



Archadeck

Here Comes the Sun

When placed in the right location, even a picnic table in the lawn can be a great spot for a dinner. “Just have people over to relax,” Shaw says. “It just needs to be inviting.”

And here comes the company. But it’s easy to host a crowd when the venue is right in your own back yard.

BY JENNIFER GARRETT

THIS ISN’T LOS ANGELES OR PHOENIX. The sun doesn’t shine every day in Madison, so when it does we all want to be outside and we want to stay outside for as long as possible. And when we find a good spot—one that is out of the direct light but still bright, one with a gentle breeze and a nice shady tree, and maybe one with a nice view of one of our lakes—we want to share it with our family and friends. Indeed, the outdoors and entertaining go hand-in-hand.

While seating styles, deck and patio designs, and even foods change with trends, the basics remain the same: We just want to enjoy the good weather while it lasts. Terry Hoard, owner of gift and floral shop Gatherings, says the economy is a factor this year, but it’s making people more interested in their outdoor spaces, not less. “A lot of families are staying home this summer ... and they’ll be spending a lot of time outside,” he says. “They’re putting money into their patios and decks.”

Shaw Building and Design



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Luckily there are ways to create that perfect gathering place no matter the size of your budget. It can be simply setting a pretty table, reconfiguring or refurbishing an existing deck or patio, or building an entirely new outdoor space.

Hoard notes that container gardening is an effortless and affordable way to reinterpret existing outdoor spaces. Brightly colored flowers and plants arranged in beautiful pottery add interest and beauty to otherwise barren decks or patios. Hoard even suggests adding some containers with unusual leaves to flower beds instead of statuary or other garden art.

Dawn Shaw, vice president of Shaw Building and Design, says accessorizing outdoor spaces can make them more comfortable and inviting. For example, outdoor rugs add definition to seating areas, making them look more like outdoor living rooms. Yet the rugs serve another purpose. "Stones can get hot," Shaw explains. "In fact, any [patio or decking material] can get hot, which is why we're seeing the surge of indoor-outdoor carpets."

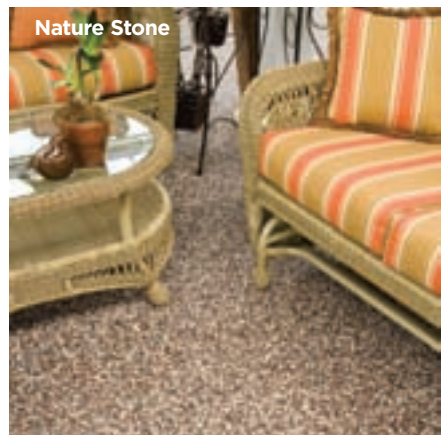
Heat isn't the only challenge for Wisconsin homeowners. Once the ubiquitous mosquito arrives, it can be difficult if not impossible to use outdoor spaces. Neil Hacker of Archadeck, a custom designer and builder of outdoor structures, says Madison's mosquito population is a big factor in the popularity of screened porches.

Screened porches are a nice halfway step between indoor and outdoor living. Hacker notes that most homes don't have the budget or space to add one that could accommodate large parties, but smaller, more intimate get-togethers are perfect in these two- or three-season rooms.

Shaw adds that people are getting more creative with their porches by adding fireplaces and other decorative elements. The fireplaces can extend the usability of a porch, making it more comfortable in early spring and late fall.

Also, Hacker notes that new window technology can turn a porch into more of a four-season room without sacrificing the close contact with nature. "[The windows] give you the feel of a screen porch in the summer, like you're outdoors, but you can close it up quickly," he says.

Shaw, too, has clients looking to close in patios and decks to make them more



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usable for longer periods. Anything is possible, but Shaw points out that it isn't as simple as tacking on a roof and adding windows. Some decks or patios won't have the necessary footings to bear the weight of an enclosed porch. In those cases, the process of converting an existing outdoor living space to an enclosed or semi-enclosed one can be more involved and expensive. Other factors to consider are ductwork for heating four-season rooms, as well as electrical service and any setback requirements.

Other upgrades are a little easier. One of the easiest ways to give an existing patio new life is to repair or refinish it. For example, Nature Stone is a stone composite applied directly on existing concrete. It instantly repairs chips or cracks while adding a new, more luxurious surface. It's a great option when you'd like a new look but don't want to start your landscaping and hardscaping from scratch.

"It takes one day to apply the Nature Stone," says Nature Stone of Wisconsin co-owner Alicia Szekeres. "It cures for twenty-four hours. Then we come in and put on a topcoat, and twenty-four hours later, you're in. So it can be complete in two days."

Szekeres says one of the best attributes of the product is its comfort. The smooth surface is great on bare feet. Also, since it is water permeable, there is no puddling—even around pools and hot tubs.

When price is no object at all, the big trend is toward outdoor kitchens. Both Shaw and Hacker have seen a growing interest in these open-air rooms complete with grills, refrigerators, sinks, countertops and sometimes even brick ovens.

"Outdoor kitchens are just more and more popular every day," Hacker says. "They allow the whole group to remain outside, instead of having one or two people cooking inside and the rest of the party going on outdoors."

Yet Shaw notes that people have been entertaining outside for years, and the most important factors aren't the amenities but how comfortable the space is. When placed in the right location, even a picnic table in the lawn can be a great spot for a dinner. "Just have people over to relax," she says. "It just needs to be inviting."

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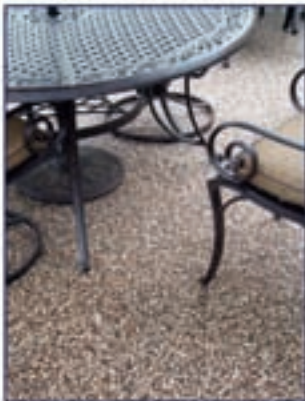
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