

Playing with a full deck

Timber, pavers and tiles can bring pizzazz and practicality to an indoor-outdoor lifestyle by merging the two areas seamlessly

These days it is no longer good enough to get by with a patch of grass and a Hills Hoist in your backyard, as outdoor areas are more likely to resemble extensions of the interior living areas and be equipped with all the bells and whistles needed to entertain in style.

If you are considering an outdoor overhaul, the starting point will be the floor covering, which might be timber decking, tiles, pavers or stone.

Secret Gardens of Sydney managing director Matt Cantwell says that timber decking has been a popular choice for a while now but he encourages clients to explore other options.

“Traditionally, decking was selected to negotiate major changes of levels so if your land fell away really quickly, it was a good way to achieve a level floor space,” he says.

“Decking has become so popular in the last 10 years that people have been using it more and more when they don’t have that complication.”

If you have level ground Matt recommends using tiles, pavers or stone.

“Typically when I’ve got a good nice level outside that relates to the interior of the house, I would never recommend timber because you’ve got to come in and excavate to get aeration under the deck and then retain around the perimeter, because

you’ve dug out ground level,” he says.

This doesn’t mean he would rule out timber altogether – it can be a great option when you have steep level changes and can also be incorporated in other ways.

“If clients request timber, for me it’s about designing for longevity so I would encourage them to get the timber elsewhere in screening or built-in seating.

“Timber decking can be great when you’ve got level changes. You can get your pool filtration equipment under it, you can get storage, you can create rooms under it.

“The best timber to use around pools is teak – but it’s quite expensive, otherwise tallowwood is quite good”

But when your site is level, I think, yes, you can do it if you absolutely must, but it becomes a very expensive option.”

Timber decking around pools is becoming increasingly popular for a resort-style look, Matt says.

“It’s not the most practical of materials around pools but it’s lovely to lie on a deck when you roll out of a pool,” he says.

“The best timber to use around pools is teak but it’s quite expensive, otherwise tallowwood is quite good.” →





SMALL POCKETS OF GREEN SPACE

Landscape architect Matthew Cantwell has built his business, Secret Gardens of Sydney, on creating beautiful pockets of green space in some of the smallest, narrowest blocks in inner Sydney.

Taking your cues from the proportions of your internal spaces, Matthew suggests creating at least two outdoor “rooms” or zones, which are more inviting than a single space.

“A lot of people will leave it as open as possible but an empty, plain garden doesn’t look bigger,” Matthew says.

Matthew suggests continuing joinery from the house into a paved garden area to create a built-in barbecue bench or seating, which can double as storage.

“You want enough length in the space to have entertaining and practical requirements and to make your garden into another room,” Matthew says.

Some kind of screening plant, such as bamboo, can be used to make a “wall” for the next room beyond.

Matthew says the key here is to direct guests to the next area via a path, or steps if the site is terraced, on the side of the garden.

“If you have the steps in a central position, it becomes a throughway where people don’t stop,” he says.

“But if you put them to the side, you invite people to stop.

“Children will engage in the space if they have their zone.

“It could be a reading garden or mini herb garden but you need to break up those long lines.” ■

● **MORE INFORMATION**
Secret Gardens of Sydney
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Low maintenance

Amber outdoor product manager Mike Barden says that for people who want something more low-maintenance than timber, or just a different look, exterior tiles, pavers, natural stone and concrete are other options.

“If you want to keep the lovely look of timber, there’s a lot of work that goes into it,” Mike says. “With a clay paver or stone, or something like that, what you see now is what you’re going to get in 10 years time. And concrete pavers are a lot better than they used to be. They do fade but it’s very, very gradual.”

A seamless flow between indoors and outdoors can be easily achieved with stone and tiles.

“Travertine is very popular these days and what people will do is use the travertine inside in tile thickness and as they move outside they’ll use the same product in paver thickness.”

When choosing a natural product, such as stone, it is important to remember there

will be natural variations in each piece.

“If you are going to use stone, people need to understand that it is a natural product. The piece that you see on display isn’t exactly what you get. So, if you’re looking for a natural product, just expect that it will vary from paver to paver.”

Mike says that large-format tiles, particularly concrete tiles, are still a strong trend.

“We’re finding these days that trends start at the coast and they work their way back in. You find that there are a lot more darker colours, particularly in browns and charcoals,” he says. ■

Alice Wasley

● MORE INFORMATION

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