

Taking it outside

Building an outdoor structure for recreation or relaxation requires a good eye for design and proper planning

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Match the materials with those used for the house.



Design by Urban Revolutions.

For some, creating an outdoor room involves nothing more than setting aside a paved area, covering it with a shade sail or umbrella and giving it a sense of definition and privacy with hedging or potted plants. For others, an outdoor room is a built structure; somewhere we go to relax and escape from everyday home life and a place where we can entertain in style and comfort. In short, the purpose-built outdoor room is the fulfilment of the dream Aussie lifestyle.

Whether it be a gazebo, pavilion or cabana, an outdoor kitchen, a freestanding pergola, a summer house or a tea house, similar design, planning and construction considerations are involved.

Current design trends say that the garden — and any outdoor structures within — should function

as an extension of the house; also that these outdoor structures should be well-designed living areas with all the mod cons, luxuries and comforts of an interior living room. At the upper end of the market, this takes the form of elaborate stand-alone resort-style outdoor structures with fully equipped kitchens and plumbing, which means they need the same professional planning, design, and construction as the house itself. Council approval will almost certainly be necessary.

Your local council needs to know that any new structure will be properly sited, designed and built. Another consideration is that an additional structure in your backyard will increase the hard surface area and decrease deep soil zones. This has an effect on stormwater run-off as well as the local microclimate

and wildlife habitat. However, it's possible to build an outdoor structure while being sensitive to the relevant planning requirements and making the most of your remaining green space.

The essential ingredient for an outdoor structure is a connection with the outside environment. This can be achieved via the layout (for example, it might be a U-shaped pavilion around a central garden), by the placement of windows and doors to take advantage of existing views and vistas or by having an open-air building that may have retractable screens and awnings. Other possibilities to ensure the outdoor connection include green walls and planter boxes or pots inside the outdoor room.

There are many creative and unique ways of



A covered deck extends the living space of the home.

outdoor structures

integrating an outdoor structure into your landscape and home. The outdoors is the perfect setting for fun, relaxation or concentration and, whatever your lifestyle and personality, there's an outdoor structure to suit.

You might use a cabana for poolside entertaining to take advantage of your landscape and pool long into the evening. You might have an outdoor games room that can be used as a teenagers' retreat or a kids' play room where they can be surrounded by nature and fresh air. Perhaps a summer house-style structure is what you crave — somewhere quiet for contemplation, reading, meditation or yoga, or you might be in need of a studio space for work or hobbies.

In terms of style, you can opt for a theme (such as a Japanese tea house or a Balinese hut). When it comes to design and décor, taking your cues from the architecture of the house and the interior décor of your home is recommended if you want to give the whole outdoor area — including your outdoor room and the house — a co-ordinated look.

All outdoor structures should have plenty of natural light and good ventilation, lest they feel like just another indoor environment. Comfortable seating is a must for just about any type of outdoor structure — for alfresco dining, casual socialising or catching a few Zs in peace.

You might also like to consider using soundproof walls if you're in a busy urban area, you plan to include a weatherproof plasma television or if you and your neighbours have differing ideas about loud parties.

The site of an outdoor structure will first depend on the amount of space available and second on the intended function of the room. An outdoor room for entertaining would be best situated closer to the house so you can move between the two areas comfortably. If you have space and you want a more secluded outdoor room to give you the sense of "getting away from it all", locate it distanced from the



Natural stone features heavily in this elegant gazebo.



An outdoor pool room and bike storage area combined.

house. You can then turn the journey from one to the other into an exercise in pleasure with a meandering paved path flanked by lush garden beds.

This brings us to an important point: be sure to have your outdoor structure designed with the landscape and house in mind to complement the style of both and avoid the tacked-on look of a hastily erected pergola or the “sticks out like a sore thumb” look of a structure whose design and colour is at odds with all around it.

An outdoor room of any construction should be similar to the house — not only in style, but in quality and building materials. Either a cheap pergola on a good-quality house or a state-of-the-art cabana teamed with a slightly cheaper house will look odd.

This doesn't mean that you can't use different materials for the house and outdoor structure, just that they need to have similar embellishments, colours or themes to tie them together so the new structure looks like it was meant to be, not an ill-conceived after-thought.

Spare a thought for all the practical issues of construction at the planning and design stage. A new gazebo might be a great idea and there might be the ideal spot for it in a protected corner of your backyard, but if there is no rear access to your property, you may be up for additional costs and headaches.

Construction means equipment such as earthmovers, rubbish skips, piles of materials, trucks and lots of people tramping in and out of your yard. If there's no driveway access to the backyard there may be no cost-effective way of getting the materials and machinery in to build, unless you happen to have a crane handy.

You also need to ask yourself if you have left provision in your budget for those unexpected costs that commonly arise during construction, just as they do during any new home build or renovation project. To get the whole package right — from the budget to the design to the construction — you'll need professional advice. You might like to consult a landscape designer who can recommend a landscape constructor to complete your project or you could look for a landscaper with design and construction experience. Whichever path you chose, with expert advice you can have the outdoor room of your dreams and one that will be an asset for years to come.



A pergola provides a spacious outdoor room for dining.