

EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN

Outdoor design diva discusses foolproof furnishings to dress up your outer sanctum.

By Alison Sisk



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With the vast inventory of to-die-for furnishings, flowy fabrics and fun frills on the market today (including stuff you'd never dream of displaying outside), the sky's the limit for outfitting your out-of-doors living environment. So how do you best navigate this back-to-nature bounty and pick the perfect props for your terrace-turned-living room? Well, thanks to internationally renowned design expert Sandra Espinet, prettifying up your patio can be an easy, breezy

undertaking if you follow a few important pointers. But because it's not like us to leave you high and dry, here we present Espinet's artful advice for fashioning a sure-to-please space that will radiate style from the inside out.

Thankfully, the outdoor furnishing realm has come a long way since the days of splintery-wood picnic tables and plastic-strapped lawn chairs, with modern motifs making open-air rooms that rival their interior counterparts. "In

the '80s, everybody felt that the outside was 'outside,'" says Espinet, owner and senior designer of San Jose del Cabo, Mexico-based Interiors by Sandra Espinet. "Now we have outdoor rugs, which we never had before, we decorate the outside with cabana curtains—[there are] all kinds of things now to create patios that look like living rooms."

What's particularly popular for fashioning an alluring alfresco ambiance, according to Espinet? Pocket doors

This umbrella and pair of chairs by Summer Classics creates the perfect setup for relaxing outdoors.



that, when slid open, create an airy pass-through from the interior living space to the exterior one—not only maximizing square footage but also supplying a seamless transition from one area to the other.

Another hot trend: cabana curtains. “A lot of homes we’re doing right now have outdoor curtains,” she says. “If the sun is in a certain area of the pavilion, you can close them. And it also helps to create that [feeling of being] a part of the inside.”

An oversized orbit chair that spins and comes with bulky pillows and its own canopy is a decadent way to deck out your alfresco den, Espinet says. “It’s so comfortable,” she says. “We’ve used that in several jobs, and I think it’s one of the coolest things that’s come out in a long time.”

Couples who enjoy hanging out side-by-side are also doing double-takes for double chaises, another stellar seller. “Those are fun,” Espinet says. “We do a lot of those.”

Other add-ons in Espinet’s arsenal include candles, lamps, stone console tables with mirrors above and hanging daybeds. “They’re fabulous,” she says. “We take a queen- or full-size mattress—depending on the size of the room—to the balcony, and then we have our carpenter use tension wire to hang it from the ceiling and build the living room around that.”

Customized tile-mosaic tabletops are hot, as well.

“Since I’m trying to bring the inside out, I wouldn’t want to pick just any tile and make it look like any table. I want it to look special. When you’re doing high-end [design], I think customization is very important,” she says. Espinet hand-selects the tile to precisely match the home’s interior and then has her tile artist craft the design. “Everybody seems to love them,” she says of the tops, which are held up by ultra-heavy iron or stone bases. “They are very popular, durable, look good and are unique because they’re a one-of-a-kind piece just for that client. And it’s also so easy to find beautiful outdoor fabrics to go with them.”

Speaking of fabrics, Espinet says outdoor ones have improved in spades. “In the ‘80s, there was just pario-furniture-looking fabric,” she says. “But nowadays, they have chenille that looks exactly like indoor fabrics. There are sheer fabrics for outdoor curtains that look just like inside curtains.”

As for outdoor furnishings, Espinet no longer uses wood because of maintenance issues, instead opting for all-weather wicker. “Wicker in the old days would rot, but now it doesn’t because it’s not actually wicker—it’s a synthetic made to look like wicker,” she says. “And you can use it inside or outside. It looks great either/or.”

Believe it or not, Espinet actually uses traditionally indoor-only items outdoors, including antique tables, wall

Various seating types and areas set the scene for easy entertaining.