

# WellesleyWeston

MAGAZINE



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PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES HARRIS

# Bringing the Indoors \* outdoors

PATTY LENZ BOVIE **writer**

**a warm** summer breeze. The aroma of freshly cut grass. The seasonal chirping of crickets. These natural delights are a few of the reasons why so many people are moving their typical "inside" spaces outside—to experience the wonders of the outdoors without relinquishing the comfort of the indoors.

Today, more and more architects, landscape designers, and builders are creating fabulous exterior living areas as their clients can marvel at a star-filled sky from an overstuffed couch, prepare a gourmet meal while their family lounges by the pool, or even watch a movie by the light of a crackling fire.

As growing numbers of people are enjoying family and leisure time outside, requests for garden rooms, fire pits, outdoor kitchens, and "she sheds" (see sidebar on page 54)—essentially outdoor "man caves" designed specifically for women—have grown exponentially.

Locally, New Englanders are starting to make the most of their outdoor spaces as they can soak up every minute of the summer months. "We design outdoor spaces that transcend the boundaries between indoors and out, using the foundations of classical design and proportion to create comfortable outdoor living spaces and timeless landscapes," said Kathryn Ostermier of Dan Gordon Landscape Architects in Wellesley.

Bruce MacDowell, Jr., owner of The MacDowell Company, a Western-based landscape architecture and construction company, has collaborated with a number of clients in



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN GORDON LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS/PATTY & JAMES HARRIS

*left: The poolhouse at Whitaker in Wellesley  
right: This stone fireplace and dining terrace provide  
space for the clients to entertain family and friends*



Bringing the Indoors Outdoors

Interior of Westover Poolhouse

Wellesley and Weston to achieve a range of distinctive exterior living areas. "We've created terraces with fireplaces as inviting spaces for family and friends to congregate closely around," he said. "They are optimal for evenings and add the natural ambience of sound, smell, and warmth to the suburban landscape."

Another trend is a move toward outdoor kitchen and dining areas. For one client, MacDowell created a unique space that transports the comforts and conveniences of indoor dining outside.

It features an open-air cabana with Greek architectural influences that is warmly lit by a bold, cast iron chandelier to create an elegant ambience. Instead of a rug, colorful ceramic tiles warm up the dining space as a practical, water-resistant alternative. And the columns and rooflines of the structure boast Tuscan styling reminiscent of Italian piazzas.

But clients don't need to have acres of land or endless budgets to create an inviting outdoor space. "Many times it's the smaller projects, whether

## The She Shed

While the term "she shed" is relatively new, the idea is not. In 1912, Alva Vanderbilt (yes, that Vanderbilt) had an elaborate Chinese Tea House built on her sprawling Marble House property in Newport, Rhode Island. Alva used the space for political rallies and social teas to raise money for "Votes for Women."

Now, "she sheds" are popping up anywhere there's space and desire for them, not just at the most elite homes. Some women use their "she sheds" for art or music studios, pool houses, to practice yoga, as a reading or writing nook, or as a place to retreat for some well-deserved solitary peace and quiet—just footsteps from home. Others use them to gather with friends, socialize, and relax—not just in summer, but all year round. No matter what they are used for, there's no denying that their popularity has begun to soar.

The she shed in Weston shown in the accompanying photo is anything but a shed. Originally built as a pool house in the 1920s, this elegantly appointed room reflects the owner's sensibility to Old World spaces. Its soaring Palladian windows bring in rays of natural light and the bright, front door in this intimate hideaway is as sophisticated as it is feminine. In the summer, the fully recessed doors have hidden screens that enhance the indoor-outdoor feel of the room. The trellised ceiling is reminiscent of a gazebo, and the hand-painted flowers that run along the border were inspired by the owner's love of roses.



## Bringing the Indoors Outdoors

*This custom dining patio is sheltered from the elements yet allows the homeowners the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors*

it be due to scale or budget, when a designer's skills and creativity become paramount," explained MacDowell. "Every problem has a solution; each canvas has a painting not yet realized. It's often amazing how small changes in the landscape can reinvent the space and make what was uninviting or unusable into a desirable place to be."

