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Backyard geography redefines ‘room’

BY [TRACY ROGERS](#)
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LITTLE ROCK — The phrase “outdoor room” can refer to a lot of spaces. An outdoor room can be a simple patio with a couple of chairs, or it can be a full-scale kitchen and lounging area complete with sofas, a refrigerator, countertops and a sink.

The market for outdoor furniture and other outdoor accessories like grills and grill surrounds has grown over the past few years, according to Lawrie Rash, owner of Ken Rash’s Arkansas in Little Rock. That’s in large part due to the recession, which, she says, forced families to look for alternatives to traveling on their vacations.

“We’ve found that people are creating more outdoor rooms and creating more of a place where they can have a vacation at home,” Rash says.

Julie Fryauf of Julie Wait Designs in Rogers agrees. “I think that people are staying home more and have for the last four years or so since the downturn in the economy, and that translates into wanting to enjoy the outdoors as well,” she says. “We live in a very unique part of the country where you can enjoy the outdoors quite a bit of the year.”



PHOTO BY [JASON IVESTER](#)

The comfortable outdoor room at Julie Fryauf’s home has ample seating and easy access to the outdoors, with the advantage of ready protection from sun and rain.

Consider the following suggestions for creating a cozy outdoor space.

Cover it up. Outdoor rooms with roofs are all the rage right now - in part because they're easier to maintain, Fryauf says.

"There are some outdoor spaces that are totally open air without a roof, and those are definitely the most difficult to maintain and keep looking good," she says. "A roof really helps and it also provides shade when it's really hot."

Cool it down. If you do have a ceiling for your outdoor space, why not add a ceiling fan for those hot Arkansas summers? A fan will not only help keep you cool but has another purpose. "A ceiling fan is almost indispensable in an outdoor area because it will keep bugs away, too, when you circulate the air," Fryauf says.

Be bold. Rash says that she finds people are freer with color and design in their outdoor rooms than they are with interior spaces. "I think that people can go a little bit more outside their comfort zone because it's not something that they live in every day - maybe a little brighter, a little more colorful than they would have the nerve to do on the inside," she says.

Make room to relax. Outdoor spaces are often a place to entertain family and friends or just to get away for a little "me time," so there's little room for formality and lots of room for relaxation. "If you have the room, I always recommend a sofa because that's where you get a lot of comfort," Rash says.

"If you have room for a sofa, you can actually lay down on it and take a nap."

Be sure you're comfortable. Even if you are planning to use your space for entertaining guests, that doesn't mean you can't all be comfortable. "I would say 90 to 95 percent of the dining chairs we sell are swivel, tilt chairs," Rash says. "They move. They're a lot more comfortable than, say, your traditional kitchen chair that just has four stationary legs that's more formal and upright."

Make sure your outdoor room flows. The space should fit in with the architecture, interior design and landscape of a home, says Arkansas-born, New York based designer Daniel Grady Faires. "The new space should feel like an extension of the old space and flow seamlessly from the indoors to the outdoors," he says. "An outdoor space can be attached directly to the home - or it can be completely detached- but it should never compete with the structure of the home or the existing landscape."

Do it yourself. If you're on a tight budget, don't be afraid to improvise, Faires says. "Simple benches with handmade pillows work great," he says. "And if you're into do-it-yourself projects, this is a chance to show your skills."

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