

Designers' Top Tips for Inviting Outdoor Spaces

FIFTEEN OF OUR FAVORITE DESIGNERS SHARE THEIR BEST IDEAS FOR STUNNING ALFRESCO DÉCOR.



1 EMILY JOHNSTON LARKIN EJ Interiors Dallas, TX

- We love to make a porch feel as cozy and comfortable as an indoor space. You wouldn't think of drapes as something that you'd install outdoors, but with the appropriate outdoor fabric, like solution-dyed acrylic, you can have stationary panels that withstand any weather.
- We don't use a lot of green-colored fabrics outdoors. Instead, we like to use colors that pop against the natural landscape, like blues, oranges, and even neutral staples like whites and grays.
- Always take into consideration the colors of your house—like the brick, siding, and trim—when furnishing your space. A cream-colored outdoor sofa can look dirty against a white brick house.
- We love nonmatching pieces of outdoor furniture in a space so it doesn't look like it was all purchased from one catalog. We often pair metal with warm woods like teak. Think of the rule of opposites when selecting your furniture.

2 MAGGIE GRIFFIN Maggie Griffin Design Gainesville, GA

- Crisp mornings and cool nights call for fluffy throws in a pretty basket, soft throw pillows on chairs, and a few colorful garden stools placed around for cocktail hour. Add in your favorite seasonal potted plants and a couple strands of pretty outdoor lights, and you're ready for a garden party!

3 ASHLEY GILBREATH Ashley Gilbreath Interior Design Montgomery, AL/Rosemary Beach, FL

- For porch furniture, mix materials. Try wicker with teak or a painted piece with natural teak; the mix doesn't really matter, but too much of the same material gets old and lacks interest.
- A tablecloth, fresh greenery, and good dishes go a really long way.
- An outdoor drapery always adds a little softness to the space and cuts out a bit of sunshine.



ASHLEY GILBREATH
INTERIOR DESIGN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREY GLENN



CINDY BARGANIER INTERIORS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON

4 CINDY BARGANIER Cindy Barganier Interiors Montgomery, AL

- When planning porches, I tend to look at them the same way that I approach interior spaces. I divide them into zones: cooking, dining, living, or sleeping. If space allows, I try to group cooking and dining together, but separate them from the sitting areas due to the smoke created by grills.
- In Alabama with our man-eating mosquitoes, I utilize screened porches as much as possible. I find that without screening, the porches don't get used very much. Retractable screens are a wonderful option. A house in our neighborhood added these to the front porch. When the screens are lowered, every exterior door can be thrown open [to create] a huge outdoor living area.
- We are also careful about placement of bird feeders and plants that draw unwanted messes.
- I try to create seasonal furniture arrangements. Fall and winter are centered around fireplaces and TV screens, while summer is focused on pools, lakes, or mountains. Swivel chairs can be used to change the focus from fireplace to pool.
- Trunks can double as coffee tables and provide much-needed closed storage for throws and pillows, away from pollen and rain.

5 MANDI SMITH T Mandi Smith T Interiors Birmingham, AL

- Porches are now secondary living spaces for many of my clients. With our current situation in the world, I am being asked to make porches feel as comfortable as indoor spaces. So, I've been designing more "outdoor rooms" than ever before! When outfitting your porch, consider items you might normally see in indoor rooms—coffee tables and side tables that look like they could be used indoors but are durable and made to last outside, and even artwork. Also, the array of indoor/outdoor fabrics is incredible. Gone are the days of laminated fabrics for durability. These outdoor fabrics have the look and feel of indoor fabrics—from velvets to linens and even vinyls that look and feel like leather.

6 MERIDY KING Meridy King Interiors Atlanta, GA

- When you are dealing with a confined space that requires both a seating and a dining area, keep your furniture clean and fabrics simple. This will allow the area to flow and not feel cluttered.
- Be sure to attach all cushions when it comes to high rises [to prevent them from blowing away].

7 JASON OLIVER NIXON AND JOHN LOECKE Madcap Cottage High Point, NC

- When it comes to mixing colors, remember that if it works in your garden, it will work in your design schemes. So, yes, you can mix green and orange, yellow with pink.
- Don't forget dimmer switches, table lamps, candles, and music! There are great outdoor speakers that connect to your home's WiFi.
- Window treatments—such as patterned panels with a great trim—finish off the room. Indoor/outdoor rugs made of polypropylene that look like natural fiber rugs work wonderfully on porches and patios. There are so many great performance fabrics on the market—you can really get the form and the function.

8 BEVERLY FARRINGTON Accents of the South Huntsville, AL

- The subtle blending of proportion, scale, color, and light is the success to any room.
- I've always felt exterior spaces should be cohesive with the interior, designed to flow seamlessly from inside to out—not only in color and design but also with ease of access. I like to use low-profile steps and large landings to facilitate movement from one space to another.
- Sight lines are important in exterior spaces. They are used to draw a person in, whether physically or mentally. Have a focal point for the eye to rest on. And what's better than a water feature to relax and calm the soul?
- The idea of color is so interesting in exterior living spaces. The main focus of being outside is to feel a part of nature, and therefore, the plantings and landscape should dominate the color palette. For me, the upholstery should be neutral, an off-white, taupe, green, or blue—a color that becomes quiet in its surroundings, though it can be fun to repeat a vivid color found in the landscaping on an accent pillow or cushion.

