

THE ELEMENTS

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS SHARE SOME OF THE HOTTEST BACKYARD TRENDS FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST

by Gary James

ON THE HEELS OF THE FIRST PART OF OUR ELEMENTS SERIES, FIRE IN FEBRUARY, THIS MONTH WE EXAMINE THE EARTH. TURNS OUT, LANDSCAPE architects have more than just the outdoor footprint to consider—and, in some cases, larger budgets to work with—as they create and enhance clients' outdoor areas. To get a sense of some of the trends, *Casual Living* interviewed two leading landscape architects in Florida and Arizona, and two firms in California and Washington, D.C., as web exclusives. So be sure to go to casualiving.com for the total package on how landscape architects are influencing the 5th room.

With heat and lighting elements more accessible and affordable than ever, outdoor areas are evolving into near year-round destinations in many parts of the country, including northern regions. And thanks to the development of new, more weather-resistant materials, products that used to be confined to indoor use—built-in kitchens, televisions, and floor and wall décor—are now becoming popular add-ons in outdoor spaces.

There's no doubt about it—the outdoor room has arrived, whether it's a sprawling estate in Miami or a desert abode in Arizona. Homeowners are showing increased interest in creating beautiful, multifunctional outdoor spaces where they can gather with family and friends to dine, socialize, play and relax. On the following pages, you'll see two projects that will make you sit back and say "ahh."





Bell Landscape Architecture designed a new yoga pavilion, walkways and gardens for the Casa Baja bayside estate in Miami. The pool area includes a variety of luxurious lounging and chat furniture. The lush plantings feature a sturdy, salt-tolerant palette.

TROPICAL MODERN ON THE RISE

In Miami, tropical modern styling is a hot trend in landscape architecture, reflecting the sophisticated, clean-lined homes that are popular in the higher end of the market.

Many of these homes have huge glass walls on the back of the house or a central, open-air courtyard, so that exteriors and interiors flow effortlessly from one space to the other, according to Deena Bell Llewellyn, founder of Bell Landscape Architecture and president-elect of the Florida chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

In the outdoor spaces of these multimillion-dollar manses, clients request that designers integrate a range

of upscale features. “We’re designing elaborate swimming pools and spas; custom-made, over-the-top water features; and fancy outdoor kitchens with the latest stainless steel appliances and all the bells and whistles, such as pizza ovens, wine coolers and deep fryers,” Bell Llewellyn says.

To deliver such projects, her team must work more closely with the site architect as well as with the interior designer. “There’s a lot of collaboration at every stage, starting with the site’s master plan, when we program out where the kitchen, the pool, the fire pit and other key elements will be,” she says.

These elements require extensive infrastructure so that water and gas are

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Bell Landscape Architecture project

Photo credits by (from top) Steven Brooke Studios and Robin Hill. Bottom: Architecture by Jaya Kader.



Coffman Studio created a multifunctional outdoor space for this home in the Phoenix area.

available in specific places on the master plan. Bell Llewellyn's husband, Charles, is a general contractor, a distinct advantage for the firm.

"The design process today is so much more complex," she says. "Water management alone is a big issue since Miami sits on a high water table and flooding poses a constant threat."

The average budget that Bell Landscape Architecture has for projects generally starts at \$200,000. For high-profile clients, such as NBA stars or entertainers, a garden design might run as high as \$2.5 million. In addition to tropical modern, the firm develops projects in a wide range of styles including cottage and Mediterranean.

With all its work, the company aims to create designs that enable clients to make the most of their space. In many cases, yards are expan-

sive and can accommodate a variety of settings.

"They might have a front-entry courtyard with water features and furniture where guests can have cocktails," she says. "That courtyard

with furnishings as well as a boat dock.

When it comes to materials, lately the firm has been using a lot of ipe for decks, and native Florida keystone and Coralina stone from

In Arizona, where consistently warm temps encourage residents to spend time outdoors, exterior spaces always have been an important part of the lifestyle.

might lead to a garden with a breakfast nook. In another area, they'll have an elaborate outdoor dining room with a formal feel under a trellis structure, complete with outdoor chandeliers."

