

THE OUTDOOR ROOM

Establishing a comfortable, stylish outdoor living area not only provides a great way to entertain friends, it also adds real value to your home. With the assistance of landscaping expert *Luke Roodenburg* of Sand & Stone Landscapes, we take a look at how you can turn your own backyard into a private entertainment oasis.

It's the quintessential Australian lifestyle choice, regardless of where in the country you live. Aussies love to spend time outdoors, especially in their own open space at home.

Outdoor living beside the pool or around the barbecue has been at the centre of Australian family life for over half a century.

So much so that outdoor living has become an industry of its own — designing, building and landscaping an attractive and practical outdoor area has become a significant factor in nearly every home building or renovation project.

We're fortunate that our climate lets us enjoy an outdoor lifestyle all year round. It doesn't take much adjustment to make

the great outdoors a fun place to live and entertain whatever the weather throws at us.

According to real estate agents, the backyard/outdoor living area is now almost as important as any other factor in the decision making processes of home buyers. It's all about offering an image of a relaxed lifestyle that potential buyers can readily envisage themselves enjoying.

And now is the perfect time of year to throw a critical eye over your own backyard to see what you can do to make it more practical, more comfortable — and more stylish.

Winter is the best time to make design and planning decisions, and to get started on making your backyard everything it could be.



A well designed and landscaped backyard will be well used and add value to a home.



"It's surprising what can be designed to make a small area look and feel larger than it really is and provide all the amenities you want."

A roof provides shelter and a cosy place to catch up with friends.



An outdoor kitchen need not be extravagant.



Luke Roodenburg, director of Sand & Stone Landscapes.

SAND & STONE LANDSCAPES AWARDS

- Best of Houzz – 2017 Award for Customer Service
- Best of Houzz – 2016 Award for Customer Service
- Silver Award – 2016 Landscape Excellence Awards Residential \$150,000-\$300,000
- Silver Award – 2015 Landscape Excellence Awards Residential \$75,000-\$150,000
- Silver Award – 2015 Landscape Excellence Awards Residential \$150,000-\$300,000

MAKE A PLAN

It's obvious that your first step is to plan a backyard design that will not just work for you as a family playground and entertainment space, but importantly, meet your budget.

Having a design plan is critical to ensuring that key design elements and a visual image of your outdoor space come to life. This is where a landscape design expert can be worth every cent. They can incorporate all your requirements and make recommendations on structural features as well as soft surface areas such as turf and planting. And importantly, any council applications required can be submitted at the design stage as well.

It's surprising what can be designed to make a small area look and feel larger than it really is and provide all the amenities you want.

That's a passion of Luke Roodenburg, director of Sand & Stone Landscapes. After nearly a decade of working with other landscaping businesses, Luke started Sand & Stone Landscapes in 2010 to pursue his own vision of creating outstanding outdoor spaces for homes in Sydney. He particularly enjoys working with and using natural products such as sandstone, granite and hardwood in his designs, to create unique Australian landscape settings.

Over four editions of *Sydney Hills & Hawkesbury Living* Luke will be our Outdoor Living Contributor, and provide his expertise to explain the fundamentals of creating a beautiful outdoor living space and help readers to make the most of their backyard during every season.



SIT ON IT

Having a dedicated lounge and dining area can create a cosy, inviting space that will be used often.

The fittings you choose to furnish and style your outdoor room will set the tone for how the space is used. If your outdoor area is next to a pool you'll want casual, relaxing furniture and fittings that can handle regular doses of chlorine or salt water.

SEE THE LIGHT

Lighting an outdoor space is a must, especially if you want to make the most of your garden throughout the winter months. Having a well lit garden is a lovely way to admire your garden at night and sets the mood when entertaining by creating a warm inviting ambience, while having adequate lighting throughout the entertaining area is practical for cooking and dining.

An outdoor nook for coffee and relaxing.

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A beautiful space outdoors.

“Flexibility is key when designing an outdoor room, particularly when it comes to heating options for winter.”



CAPPING IT OFF

Having a roof over your head is probably the biggest, but arguably the most important, investment in creating a space to entertain in the colder months.

A roof covering all, or at least part, of your outdoor area provides shelter against wind and rain throughout the year, as well as protection from summer’s beating sun. Shelter from a roof makes outdoor entertaining so much easier all year round.

A roof also provides protection for much of your outdoor furniture and outdoor kitchen, whether that’s just a small barbecue or a fully built in barbecue, fridge and bench.

A pergola is a practical solution for many smaller backyards, and provides an extension of the living space

from inside to outside. What’s more, anything less than 25m² in size is exempt from council approval.

A pergola with lighting and beautiful flooring, such as a natural stone tile or the warmth of a timber deck, is the starting point for creating the ultimate outdoor room.

If you have the space (and the budget), a fully equipped outdoor kitchen can include a barbecue, sink, fridge and adequate bench and storage space to allow you to entertain all year round. One important aspect of designing an outdoor kitchen is considering ventilation for the area, such as installing a range hood.



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A cleverly planted outdoor space adds interest and contrast.

WARM IT UP

Flexibility is key when designing an outdoor room, particularly when it comes to heating options for winter. An adjustable roof can be closed in the summer months to provide shade and UV protection and then can be opened during the colder months, allowing sunlight in.

Having adequate heating is critical for entertaining in cooler months. That can take the form of strip heating (fixed to the ceiling of an outdoor room), an outdoor gas heater which can be moved around as needed and stored away in the summer months, a built-in gas fireplace or a fire pit.

Radiant heating, such as from electric strip heaters, provides targeted, instantaneous heat. However, they are not the cheapest to run.

Portable gas heaters are the most cost-effective option. These can be moved around the space as required and stored away when not in use.

A well designed fire pit has the ability to transform a garden into an inviting, cosy space perfect for gathering around in the colder months. Fire pits are becoming increasingly popular, and while building a dedicated space for one adds a great feature to a garden, they could potentially become outdated over time.

An alternative is to purchase a freestanding fire pit such as the Kadai fire pit from Gather Co. Green (gathercogreen.com/product/fire-pit/). They can be moved around the garden and can also be stored away when not in use. You can then bring in seating in the form of wooden logs, or even outdoor bean bags, for a more outdoorsy and casual feel.

It's a good idea to provide blankets for guests when entertaining during cool periods. You can also use an outdoor rug to zone off different areas if your space allows.



A LIVING LANDSCAPE

Equipping your outdoor room is important, but so is creating an attractive space using appropriate trees and plants. They are essential for creating a lush tropical or native bush setting, especially near pools, and can also provide shade, privacy and quiet “rooms” in the garden.

Choosing the right plants for your garden is important. Think about where the sun is positioned during winter. Planting deciduous trees can allow natural light from the sun in the winter months to warm up the space during the day, and provide shade during summer when they're covered in foliage.

Lush green grass in open areas adds softness to the overall appearance of the area, and provides the ideal zone for children to play.

GET GOING!

Whatever your plans and aspirations, now is the time to get started. Use the winter months to plan, design, build and establish your outdoor area so that when next summer arrives you'll be ready to entertain whenever you feel like it.

And your family will love it every day of the year.
Get to it! *



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