

PHOTOGRAPHY: LIZ HARRISON



Reclaimed pennant stone can be used inside and out. Subtle light fixtures and tiers of planting create a private dining space

OUTSIDE ROOMS

The garden can be used as a refuge and a social space, an outdoor room where you can play, cook, eat and lounge. Interior designer Clair Strong talks to landscape architect and garden designer Liz Harrison about how to create practical and stylish garden rooms

LINKING INDOORS AND OUT

One of the most effective ways to bring a 'garden room' to life is to connect it with the interior, providing a smooth transition from inside to out. Landscape architect Liz Harrison explains how this connection can start from inside: "In our climate, we spend a vast proportion of the year looking at the garden from the house. So ensure the views from your most-used spaces – the kitchen and living room – are visually stimulating. Provide a focal point such as a specimen shrub or tree with seasonal colour to provide interest throughout the year, or install an archway or sculpture to lead your eye into the space."

USING COLOUR

Another useful device to link indoor rooms to the garden beyond is to use colours from the interior scheme. Liz has a number of tips for using colour in the garden: "Carry colour from your soft furnishings or accessories into the planting scheme, and repeat the colour palette throughout the garden. This will make the space feel more 'as one'".

Seasonal bedding will create an instant colour lift in the garden, and this becomes even more effective when it features colours that are used in the interior. "Changing planting in window boxes and containers will complement an interior scheme," explains Liz. "Colour can also be used to create a visual trick – blues recede and make the area feel bigger, for example, whereas hot hues such as reds and oranges come forward, demanding attention."

FLEXIBLE BOUNDARIES

Bi-fold doors are a dramatic way to connect the house and garden, so that you can open them up, fold them back unobtrusively and benefit from a joined-up space that stretches from inside to out whenever the occasion demands. "While terraces were traditionally accessed via French windows," Liz explains, "the use of bi-fold or retracting glass panels allow rear walls to disappear and gardens become part of the house. As a result, external terraces become larger and more flexible; used for dining, lounging and, more recently, as outdoor kitchens."

FLOORING AND PAVING

Flooring plays a significant role in creating harmony between your inside and outside spaces, so it is advisable – whenever possible – to use flooring that creates a seamless flow from one area to the other. It is sometimes an option to use interior materials and products externally, but you'll need advice from the manufacturer or retailer of products you are considering.

"The use of a thin paving profile internally, often combined with underfloor heating, positioned next to outside flooring that needs to be slip and frost-resistant, make for a challenging specification," says Liz. She recommends natural stone over reconstituted paving or ceramic tiles as this has greater longevity and can be jet-washed every couple of years to remove the build-up of algae.

If you plan to use two different flooring products, aim to source materials that look similar. This will create the illusion of a continuous flow from one space to the other – then, when the outside doors are open, the whole area will be transformed into a spacious, open-plan room.

Photography: Liz Harrison

FURNITURE

Your outdoor room has so much potential beyond the standard table and chair set. You can ‘decorate’ your garden as you would your living room, with sofas, cushions, lamps, rugs and more. Liz likes to echo the style of contemporary interiors with furniture from Indian Ocean or adds a touch of elegance to a classical scheme with a sustainable oak bench from Gaze Burvill. Strong brands for outdoor furnishings include Coco Wolf, Dash and Albert, Serralunga and Fatboy. You can also buy fade-resistant outdoor fabrics from companies such as Designer’s Guild and Thibaut to create your own bespoke furnishings.

LIGHTING

Lighting can be an effective way of complementing your garden design and making the most of your garden. A string of fairy lights and a few solar lanterns may look pretty, but don’t provide flexible options. Installing proper lighting will allow you to use the space after dark, and will further enhance the feeling of your garden as a room.

Liz suggests using quality lighting fixtures that reflect the interior style: “Although there are a large range of fixtures on the market, I would advise investing in lights designed for longevity and sustainability. When combined with low energy LEDs, these cost very little to run and are virtually maintenance free.”

Instead of dotting lights here and there, a lighting plan for the whole garden is recommended, one that draws attention to key features such as steps and footpaths and introducing subtle lighting in seating areas. A wireless system will even allow you to control your garden lighting from your phone.

Relaxing in your garden room has never been easier. ■

Clair Strong Interior Design is a small, friendly, creative business based in Bath and London, providing services for residential and commercial clients. Visit: clairstrong.co.uk or contact: clair@clairstrong.co.uk. View Liz Harrison’s garden projects: lizharrisondesign.co.uk



COLOUR MATCH: The colours of *Iris pallida* (right) and *Echinacea purpurea* (above) complement features such as the outdoor sofa below



Sliding doors open to create an inside-outside space – soft textured planting breaks down the lines and is reflected in the glazing