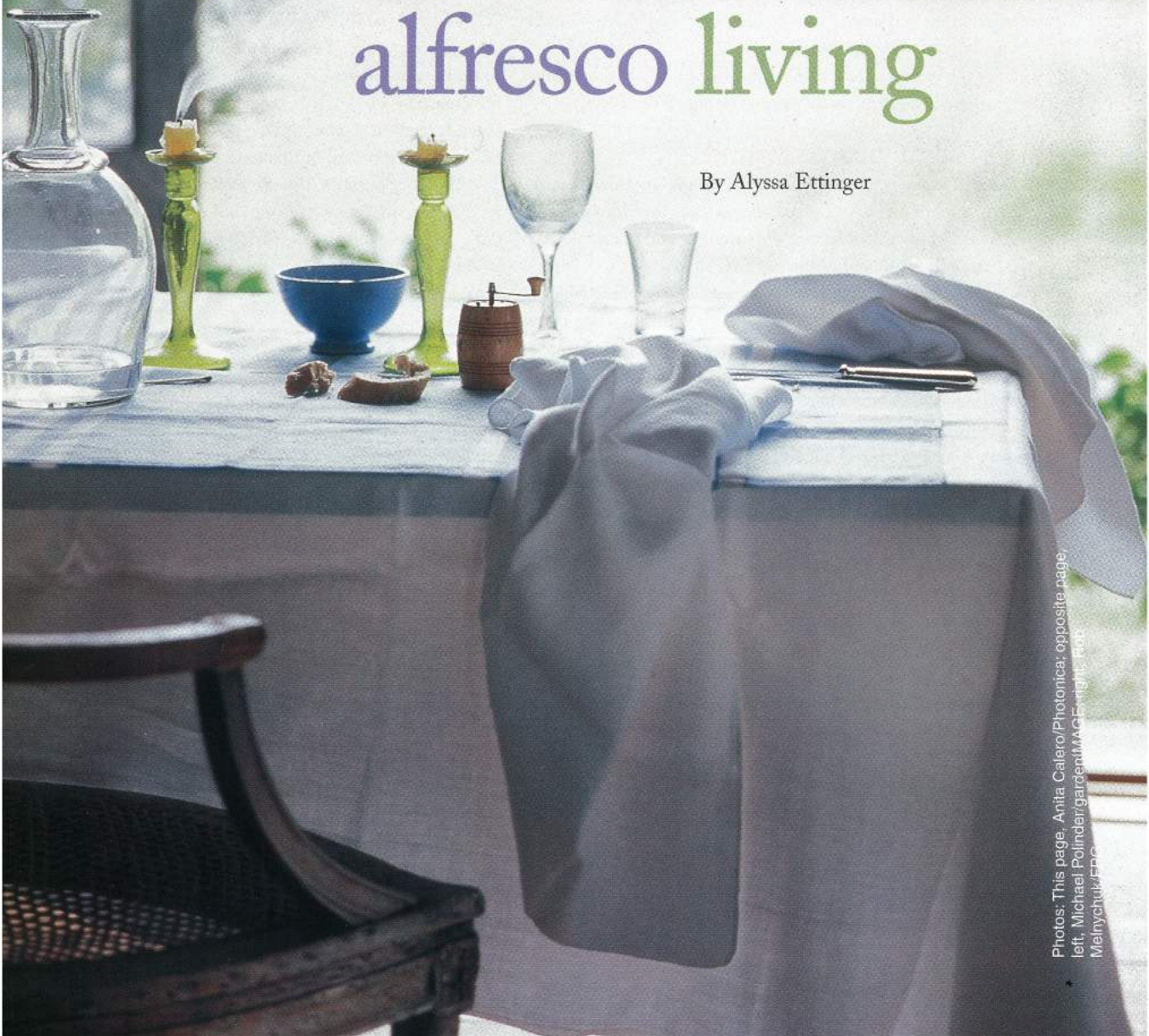


when it comes  
to creating  
comfy, livable  
outdoor spaces,  
the sky's the  
limit—literally.