9 ERIC ROSS Eric Ross Interiors Nashville, TN

- When decorating outdoor spaces, especially terraces, resist the urge to overdecorate. You don't have to try so hard to decorate the wonder that is God's creation. I amp up the plants and ceramics, so it's all easy to look at and easy to clean. Also, keep in mind that wind can be a real detriment to tabletop items, so be sure they are heavy, not just pretty.
- For porch living, the rules are fewer because you are in a more protected environment. I love to use outdoor curtains to give a sense of enclosure. With outdoor upholstery, I often do a contrasting fabric on the back cushions and welts to keep it more casual. Another must on a Southerner's porch is a blue ceiling. Try Babbling Brook from PPG/Porter Paints; it's a favorite. But don't use it inside, because it needs to be

saturated by the daylight to create the perfect effect.

- An easy way to refresh your outdoor living area is to change out all of your flowerpots. Over the seasons, they get cracked, faded, and tired-looking. By changing out all the containers, your space will look updated and well cared for.

10 ANITA RANKIN Anita Rankin Interior Design Fairhope, AL

- I am a porch person. When people say the kitchen is the heart of the home, I say the porch is the soul! We are fortunate in the South that we are able to use our porches year-round. Comfort is key; there are so many great outdoor fabrics, rugs, and upholstered pieces that it's easy to create a room outside that's comfortable and easy to maintain.
- I like slipcovers not only for ease of washing, but you can also change colors and patterns with the seasons.
- As in any room, lighting is key. I love to use gas lanterns when possible, as they have that magical glow at night like nothing else. In addition, use lamps in the seating area and a chandelier that dims. If you have a vaulted ceiling, use spots that light up that feature. I always use dimmers on lighting so you can create [the mood] you need.



ERIC ROSS INTERIORS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EVIN KREIHBEI, EVIN PHOTOGRAPHY



J. BANKS DESIGN GROUP
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LYNDI LEARY PHOTOGRAPHY

- Fans are another must—several, if you have the space—to create a breeze, especially when you don't have any.
- My favorite porches have a dining table and as many chairs as it can handle for playing games, hosting family meals, or a fabulous dinner party. Music is a must, whether for a dance party or soft dinner music. I like to have a TV (preferably inside a cabinet) for watching sports or movies.
- When building, the depth of your space should be at least 12 feet for flexibility. Add more electrical outlets than you think you will need and include wiring for sconces, a sound system, TV, chandelier, fans, floodlights, and accent lights.

11 HANNAH ZOE FULTON

J. Banks Design Group
Hilton Head, SC

- Front porches have long been an integral part of a gracious Southern lifestyle. We love to include hanging beds, swings, and rocking chairs, as we welcome friends and neighbors to gather and linger. Garden stools and scattered tables offer spots to rest a coffee cup or a glass of sweet tea as you start or end your day.
- “Haint blue” painted ceilings also add to the allure of a Southern porch. The light blue tone was said to ward off haints, or evil spirits, looking to harm the family or home. Some people even believe it helps to keep insects away.

12 MARIE FLANIGAN

Marie Flanigan Interiors
Houston, TX

- When sprucing up your porch, prioritize functionality, durability, and comfort. Choose furniture pieces that will accommodate multiple uses, like lounging and dining, and use materials that will stand up to the elements. Furnishings made from teak, rattan, stone, concrete, and performance fabrics will all wear well over time.

- Make the space feel inviting by adding a soft outdoor rug underfoot, accent pillows, and throw blankets for chilly evenings.
- Throughout the year, be sure to properly care for your furnishings to ensure their longevity. Utilize furniture covers whenever possible. Also, consider moving furniture indoors when it won't be in use for an extended period of time.

13 MARY HANNON REID

Mary Hannon Reid Interiors
Winston-Salem, NC

- When designing an outdoor space, use elements that are architecturally relevant to your home. For example, if your home is brick, your outdoor space should include the same or similar brick. This creates a cohesive flow.
- Always consider the scale of your outdoor area. It should not take over the home; it should be an extension of the home.
- Always design a focal point. I like to base this on the client's interests. Do they like to cook outside? A beautiful outdoor kitchen would be an important focal point. Do they enjoy sitting by the fire or looking at their garden? Many times Mother Nature makes this decision easy, especially when the house has an amazing water view or is in the mountains.
- Create an element of surprise and give yourself and your guests a change of scenery. A garden path or a staircase leading to an outdoor area is always a nice surprise.
- Keep a plethora of sidewalk chalk, bubbles, Popsicles, and anything else to lure children to play outside and enjoy outdoor spaces together.

14 LATHEM GORDON AND CATE DUNNING

GordonDunning Interior Design
Atlanta, GA

- We always treat porches like a continuation of the interior, and we make special considerations to layer accordingly. We encourage pillows, drapes, lighting, accessories, and rugs to be layered in the space, as if you were in an interior living area. If you have a screened porch, in many cases, you can even use a few interior pillows as long as they come inside for inclement weather.

15 TRACY DUNN

Tracy Dunn Design
Fort Lauderdale, FL

- I believe a porch design should be an extension of your indoor living aesthetic and style. I often say, “I like to bring the indoors out.”
- My favorite color scheme to work with when designing a porch is blue, white, and green, as these colors naturally reflect the outdoors. Additionally, I like to pop another color in with flowers or accessories, such as fuchsia bougainvillea, poppy red flowers, coral branches, or sea fans.
- Incorporating different layers of textures gives a porch depth and a feeling of ultimate comfort. My favorites are wicker, rattan, bamboo, a touch of lacquer, and plush upholstery. Adding an unusual piece like an antique iron mirror is fun, too.



GORDONDUNNING INTERIOR DESIGN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMILY FOLLOWILL