



# OUTDOOR DESIGN GUIDE

A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO VISUALIZING  
A NEW OUTDOOR LIVING ROOM

**Poynter**  
Landscape  
Architecture  
& Construction





<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><u>THE DESIGN PROCESS</u></b>	
Step 1: Questions and Answers	3
Step 2: Site Assessment	4
Step 3: The Plan	5
<b><u>THE ELEMENTS</u></b>	
Drainage: Determining Solutions	6
<i>Grading</i>	
<i>Dry Stream Beds and Creeks</i>	
<i>Trench Drains and French Drains</i>	
Privacy Screening and Fencing	7
Hardscape	
<i>Patios and Terraces</i>	8
<i>Decks</i>	8
<i>Walls</i>	9
<i>Paths and Walkways</i>	9
<i>Outdoor Cooking Areas</i>	10
<i>Driveways</i>	10
<i>Fireplace and Fire Pits</i>	11
Irrigation	12
<i>Sprinkler Irrigation</i>	
<i>Drip Irrigation</i>	
Lighting	
<i>Lighting Techniques</i>	13
<i>Types of Lighting Fixtures</i>	14
Outdoor Structures	
<i>Pavilions</i>	15
<i>Gazebos</i>	15
<i>Pergolas</i>	16
<i>Pool Houses and Cabanas</i>	16
Plantings	17
<i>Shade Trees</i>	
<i>Ornamental Trees</i>	
<i>Evergreen Trees</i>	
<i>Shrubs</i>	
<i>Perennials</i>	
<i>Annuals</i>	
Pools	18



## **ACCENTS & OTHER FEATURES** 19

Caring for Your Landscape:	
Points to Remember	20

## **THE EXPERTS IN** **OUTDOOR LIVING** 21

<b><u>BONUS FEATURES</u></b>	
18 Questions To Ask a Contractor	22
Red Flags	22
Keys to Good Communication	23





## INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest trends amongst homeowners today is incorporating an outdoor living room. The evolution of the outdoor living room has forever changed the design process from simple concrete slab patios to larger areas for entertaining, cooking, and relaxing.

Swimming pools are popular for outdoor enjoyment however the companion components have become exceedingly popular. Pergolas, pool houses, fire pits, and outdoor kitchens have become mainstays of the outdoor living space. Patios now incorporate grills, refrigerators, televisions, and even fireplaces allowing your indoor living space to flow outdoors.

Use this Homeowner's Guide to help you visualizing a new outdoor living room. There are a multitude of choices to consider and a homeowner needs to consider their choices before starting the process. With some planning and imagination your outdoor living room can provide hours of enjoyment for your family and guests.

## STEP 1: QUESTION AND ANSWER

Begin the design process by consulting with your family and answering the following preliminary questions. Honest and open discussion of these questions will give you and your family direction and assist in making the overall design process easier. Preparing your answers to these questions will also contribute to an impactful first meeting with your Landscape Architect. In many instances yard characteristics that you may consider a problem area, can actually be an asset depending on the goals for your project.

Does your yard present any of the following perceived challenges?

- Poor Drainage*
- Lack of Privacy*
- Overgrown Vegetation*
- Stark Site (Blank Slate)*
- Large Slope*
- City/County Limitations*

How do you and your family plan to use your outdoor living space?

What elements do you want your outdoor living room to include?

Does your family entertain guests regularly?

Do you have small children or other factors that present safety concerns?

Balancing cost, time and quality are key in helping your designer meet your goals and budgeting is an important part of this process. What is your budget?

Consider the three primary factors:

- Cost*
- Time*
- Quality*

Decide which is most important to you and your project as well as the order of importance.







## STEP 2: SITE ASSESSMENT

A site assessment is a thorough analysis which measures strengths and weaknesses, including soil quality, sun and shade, hills and slopes, and more. The designer will measure the elevations of your property which is a critical step in assuring that your outdoor space drains water properly.

This assessment will help your designer create a landscape design plan to fit the needs of the site while integrating your personal style with the home's architecture. It will also help dictate steps that need to be taken before installation to ensure a healthy, successful landscape, and outdoor space for years to come.

