

Southern Accents

BEAUTIFUL HOMES, GRACIOUS LIVING, A SENSE OF PLACE



**Make the
Most of Your
SUMMER**

**96 Ideas for
Outdoor Living,
Decorating &
Entertaining**

DECORATING | OUTDOOR LIVING

Dressed for Summer

A backyard designed for entertaining makes a fashionable setting for a plain air party



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—architect John Carraway

BIRMINGHAM IS ONE OF THOSE CITIES WITH LOTS OF SHADE, so even in the hottest months—namely July and August—relief is possible, unless the humidity gets you. That’s why we all seem to congregate around pools and under trees and awnings. But it’s one thing to put a table and chairs on the back porch, and quite another to furnish an outdoor living space that’s as inviting as your living room, and a whole lot more airy.

When I first pulled into the drive of this Alabama home, I knew my task, but had yet to see the space. My company LP Design focuses on outdoor spaces, from large containers and their fillers to pillows, furniture, and accessories. You might say I’m an exterior designer (a term I coined for lack of an explanation for all we do). The homeowner was expecting a small gathering of friends for a luncheon later that week, and the rear garden needed a bit of fluffing.

As I walked through the custom-designed shuttered doors into the back garden, I saw an area that was chic and uncluttered. The porch is long and deep, with an antique harvest table and mismatched chairs on one end, and a sitting area with heirloom caned seating on the other. The scattered pillows are a mix of bubble gum pink and chartreuse. The only real flourishes

The stacked porches are an ideal backdrop for an outdoor party in the heat of summer. The color palette complements interior colors, while the furniture selection and table setting connect to the garden. Margot Shaw puts the final touches on the summer flower- and vegetable-inspired table.

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that were needed were containers that reflected the color palette and fit with the classic lines of the rest of the garden. This is a house that was planned not only for indoor living, but also for enjoying the outdoors.

“We looked for the most comfortable place and usable space for everything,” says Birmingham architect John Carraway. “It’s not just a house where the grounds are an afterthought. It’s a garden, a pool, and a house.” Inside, beyond the five sets of double doors, there’s a parallel living space, a den on the left and a galley-style office on the right. This blueprint allows for constant, uninterrupted flow. “This is an old recipe for hanging inside and out. Early Charleston houses didn’t have air conditioners. Doors were always open, and big covered areas were a necessity for shade,” he says.

Garden designer Mary Zahl of Winter Garden, Florida, envisioned the landscape as a multiuse space: big enough for parties, cozy enough for family, and welcoming for

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Mary Zahl

pets. There was also a need for privacy. “The house has three sides facing public spaces, so the gardens are very visible. The back had to provide a private living area for the family,” explains Zahl. “The rows of crab apples on one side are a balancing act for the pool house/garden shed on the opposite side, both framing and visually protecting the home.” The pool, surrounded by grass, is unobtrusive, blending in with the landscape. “I prefer not to have a deck around the pool if feasible because aesthetically there’s nothing to interrupt the line, and it’s pretty. Besides, grass is so much cooler to sit on than paving,” she says. Zahl purposefully mixed lounge chairs and Adirondacks. “The pool area is not just for swimming but also for looking at and sitting around when it may be too chilly to swim. The simple selection of chairs instead of all loungers adds months to the enjoyment of the space,” she adds.

Entertaining is effortless here. Margot Shaw, a relative of the homeowners and the

editor of *Flower* magazine, arrived the day of the luncheon to select an area for a summer-inspired table. “I’ve helped set parties in the orchard with silver and china, but I adore simple alfresco dining on the porch. It’s wonderful because you can go from living room to porch to pool. You can have 6 guests here or 106,” says Shaw.

For this event, Shaw took her cues from the pillows and flowers in the garden, and gave the day a color identity. “The designs on the pillows and tablecloth are very fun and graphic. I echoed those colors and shapes in my arrangements,” she says.

The homeowners have lots of style, but they’re down-to-earth too. Everything about this garden is here to stay for years or even decades. The plants may change, and the fabrics may be updated, but this space will always be used. It just works—for reading the morning paper, for putting their feet up, or for the splashiest summer pool party. ♦

Five Secrets for Planning an Outdoor Space

- 1 **Think about your own comfort.** “Ask yourself how you’ll use the space,” says architect John Carraway. Establish whether it’s for kids and fun, for more grown-up entertaining, just a place to relax, or all of the above.
- 2 **Consider your views both from the house and toward the house.** “The outdoor space has to not only relate to your interior but also be a spot that draws you outside naturally,” says garden designer Mary Zahl.
- 3 **Pay attention to the details.** There should be comfortable chairs and a place to set a glass. Good lighting is key for afternoon parties that extend into the evening.
- 4 **Keep herb gardens close to the house and kitchen.** They’re beautiful, and you want them handy when you need them. They also serve as fragrant foundations for a fresh arrangement.
- 5 **Pots should vary in height** and be filled with plants that are fragrant as well as colorful. Select one plant, such as boxwood, that can be there year-round, and then add flowers and a trailing vine to keep the pot looking current.