



The indoors outdoors

Renovate's interior design expert Donna White applies her design principles to her garden and plans the outdoor room of her dreams.

COLUMN Donna White

I am an Interior Designer, not a Landscape Designer – I can live with that, but the fact is that I want a beautiful garden. Sadly, I haven't won lotto yet. So, my desire for an architecturally landscaped garden, planted in mature plants and trees, right now, is a dream. To convert the dream into reality I will have to undertake most of the garden development myself. A daunting prospect, or is it?

As an interior designer, I work by the principles of good design. If I apply these principles outdoors, I should be able to design my garden. This is the process I want to share with you. Inside your home, four walls define a room. Outside, fences, gates, hedges and other devices define the boundaries, or 'walls', of the outdoor room. This makes sense to my interior designer way of thinking.

To help my clients develop a theme, I tell them to tear pictures of rooms they like out of magazines. I can then source fabrics, paint colours, wallpaper and flooring samples based on this theme. As I want everything in my garden to be part of a well-planned integrated scheme, I should follow the same interior design procedures – tear out magazine pictures of gardens I like to identify the theme I am drawn to. I can then talk to the professionals at local garden centres to source the best trees, shrubs and plants for my garden's environment.

I find the inappropriate use of colour, texture and pattern disturbing, so my 1940s English-style house will not have a Japanese-style garden. This

combination would jar the senses. I'm going to work with the existing style of my house and will also break my renovation down into stages, which makes any project a lot less daunting and more manageable. In the first instance, I will just focus on my front lawn.

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When I take a brief from a client for the renovation of an interior space, I ascertain the purpose of the room's function. Similarly, I now ask myself, 'What do I want to use the outdoor room for?' I want to be able to pick flowers, relax, entertain and dine, and create a pleasant journey for all my visitors from the front gate to the front door. My garden site can be treated just like an entry, hallway, open-plan dining and living area inside a house.

During the initial consultation with my interior design clients I work out what furniture and accessories they want to remove, retain, renovate, re-upholster or replace. I can then organise the re-upholstery and renovation processes and source new products. Ultimately, I want them to clear the room of everything while work is being carried out, so

that tradespeople can move around effectively and efficiently.

The same applies in creating an outdoor room. I'm asking myself, 'What existing plants are worth saving?' I plan on digging over the lawn in another area and transplanting the plants worth saving from my front lawn into it. The other plants I will throw out or give away. I will then have a clean slate for my garden renovation.

Next I will look at the 'walls', 'floor' and 'ceiling' of my outdoor room. I need to clean and paint the perimeter walls, improve the soil, reshape the garden layout and prune overhanging branches on the big trees. Once I've done all this, I can re-plant in the order of large to small. Rather like placing furniture inside a room.

In a home, horizontal surfaces take the most wear and tear. Consider work done on kitchen bench tops and foot traffic on floors. This is where I advise my clients to buy the best they can afford. In a similar fashion, my garden path and lawn are going to be the best I can afford. The last trades to enter a home during a new build or renovation are the carpet layers, so sowing my new lawn will be the last thing I will do.

Finally, I will be able to select and place my outdoor furniture. The style, colour and fabric should all be extensions of the home, with no compromise in quality. If there are fine furnishings inside, it makes little sense not to invest wisely outside. ■



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