The site assessment is usually the initial meeting between the designer and home owner; budgeting, scope and preliminary timelines will be discussed. Always have a budget in mind but don't be afraid to dream big; you never know what a Landscape Architect can help you accomplish.

## STEP 3: THE PLAN

Exquisite, long lasting landscapes do not happen by chance, they are delivered by the hands and minds of talented Landscape Architects who will analyze the site, provide solutions, and develop a landscape design plan.

A landscape design is like a floor plan for an outdoor area which creates a visual representation of your site using scaled dimensions that will include your desired elements. The design plan will give you a good idea of what your outdoor living room will look like and will be shared with you via paper drawings or through a 3-D presentation.

These three steps in conjunctions with employing a professional Landscape Architect help to protect your home investment by ensuring that your outdoor living room is constructed properly.



AFTER ELEVATION VIEW



## DRAINAGE: DETERMINING SOLUTIONS

Early stage drainage engineering is fundamental to outdoor design success and just as you would expect a house to be level; any outdoor space should drain properly. If you have noticed puddles throughout your property or areas of streaming water during storms, you may have a drainage problem.

Diagnosing drainage issues begin with math; a topography to be specific. A topography is a measurement of your property which may reveal existing issues and more importantly potential drainage issues that could occur after construction. When designing a new outdoor space it is just as important to avoid creating drainage issues.

A topography takes the guess work out of determining drainage concerns. Trusting your 'eye', as many companies often do, is never the correct path to resolving a drainage problem and a competent Landscape Architect would never make this suggestion. Also, a good Landscape Architect should understand that different surfaces require different degrees of pitch (% of fall) and should be able to explain these differences.

Once your site's drainage issues are determined there are many ways to address those issue, here are a few:

**GRADING:** Grading is the process of creating the appropriate slope. It can get rid of low-lying areas that could create puddles or standing water. A landscape architect can alter your landscape in a way that encourages water to run in the proper direction.

**DRY STREAM BEDS AND CREEKS:** A dry stream bed is usually a shallow trench lined with small stones and can solve water run-off and drainage issues while simultaneously improving the beauty of your outdoor living area. Dry Creeks are good solutions to eliminate excessive water and help it exit your property, or re-direct that water to other areas of your yard needing irrigating.

**TRENCH DRAINS AND FRENCH DRAINS:** French drains capture and remove sub-surface water while trench drains quickly remove surface water before it can saturate the ground. Both Trench and French drains are subtle, structural ways to correct drainage problems and to protect a heavily paved area.







*"Good fences make  
good neighbors."*



## PRIVACY, SCREENING AND FENCING

Privacy is a common goal used to make an outdoor living space feel like a personal oasis. This goal is achieved through fences to vegetation or combinations of both working in tandem. Screening elements can be a beautiful and effective way to add good privacy and increase your home's value.

Fences offer seclusion and are a popular and versatile privacy option. They come in a range of materials, colors and styles that offer varying degrees of privacy. Limited panels strategically placed also can be very effective and a great asset to highlight privacy. Fence height, density, and materials are controlled by most city or community ordinances so it is important to do your 'homework' before beginning a fencing project.

While many homeowners rely on hardscape elements like fences for privacy, others may choose a mixture of vegetation for added solitude. Ornamental grasses backed by larger shrubs and trees can substitute for a fence. Layering evergreens and flowering shrubs will create visual interest year-round and provide a level of privacy in your yard.



# HARDSCAPE

When designing an outdoor living room, hardscaping is defined as the placement of any design element that is not a plant. Incorporating hardscape design elements into your outdoor room design can provide you with the yard of your dreams. Here are some hardscaping elements to consider:



**PATIOS & TERRACES:** If thoughtfully and correctly designed a patio or terrace is a wonderful way to extend your living space into the outdoors and is often the foundation for outdoor spaces. Patios come in many shapes and sizes and can be constructed out of materials such as concrete, brick, pavers, and tile.

**DECKS:** Decks are one of the most popular outdoor living elements because decks are built to accommodate the existing grade surrounding your home. In addition, it is possible to create level areas without making major changes to the drainage and slopes surrounding your home. Decks can be constructed from treated wood, composite materials or even plastic. *(Bonus: With a high enough deck surface, there may even be room to create some storage underneath.)*



**WALLS:** Your outdoor living area may benefit from a retaining or seating wall. Retaining walls are usually thought of as utilitarian and only needed for holding back soil. However, these innovative barriers also provide additional sitting areas and can be used to increase functional yard space by creating visual separation among the different elements of your space.

