



This month interior designer Clair Strong looks at how to make your outside space feel like an extra room



Connect the spaces

The most important thing is to visually connect your outside space to your inside space. If your home is a homage to boho, fill your garden with hanging baskets and colourful throws. If you love the minimalist look, go for sleek concrete benches and structural planting. Love colour? Plant bright flowers. Pretty and feminine inside? Embrace the French country look with painted bistro sets and linen cushions outside. Make your outside space reflect your interior style and it will work seamlessly as an extra room.

Plan your outside space

Treat planning your outside space as you would a room. Think about how you are going to use your space throughout the day and plan accordingly. If you like to enjoy a morning coffee in the sun, get a pretty bench to sit and read the papers on. If you are a party animal, build a bar and add lots of fun lights. Enjoy big family BBQs? Get a big table and build yourself a proper outside kitchen. When you have thought about how you are going to use your garden, you can make in a multifunctional space.

Don't forget to plan around when your garden gets the sun too. No use building a place for sun loungers if its in the shade half of the day.

Think about things like reading the paper, eating breakfast, sunbathing, entertaining your friends, cinema nights under the stars, cocktail parties or Sunday BBQs

Get your structures in place first

Structures are things like steps, pagodas, patios, decking and graveling. These are the things that will define your space. Plan where these structures will be first and they will act as the building blocks for your outside space. Not all structures have to be permanent. Gazebos or swinging chairs and even clothes lines are structures that define how you will be using the space.

Don't buy cheap garden furniture

Invest in furniture designed to be used outside. Nowadays there are so many options for garden furniture at every price point that we are spoiled for choice. Choose stylish sofas and sun loungers that will withstand being outside. Don't forget you can repaint or varnish garden furniture and it's easy to revamp or replace cushions with your own textiles. Lots of fabric designs are now available as outdoor fabrics.

Don't scrimp on dining furniture and choose carefully to ensure it fits in the space you have allocated for outdoor dining. Get the biggest table you can squeeze in and remember you need enough room to comfortably slide your chairs beneath the table so as not to feel too cramped. Fold up bistro sets are brilliant for small balconies.

Situate your outdoor dining area in a shady area where its more comfortable to eat.

Choose stylish textiles

Adding the right cushions, rugs and throws can transform an outdoor space into a stylish extra room. Just as you would inside, plan your colour scheme and make sure all your textiles work together to create a cohesive look. Pick a colour theme to make it look pulled together rather than a mess. There are so many wonderful outdoor rugs, tablecloths and cushions available it's never been easier to carry your interior style outside.

Keep warm

English summers can get chilly in the evening. If you want to take advantage of the longer lighter evenings, make sure you think about how to keep your outside space warm at night. Firepits are cheap but throw out heat so are great if you are on a budget. Patio heaters keep you super toasty but can be environmentally unfriendly and expensive. Do your research and then sit back and enjoy summer evenings socialising in your garden.



All fresco cooking

Dining outside is relaxed, sociable and fun - and food just tastes better when its cooked outside doesn't it?

If you love having friends round for an evening barbeque, invest in an all singing-all-dancing BBQ. Just the two of you? A portable BBQ you can also take out on pic-nics, might be your best option.

If you have a large garden and enjoy outside entertaining, I recommend creating an outdoor kitchen with a built in BBQ, fridge and prep area. Add a bar and you have a wonderful entertaining space for parties, lunches, dinners or just drinks in the garden.

Garden lighting is key

To use your space when it gets dark, you need to plan lighting in your outside space in the same way as you would inside.

Candles and lanterns are great for tables. Festoon lights and fairy lights are perfect for creating a party vibe and solar lights are useful for lighting up pathways.

All the extras

Just as you would inside your home, plan in the little extras that make your space unique to you. If you love music, get some portable speakers (but be careful not to play music too late or too loud). If films are your thing, an outdoor cinema is easy to create. If you are a mad keen cook, make a herb garden near your BBQ so you have easy access to fresh seasoning. Your outdoor living space should be as carefully planned and stylish as your home. Make your garden work day and night, summer and winter and you'll have an extra room all year round.



If you are looking to revamp your space, working with an interior designer will really help you use your budget wisely and create a look that feels cohesive, pulled together and will stand the test of time.

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You can see many of the projects I have worked on since 2006 on my website at www.clairstrong.co.uk or click the buttons below.