

How to Create the

→ *Perfect* ←

Backyard Space

A guide for Hudson Valley homeowners on outdoor living design and build essentials.

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Your path to

Outdoor perfection is almost here.

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Lets get

Started

Many homeowners today are seeking ways to extend their home's living spaces into the great outdoors. But while you can probably find information and inspiration for creating a beautiful indoor space like a living room or kitchen, outdoor living design advice is not quite as available. At least not yet. Luckily, in finding this guide, you've found a resource that will help you to create an outdoor living space that is perfect for your home and for your family. Let's dive into some of the considerations you'll face when designing and planning your outdoor space.



Great projects begin with design

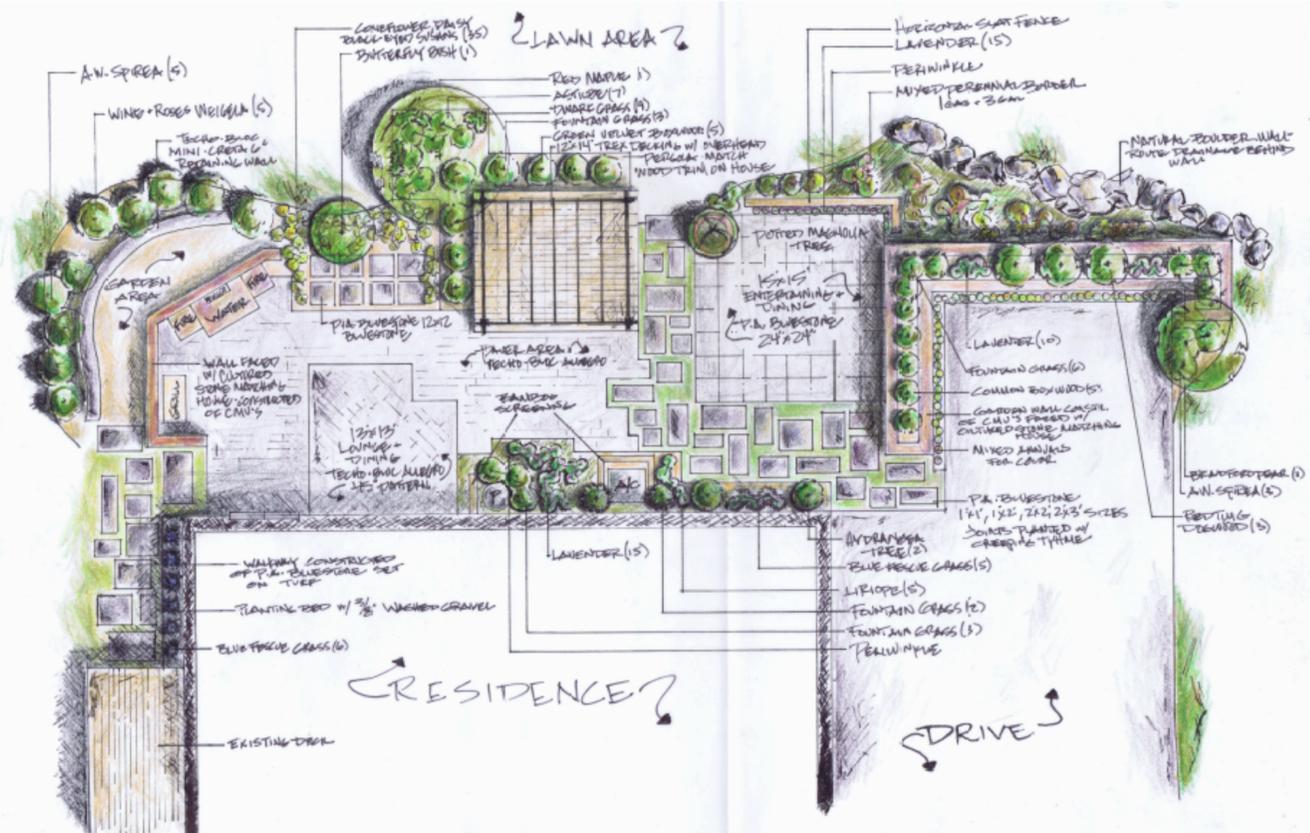


Just like with most things that end up great, backyard patio spaces begin with extensive thought and planning. And before any of the finer, perhaps more fun, design details like colors, materials choices, and styles can be considered, a few very important elements must be addressed.