## **PATHS AND WALKWAYS:**

The lack of proper paths and walkways can make the various elements of your outdoor space appear disjointed. Consider a walkway to connect these elements by adding transitions and connections. This is also an opportunity to get creative with hardscape materials, plants and even landscape lighting.







**OUTDOOR COOKING AREAS:** Homeowners are learning about the joys of open-air cooking and alfresco dining spaces by building outdoor kitchen in their backyards. With an outdoor kitchen you can prepare meals and be around your guests and never have to take a break from the fun. An outdoor kitchen can be a big investment, yet it is an investment that is sure to add lasting value to your home.

**DRIVEWAYS:** Landscape Architects use driveways as a perfect opportunity to create a cohesive, coordinated look between your homes' landscape and architecture. Landscape Architects get the most out of your driveway space by creating multifunctional spaces which can double as extended patios and sports courts while incorporating important elements such as drainage, privacy, parking, and turn-arounds. Personalize your space through the countless finishes available and provide your guests with a great first impression as they approach your home.



**FIREPLACES AND FIRE PITS:** Fire, the 'original' evening entertainment for thousands of years provided security and life for human kind. Modern day, fire pits and fire places bring the campfire experience into the home setting. Nothing says quality time quite like relaxing around a fire with your family or your favorite book.



Fire features come in many shapes and sizes and can be made to operate with propane or natural gas burners, as well as traditional wood burning.



# IRRIGATION

Irrigation is a method of delivering water to an area where it is needed. Irrigation systems maintain moisture in the soil and are an extremely efficient way to ensure your yard gets the hydration it needs without over-watering. The key to an effective irrigation system is to keep the water as close to where it is needed to ensure individual plants gets the perfect amount of water. There are two basic types of irrigation, drip irrigation and sprinkler irrigation

**DRIP IRRIGATION:** is an eco-friendly option, minimizing wasted water by delivering water directly to a plants' roots. Drip irrigation can be used everywhere, even in container plantings. This popular method saves time, conserves water and is easy to implement. Studies show that a well-designed drip systems use up to 50% less water than other methods of watering.

**SPRINKLER IRRIGATION:** is a method of applying water which is similar to rainfall; water is delivered from overhead. Sprinklers can cover large areas and can be installed in zones to switch on and off automatically.



Build healthy landscape through appropriate and efficient irrigation. Properly installed irrigation conserves water, increases the value of your home, saves you time.





# LIGHTING

Great landscape projects should end with a landscape lighting system. After all, everyone should be able to enjoy their outdoor living space after dark. Effective landscape lighting techniques will create space and depth at night to highlight landscape elements that are not visible during day light. Lighting will add to the appearance of your home by accenting the architectural features and providing easier navigation around your yard at night.



## COMMON LANDSCAPE LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

**UP LIGHTING:** Light is aimed upwards for dramatic effect. Used commonly to light up a tree, sculpture, or walls.

**DOWN LIGHTING:** Casts light down and may create interesting effects by way of shadowing. Especially useful in lighting up very dark areas to heighten security and safety.

**MOONLIGHTING:** Simulates moonlight by positioning light fixtures very high above trees and larger plants or objects to create enchanting shadow effects.

**ACCENT LIGHTING :** An intense beam, or spotlight, creates high focal points in your landscape.

**GRAZING:** Placing the light fixture close to a surface to achieve the effect of the light traveling and enhancing the lighted area.

**BACKLIGHTING:** Silhouettes a sculpture, tree or plants.

**CROSS LIGHTING:** Enhances a three-dimensional view of a voluminous plant, tree or object.



## TYPES OF LIGHTING FIXTURES

**OUTDOOR LANTERNS AND WALL LIGHTS AND SCONCES:** An excellent choice for doorways, garages, and windows. Used to enhance walled areas or square pillars.