# alfresco living

By Alyssa Ettinger



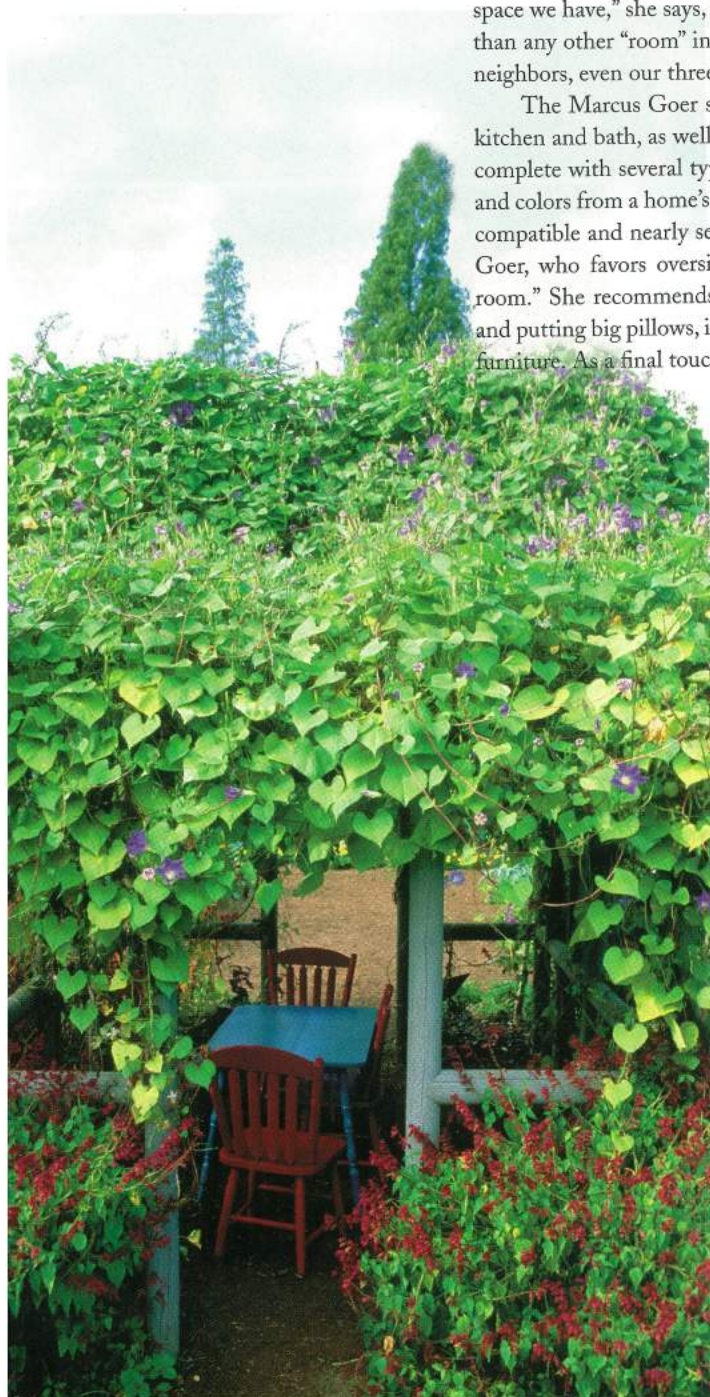
Photos: This page, Anita Calero/Photonica; opposite page, left, Michael Polindirgardent/MAC-E-right, Bob Melnychuk/EPG



ONE OF THE HOTTEST INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS IN YEARS IS all about exteriors. With just a few clever additions to your home's outside spaces, it turns out, you can expand your overall living area and maximize your outdoor enjoyment. Some designers are capitalizing on great weather, while others are employing drastic measures to make the most of less-than-perfect conditions. In any case, the result is a wonderful combination of nature and nurture.

