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By Beverly Smirnis

# Tips for Creating **IMPRESSIVE** Outdoor Living Spaces

**Whether your outdoor living space is a small patio area or the expansive backyard of a large estate, making the most of outdoor spaces is high on the priority list for most homeowners.**

## Start with a Plan and Careful Site Preparation

To create an enticing outdoor living space, the first step is to create a strong and sustainable foundation, which involves preparing the ground beneath the hardscape and grading so that water moves away from the home. In some cases, a yard area may need to be leveled or elevated. Pavers and stone projects may require a particular type of base material.

If the project calls for a retaining wall, take a look at the MagnumStone™ product from CornerStone Wall Solutions. MagnumStone's patented, mortarless SecureLug interlock system sports a hollow-core design, using 40% less concrete than solid blocks and allowing more blocks to be transported with less fuel. Once the product is on-site, a small crew can easily install up to 1,200 square feet of MagnumStone per day. When the blocks are in place, their hollow cores are filled with gravel to provide mass and stability comparable to solid blocks. If extra reinforcement is needed, MagnumStone easily accommodates positive or friction-based connections to all popular types of geogrid, making it suitable for everything from simple

landscaping to critical roadside and waterfront applications.

Plan your design around existing trees, but seek advice from a knowledgeable horticulturalist to avoid disturbing tree roots or causing a tree to become susceptible to disease or insect infestation. A plant expert can also help you choose plants that will thrive in spite of tree shade and reduced water availability. A landscaping plan is essential to creating a positive aesthetic environment that significantly increases the overall appeal and value of any home.

## Seek Problem-Solving Solutions for Paving and Decking

Porcelain rises above in durability and extremely high compressive strength due to its high density and ultra-low water absorption rate. Most porcelain products don't require any treatments (sealers) and are unaffected by mold, moss, dirt, effloresce, or discoloration, making them perfect for exterior environments and water features.

The right choice in composite decking can outperform your run-of-the-mill composite, maintenance-heavy wood or plastic-like PVC decks. Designed for durability and imperviousness to rot, most composite decking materials are a mix of recycled wood fibers and recycled plastic. The big brand names in this category seek to distinguish themselves by offering complete solutions and/or introducing technology for effective problem-solving. For example, TimberTech® (the outdoor living divi-

sion of AZEK Building Products) offers railing collections to match many architectural themes, as well as integrated lighting and accessories to complement a broad range of composite deck options, making it easy to create an entire deck system that works together seamlessly. MoistureShield® Infuse™ composite decking (of Oldcastle Architectural Products) has won a slew of awards for its CoolDeck® technology, which optimizes heat reflection to provide a cooler, more comfortable deck. The boards absorb up to 35% less heat than conventional capped composites in similar colors, making for noticeably lower surface temperature in direct sun.

## Use Water to Add a Sense of Calm

Whether you're building a small lap pool in a long, narrow side yard or a plunge pool in the center of a C-shaped home with an inner courtyard, pool areas should marry fun and function. Pool design should be appropriate for the period and design of the house. If a pool isn't desirable or within budget, consider a fountain. Some buyers simply don't want the upkeep of a pool but might appreciate a pond or waterfall. Any type of water feature that adds sounds of burbling, trickling, rushing, or roaring water lends a sense of serenity and design drama; the fire-and-water combo as a decorative element also remains popular.

Think ahead! For example, if you're installing a pool, put in column footings and pre-run needed electrical and



Horizon by Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens features a powder coat finish and marries the best of design and durability, with the aesthetic of real wood and low maintenance of stainless steel.



CoolDeck®, available as an option in two of MoistureShield's composite decking product lines, minimizes heat absorption by up to 35% versus traditional capped composite deck boards.



EVO\_2/E™ 20 mm-thick porcelain stoneware by Mirage offers a complete range of outdoor flooring for swimming pools and sun decks.



Weatherwell Elite® aluminum shutters allow the perfect mix of light, airflow, temperature, and privacy.

gas lines under the pool deck to make it easy to add a pavilion or outdoor kitchen later. You might even provide a rendering of a fully finished outdoor space in your sales brochure as an option for before or after the home sale; remodelers might use a similar rendering to offer a one-phase-at-a-time solution to homebuyers who are adding an outdoor living space to their existing home.

### Add Screens to Extend the Season — and the Living Area

Motorized, retractable screens can provide solar shading, climate control, ventilation, and protection from insects, allowing for seamless outdoor/indoor living spaces. Products such as Phantom® Screens integrate effortlessly into the building structure and retract out of sight at the touch of a button. Options include sun and wind sensors, as well as home automation integration for doors, windows, glass walls, and outdoor spaces.

Aluminum shutters can be used to shade an area or create a privacy screen for a patio, balcony, or any other outdoor space. A challenge has been finding wind-rated and security-rated aluminum shutters that don't sacrifice beauty to gain functionality. The Weatherwell Elite aluminum shutter collection addresses this dilemma with blades that are fully lockable at any position and a frame designed to conceal the internal blade rotation mechanism. The two-part aluminum shutter frame is designed to hide all

screws, resulting in no visible fixings.

### Exterior Lighting — Equally as Important as Interior Lighting

The plan for outdoor lighting should create a relaxing atmosphere and, at the same time, provide safety and security. Smart products let users control lighting with their mobile devices or program a unique lighting schedule. Advanced options like the myTouchSmart Wi-Fi Smart Dimmer by Jasco® come equipped with SunSmart technology – a built-in component that automatically recognizes sunrise and sunset times for your region and adjusts your on/off times accordingly.

### Leave 'Em With Something to Talk About!

Now that you've created an environment that's enticing and relaxing, next on the agenda should be adding items that will leave guests talking. Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens' 2019 Outdoor Living Report says, "The rise of backyard organic gardening and the influence of cooking demonstrations across social media have inspired homeowners to embrace the pride of what is homegrown. The result: Homeowners are looking beyond the grill — making room in their budgets and floor plans for specialty appliances: Argentinian grills, smokers, pizza ovens, and more."

With products such as Sub-Zero®'s outdoor refrigeration line, Wolf®'s outdoor grills with available burner module or warming drawer add-ons, and the

only outdoor-rated dishwasher from ASKO®, homeowners can experience a complete outdoor kitchen that equals the quality, performance, and convenience of their indoor kitchen.

The Brown Jordan report also notes that buyers are looking for stylish but ultra-durable materials, like powder-coated stainless-steel cabinetry that offers the same level of comfort and finish as indoors. Elements that will extend use past sunset or beyond the warmer seasons were also on the list: "Think layered heat sources (sleek heat lamps seamlessly integrated into the ceiling, romantic fire pits), shade solutions (pergolas, patio covers), and cooling sources (fans, rugs)."

Advance thought and preparation, the right product selections, and finishing touches that add a "wow" factor can make all the difference in your outdoor living space. ▼

*Beverly Smirnis is the co-founder of Building SAVVY magazine and publishes its flagship Dallas/Fort Worth edition. She and her business partner and husband, Steve Smirnis, have served as judges for the International Builders' Show Best of IBS Awards, the Greater Houston Builders Association Prism Awards, the Greater Orlando Builders Association Parade of Homes, and the Building Industry Association of Okaloosa-Walton Counties' Parade of Homes.*