

Los Angeles Times Magazine

JULY 6, 2008

OUTDOOR LIVING

Silver Lake's
dynamic
architects
of change

Rethinking the
California dream

Sunday lunch
under the
olive trees

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Living spaces that know no boundaries

INSIDE/OUTSIDE

A GRACEFUL OPEN-AIR PAVILION, A WILD YARD TAMED FOR DINING: THIS SUMMER, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE OUTDOOR ROOM **BY BARBARA THORNBURG**

IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA HOMES, indoor and outdoor blur, the color and light of our gardens spilling into our interiors, the energy of kitchens and living rooms splashing onto patios. Our fabled setting inspires spaces designed to take full advantage of the long seasons when beautiful days slide into gentle, temperate nights. And this year, in particular, forces both interior and exterior are conspiring to put a new emphasis on the outdoor room.

Luxurious life in a reimagined backyard (or its urban terrace equivalent) sounds particularly appealing this summer, as gas prices rise and more of us long for relaxation that's within easy reach—say, a starry candlelight evening on the deck with friends and family.

"There's definitely a brain shift" when we go outside, an almost primal pull toward pleasure, says Westside psychologist Linda Trozzolino. "When we're children, we go outside to play," she says. "On some level, there's a learned association between the two." But nature and good company aren't more restorative just because you've taken an expensive trek to reach them. Thus, trend maven Faith Popcorn, who coined the term "cocooning" in the '80s, sees us increasingly opting for the "staycation." "That's where people take a vacation—at home," says Popcorn, founder and chief executive of BrainReserve, a strategic trend-consulting group.

The good news is that technology has brought a new level of comfort to alfresco living. The old portable grill and folding lounge chairs are being replaced by an aesthetic that makes the outdoor room an extension of the family and living rooms. The transition from the home's interior to the exterior is being designed with wider doors—or those that slide completely out of sight—to tie together the two environments. And outdoor spaces are being outfitted in ways that encourage lingering.

The cardboard-stiff canvas fabrics that once wrapped lounge cushions in plain-Jane solids and stripes have been usurped by sexier solution-dyed acrylics with the feel of chenille, cut velvet, linen and even leather. And they're complemented by an array of trim cords, tiebacks and tassels.

Once made of cast iron, wicker or rattan, outdoor furnishings are being turned out in sleek stainless steel and polished aluminum, with colorful powder-coated finishes. French designer Philippe Starck's new high-polished aluminum and teak RobinWood Deluxe collection is a case in point. Designed for outside use, its high-back settee and

four-poster tester bed look as if they were made for a master bedroom or tony boutique hotel. And large-scale furnishings such as sectional sofas have migrated outdoors as well.

Outdoor upholstery foam no longer means a crumbly chunk with all the give of packing peanuts. New varieties include Janus et Cie's premium fill—siliconized polyester sewed into a channel casing (the high-tech laminated polyester knit is water-, mildew- and mold-repellent)—to make outdoor sofas feel as cushy as a feather-down lounge.

Keeping company with the 21st century furnishings, outdoor kitchens are decked out with all the bells and whistles of their indoor counterparts—refrigerators and wine coolers, pizza ovens and warming drawers.

Even grilling is showing its elaborate side. Looking beyond the burger, new grills come with attachable sushi bars, portable woks and cast-iron griddles. "Food cooked outside simply tastes better," says producer Gail Katz, whose new custom outdoor kitchen is adjacent to a fireplace and built-in sofa where she reads scripts and relaxes.

The upshot of moving more of our lives into outdoor rooms is a relaxation of roles and a chance to connect in new ways. For architect David Hertz, whose two-story Venice home epitomizes the indoor-outdoor California experience, the best part of being outside is the way it lets him rediscover his three children. "When the family is inside the house, living is more fragmented," he says. "Everyone's doing their own thing: working on their laptops, watching TV, playing video games. Outside, we don't have those techno-distractions. Some of the best times I've had with my kids are when we are in the pool together."

Then there's the pragmatic angle to consider when creating outdoor rooms. "It's a question of utilizing real estate and being able to convert it to more usable space," says architect Steven Shortridge, who did just that on a small lot in Venice for his client, producer John Melfi. Adding two outdoor rooms, one an extension of the kitchen and the other on the roof, increased the producer's living space by hundreds of square feet and had an expansive effect on his quality of life.

On the following pages we take a look at how Southern Californians are living outdoors—oh, so comfortably. Although these spaces are definitely upscale and come with hefty price tags, the many ideas scattered through them—inventive ways to create shade, or use a long buffet counter as a focus for outdoor entertaining, or add drama with a fire pit—have an equivalent in every price range. We hope they'll inspire your own spin on luxurious outdoor living.

ATEASE

When Gail Katz and Bruce Wessel, at right with daughter Nora in the pool, wanted to transform their bland backyard into a family gathering spot, they turned to Santa Monica architect David Hertz. See Page 34.



THE LIVING IS EASY

INDEPENDENT FILM PRODUCER Gail Katz longed for a place to sit outdoors by a fire—a comfortable retreat with a kitchen setup for easy meals and a small bar for blending smoothies for the kids and margaritas for her friends. But her backyard was the land that time forgot.

“There was a large pool that took up almost the entire yard,” says Katz. “We never used it; the kids didn’t hang out there. . . . Once in a while we chipped at a golf ball—and that was about it.”

The transformation began when she called in a longtime friend, Santa Monica architect David Hertz. Out went the hulking pool and the unattractive concrete slab that surrounded it, to be replaced by a sleek, 45-foot-long lap pool at the far side of the property and a border of giant timber bamboo and festuca grass. That left ample room for an area that would pull together the outdoor activities Katz and her attorney husband, Bruce Wessel, enjoy. Hertz proposed an open-air pavilion.

HANGOUT

Gail Katz catches up with her husband, Bruce Wessel, at the bar, above, while children Jacob and Nora enjoy the pool and deck made of ipe, a sustainably harvested wood.

Anchoring his design is a vertical masonry fireplace, which creates a wall dividing the pool from the driveway and garage. An attached L-shaped seating area offers a cozy nook for warming up by the fire, while a sofa facing the pool allows friends to watch the action in the water.

A slatted wood insert between the back-to-back sofas can be removed to create one large bed for sunbathing.

On the other side of the seating area, a kitchen with a small bar allows Wessel—the griller in the family—to be part of the party instead of being stuck in a corner of the yard with the barbecue. Hertz unified the space with an aluminum trellis, placed overhead, which suggests a room without actually enclosing it. “Keeping all the functions together,” Hertz says, “creates a more cohesive, functional unit.”

Today, the couple and their kids, Nora, 19, and Jacob, 16, use the backyard year-round. “My son, in particular, loves to barbecue and have parties back here. That was really one of the goals . . . to have a place for the kids to be with their friends. We know where they are,” Katz says, “and sometimes if we get lucky, we’re invited to join in.”



PAVILION

DIMENSIONS: 12 feet by 12 feet.

MATERIALS: Integral-colored, steel-troweled stucco with 2-inch-by-2-inch clear anodized aluminum; Perennials “Very Terry” outdoor fabric at David Sutherland Showroom, Los Angeles.

COST: About \$150,000.

ARCHITECT: David Hertz, Santa Monica, (310) 829-9932.

INTERIOR DESIGN: Hermosillo & Ross, Los Angeles, (323) 549-0102.



