

It's cozy outside

3 pros discuss ways to create an open-air 'living room'



An outdoor rug in a rooftop sitting area designed by Abbe Fenimore brings the softness of a living room to an outdoor space.

MELANIE JOHNSON ABBE FENIMORE PHOTOS

BY MELISSA RAYWORTH

Designers often talk about the perfect "outdoor living room" — a deck or patio that combines the comfort and style of indoor decorating with the pleasure of relaxing outside. But what separates these outdoor entertaining spaces from more typically decorated backyards?

We've asked three interior designers — Brett Beldock of New York-based Brett Design Inc., Abbe Fenimore of Studio Ten25 in Dallas and Dan Mazzarini of the design firm BHDM — about what items they use to elevate a simple deck or patio to true "outdoor room" status.

The perfect rug

"Adding textiles underfoot," says Mazzarini, brings "that added tactile quality that's expected to be only indoors, and helps sort of redefine the outdoor space."

Beldock agrees, and says companies like Sunbrella and Perennials offer soft rugs made of durable, dyed acrylic yarns in gorgeous patterns and colors. "It doesn't feel like plastic," Beldock says, but "you can hose it down."

And fortunately, says Fenimore, you don't have to invest a lot — even big-box stores like Sam's Club sometimes offer good-quality outdoor rugs in geometric prints or stripes.

Some of these may actually dry more quickly after rain than more expensive, thicker outdoor rugs. Choosing a rug that drains and dries well is especially important if you have a concrete floor or little direct sunlight.

But, Fenimore says, don't skimp too much on the price: Very thin acrylic rugs may not last long and may fade quickly.

In choosing the number of rugs and their placement, consider defining separate entertaining areas: one rug for the dining area under the table and chairs, and another to define a seating area that serves as a living room.

Living room lighting

Typical outdoor lighting can be harsh and unflattering, and "overhead lighting is nobody's friend," says Mazzarini. So look for outdoor table lamps and floor lamps to add the soft glow of indoor lighting.

Although they vary in what weather conditions they can handle, outdoor lamps can be used throughout much of the year, Mazzarini says.

Fenimore agrees: "Bringing in lamplight, especially outside, is really beautiful and subtle," she says, and it's easy to find a wide range of styles and prices for outdoor lamps at home décor retailers.

As a finishing touch, Beldock loves adding to