In South Carolina, for example, Wendy Marcus Goer, ASID, of Marcus Goer Interiors Inc., says her home's outdoor space gets plenty of use—and not just for summer barbecues. “Our weather is so friendly, it makes sense to use all the space we have,” she says, adding that her family uses the outdoor living area more than any other “room” in their home. “Everyone gathers here, all our friends and neighbors, even our three boys and their friends.”

The Marcus Goer space is elaborate, incorporating a guest cottage and full kitchen and bath, as well as a large swimming pool—all done in a tropical theme complete with several types of palms. She often advises clients to extend themes and colors from a home's interior into the outside areas, as a way of keeping things compatible and nearly seamless. Comfortable seating is also crucial, says Marcus Goer, who favors oversized furniture, which “helps it to feel more like a real room.” She recommends using Sunbrella fabrics, which hold up in all weather, and putting big pillows, including overstuffed cushions, on wood or metal outdoor furniture. As a final touch, she adds flowerpots filled with overflowing plants.



Opposite and above: No matter what climate you live in, outdoor living becomes a four-season option thanks to details like accordion windows, cement floors, and French doors. Left: A lush, vine-covered gazebo provides pleasing shelter for tea parties and evening cocktails.



On these pages: The key to making an outdoor space viable is to make it comfortable. One way to do so is to bring indoor furniture—such as a platform bed, throw pillows, and glass and china tableware—outside. Other homey touches include an outdoor fireplace and plenty of potted plants. This page, center: For colder climates, an enclosed porch brings the outside in, thanks to a series of large, uncovered windows and a lazy hammock.



#### VIEW FROM THE SOUTHWEST

Arguerite Brown, a special events planner and interior signer in Tucson, Arizona, begins outdoor projects by asking clients what they're after. How much time will they want to spend outside? Do they want a place where they can relax and lounge, or a hub of activity—like an extension of the family room—or a private space for a couple?

Brown, too, insists on comfortable oversized furniture and cushions. "Unless the space is super-cozy, it won't be used," she says. "What about a family room makes you want to sink down into one of the chairs? The same feeling should be carried over to the outdoor room." Fortunately, in Tucson's arid desert climate, overstuffed furniture with weather-treated fabrics can be kept outside year-round. Brown also suggests using outdoor heaters on chilly nights—or even a large fireplace like the one in her own outdoor area. "When it's cooler, we wrap up in blankets, turn on the heaters, and get the fire going. The kids make s'mores and the grown-ups have wine. It's really cozy and fun."

For outdoor areas exposed to the sun, Brown adds shade umbrellas. And she loves flooring made of brick or painted concrete, either of which require special care.

#### NORTHERN CLIMATES CAN ENJOY IT, TOO

You don't have to miss out on the great outdoors just because you live someplace with four distinct seasons, either. Lisa Badger, an interior designer with Tuttle Bradley Interiors in Salem, Massachusetts, says that because New England summers are shorter, "We want more time outside, so we tend to savor it." But, she adds, people tend to skimp on their outdoor spaces, because they know they'll have to bring so much inside once foul weather hits.

To be enjoyable, outdoor spaces shouldn't feel as though you're just putting a chair on a patio. Says Badger, "We're thinking about outdoor living rooms, not just chairs on lawns." Her favorite furniture picks are canvas market umbrellas,



