



Creating Curb Appeal



Michelle Valigursky & Lisa Vail with Photography by Theresa M. Grant



Schiffer



The Decorator's Touch: Fabric and Furniture

Top decorators understand the value in carrying this same attention to detail to the outdoor spaces. "People should enjoy all facets of their homes," says Amy Novek, an interior designer in New Jersey. "Fabric and furniture manufacturers have addressed our need to expand our living space to the outdoors. While once we only had a handful of selections for weatherproof fabric, now we have hundreds of choices in pattern, texture and weight. It's a fabulous way to express personal taste."

Novek recommends evaluating the exterior space to be decorated by asking three important questions. How much sun exposure will the space get? Will fabric and furniture be regularly protected from the elements? If not, are you willing to remove or cover cushions and furniture during inclement weather and the off-season?

The answers to these questions will determine how durable your outdoor furniture will need to be. Wicker chairs with lovely cotton fabric cushions should need little upkeep on the front porch, but not everyone is up to the task of bringing them in from the uncovered patio every time the sky looks threatening. Consider opting for low-maintenance materials like aluminum and Sunbrella® fabrics.

Avoid the temptation to buy your furniture in "suites" or have everything covered in the same fabric. Says Novek, "Mix and match your fabrics. Choose complementary shades in a burly textured fabric to provide visual interest to a seating arrangement.

On a porch or beneath an arbor where sun and rain exposure will be limited, experiment with a palette of patterned and solid cotton blends for cushions, throw pillows and tablecloths." Author Lisa Vail adds, "I pair unique finds, like the pair of bamboo folding chairs I discovered at an import store, with other pieces I have collected in my travels. I use my knowledge of scale, line, color and shape to determine if an arrangement works, rather than obeying outdated rules about what 'goes together.'"

When it comes to furniture style, Outdoor Designer Robin Nowicki advises her clients to choose classics. "Because furniture is an investment, I want my clients to enjoy their choice for many years. My favorite is molded cast iron with a bronzed finish. It's fairly ornate, holds up to all types of weather and needs very little maintenance. For the Northeast it's perfect – you don't have to bring it in during winter."

Another great option in warmer climates is synthetic all-weather rattan, as opposed to the natural variety, and the modern offerings of plastic, aluminum, stainless or powder-coated steel. Two newcomers to the outdoor furniture arena are ipe (pronounced ee-pay) and nyatoh, non-endangered hardwoods prized for durability, strength, price and good looks.

For a more artistic approach to furnishing outdoor spaces, look beyond tradition. Tree seats, hand chiseled stone benches and hammocks provide privacy, seating and relaxation with a flash of personality.

Designer and mosaic artist Jo Beserra has decorated his front patio with as much attention to comfort and personal expression as the interior of his home. *Photo by Jo Beserra*



The Artistic Touch

In television productions, pale blue light is used to simulate the effect of natural moonlight. Yellow-orange incandescent light will mimic a setting sun. A rosy light will give the impression of dawn. But when lighting a house to maximize curb appeal, "Crisp pure white mercury vapor gas lights looks absolutely the best," says Jeff Williams. "Though some of our customers want to experiment with colored lenses for special occasions, the architecture stands out the best through simple application of light. We don't do much colored lighting because it can have an overpowering and garish effect."

"We recommend lighting to highlight peaks and special architectural features like keystones over windows," Williams explains. He points out that a favorite technique is "to highlight ornamental trees such as Japanese maples, crape myrtles and river birches. The variegated foliage becomes a stunning sight in the evening landscape."

"My clients rely on accent lighting to add as much drama to their exterior spaces as they do for their interior surrounds," comments Amy Novek, an ASID interior designer in New Jersey. "It's all about setting a mood. Some homes have purely functional lights, while others marry form and function with a hint of romance and personality."

LeMay Madden recalls a client who asked for subtle and natural looking exterior lighting. "We gave him a moonlighting effect, with a pale blue light source in a tree shooting down very, very softly to give the impression of a full moon."

When special occasions demand drama, look to exterior lighting as a solution. Imitate starlight by draping white twinkle lights over pergolas. Uplight columns for high impact, or install color-changing fiber optic lighting.

Some people prefer to permanently set mood-invoking lighting scenes they can recall with the touch of a button. For a high-tech approach to simplicity, LeMay Madden recommends programming a lighting keypad with different customized themes: exterior dining scene, dance party scene, low level scene, night light scene, out-of-town scene, holiday sparkle scene, etc.



A clever window art installation allows light into a neighboring yard, while also providing privacy for the homeowner. *Photo by Jo Beserra*



Tucked among the succulents along mosaic artist Jo Beserra's front path, this canine Buddha adds an extra layer of light on special occasions. *Photo by Jo Beserra*

Brush Strokes



Artist Jo Beserra's paintings of clouds and sky gives depth and interest to an expansive blank space. *Photo by Jo Beserra*

Imagine sipping wine while gazing at a sweeping view of rows of glistening grapevines. Perhaps you see a forbidden glimpse inside a sunroom where a lazy cat sleeps. Or maybe you envision a beckoning entry into a shadowed garden.

You can have it all and more with *trompe l'oeil*. Fool the eye. It's the mural artist's trick of setting a scene with the mystery and inspiration of paint and it's been around since 400 B.C. when the Greeks and Romans embellished the walls of their homes. Architect Leone Alberti claimed the technique offered "a window into space." Today, urban artists reclaim graffiti-stained walls with expressions of community and spirituality, changing the high-rise landscapes of our nation's largest cities.

These same *trompe l'oeil* techniques have residential applications. Jo Beserra learned the technique while set painting. "Working on scenery made me aware that

you can create any kind of aesthetic for your home with paint. It's the most inexpensive way to do something lush and wonderful with incredible dramatic impact. And it's especially effective outdoors."

Jack Pabis is a Maryland muralist whose imagination takes shape through vivid brush strokes and splashes of color. "Murals offer the illusion of something more. On the surface of a garage door, for example, my clients want rose gardens, crumbling Roman ruins, or open windows. There is no limit to what we can create."

Pabis explains the technique. "The simplest outdoor murals are usually done in exterior oil-based house paint. When painting over a porous surface such as brick or concrete, we treat the area in advance of the mural creation. A homeowner can extend the life of a mural by choosing a location with indirect light and sealing it periodically with a non-yellowing oil-based or polyurethane varnish."

Water, Water Everywhere

Nothing holds more universal appeal than the sound and sight of running water. The soothing influence it has on us can't be definitively explained. Perhaps it goes back to our primal human desire to live near water, on which man is dependent for survival, or a physiological syncopation with our own inner H₂O. Or, it could simply be a reminder of carefree days at the beach or wading through a forest creek.

"There is no front garden or entryway that won't benefit from a water feature. Not a day goes by that we aren't installing one for a client," says Landscape Designer Randy Anderson. The most elaborate and most expensive are boulder waterfall designs, but he assures that a water feature is possible on any budget. "Even a birdbath can act as a water feature because of the animation when birds splash."

With a kit from your local garden supply store, create a fountain out of any vessel you'd like. Water spilling from a large urn into a bed of pebbles (the water re-circulates through tubing in a watertight reservoir underneath) makes a simple yet striking statement. Be sure to seal porous, unglazed pots to prevent leakage. Consider the location from inside the home and out to maximize enjoyment. And don't forget to illuminate your water feature for added drama.



This classically-designed cast iron fountain also serves as a birdbath. *Photo by Michelle Valigursky*



In Jo Beserra's front garden, the mosaic fountain pays homage to his grandmother, whose collection of Presidential plates was the impetus for this functional work of art. *Photo by Jo Beserra*