

Title: Outdoors

Lead: Australia's outdoor areas are evolving, from cheery patios into well-groomed settings with all the comforts of the indoors – except a roof.

'Designers are approaching outdoor areas as an extension of indoor rooms,' says Andrea D'Cruz of interior design firm RLD. She lists weather-resistant lounges and the concealment of unsightly bins, compost units or wiring as important things to consider, while cooking areas should be designed as deliberate gathering points or tucked well out of sight.

Lighting can be another dynamic element of outdoor areas. 'Instead of the spotlight approach, we use landscape lighting to highlight slopes, steps and garden features, along with border lighting to show an area's periphery after dark,' D'Cruz says.

Architects will point out that sophisticated outdoor areas are nothing new, having important precedents in Asia and early 20th century Modernism. 'There's been a conservative lag in Australia,' notes architect Stephen Varady.

Nicholas Tobias of architecture and design firm Tobias Partners names the Italian loggia – originally a colonnaded outdoor passageway – as another great influence on outdoor design. Loggias are the semi-enclosed verandahs seen in many new apartments.

'Covered outdoor areas are an important part of the transition between inside and out. Many things that make an interior space comfortable can exist here – such as feature lights and pot plants,' he says, describing the loggia at his own 1920s home.

And outdoor spaces would lack much charm – and usability – without greenery. Matthew Cantwell at Secret Gardens of Sydney says plants bring privacy and shading, and stimulate the senses with their colours and scents.

'Right now, flowers are coming back – people want "pretty" again,' Cantwell says. Flowering gums, dwarf acacias and ornamental grasses are all soft in appearance, while meeting the current criteria for drought-tolerance.

Cantwell muses on Australia's baby boom as being another recent influence on landscaping. 'We get many requests for gardens centring on kids: colourful flowerbeds, vegetable gardens and mini amphitheatres all come to mind,' he says.

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