**OUTDOOR CEILING FIXTURES:** Perfect for porches, patios, breezeways, and covered areas or walkways.

**POST LIGHTS:** Majestically light up ponds, pools of water, main driveways, and walkways. Create a picturesque scene by placing in a garden near outdoor benches.

**DIFFUSERS AND SPREADS:** Low voltage lighting fixtures that give off a softer light and are used to outline borders.



**CYLINDERS, SQUARE AND BULLET SHAPED LIGHTS:** These are designed to focus a beam of light.

**WELL LIGHTS:** Hidden from view, they flush with the ground. Mostly used for up lighting on plants, trees and walls.

**ACCENT LIGHTING:** Very versatile fixtures that are used for up lighting, moonlighting, grazing, and down lighting.

Highlighting your patio, pool, and/or walkways with a landscape lighting system will add safety, security, and sophistication to your outdoor living room.



## OUTDOOR STRUCTURES

An outdoor structure can often be the finishing touch for your outdoor environment. Outdoor structures come in varied forms and include pergolas, pavilions, arbors and other shade structures. These structures can be utilized to allow enjoyment of the outdoors while offering protection from the elements. Using outdoor structures in conjunction with other features such as outdoor kitchens and fireplaces can create an inviting space for friends and family to gather and enjoy the open air even when weather conditions are less than perfect. Listed below are some common outdoor structures:

**PAVILIONS:** Pavilions typically have roofs that are similar to a house. Imagine a house without any walls! You may commonly think of pavilions in park picnic areas, but a pavilion can be built in any shape or size for any space. It is a feature that can be seamlessly integrated into your landscape design to add beauty to your outdoor space while also adding essential functionality.

**GAZEBOS:** Typically smaller than a pavilion; a traditional gazebo is an eight-sided shade structure with a solid roof, built-in bench running along the inside, and open sides to enjoy the surrounding views. Gazebos are less popular today partially because architecture styles have changed. However, a modern gazebo is not limited to an octagonal floor plan and can be an elegant, refined choice if it is built well and seamlessly incorporated into the landscape.







**PERGOLAS:** A pergola can add shade and dramatically cool a hot area around your home. Pergolas do not have a solid roof allowing for partial sunlight to shine through on a beautiful day. Many times, these structures are used in gardens, to cover walkways, or to provide shelter for elegant outdoor seating. A pergola with its open sides lets you enjoy some shelter without obstructing the views of the outdoor living area.

**POOL HOUSES AND CABANAS:** A pool house is a second house on the property which can include a second kitchen, game room, or even a spare bedroom for guests who want privacy. The term cabana is often used interchangeably, but this is not a pool house. Cabanas are typically three-sided roofed structure designed to provide shelter and privacy at pool side.

Above all, strive for that first glance wow-factor. Outdoor structures increase the square footage of your home at a fraction of the price of a full blown home addition and homeowners are more likely to utilize their outdoor living rooms on a regular basis.





## PLANTINGS

Saint Louis offers a unique climate, often having 95°+ weather in summer and single digits in winter. In addition to the weather, Saint Louis has challenging clay soils and requires irrigation systems. These factors play roles in what plant choices are best for our great city. We need plants that not only survive in The Lou but THRIVE in The Lou. Allow a Landscape Architect to help you navigate the many plant characteristics available for your outdoor living space. The plants you select will literally bring your landscape to life.

**SHADE TREES:** Shade trees grow to 45' and up to 75' tall and 25 to 40' wide; not normally flowering but many have good fall color. Some popular shade trees include Oaks, Maples, and Elms.

**ORNAMENTAL TREES:** Ornamental trees grow to 18 to 35' tall and 15 to 35' wide; most flower and some have fall color. Some well know ornamental trees are Magnolias, Service Berry, and Redbuds.

**EVERGREEN TREES:** Evergreens screen your property and create privacy. They look pretty much the same all year long providing evergreen color during the winter. No flowers or fall color but they are evergreen.

**SHRUBS:** A shrub is a small to medium-sized woody plant.

**PERENNIALS:** Perennials are small flowering plants that grow and bloom over the spring and summer, die back every autumn and winter, and then return in the spring. Most will flower for 3-8 weeks and/or have striking foliage color.

