces.





MAINTENANCE & DURABILITY

Another important conversation McQueen has with people is how much maintenance they actually want to do. Many projects include hardscapes that divide up or open out spaces, in tandem with a softer layer of plants. And plants, too, need care. Rainbow Valley installs plants, water features, and masonry and hardscapes, but does not have a landscape maintenance department. McQueen says some people love the idea of lush outdoor gardens but need to understand the maintenance required to keep everything alive and looking tidy. Whether they love to get their hands in the dirt and handle it themselves or prefer to outsource the work to a landscaping company is an important thing to plan for.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ANY HOME

An unforeseen benefit of a new structure when you have a good view in one direction, Clark says, is that the addition of columns and large cross beams creates a sort of “picture frame” to highlight whatever is beyond it. Adding perspective in the landscape to give you a closer focus or draw your eye out to a borrowed view is another strategy that they often use. “Figuring out the juxtaposition of the structure, the built-in features, and the furniture to get the best circulation and the best views is done on site and at the computer, but always involves the client. Our goal is to maximize whatever opportunity the client has to work with,” says Clark.

“Everyone has an opportunity to create an outdoor space, as long as they are willing to get creative and work within the physical context of their home,” says McQueen. “Your needs are going to be different than another person’s and your budget will be different than theirs too, but that is okay. These parameters can trigger some of the most interesting and creative designs, so I hope that everyone understands that they can, and deserve to, have an outdoor space of their own.” ■

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