

# Homeowners want to bring their living spaces outdoors

Marlaina Cockcroft, Special to The Record 9:34 p.m. ET Feb. 24, 2017



(Photo: Courtesy of Creative Design Constructing & Remodeling)

Homeowners want to bring their living spaces outdoors, but not *completely* outdoors, according to North Jersey designers and contractors.

As outdoor kitchens and living areas become more sophisticated, with couches, fire pits, fireplaces and more, homeowners are looking for ways to keep their patios and decks away from the sun.

“We’re doing a lot of covered patios,” says Glen Lumia, president and chief executive officer of Creative Design Construction & Remodeling in Northvale. Those patios are either attached to the home, detached or part of a cabana, he says. Clients have been asking for sun protection, too. “We’re looking for different, creative ways to block sun without blocking light to the house,” says Lumi, including powered screens that retract when not

needed to block the bugs. “A lot of people will ask for the screened-porch option, but then not want to look at the screens all year,” he notes. Homeowners can press a button or their phone to retract them.

Another option Lumia’s company offers is an underdeck – finishing the underside of a second-story deck so that residents can stay out of the sun or remain dry when it’s raining. A house with a walk-out basement can have a full deck on the first floor.

Lumia, three-time president of the Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern New Jersey, says he used to get asked for covered porches maybe once a year, but such requests are now much more common. In the last six or seven years, more people are investing money in outdoor projects. Such projects can take between three and seven weeks to finish, he says, and can range from modest to high end, depending on the materials used.

One high-end project in Old Tappan, for instance, featured a bluestone patio and stone fireplace, and was designed to be maintenance-free. A more modestly priced two-story project in Mahwah featured a trellis meant to shade the deck at the hottest point of the day, and an underdeck with a gutter system. The trellis will periodically need water-stain removal, though the aluminum underdeck won’t need maintenance.

“For myself, I did a cabana with a screened area. It really extended the season,” Lumia says. “We open our pool now in early April, sometimes even late March, depending on the weather. But last year, we put the cover on the day before Thanksgiving.” He also uses a fireplace and small heaters similar to those that restaurants use for outdoor dining.

Sun exposure is a bigger issue for people now, says Lumia, who’s had firsthand experience: He and his wife have both dealt with skin cancer. “It’s something that’s happening more and more,” he says. “We grew up in the sun, we were sun worshippers. Now we pay the price.”



Deck with trellis over an underdeck at a home in Mahwah. (Photo: Courtesy of Creative Design Constructing & Remodeling)

Residents can always walk out of a covered area and enjoy the sun, “but you’re not obligated to stay in it,” Lumia says.

The furniture and materials used in outdoor spaces have gotten more stylish as well, says George Vallone, president of the Hoboken Brownstone Co. in Jersey City. His company has created a number of multi-unit residences – including Maxwell Place on the Hudson in Hoboken and Van Leer Place in Jersey City – that feature rooftop decks.

“It’s as comfortable as your living room furniture,” Vallone, also chairman of the board of the New Jersey Builders Association, says of current patio sets. And where his company previously used pressurized lumber for the finish on roof decks, the crew now uses more high-end, durable finishes such as ipe wood or composite materials.

Outdoor kitchens are a booming business, according to Will Evertz, president of Eastern Outdoor Furnishings in Totowa. When the company launched in 2008, it designed eight outdoor kitchens. Last year, the company did 562 kitchens for clients nationwide, from Boston to Key West, and about 300 to 400 kitchens in the Bergen County area. “The trend is just exploding,” Evertz says. “We just find people are spending more time in their backyards, not really going out on vacations or renting the Shore houses.”

Another big trend is fire features. Evertz reports getting a lot of requests for fire pits and fireplaces, saying customers are “getting away from your standard dining room table and they’re creating more of a lounge-y kind of area, where it’s couches, big comfortable chairs outside, surrounding a fire pit.” He says many of their designs lately include outdoor fireplaces with weather-resistant, waterproof televisions above them. The flatscreens range from \$3,000 to \$24,000, depending on size, Evertz says.

Creative Design also creates fire features, and as part of one recent project, added fire bowls to either side of a pool overlooking a reservoir in Woodcliff Lake. The bowls switch on and off by phone, Lumia says.

Though most fire features (which can be either wood or gas) are designed for visual impact and warmth and not meant for, say, roasting marshmallows, Evertz does offer a fire pit that comes with a pizza stone and grill grates.

Eastern Outdoor Furnishings uses drawings from the homeowner or contractor to create a 3-D rendering of the design and build the kitchen, then ships the materials to the job site. This condenses the process “from about three weeks to about three days,” says Evertz, who adds that the kitchens range from \$4,000 to \$90,000.

Tastes in furniture have changed, Evertz says. “Five years ago, everyone was into that teak furniture, and now we find that it’s just declined rapidly. People just didn’t like the maintenance of it, the wear and tear on it. They constantly have to be sanding it, finishing it, if they don’t want that weathered look.” Cast-aluminum furniture is still the most popular, he says.

Evertz says his company uses stainless-steel appliances and natural stone, “so there’s really nothing that can go wrong,” and only granite counter tops. “Granite’s been in the ground for millions of years – nothing’s going to happen to it within the next 30.”

Eastern Outdoor Furnishings is a debut exhibitor this year at the “New Jersey Home Show,” which runs March 10-12 at the New Jersey Convention Center in Edison. Evertz says they’re doing the show “to create awareness and get the ball rolling for all the customers.” Now is the time to schedule outdoor projects, he says. “We’re already back-ordered, probably about 35 outdoor kitchens right now. In the height of our season, we can get back-ordered up to 80 or 90 of them.”

At least three exhibitors will be focusing on patios and decks this year, says Eric Udler, producer of the home show. Customer surveys reveal an increased interest in outdoor kitchens, he says, citing an improved economy as a factor. “Everybody wants to dress up their outdoor space,” he says, and these people are looking for ideas.

Udler says vendors book 80 percent of their business for the year because of the show, which is expected to draw more than 20,000 attendees over the course of the weekend. “People are planning now what they’re going to do for their spring projects, summer projects,” he says.

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