What existing conditions are you working with?

First up, let's have a look at the existing plot or site. What conditions must be dealt with when creating this new space? Usually, when you visit a truly amazing living space, either indoors or out, the design is one that works very well with the surrounding native conditions. There are a few important factors to consider during this step. Are there any existing views that you would like to keep? Maybe there's a mountain range visible from the back door sliders that we have to maintain. If not, then now is a good time to realize that you will need to create some kind of focal point for your patio space like a fountain or a special ornamental tree.

Secondly, you must take notice of what is referred to as the microclimate of your property. All this means is to identify factors that will affect you and your guest's comfort while using the patio. Often finding things like really hot spots without natural shade or windy sections of the land unsheltered from prevailing winds can make or break an outdoor living space. Knowing these factors in advance will allow you to place an overhead shade structure in just the right spot or install large tree plantings that will work to block strong winds from reaching guests.



Properly locating special features like fire pits and outdoor kitchens is crucial the success of the project. For instance, outdoor kitchen should not be located too far from the indoor kitchen or else entertaining will be more workout session and less fun. A fire feature should be protected from prevailing winds and visible at night from the main seating area. Drawing simple bubbles for these elements on the map is a perfect way to start framing out the spaces.



A basic site map is a great starting point.

While your new outdoor space may become an important part of your family’s home, it is not the only part. Remembering this will make sure you don’t create your patio in a vacuum. Working with a basic drawing of your property and house, now updated with your existing site conditions, it’s time to begin roughly locating where the main elements of the design will be.

Consider things like traffic flow from the house to patio, from the driveway to the patio, and so on. Thinking what it would be like to use the spaces is a great way to identify problem areas in the layout.

Proximity is everything.



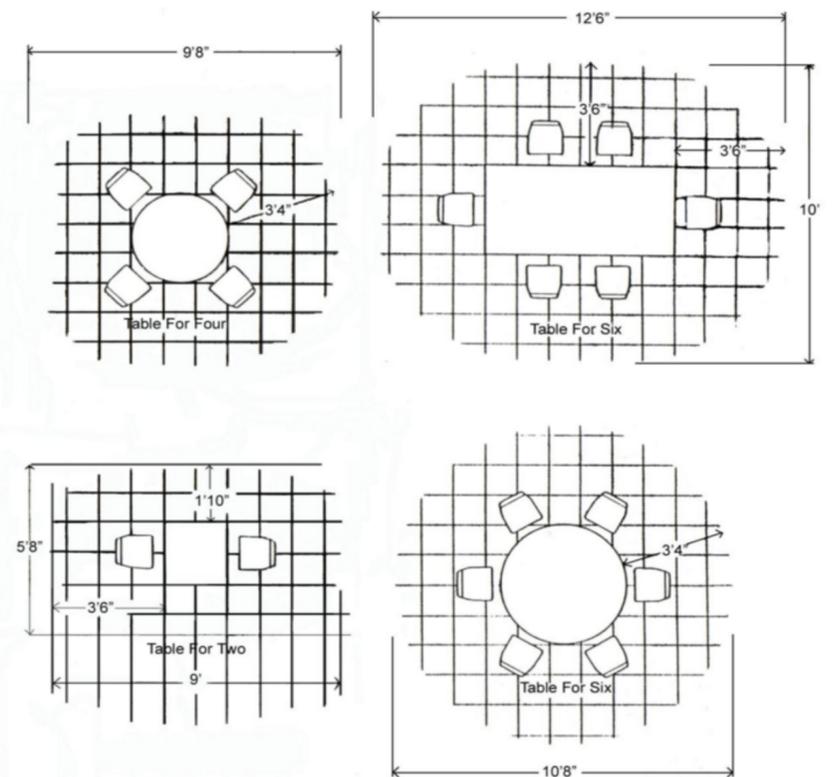


Sizing your new space.

