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Building Success 101

Q: What is an "infinity-edge" pool

A: An infinity or disappearing edge pool is one in which the water at one end appears to "drop off" into nothing, without a border. In fact, that's exactly what's happening. Along that edge, the pool water spills into a trough, from which it is filtered and recycled back into the pool. The look is very sleek and contemporary, especially if you are fortunate enough to have a back yard that overlooks a desirable, natural view.

Backyard as Destination Resort

Most of us have fond memories of family barbecues in the back yard or running through the sprinklers. Only the clairvoyant among us could have imagined the new 'back yards': the highly appointed outdoor spaces that are becoming increasingly popular in today's new homes.

Long gone are the days of the patio slab, rectangular swimming pool, and rolling kettle grill. Current outdoor living features and materials are just as stylish and creative as the homes they serve, providing multifunctional destinations for owners and guests.

Professional designs ensure a smooth transition to and from the indoors, provide artful square footage, and the proper utility connections for all of the desired features. Careful planning can even accommodate year-round enjoyment through creative options for shade, sun, and other weather conditions.

One of the primary requests for outdoor space is a fully functional kitchen. A built-in, gas-powered barbecue grill, complete with warming drawers, heating elements and plenty of grilling surface, is essential equipment for today's outdoor chef.

Because an outdoor kitchen is often designed within a covered patio or veranda, grills are usually supplemented with a ventilation system to exhaust smoke and odors. Other conveniences include a sink and faucet, an under-counter refrigerator/ice maker, and a row of base cabinets topped by a weather-tough countertop.

An outdoor kitchen logically demands an outdoor eating area. Weather-resistant furnishings and upholstery are available in an increasingly wide range of styles to suit any taste and need, from formal dining tables to casual, plushy seating options. Outdoor rooms might also include a bar island between the cooking and eating areas. Such islands double as serving areas for casual meals.

Another popular feature of outdoor rooms is a fireplace-television combination. Modern gas-powered fireplaces are designed to simulate authentic wood-burning units, but with better energy use, heat distribution, and ventilation. Such chimneys can accommodate a niche for a flat-screen television, easily supplemented by small, outdoor-rated speakers for surround-sound. What used to be a plain patio has now become an enviable destination for family and guests.

To make the space accessible to the indoors and to merge indoor and outdoor entertainment space, many designs feature all-glass folding or pocket doors that create wide-open passages. When designed with the home's micro-climate in mind, these doors may also help to cool the house with natural breezes. Ceiling fans keep the air moving through the outdoor room, while outdoor-rated lights in the ceiling and on the walls allow its use after dark.

To keep less-desirable weather out of both the house and the covered outdoor space, motorized roll-down screens -- ideally concealed in the structure -- keep pests, winds, rain, and other debris out. Such screens come in a variety of weights and are easily controlled by a remote device or wall switch.



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The living space extends beyond the covered area, of course. Patios can be equipped with interlocking pavers, flagstones, or stamped or colored concrete to add dimension and interest. The open-air space might be a deck, increasingly finished with weather-resistant engineered planks that require little maintenance, maintain their color and structural integrity, and are eco-friendly. To complete the look, consider adding comfortable built-in seating and a freestanding fire pit.

Finally, modern pools and spas, are becoming works of art, incorporating fountains and waterfalls, rock formations, frameless edges, and other landscaping features.

Combined, a covered outdoor room, open deck or patio, and pool/spa feature create a value-added feature for any new home. By extending the living space with year-round options to enjoy it, the modern back yard provides years of enjoyment and boosts property value for any homeowner. The old backyard has become a destination resort.

Warm regards,

Brian

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