

The three-season room: Elegant entertaining in the (almost) great outdoors

WE'VE JUST TURNED THE CORNER TO AUTUMN and already I'm feeling nostalgic for summer. Fall nights in New England may be lovely, but they also signal the time to (sigh) pack away the deck cushions, cover the grill where we make our most sumptuous warm-weather meals and close the door on the threat of cold. Or do they?



By Sandra A. Miller
Photos By Shelly Harrison
Metrowest Magazine, October 2007



According to Dan and Mary Tibma of Tibma Design Build in Needham, the newest trend in the home industry is what's known as the three-season or outdoor room. It's an upgrade of the traditional patio into a versatile living space that allows for grilling; elegant, insect-free entertaining; and weather protection from early spring to late fall. "It's that extra space that lets you connect to the outdoors, even when it's too cold to be outside," says Mary. "Outdoor rooms are popular nationwide," her husband Dan adds, "but there are challenges for the adaptation to New England."

Having just completed an outdoor room on a home in Wellesley, the Tibmas know these challenges well. They also know how this type of space can enhance a home and bring a distinctive dimension to entertaining. They explain this as they guide me from the dining area of the home, through French-style sliding doors into the three-season room.

Now I'm really sighing. Admiring its Vermont Castings fireplace, 48-inch Viking gas grill and flat-screen plasma television, I'm more than ready to park myself in one of the cushioned wicker rockers, put up my feet, pour a goblet of Merlot and kiss summer good-bye.

The room, which opens to the house on one side, abuts the garage on a second and is screened-in on the other two, started off as a place where the clients could entertain and avoid the bugs. "But then it morphed into, 'Gee, if I'm out here grilling and watching a football

[above] The covered pathway follows the natural contours of the landscape and leads from the garage into the privacy and tranquility of the backyard.

[left] The porch leads onto a bluestone terrace that provides additional outdoor living space and is ideal for summer entertaining. The positioning of the porch creates a private retreat sheltered by the landscaping and surrounding trees.



game, it might be a little cool,” Dan says. “So we added a fireplace with blow-off and expect that even when it’s 40 degrees outside, they can be out here in a sweater and still be cozy.”

The stone fireplace in cream and pinkish hues gives the room a strong anchor. “We are putting in a lot of fireplaces

look very natural. No more of those evenly spaced jets. Now when you have the fire on, it has real personality.”

Radiant heat from the ceiling or floor is another option for heating outdoor rooms, but in this home, the fireplace matched the client’s vision of smoking cigars while watching the game. And, of

ing how to vent it. “It took more than one try,” Dan concedes. “Putting a gas grill inside is hard. We had to put a powerful motor up on the roof.”

Looking up, I’m struck, not by any hint of a hidden vent, but by the white, bead-board ceiling that slopes on the sides then goes flat at the top. Dan says this ceiling

“It’s about bringing an element of nature in, and it adds a lot to the feel of a room like this where you want to make it more comfortable more months of the year.”

inside and out, and many of them have great finishes,” Mary explains. “It’s about bringing an element of nature in, and it adds a lot to the feel of a room like this where you want to make it more comfortable more months of the year.” Dan adds, “They are making gas fireplaces that

course, to complete the picture, there is now the option of preparing grilled steaks, which is where the handsome Viking with a rotisserie comes in. The grill—an outdoor room essential—was also the element that gave the design team the greatest challenge when decid-

design adds “dimension and visual interest to the room.” For lighting, they used recessed cans in the ceiling. Dimmers allow the space to be bright for reading or more muted for ambience.

While the ceiling stands out, the teak floors are in keeping with the rest of



The sliding French doors create a gracious entry onto the porch. During warm weather, they open up to connect the two spaces and bring your eye into the lush landscaping beyond.

The porch is warmed by the flames of the fire as well as the natural tones of the cultured stone that surrounds the fireplace and grill. In the summer, the ceiling fan that is mounted on the beadboard tray ceiling cools the porch.



the home. "The client wanted to carry the same color family from the dark oak floors inside," Mary explains. As for rain (and that other nasty New England element, snow) that will sneak in through the screens, the water will drip through the floor just as it would on an outdoor deck. "We tried to make the room as low maintenance as possible, and teak floors are zero maintenance," Dan says. Mahogany, ironwood, stone or slate would also be good floor choices for outdoor rooms. Dan and Mary also rave about composite floor materials like Trex that look natural but require no maintenance.

Other touches include a storage area for outdoor chair cushions and, next to the grill, Silestone countertops, a man-made material that is heat—and stain—resistant. Also, the outdoor room opens onto a large bluestone patio, allowing the two spaces to interact.

The Tibmas are delighted with their completed project and the overall trend that they call leading edge. "This kind of

room is hot, hot, hot in the rest of the country," Dan says. "It's just a little slower catching on here."

They also recommend that anyone considering building an outdoor room start by deciding on an investment

Other touches include a storage area for outdoor chair cushions and, next to the grill, Silestone countertops, a man-made material that is heat—and stain—resistant.

threshold for the project and then pull pictures from magazines. Mary also suggests, "Look at homes in your neighborhood that have done this type of project and ask what they like about it and what they would do differently. Then

you can develop your vision for the space. How would you imagine using it? Is it for entertaining? Relaxation? Will you use it as a space for hobbies?" For example, a gardener might want to install a work space or grow lights to start seedlings in the spring. If the function is entertaining, you might want a wet bar or serving area.

Another major consideration with an outdoor room is placement. "You don't want it to look like it was stuck on the back of the house," Dan says. "The layout should integrate the space into the existing home and increase the visual appeal."

Are you thinking about an outdoor room? Maybe it's time to shut the door on that New England winter and plan for a time when you can sit by your fireplace and watch a movie with leaves swirling outside and the door wide open.

For more on Tibma Design Build, please visit tibmadesignbuild.com or call 781-453-0414.