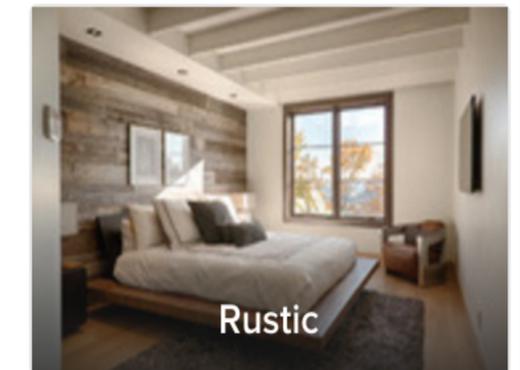
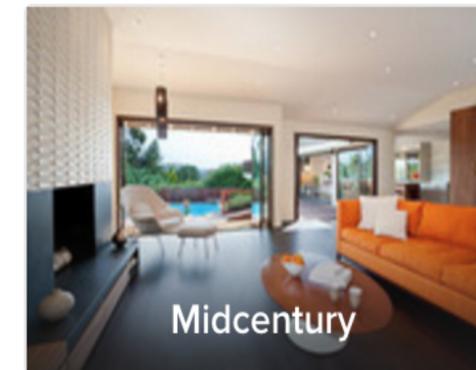
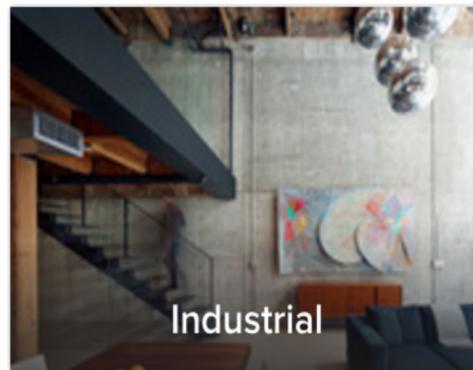
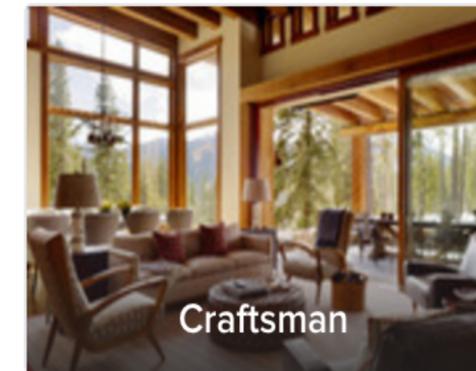
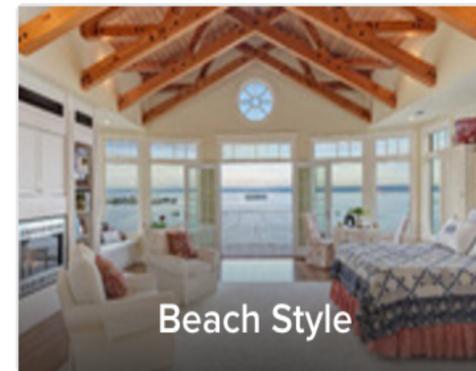
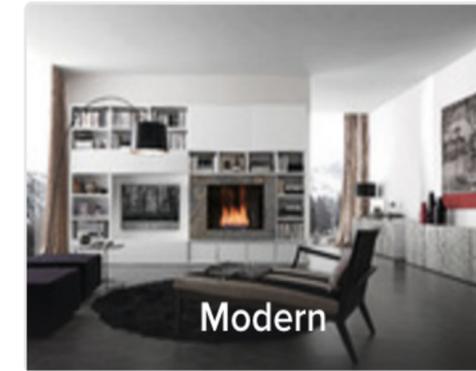
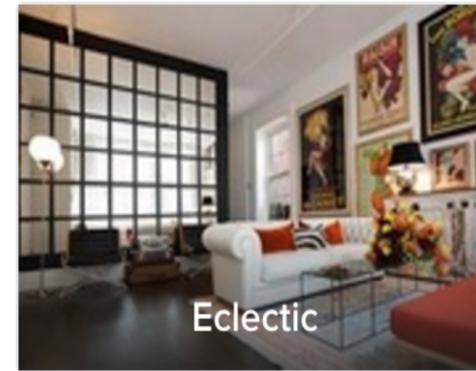
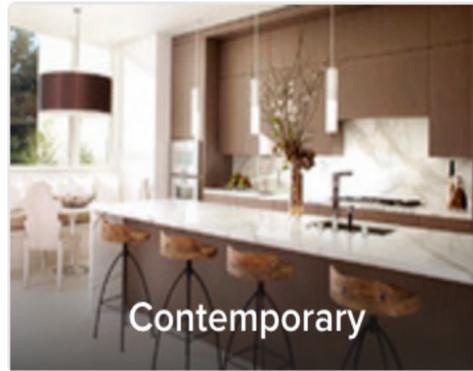
Considering how you will actually use your backyard is the best way to solve for the sizing problem. How big is your family? Do you like to entertain regularly? What type of furniture do you like and what are the dimensions? Questions like these are extremely helpful in making sure to not go too small or too big.