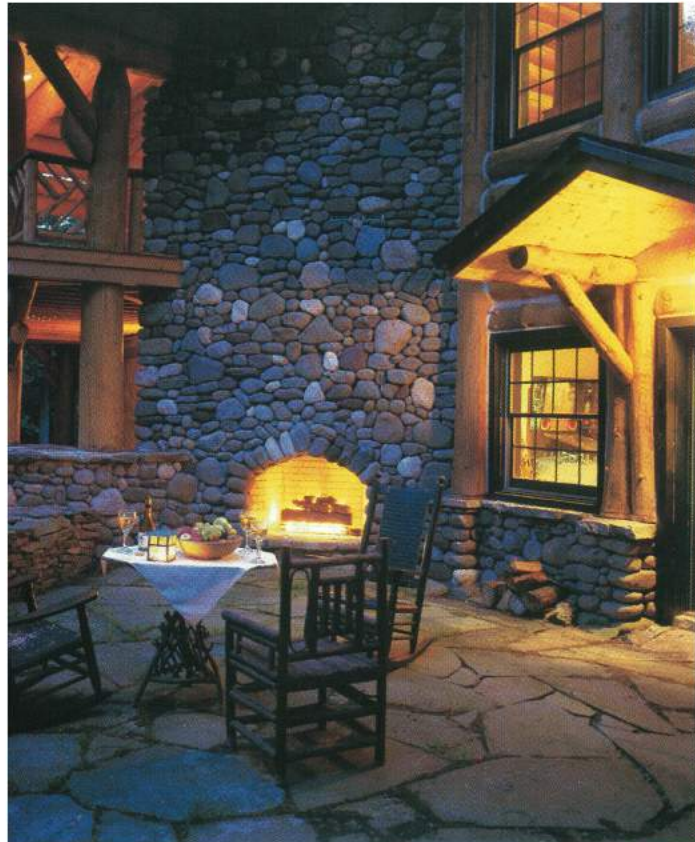
Adirondack chairs, and weather-friendly coffee and side tables with galvanized tops.

Badger also likes to set up an outdoor space in the middle of a lawn to make it feel as though you're entering a real room. She and her design partner once created such an outdoor living room for a Junior League of Boston Showhouse. They separated the area space by turning metal plumbing pipes into curtain rods that stood firmly once they were pushed deep into the ground. On these they hung ground-length drapes made from Sunbrella fabric. These not only created privacy, but also gave the illusion of an enclosed space. Another important element in Badger's layouts is teak furniture: "It weathers well and is far more inviting and comfy than metal." Unlike many designers, Badger uses real fabric pillows. "If they get a rain shower on them, who cares? They'll dry." Lighting-wise, she insists on lots of candles and twinkly bulbs, so the room can be used day or night.



Photos: This page, top: Rob Melnychuk/PhotoDisc; Janis Christie/PhotoDisc. Opposite page, top left: Brad Simmons; top right, Neo Vision/Photonicca; bottom, Julie Sprott/gardenIMAGE





To avoid the problem of foliage freezing in a cold winter, Badger uses potted plants that can be brought inside once the temperature dips. She likes pots and plants in varying sizes, and loves bold-colored blossoms (such as hibiscus) and varieties dense with large leaves.

Another option is to create an outdoor bedroom. Badger's own home features a screened-in porch she uses as a sleeping porch during warmer months. A daybed acts either as a sofa or bed, and—as you might suspect—the room is filled with over-tuffed pillows.

In general, Badger says, no potential outdoor living space should be overlooked. If you live in a more urban area, for example, she suggests using a water fountain to muffle street noise and make for a more tranquil space. And who knows? Once you create the perfect living area outside your home, you may find you have a hard time going back inside. ▲



### Small Paradise

Even a small porch can create a wonderful outdoor space, says Texan stylist Joetta Moulden, owner of Shelterstyle.com, a Web site offering home makeovers that use furniture you already own.

- Pile up the seating options, she says. Use a love seat or settee, and two to three chairs—plus plenty of throw pillows. You can use traditional fabrics, says Moulden, as long as you have a covered bin to house them in during inclement weather.
- With smaller spaces, Moulden favors using country-styled twig pieces or treated wicker that has been painted. "Traditional outdoor furniture won't be as charming," she explains. Twig and wicker furniture create a more unique feel and can often be found at yard sales and flea markets.
- A coffee table is imperative, for putting your feet up or as a place to rest drinks. (In a room she recently created, Moulden used a painted piano bench that was already old and peeling.) Pitchers of fresh flowers make the space feel more inviting.
- A rug will also make the porch or deck feel more like a room, especially if it's woven from coir, jute, or sea-grass. Luckily, all three materials are affordable—since you're likely to replace this rug every few years because of exposure to the elements.
- Another Moulden must-have is a handy rolling cart, perfect for transporting dishes, flatware, and food items easily. And a big galvanized washtub filled with ice makes a fabulous weatherproof beverage cooler.

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