

SELL THE ALFRESCO LIFESTYLE

By Jackie Sears

For many of us, the summer months are the best time to sell a property because we can take advantage of one of the best developments of contemporary residential design - that seamless blending between interior and exterior spaces. And when the outside world is at its most inviting, there's plenty you can do to draw attention to all the touching points between inside and out, that's guaranteed to inspire buyers.

To find a scheme that suits your space rather than one that just looks good in a stylised retail environment, requires a bit of thought and planning before opening our wallets at the laptop or the till.

The key thing to consider is the approach and framing of the access to the garden. Start with the view that's framed by the door. Hold this in your visual field so you can take in all the elements that frame the view to the outside. If you find it doesn't easily stay in your mind's eye, take a photograph, which always helps to improve a sense of objectivity anyway. If necessary, take a few from a single position and "stitch" them together either on your software or printing and gluing.

We're aiming for an ambience, a particular feeling of unobtrusive calm and promise, a sense of invita-

tion.

Take in the objects and elements you can see on the framing wall, and in the view outside. Consider their colours, shapes and textures, their placement relative to each other, and see if there are any elements outside that you could echo inside. This is a key trick to drawing the viewer through the room and out of doors.

If you have a lot of artwork, window dressing etc., on the framing wall, it could be that they are attracting more attention than your outdoor focal point, so edit these accordingly. The best way is to select those elements that relate most to the view, then remove everything from the wall. Add the selected elements one at a time until you get the balance right.

If your view is not one you want to draw attention to, then create a closer, more attractive, focal point. In fact, a partially screened view can arouse more curiosity and interest than one which can be taken in all at once, so this is a good technique for smaller gardens too. To achieve this, you'll need to choose the area to screen from standing where you would first come into the room. Screen the area either with hanging plants, tall plants in pots, or a latticed screen, or a combination. Give the screened area an identity and purpose. For example, set up a small table and chair, add cushions, glasses, a jug, magazines, hang some decorative tea-light holders. To get that seamless look, ensure the colours relate to your indoor objects, and make sure the route to it is clear of furniture.

Articulating an alfresco lifestyle is the ultimate wow factor in summer selling. Even if you can only set up a small dining area, beautifully done, this will add great value in the eyes of potential buyers.

Again, we work with what's already there so take a good look at



the colours of your planting to inform your alfresco scheme.

You can create impact by choosing objects of opposite hues, (but be sure to get the balance right - a little yellow/orange goes a surprisingly long way with its opposites, purple/blue), or you can create calm by choosing colours in the same area of the colour wheel. Whichever your palette, use these in your parasols, table and glassware, seat cushions, lanterns, rugs and painted furniture. Do dress the table as for dining prior to viewings.

Add to the drama by arranging planters and other objects in vertical triangles; it's best to avoid placing same-height objects together. For larger items, think lightweight, waterproof and readily de-mountable. Permanent fixtures such as a weatherproof dining table can team up with portable chairs and accessories. Store cushions, throws and rugs in rattan cushion-topped trunks which can double up as seating. ♦



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