



## **Creating Your Outdoor Oasis**

By: Masterworks Construction Services, Inc.

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With our amazing year-round weather in Southern California it's no surprise that our team at Masterworks Construction Services has seen an increase in our outdoor living projects. Projects that are varied in depth and range, from complete backyard redesigns that have included outdoor kitchens, dining areas, fire pits, bars, lighting, water features and landscaping, to smaller projects like BBQ islands and small front yard seating areas. We have even built an elegant custom chicken coop.

There is no doubt that outdoor living spaces are popular now. "Next to energy efficiency, perhaps no other market trend is changing the landscape of home design than outdoor living," David Barista, editor-in-chief of Professional Builder, wrote in a recent column on his website. Adding or enhancing an outdoor living space can also be a great investment in your property value. A National Association of Realtors survey shows more than half of surveyed buyers would pay a premium for a home with an outdoor living space.

Perhaps you have been thinking about creating your dream outdoor oasis or maybe just tackling some small improvements to your back or front yard – where do you start? We hope this short primer of ideas and planning strategies will help get things going in the right direction. Whether you'll tackle the project on your own or plan to hire a professional, these first steps should help make you better prepared to start and plan for your project.

### **Brainstorm and Imagine**

It may seem obvious, yet it is important to spend time in the space you plan on improving. Experience the space at various times during the day and night, imaging what features you would like and where you would like them. Observe the seasons and the changing light and how the path of the sun moves throughout the space.



If you have small kids, think about what kind of plan will match their needs and your dreams as the family grows through the years.

Think about proportions. Be careful not to imagine your new space so large that it takes over your yard. On the other hand, a large yard with a tiny patio won't feel right either. Keep your plans proportional.

Consider privacy. No matter how nice you make your outdoor space, you'll never use it if you feel like your neighbors are watching your every move. Your renovation may need to include a budget for nice fencing or privacy landscaping.

If you're considering how your renovation will affect your home value, as with any home renovation, you must keep your neighborhood in mind. If yours is the only home with high-end features like a stone pizza oven, outdoor fireplace or entertainment system, you probably won't get much return for your investment. Stick with functional items you'll actually use – "keeping it simple" is sometimes the best strategy.

Don't forget to "future proof" your project by considering improvements that may not fit in your budget now, but that you may want to add later. For example, if you plan on eventually installing an outdoor kitchen, but have the budget only to lay the concrete patio first, be sure to consider where plumbing, electrical and gas lines should be installed before the patio is built.

Dream big and make a wish list of all your wants and needs, prioritized by necessity. This list will be helpful to you and/or your design professional throughout the development of your project.



## Research

Do your homework. There are tons of resources on the Internet to develop ideas. Research what others have done and use them to your advantage.

Make an inspiration board to bring all of your ideas together. This will help you and/or your professional develop a design according to your wishes. Websites like Pinterest and Houzz have excellent tools for organizing your ideas.

Tour the community and learn what your neighbors have done - right and wrong. Some communities have annual open house tours to showcase your neighbors beautiful homes and yards.

Visit professionally maintained botanical gardens. Experiencing a wide variety of plants, flowers and trees at various stages of maturity will help you with your landscaping selections. Look for architectural elements such as seating arrangements, shade structures, lighting and water features which may give you ideas to further develop the design of your outdoor living space.

Research and consider incorporating environmentally friendly landscaping solutions and lighting. Not only would you be doing your part to help the environment; but "Going Green" may be more cost effective in the long run.

Lastly, look into your city's building and planning regulations and, if necessary, obtain the proper permitting before you start your project. Also, if your community is part of an association be sure to research your neighborhood bylaws early in the planning stages; avoiding the disappointment of having a key part of your outdoor living renovation squashed by an associations architectural committee.



## **Budget**

If you're going the D.I.Y route, take the wish list you developed during the project brainstorming and research stages and use it to develop at budget. Estimate the cost of construction labor and materials to come up with a ballpark figure for your project that fits in your budget. Always add some padding to make room for unforeseen expenditures that usually arise with any home renovation.

If you are planning on hiring a professional, having a personal budget (with wiggle room for unforeseen expenses) and your wish list in hand will be an excellent start to finding a professional that will fit your pocketbook.

## **Hiring a Professional**

There are many ways to find professionals these days, but one of the best routes is through personal sources. Ask neighbors and friends for references. If you see work being done in the neighborhood, stop and chat with the homeowner and contractor and follow-up to see the results of the completed work. Be sure to ask the homeowner if they were happy with their experience and would recommend the contractor.

Sources like Houzz and Yelp are also excellent ways to find a contractor with good online reviews and the specific style you are considering for your design. However, be wary of misleading or inflated reviews. Before signing any contract be sure to thoroughly check the contractor's insurance and licensing credentials. Also, ask for referrals and arrange to speak with the referral; perhaps even visit their completed or under-construction project. For more information on "Hiring a General Contractor" you can check out our other [articles and videos here](#).

We hope that you will have a fantastic experience and amazing results in the creation of your outdoor oasis!