**ANNUALS:** An annual plant is a seasonal flower that completes its life cycle within one year, and then dies. Annuals will need to be replanted every year but have dramatic flower color during their entire life-cycle.



## POOLS

A swimming pool is the ultimate backyard amenity and is usually the center of attention. Pools can include water features, unique lighting, specialty materials and design features. Pools bring a feeling of calm and create a sanctuary in your backyard. A pool also provides the following benefits:

- Recreation & Relaxation
- Fitness & Therapy
- Entertainment
- Aesthetics

Deciding to build a pool does not have to be stressful. Poynter Landscape actively avoids stress and conflict by making the pool installation process fun.

For more information download our **Swimming Pool Design Guide** at:  
<https://www.poynterlandscape.com/services/pools/swimming-pool-design-guide/>





## ACCENTS AND OTHER FEATURES

Once you have decided on the elements for the core of your outdoor living room, you can let your personality shine by incorporating accents that reflect your unique design style.

When furnishing an outdoor living room, it is important to have several seating options for guests. Purchase outdoor furniture with plush upholstery, incorporate several bistro tables and chairs.

Maximize your seating capacity with stacks of over-sized pillows laid out near sofas and love-seats to use as floor cushions. From wicker and wood to chairs cushioned with all-weather fabrics there is outdoor furniture designed to suit your style and entertaining needs.

Bring on the Color! One of the quickest ways personalize an outdoor space is with color. Adding your favorite fresh colors to an outdoor space is easy. Add umbrellas, throw pillows and outdoor rugs for a splash of color and a soft surface.

Containers and Urns put you in a better position ergonomically to plant and maintain things. They also bring the foliage and flowers closer to eye level and the increased height can be used to screen things nicely. Another added benefit is the wonderful array of urns available. They come in many great shapes and sizes and in any color you can imagine. Containers bring plant life closer to your home and add visual interest that coordinates with your design style.





# CARING FOR YOUR LANDSCAPE

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

Poynter will provide a DVD on plant care, watering, and maintenance guidelines and even a sprinkler system schedule in simple easy to understand language.

We offer various maintenance programs to help you sustain an exquisite, long lasting landscape. Our maintenance programs are designed to provide services for trees, shrubs, flowers and overall bed upkeep. Common services include:

- Spring and Fall Cleanups*
- Mulching*
- Weed Control*
- Fertilization*
- Trimming/Pruning*
- Annual/Perennials Flowers*

When selecting landscape professionals for your yard maintenance, consider separating tree, shrub, and bed maintenance from mowing maintenance. Mowing is an important but low skill task which is hardly ever completed by workers with horticulture education. In order to keep mowing costs down, many companies hire lower skilled laborers to complete the mowing tasks and then employ these same laborers to provide additional yard maintenance. There are several aspects, for instance, chemical applications and proper pruning, weed control, insect control, fertilizers, simple plant ID or plant health diagnostics and watering corrections that should be completed by an educated horticulture professional. Allowing laborers who are not well educated to maintain your outdoor space can be a costly mistake outside of mowing.



# OUTDOOR LIVING ROOM

## THE EXPERTS IN OUTDOOR LIVING

Designing and building an outdoor living room can be an intimidating process; let Poynter help! By employing a slightly different approach for these types of projects, you receive the best expertise in design, horticulture, and craftsman construction, plus all the follow through your project deserves.

Poynter Landscape Architecture and Construction is an award winning design build architecture firm bringing 25 years of experience to St. Louis and its surrounding areas.

### WE OFFER A FULL RANGE OF SERVICES:

*Professional Landscape Architecture*  
*Unique After Care Instruction*  
*Driveways, Walkways, Patios, and Retaining Walls,*  
*Swimming Pools and Waterscapes*  
*Arbors and Pergolas*  
*Flowers and Gardening Areas*  
*Drainage and Erosions Control*  
*Fencing and Decks*  
*Irrigation*  
*Lighting*  
*And more...*

For more than 25 years, our talented team has completed some of the finest residential outdoor space and landscape designs. We build complex, multi-trade, endeavors as well as modest everyday projects; bringing our signature standards to each project:

