



Creating the Perfect Room — Outdoors

Outdoor living has taken on a life of its own, bringing our lives outside.

By Heidi Bitsoli / Photography Jason Arnott

Some people are fine with setting out some lawn furniture and a big umbrella. Others, however, want to feel their home has living quarters outside that are as nice as the inside. Be it an elegant patio with a blazing fire pit or a pool with a pool house, complete with a full bar and family room style recreational TV room, creating outdoor living space is quickly becoming the norm.

Jason Arnott, of Romeo-based design and landscape development firm Earth Environments, helps clients create what he calls "an outdoor living experience."

Experts like Arnott think of details both large and small, everything from the slope of the land to how things will look from inside the house. The goal is beauty and harmony, a spot one looks forward to spending time in. "Even with newer construction," he says, "people are trying to mimic the French style, with a more formal feel, that looks older."

And, despite Michigan's short warm-weather season, "believe it or not, pools are going in," he says, in whatever size or shape or design that one's budget and property size can afford.

Arnott says "There's a desire to return to nature, people want natural, beautiful surroundings. They are getting into herbs, fragrant and flower-cutting gardens and places to meditate or do yoga are popular. It's almost like a secret garden."

"Outdoor living is getting big," agrees Michael Marcial, owner of Shelby Township's Visions of Paradise Landscaping. Marcial started his company with annual and perennial landscaping and it has evolved into that and more, including designing outdoor living features like kitchens, bars, fireplaces, gazebos, fire pits and more. "Any type of gathering area is where the trend is going," says Marcial.

No matter how big or small, "it improves quality of life," Marcial adds. Sometimes it's about protection from the elements and bugs — like a wall to block gusts of wind or a shady spot to cool off under. Other times it's lighting installations, broadening the number of activities one can do outdoors once the sun goes down. "It's nice to get a glass of wine and unwind after a day at work, to roast some marshmallows, to get back to family and friends." Something like a pizza oven outdoors proves incredibly versatile. "You can cook everything in there."

Visions has also designed courtyards in front of houses. "It's something different," Marcial says, and it's another way to extend the living and relaxation spots a home has.

It just boils down to those natural touches. A water feature provides relaxation and to gaze into a fire, "it's mesmerizing," Marcial says.