Think of your outdoor spaces just as you would your indoor living room and kitchen. This is an excellent way to get a feeling for spatial sizing. Considering the trends in outdoor living today, chances are pretty good that you will find yourself using your landscape spaces just as you would your indoor home.

We've included a handy guide from the Concrete Network, which shows the average square footage it takes to accommodate different furniture arrangements. Planning should start from the essentials like a dining set and expand from there. Once the fundamentals are met, you can access what's left in the budget and how you would like to allocate them.



MISH MASH OF EVERYTHING ISN'T A STYLE. PICK ONE AND EMBRACE IT.



This is how the folks at Houzz classify the style options.

Deciding on the design style of your new outdoor space.

With the very important preliminary considerations in place, it's now a good time to start thinking about your style preferences. Again, these will not be very different than if you were designing a family room inside your home. Are you a lover of clean-lines and modern flair? Perhaps you feel most at home in the country.

Whatever it may be, knowing this will be important for pulling your new space all together. There are a ton of online resources that are jam-packed with decorating inspiration for both indoors and out—one of the best being Houzz.

Features=Benefits

A well planned outdoor space often includes more than just a patio. Special features such as a pergola, outdoor movie screen, outdoor sound system, water features, and fire features can really add a higher level of detail to the space. Considering these important features as you budget will help you enjoy your outdoor living space even more. Here are a few to consider.



Patio Heaters are one of the main reasons people prefer to stay indoors during the spring and fall is the warmth found inside a house. You can now bring this warmth outside by adding a portable heater to your outdoor space. Thanks to the advancements in portable heaters you can choose from a variety of designs and colors that will meet the style you have chosen for your outdoor space.

Landscape lighting is a huge part of an enjoyable patio space. This can come in the simple form of candles, but for a more long-term solution you can choose hanging string lights, lanterns, pathway lights, and spotlights. Aesthetic appeal and safety are great results.

Built-in Grills and Outdoor Kitchens change the way you use your new outdoor space. We all love to eat, and some of us love to cook. But why cook inside when you can grill outside? By building an outdoor kitchen you can create a space where you can prepare and cook food even as you socialize with others. Additionally, your grill area can be customized to meet your cooking needs, budget, and size requirements —perfectly complimenting the rest of your landscape design.

Water Features offer something very relaxing and refreshing, and if your budget allows for it you should definitely add a water feature to your landscape. This can come in the form of a small fountain, water garden with Koi fish, or an elaborate pondless waterfall with custom pavers and retaining walls.

Shade structures range from pergolas and umbrellas to sails and trees. Shade is an important factor to any outdoor space. You should plan to enjoy your space as much in the middle of the day as you do in the evening. For those “hot spots” that you identified in your sitemap planning exercise earlier, a properly placed pergola can make all the difference.

Choosing the right material.

Just like so many products today, the dizzying options for concrete paver styles from manufacturers like Unilock can be a daunting task. So many catalogs filled with ideas to look through which are fantastic for inspiration, don't get me wrong. But how do you begin to narrow down the choices to something that you know will match well with your home's exterior and last forever? Here's a few tips to get you heading in the right direction.





Look for the Lifetime Guarantee.

