



# Outdoor Oasis *in your own backyard*

Create a functional and stylish living space to enjoy all year long

**R**aised in the Okanagan Valley, I admit that even after 20-plus years of living on the coast, I still pine (and, yes, whine) all winter long for the arrival of some serious summer heat and the plethora of sights, smells, sounds and seasonal activities that seem to accompany the lazy days of outdoor living.

Each year – hoping to eke out at least eight to 10 weeks of backyard barbecues, bocce “tournaments” and alfresco R&R – the moment I hear the Black-capped Chickadees start whistling their springtime wake up calls, it’s adiós, crock-pot! Hola, Broil King!

And off I go, excitedly dusting off patio furniture, hanging flowering baskets and filling up the freezer with a dinner party-friendly assortment of kabobs.



by **CHRISTIE**  
*Judson*

Thing is, while I, and many other Lower Mainlanders, wait with bated breath for this window of opportunity to finally open up each year, the truth of the matter is – according to Roger Clifford of Casa Vita Outdoor Living – our mild coastal climate means we could be enjoying our outdoor living spaces a lot more often than we think.

“We normally have a mild spring, great summer and temperate autumn – that’s

three seasons of the year,” he said in a recent article that he wrote on designing effective outdoor living spaces.

“Most of the time...it’s mild enough so that we can still get out to cook on our barbecue – goodness, we even managed it during the snowstorm of 2008!”

But, Clifford, who specializes in creating “dream” outdoor spaces – complete with gourmet kitchens, gas fire places, cascading waterfalls and comfortable dining and “living” areas – isn’t simply talking about finding a handy spot for your outdoor grill during the winter months.

If you love spending time outdoors and enjoy entertaining and relaxing at home, he has the goods to help you bring all the comforts of the indoors, out – and unlike

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wearing white shoes past Labour Day, he says there is no magic date to dictate when you should stop or start using your newfound outdoor space.

So, want to know what's getting people all "fired up" when it comes to outdoor living spaces for 2011?

Below, Clifford lets *Indulge* in on a few "hot" ideas that are sure to inspire more than a new steak spice concoction. And if you really want to stretch your home's active living area and your family's time spent outdoors this summer (and beyond), Clifford also shares a few of his key space planning tips guaranteed to please no matter what your style or budget.

**Q: What outdoor living space features are most popular today?**

**A:** • Complete outdoor kitchens, including built-in barbecues with stone-built islands

- Stainless steel cabinetry
- Brick pizza ovens
- Fireplaces
- Polished concrete countertops
- Waterfalls
- Water features, such as container

water gardens, "tabletop" fountains and "ecosystem" ponds, home to plants, fish, rock and gravel

- Wicker resin furniture
- LED and solar lighting

**Q: What are the absolute "must-haves" in today's great outdoor living spaces?**

**A:** A barbecue, a work/prep surface, a comfortable place to sit and a fireplace or fire pit – perhaps, under cover.

**Q: What can you do yourself and what should you leave to the professionals?**



**A: Yourself:**

- Clearing and preparation of the site
  - A sketch plan
  - Furnishing sourcing
  - Choosing finishing materials such as composites, natural stone or cultured stone
- Professional:**
- Gas or electric supply
  - Building walls and structures

**Q: How can you turn a small patio into a unique, one-of-a-kind space?**

**A:** You can make it more intimate with screening, seating, lighting and planting. If you have the space, I would recommend adding a fire pit or an outdoor fireplace.

**Q: Where would you start with a big, open backyard?**

**A:** Planning and design is key. Noting where the sun and shade is at various times of the day is important in order to get the best from your space.

To ensure you gain [maximum] privacy, be sure to take the proximity of the neighbours into account.

**Q: What are some good tips for buying and/or building furniture to suit your space, style, budget and needs?**

**A:** All weather-resistant furniture is essential. Buy the best you can afford – something that is timeless. Classics always outlast the fashion themes. You can always bring in modern, colourful elements with inexpensive accessories.

Ensure that any decor items match the style of your interior and that it also ties in

with the exterior of your home as well.

Maximize your seating area with benches in stone or wood or a sectional-style sofa. Note: Outlet stores can save you dollars.

**Q: What should the ultimate outdoor space for relaxation include?**

**A:** Cozy and intimate seating with scented plantings and large shrubs, such as bamboo, to enhance the space.

A spa tub (or a rock-look spa pool) and a sauna; an outdoor shower; a water feature with a gentle stream offering quiet, muted sound; rock-look outdoor speakers emitting spa-style or woodland/nature music. Intimate lighting.

**Q: What should the ultimate outdoor space for families include?**

**A:** A play area (in sight of adults) that incorporates certified play equipment on top of a safety surface, a rock-look play pool (man-made rock comes with smoothed edges for safety) and a family eating area (picnic style so that the kids can come and go as they please).

**Q: What types of fire pits or fireplaces do you recommend?**

**A:** If you have young children, we recommend a fireplace as they are safer than an open fire pit. We don't recommend any one make or model as we try to work to the homeowner's particular design and style. We focus on making it a unique focal feature of the outdoor space. ①

*For more design and planning tips for your outdoor living space, see page 23.*