"When able, we like to get away from the basic stone patio, function-only walls, square lawn spaces, and simple plantings," said MacDowell. "We feel it's our obligation to introduce interesting and inviting spaces that draw in the client, their family, and their guests."

Rebecca Verner, landscape architect and senior associate at Gregory Lombardi Design in Cambridge, agrees that livable outdoor spaces are becoming more and more desirable. "There's definitely been a growing interest in creating elaborate outdoor spaces for our clients—five pits with hearths you can sit on, pools adjacent to sports courts, and entire cabanas with full-on outdoor kitchens that include not only a grill, but an ice maker, a dishwasher, and a fully-stocked refrigerator. These exterior spaces have become an extension of their interiors and a destination, especially in the summer."

One Lombardi client wanted to create a space to entertain their two teenage children—a place where the kids would feel comfortable inviting their friends over and hanging out at home. "When the family moved in four years ago, the lot did not have much usable space.

The property abuts protected wetlands, and is very steep and rocky," said Verner. But both the client and the designers knew it had tremendous potential.

Lombardi and Verner worked with Meyer & Meyer Architects to create doors that open up onto a terrace for entertaining. Under the terrace, a walk-out "outdoor basement" has a flat-screen television built into the wall. Hammock chairs dangle from the ceiling, and a circular couch for lounging and entertaining looks out onto a 100-year-old wooded landscape. "It's a really inviting space now," said the client. "I have two teenagers who are constantly coming and going so I wanted to make our home accessible to them and their friends with game tables, a snack bar, and movies. We



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didn't want to be inside in the movie room in the summer—we wanted to be outside with the crickets and the babbling brook and the sounds of nature. Now, when we're sitting out there, we feel like we're on vacation."

Jim Douthit, owner of a Blade of Grass in Wayland, sees the appeal of outdoor additions as well. "Creating an outdoor 'room' makes it feel like your home has a whole new level of living space." But he also points out that it's important to make these "rooms" easily accessible. "If you have an exterior space that's just a few steps from the house, you're much more likely to use it." One of the things he's big on is elevating patios. "Walking down two steps versus four can make all the difference when you're doing it a lot."

He also believes in adding interesting visual elements whenever possible. "Mixing a brick herringbone pattern with traditional bluestone provided a little extra something at one Wellesley home," he said. Without deterring from practicality, the bricks added texture and created a dining space distinct from the rest of the patio.

One client's home in Weston had a view of a wire fence, with very little privacy. French doors opened to a yard, but the space was completely underutilized. Douthit recommended building a large bluestone patio with a fireplace and sitting wall separate from the dining area. To create privacy, his landscapers planted dark American Arborvitae along with white pine, spruce, and hemlock trees beyond the stone fireplace, creating an additional spot for family and friends to gather. And because

COURTESY OF A BLADE OF GRASS



*The elevated patio at this Wellesley home increases its usability*





**Bringing the Indoors Outdoors**

*Casual entertaining in Weston is made easier with the dining area adjacent to the pool*

## Resources

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Omar El Abd, MD

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Douthit raised the grade of the patio to match the dining room level, "it now feels like it's part of the same room," he explained.

Another of Douthit's projects in Weston had an oversized, flat yard, which was easier to work with than some, but begged for depth and dimension. In this case, the client wanted a place to relax in the summer and entertain, while also creating an intimate setting for family. The team at a Blade of Grass transformed the space by adding extra windows for an enhanced view; an expansive patio and pool with hot tub; and plantings of plane trees, boxwood, quick fire hydrangeas, and tree-form 'PecGee' hydrangeas.

"Hardscaping adds beautiful structure to a space, but mixing it with plantings and landscaping is what makes a project really special," added Douthit.

No matter how small, steep, wooded, or barren as your yard may be, most lots have underused space that can be repurposed and transformed by someone with a trained eye and creative vision. In the end, it can make all the difference. Having outdoor space provides an extra space to entertain—or just relax and decompress. [www.wellesleywestonmagazine.com](http://www.wellesleywestonmagazine.com)