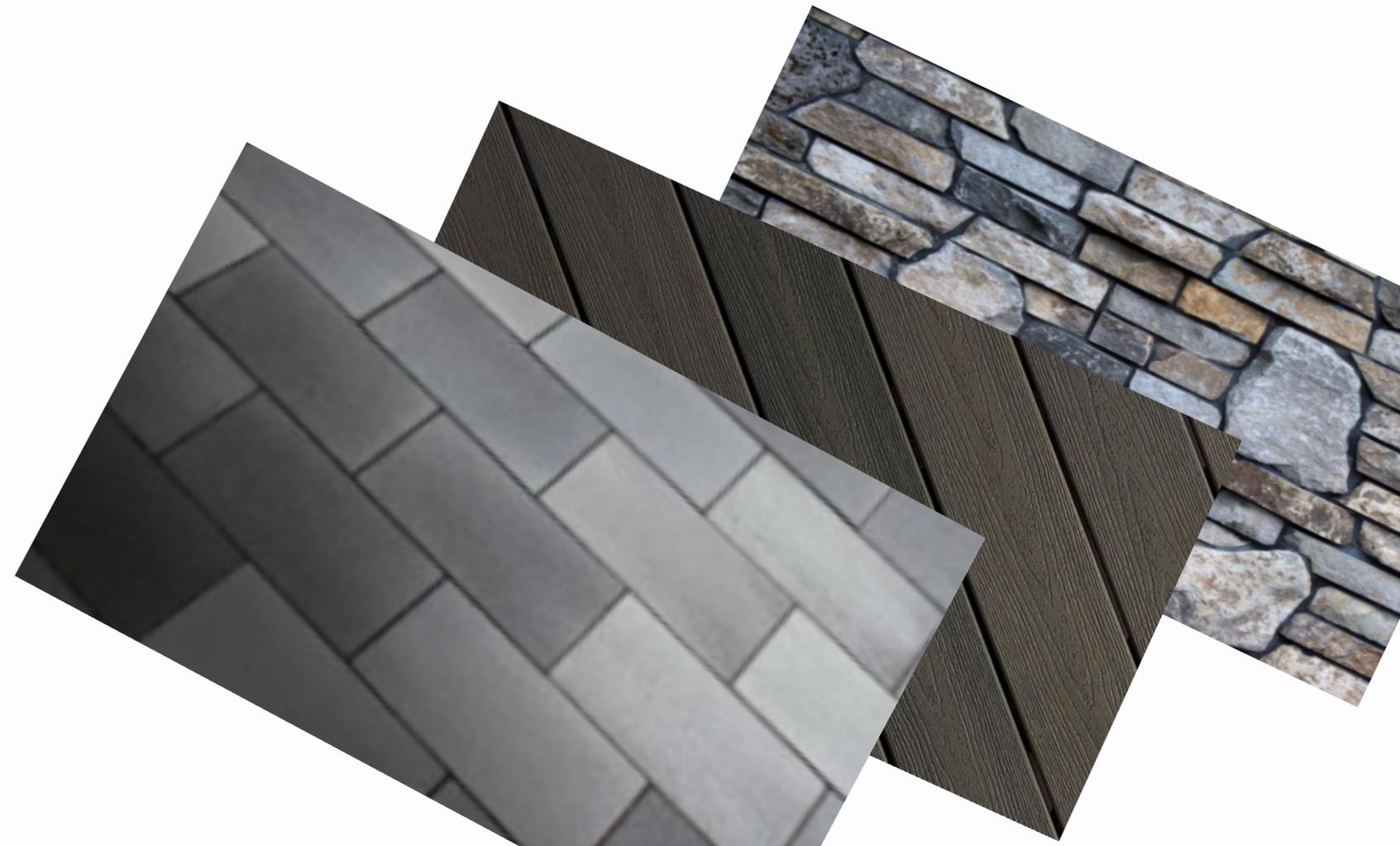
There are so many manufacturers of concrete paving stones today that offer a wide range of products with differing quality. With all of these quality options there is no reason for homeowners to settle for a product that doesn't have a lifetime guarantee on the structural integrity of the product. Your outdoor kitchens, fire pit areas, patios, and walkways will thank you later.



Style choices.

Let's face it. Just like when deciding on colors and styles for the interior rooms of your home, the style of your outdoor pavers is crucial to your satisfaction. Many manufacturers offer tools like real outdoor displays, design suggestions, tested combinations, and photo galleries to help homeowners see the different colors, finishes, textures, sizes, and shapes available.

