

## OUTWARD BOUND: TRANSFORMING YOUR PATIO INTO A PARADISE FOUND



Some people are eager to hit the road as the quarantine rules progressively ease, while others are intent on playing things safe. No matter what your outlook on the future of travel is in the long run, the summer of 2020 promises to be quiet and low key. For this reason, Florida-based interior designer Perla Lichi points out that the ultimate silver lining of this dark, brooding cloud is incentive to transform your backyard in to a little slice of heaven that belongs to you and your family.

Lichi, however, says the process will require a little more planning beyond scouring Pinterest and various home design magazines. Ultimately, your goal will be to work with a skilled professional to create an outdoor space on your property that reflects your past travels, present outdoor pursuits and future ambitions. Furthermore, it also needs to be in harmony with the interiors of your home.

“When creating or rethinking your patio, the first thing to consider is the square footage and shape,” says Lichi. “A good floor plan for your outdoor space is essential because scale and proportion will inform what furniture and décor will work and how the various pieces should be arranged. There also needs to be flow between the outdoors and the indoor space adjoining the patio. Once we establish the floor plan based on the size and shape of the outdoor space, we then set out to create what I’m going to call it the flavor of the space. Finding the right flavor or style of the outdoor space involves connecting it to what’s happening in the indoor interior.”



Lichi also stresses that the homeowner's lifestyle factors into good patio design. Are you somebody who likes an open, festive environment for entertaining at home (even if it's just your immediately family for now) or do you want something private and intimate that suggests a cozy yoga retreat vibe? Kids, pets and hobbies like gardening and cooking will also determine what extras need to be worked into the plans your designer, landscape architect or any other professional you hire will need to get the job done.

Although Lichi says that the patio areas within her high-end apartment complex clients mimic design trends of patios and pool areas of contemporary five star hotels and retreats around the world, going too minimalist with private home's patio layout will feel too generic to feel like an escape from the everyday especially if you plan to enjoy it everyday during this summer and the years to follow. She adds that while all of the "white-on-white stuff" was popular a few years ago, there needs to be connectivity that ties the patio's whole look together. For example, adding a pillow with colors that tie into a piece of art or the flowers within the landscaping. That connectivity makes things so much more interesting and adds that extra pop.





“While older clients love nostalgic surroundings, and younger people like minimalism, what every patio needs can be explained in one word character,” she affirms. “The outdoor look needs to be an extension of the existing spaces of your interior, from furnishings to colors, lighting and accessories. Also, based on the climate of where your home is based, you need to pick outdoor fabrics that will withstand sun, rain and others elements even as it visually matches up to your interiors.”

Regardless of the diverse architectural styles of her clients’ homes, Lichi says a common thread of Mediterranean aesthetics runs through those clients’ wish lists. Whether a finished look evokes a Moroccan medina, a Greek island bed-and-breakfast or the Italian Riviera, a Mediterranean sensibility can easily put somebody in that space into a vacation state of mind. She explains many of her clients tie the appeal of that aesthetic to their family histories and vivid memories of happier times. In other words, if the slate is a little too clean, the space won’t stir the senses.”

“Mediterranean outdoor design has a history (as well as) evocations of comfort,” she details. “When you travel to those areas and look around, your eyes will be drawn to the history and character of all those architectural and interior design details (of the destination). The outdoor dining culture is strong, especially along the Mediterranean, and the first thing travelers notice when they get to the destination is that there are a lot of people dining outside. A lot of my clients want to take memories of past travels and bring all of that history, color and flavor into their lifestyle at home. While modern patio design is great,







While those aforementioned magazine spreads and Pinterest shots are a source of inspiration reflecting these ideas, Lichi points out that hiring a professional to bring your at-home outdoor retreat vision to life ensures what you create will transcend trends and can be readily adaptable to a lifestyle change or interior remodel. This is a case where a smart homeowner gets what she or he pays for.

“Most of the clients are not trained in design as professional space planners and designers need to be,” she says. “They’re not trained to see the big picture in terms of scale or proportion, or how individual elements tie together. When they try to pull different things together without that perspective, the result may not end up being how they envisioned it. It is my job to explain how elements they like will work best together and how to reconcile the things and ideas they love with the reality of the space’s size and dimensions. Design itself is like art, as everybody has his or her own ideas of what makes it good. Allowing a professional to put it together is what can differentiate something that’s nice and something that’s beautiful.”

## **FIELD GUIDE: PERLA LICHI'S PATIO PLANNING CHECKLIST**

Lichi compares the process of creating perfect patio design to the way a woman applies her make-up. While some add too little or pile on too much, those who achieve the right overall look focus on cohesiveness. Here are some of her suggestions to help make that happen:

- An itemized budget is important, as it helps the designer determine how much should be spent on the visible furnishings, accents, safety features and extra “bells and whistles” (such as outdoor kitchen appliances or a sound system) to make the patio as inviting as any other room in the house.
- Determine what the patio will be used for. Will it be used for quiet reflection, the whole family’s use or full-on entertaining? How do you define entertaining? Will it be casual, formal or somewhere in between?
- As many homes have kitchens or living rooms with large windows or sliding glass doors looking out into the patio (and vice versa), take into consideration what furnishings, fabrics and colors should be incorporated to ensure there is a visual flow between the outdoors and indoors.
- While you should have questions and concerns ready for your designer, be prepared for him or her to ask you questions about your vision for the space as well as suggestions about what will work best based on his or her professional training. Even with accents and colors that connect the interior to the exterior of the home, the overall outdoor color scheme needs to work with the climate. If you are in a bright, sunny region, avoid using very dark colors as they absorb the sun and make the floor hard to walk on and the space overheat. Fresh cool colors will ultimately make the environment cooler and more comfortable.
- The floors should be non-skid. Even if you don’t have a pool, the floor can get wet with rain or spilled liquids.
- Consider the landscaping around your home and neighboring homes during the planning so your space will blend fluidly into the neighboring surroundings.
- When planning for the patio’s lighting, you not only will need to brighten things up after dark, but also illuminate unique aesthetic features built into the patio.