

Haven on Earth

Outdoor living areas provide comfort and relaxation to homeowners while bringing many green solutions to the plan.



While I normally have fun learning about new trends in green design, this one, outdoor living areas, made me just plain envious. As I gazed at the drool-worthy backyard escapes created by The Green Scene and Marin Outdoor Living, it never even occurred to me that these installations could be so green. I just kept imagining myself sipping a mint julep in my very own outdoor oasis.

When I finally stopped fantasizing (I live a pretty cloistered life), I called the innovators at these companies and learned a lot about what goes into these outdoor spaces. They aren't just amazingly beautiful outdoor living areas, they're very green in both the products installed and the construction methods used.

Scott Cohen of The Green Scene, Canoga Park, Calif., takes much inspiration from recycling. From the very beginning of the construction process, Cohen is always thinking of ways to re-use materials.

Upon initial construction, Cohen visits local refuse centers to obtain old concrete that can be ground into crushed gravel. He says this creates an excellent base under the patio.

"We also use old wood pallets for many things," says Cohen, "sometimes we re-use them to construct concrete molds for the patios; other times we use the wood to build garden walls."

Glass, especially, seems to inspire much creativity from the landscape artist. Because outdoor kitchens are a huge trend in backyard home improvement, Cohen sought more dramatic looks with a recycled twist to create the countertops and bar areas. His cast concrete countertops are mixed with crushed, colored glass. "The resulting surface is polished to a smooth finish which resembles granite," he says, "allowing light to reflect on the surface while the glass adds depth."

Loll Outdoor Furniture looks great, lasts longer than wood and is made from recycled milk jugs — the triple crown of environmentally-minded products. Photo courtesy of Loll Designs.

Cohen also builds interesting glass features into fountains and bar areas using recycled colored wine bottles obtained from a local wine shop. The resulting jaw-dropping creations are sometimes backlit for a more dramatic effect — especially at night.

Cohen also advises clients on which plants to choose and where to place them. "When designing landscape, it's important to consider tree, shrub and vine placement," he claims. "Plants can provide shade in the warmer months, but some also can provide warmth during colder months."

For instance, Cohen says you may want deciduous trees to shade a southern exposure patio. When those trees lose their leaves as the weather cools, the resulting space can allow sunlight into the home, thereby providing warmth. Conversely, coniferous trees that keep their "leaves" not only provide color during colder months, but also shield the house during cold, windy days.

"It's also important to group your plants by their water needs," asserts Cohen, "water will be wasted on the plants that are more drought-tolerant when watered the same way as those needing more."

Programmable timers that regulate the watering activity are an ideal way to control water consumption. "It's more effective, especially in areas where the soil has more clay and run-



Shown is The Liberty from Shademakers. Eco-friendly furniture options include dining, lounge, bar, and storage solutions. Photo courtesy of Michael Galica.



Combining crushed, recycled glass with cast concrete, Scott Cohen of *The Green Scene* creates one-of-a-kind polished “stone” surfaces for outdoor bars and kitchen areas. The resulting surface can be backlit for dramatic illumination. Photo courtesy of *The Green Scene*.

off is more prevalent,” says Cohen, “to water for 10 minutes, let the water soak in for a few hours, then repeat the 10-minute watering cycle throughout the day.”

Michael Galica, owner of Marin Outdoor Living in Greenbrae, Calif., also embraced the green philosophy when choosing products for outdoor living areas.

Fireplaces are an interesting focal point of many of Galica’s outdoor designs. The EcoSmart systems that he installs are not only great looking, they also burn energy-efficient denatured alcohol instead of wood or fuels. Adding to its design versatility, the fireplaces don’t need a flue, so designers can put them virtually anywhere inside or outside.



Even when not lit, EcoSmart fireplaces are not only gorgeous, their flueless design allows them to be placed virtually anywhere — indoors or outdoors. Additionally, the units burn eco-friendly denatured alcohol. Photo courtesy of Michael Galica.

Galica also offers some of the most energy-efficient spas available. He offers “athletic swim spa” models outfitted with strength training equipment or more typical “relaxation” spas. Crafted of recycled plastic, the designs include 100% closed-foam insulation allowing the units to retain heat when not in use. He claims, “a typical unit costs about \$80 to \$100 per month to run — these units bring those costs down to \$15 to \$25 per month.”

Providing natural, instant shade to block sunlight and cool patios, Shademakers canopies are made from 100% recyclable anodized aluminum that’s designed to withstand all of the elements. “If clients have a wind, sunrise or sunset issue,” says Galica, “these units can tilt, turn and spin to block the wind or sun and create a more comfortable patio while allowing clients to enjoy the outdoors.”

Other ecologically friendly furniture options include those manufactured by Duluth, Minn.-based, Loll Outdoor Furniture. Made of post-consumer, recycled HDPE, the maker claims their furniture is crafted of 90% recycled milk jugs. “Our website even provides the number of milk jugs used to make each piece of furniture,” says Nate Heydt, Loll sales manager.



In keeping with the recycled glass theme, Cohen arranges bottles obtained from a local wine merchant into colorful art for the outdoors. Photo courtesy of *The Green Scene*.

Aside from the obvious green benefits, Loll furniture’s edgy, contemporary designs fit well with most settings. Heydt adds, “It’s also a way to save money — you never have to paint them, they’ll last longer than wood-based furniture and because it’s weather-resistant, you can leave it outdoors all year round, eliminating the need for extra storage space.”

Because these are some spectacular ideas, I hope you’ll overcome garden envy, like me, and seek out some of these building technologies and products for your own backyard. 🌿

By Barbara J. McHatton

RESOURCES

EcoSmart Fire,

www.ecosmartfire.com

The Green Scene,

www.greenscenelandscape.com

Loll Outdoor Furniture,

www.lolldesigns.com

Marin Outdoor Living,

www.marinoutdoorliving.com

Shademakers,

www.shademakers.com