Look to tap into the expertise of a landscape contractor for help as these folks design and install these paver materials day in and day out. Take your time and choose pavers that you will be happy living with for years to come.



Hiring the right contractor for your project



Choosing the right professional landscape contractor for your job can be challenging, so be sure to block out the necessary time to do your homework. It will save you a lot of stress and money in the future.

Do your research.

So what exactly should you look for in a landscape contractor?

For most landscape and pool projects, a qualified landscape design/build firm is the best choice. These types of projects generally include concrete paving stones—manufacturers like Unilock, Techo-Bloc, and Cambridge have extensive product catalogs—and/or a deck built from composite materials like Trex or Fiberon.

That said, you want to hire a landscape firm that has extensive experience installing custom hardscapes and decking. Check their portfolio of work and be sure to also get references of past and current clients. Important certifications for paving stone and retaining wall installers include ICPI and NCMA, as well as manufacturer certifications like the Unilock Authorized Contractor Program and the Techo-Bloc program, Techo-Pro





How do I compare estimates and landscaping companies?

When interviewing landscaping companies for your project, you will be faced with the challenge of comparing pricing, details of the design, and proposed quality. It is critical to ensure you are comparing apples to apples throughout this process. 9 times out of 10, if you have 3 estimates in front of you, and one is far lower priced than the others, this contractor is cutting corners and sacrificing the installation quality of your project to win the job. Do not fall into this trap as the price you will pay to repair the project later will far surpass doing it right the first time.

What questions should I ask potential landscape contractors?

This helpful list of questions to consider was compiled by paving stone and retaining wall manufacturer, Unilock.

- How long have they been in the landscape business?
- Do they have liability insurance and are they covered by Workers' Compensation?
- What landscape jobs have they done that are similar to what you need done?
- Do they have a list of references?
- What is their landscape training and background?
- How are their employees trained?
- Do they attend manufacturer-training sessions?
- What warranty do they offer?
- Do the products they recommend have a warranty?
- Are there any permits required for this job? Whose responsibility is it to get these permits?
- What is their timeline for your project?
- What is their cleanup routine?
- Do they provide a written contract?
- What are their payment terms?
- Do they have a website?
- Other thoughts:
 - Base preparation is a key factor in every paver and wall installation. Ask them about how they handle the base preparation.
 - Drainage is also a key factor in every landscape job. Ask them how they plan to handle the drainage.

ADDING ACCENTS AND DÉCOR

Once your new space is complete, it's time to make it a true part of your home. Imagine moving into a new house and leaving it empty except for a few pieces of furniture. Wouldn't happen, right? So it shouldn't happen with your backyard patio space either.