### STANDARDS TO EXPECT FROM POYNTER

*A Dedication to Customer Service*  
*Talented Landscape Architects and Designers*  
*Experienced Craftsman Builders*  
*An Avid Commitment to Quality*  
*A Passion for Creating Remarkable Outdoor Spaces*  
*Proper Licensing and Insurance*  
*Respect for Home Safety*  
*An Obsession with Efficiency*

We invite you to contact us for a free consultation.  
(636) 256-2600  
[www.PoynterLandscape.com](http://www.PoynterLandscape.com)





## BONUS FEATURES:

### 18 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN HIRING A CONTRACTOR TO BUILD YOUR OUTDOOR LIVING ROOM

You will probably interview a few contractors to bid on your project; consider limiting your bids to a few top contractors that can truly fulfill the goals of your project. Ask questions and do research before inviting a company to give you an estimate; you will save time, money and avoid making the process more difficult than necessary. Here is a list of common questions to ask any contractor before moving forward:

1. How long have you been in business? Tell me about your experience.
2. Can you provide a portfolio of complex projects you have built?
3. Which subcontractors/vendors do you partner with and are they insured?
4. Are the photos you have actual photos of work you built?
5. Can you provide references to call?
6. Do you have design capabilities in house or do you outsource?
7. How do you prefer to communicate?
8. Can you outline the construction process and what I can expect?
9. Will you provide construction timelines?
10. Will you handle all permits and inspections?
11. Do you handle construction drawings, municipal approvals, architectural review board meetings and variance requests to the local city?
12. Who will oversee the building of our project?
13. How large is your contracting crew?
14. What specialties do you provide in-house (such as masonry, plumbing, landscape architecture, lighting, irrigation, and engineering)?
15. What payment schedules are available?
16. Are you affiliated with any professional associations?
17. Do you have general liability and workers' compensation insurance, and can you provide certificates of proof?
18. What safety measures do you take during the construction process?

## RED FLAGS

Don't hire a Contractor if...

1. The contractor does not return calls promptly or communicate well.
2. Cannot provide solid references or provide photos of work they actually built — not stock internet images.
3. Has unresolved or numerous complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau.
4. Provides estimates that are significantly lower than others.
5. Cannot provide proof of insurance.



## KEYS TO GOOD COMMUNICATION

Now that you are ready to get started with the design and pre-planning process it is important to understand that communication is the 'mortar' that will hold your project together and keep everyone on the same page. No one wants surprises during a project and you can avoid any future frustration during the build by ensuring communication efforts are understood at the beginning of your project.

Without proper communication and documentation, your project might go from being a dream come true to a disaster.

### 1. Set expectations as to how you prefer to communicate early in the process.

**Email** is a great form of communication because the information shared is documented, can include multiple parties, and emails allow for each party involved to write or respond at a convenient time. Use emails for updates, setting meetings and more but avoid using email for complicated messages or messages that require substantial visual needs.

**Telephone conversations** and **face to face meetings** may be the old fashioned way of doing things but they are still the most effective methods to communicate. There are so many nuances associated with complex projects that voice and face to face communication is always best for all involved, whenever possible.

**Texting** can be the worst form of communication for detailed conversations. Texting is not well tracked and can easily be missed making either party feel overlooked. Texting should be used for short easy messages such as, 'I'm running late.' or 'Can we reschedule?' Anything more can lead to dissatisfaction in the communications process.

### 2. Outline the Project Timeline

Outdoor Living Rooms can take time to install so be realistic when communicating with your builder about the project timeline. A competent contractor should provide you with a worksheet that shows the order of the building process which will help you understand what to expect. Understanding the timeline and knowing where the gaps in construction may occur will lead to a better construction experience for all parties. Keep the following information in mind when reviewing your construction timeline:

Ask your contractor to be honest about when the company can start building your outdoor living room.

Get a sense of any factors that could affect the construction timeline; such as complexity, weather, number of construction workers, permits and inspections, and delays for materials.

Remember to consider scheduling time for permits, subdivision approvals, architecture review boards, and variance requests. Almost all St. Louis municipalities have regulations regarding outdoor construction and those regulations vary for each municipality. Your landscape architect should be well versed in the different requirements.

During the project you should check-in regularly to make sure the project is progressing as promised. Ask the contractor how they plan to keep you updated and ask what the process is for scheduling site visits.