On the perimeter of the property, there might be additional areas to lounge, or a secret garden for practicing yoga. And, if the estate is near the water, there will be additional gathering spots

the Dominican Republic for paving and decorative applications. Terrazzo has also come back in style.

"The color and design options are unlimited," Bell Llewellyn says. Her firm incorporates marble and glass aggregate with concrete to create custom pavers and countertops for outdoor kitchens. Recycled materials are more popular, particularly in projects where sustainable

design is a goal. (Turn to p. 42 for an environmental piece, "Down to Earth.")

To provide clients with additional options, Bell Landscape Architecture designs a custom line of planters, benches, fountains, sculptures and tables called Bell-la Furnishings.

MAKING USE OF SPACE

In Arizona, where consistently warm temperatures encourage residents to spend lots of time outdoors—save the extreme-heat months of July and August—exterior spaces always have been an important part of local lifestyles.

In the past, a swimming pool with a small covered patio area took up the bulk of many backyards. Today, quite a few homeowners are reclaiming this space so it can host a broader range of activities.

“In one recent project, the homeowner had removed the pool and asked us to create a new area so they could do more than just swim,” says Jim Coffman, president of Coffman Studio in Tempe. “We took that space and created a wonderful retreat with a dining nook near the house, a living room-like gathering spot in the middle and a separate fire pit lounging area on the side.” The transformation (*right*) includes room for plantings and a small strip of artificial turf, as well as a chaise lounge and an outdoor shower outside the master bathroom.

Low-voltage lighting enlivens the entire yard, while the turf front yard is partially converted to a water-sensitive design that maintains concordance with the existing lush neighborhood.

FIRE AND LIGHT

More than 90% of the firm’s projects have some sort of fire element—either a decorative fire pit or a fireplace. “Fire pits are the most popular,” Coffman says. “People love being able to sit under the stars with loved ones or friends. It gives being outside a whole different feeling.”

And, yes, Arizona does get cool enough in the evenings in November and December when a little extra heat is needed—and welcome.

Lighting is another popular element receiving more play in Arizona backyards. His firm deploys lighting in two ways—to illuminate circulation paths for added safety and to add a touch of drama.

“We like to highlight a few interesting focal points in the space because everything looks so much different at night,” he says. While cost is always an issue with lighting,



Coffman project

homeowners show an increased willingness to invest in this area. Low-energy LED lights are particularly popular.

When it comes to the design aesthetic, Coffman says his clients fall into two groups: They either want the space to look colorful yet “deserty” and blend into the local setting, or they want something sleek, clean and modern.

“Since so many people move here from other states, they’re happy to leave behind the types of yards they had in the Midwest and East, which involved mowing or raking leaves,” Coffman says. For these clients, his studio suggests using local plants such as succulents, cacti, agaves and perennials that provide a Southwestern flavor.

Because the bright Arizona sun can quickly damage wood, Coffman often uses a porcelain tile that looks like wood rather than the timber decking that’s so prevalent in northern markets. “The

tile doesn’t need to be sealed or sanded and has a rich, organic look,” he says.

To conserve water, Coffman recommends that clients use colorful, native plants that can hold up to extreme heat. And while water features are still a popular element, they play a supporting role—adding a touch of sparkle and sound—rather than being the star of the show.

As is true of other regions, providing space for a quality grill is a must-have in all the firm’s designs. “We’re not seeing full-blown outdoor kitchens, but we are doing more built-in grills with nearby seating and bar setups,” Coffman says. “People also want a place where they can store things when they’re not in use.”

Similarly, the furnishings in his spaces are interchangeable and portable, so they can do double-duty and not be glued to one spot. Styles and colors pick up on themes from the indoors, as do

the materials and colors of walkways, which often flow from a sliding glass door that leads to similar flooring on the inside.

Coffman adds that most of his designs lately have been in the \$20,000–\$100,000 range—and business has been good. “We’re doing a lot of residential designs,” he says. “People are recognizing the value in their backyards, and are more willing to try something new.” **CL**