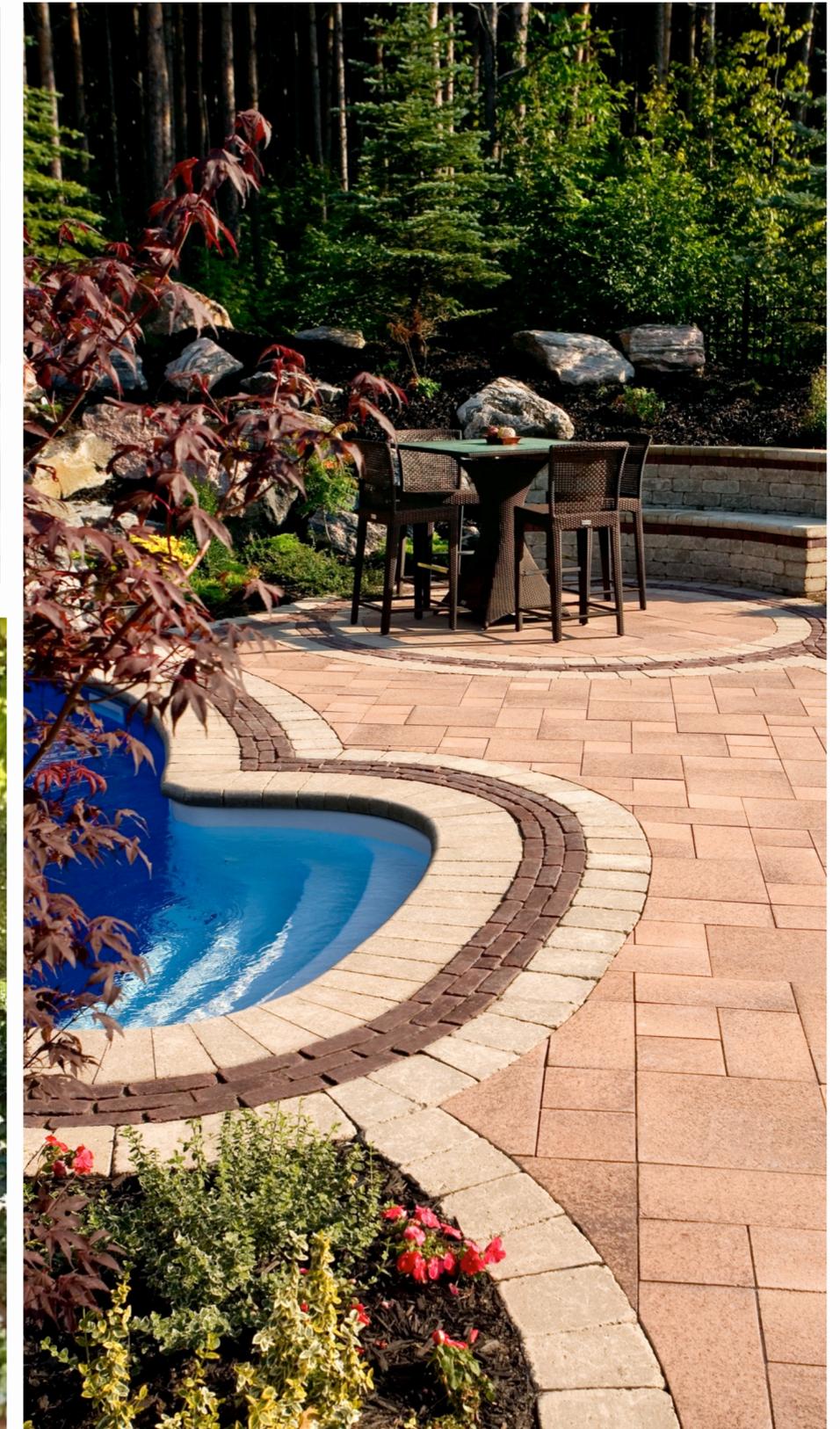
Adding pops of color.

Just like the interior spaces of your home, the outdoor living and landscape spaces need a color scheme. Let's take your new patio for instance. While considering the colors of your natural stone or concrete pavers, add one bold accent color to the soft, muted colors of nature. Introduce this color through outdoor pillows, couch cushions, planters, and even outdoor rugs. Remember, a little goes a long way here!



Texture brings dimension.

One of the best ways to add warmth and class to an outdoor living space is through the careful use of contrasting textures. There are a ton of options in the outdoor fabrics world today for pillows, throws, outdoor curtains, and outdoor rugs. Combine these durable fabrics with woven wicker or wrought iron outdoor furniture and throw in some rough concrete and stone. Top it off with lush plantings and you've got yourself a truly special outdoor space.



Let there be light.

Show me the light.

Outdoor lanterns are popular for a good reason—they bring function and style together in a traditionally interior design element. Restoration Hardware and Pottery Barn offer some awesome options in a variety of shapes and sizes. Adding a fire pit or fire bowl can add both warmth and light, not to mention a reason to gather the family up for a cozy chat session! Landscape lighting, string lighting, and even candles are all great additions to your outdoor living spaces as well.



FINAL THOUGHTS.



We have covered a lot of ground in this guide. The disciplines of landscape design, patio installation, and interior and exterior decorating are ones that require extensive education and experience. That said, we hope this guide has helped to shine some light on the important steps involved in creating a backyard escape for your home. Have fun creating your outdoor spaces and more importantly, enjoy using them with your friends and family.

If you are planning an outdoor living project in the greater Hudson Valley, NY region, and are looking to hire a professional team to help you with the design and installation of your home's new outdoor living space, the professionals at Harmony Hill Landscaping in Fishkill, NY would love to help. Please call us anytime at (845) 546-6471 or email us at JH@HarmonyHillLandscaping.com.