

by Laurie Rudd

OCEANFRONT ELEGANCE

A Tampa designer looks to Italy for outdoor inspiration



A balcony seating area offers stunning views of the ocean.

Designer: Ryan Hughes
Firm: Ryan Hughes Design Build
Project Location: Tampa, Fla.
Furniture Brands: Skyline Design
Fabric Brands: Sunbrella, Maxwell Fabrics
Accessories: Grand Effect fire pits, Fire Magic grill

INSPIRED BY THE SUN-DAPPLED SHORES AND sweeping views of the Mediterranean, designer Ryan Hughes recalled the romance of the Italian seaside to create an outdoor retreat for clients in the Tampa, Fla., area.

The project drew inspiration from the homeowners' Italian villa-style abode and their desire to capture the vacation vibe of the European coast in their own backyard.

"Every great outdoor design begins with a focus

on the needs of the client and their lifestyle," says Hughes, owner of Ryan Hughes Design Build in Tampa.

"Many of our most successful designs also have been based on the homeowner's personal experiences, including travel destinations."

The client asked Hughes to create a luxurious, exotic retreat with multiple areas ideal for swimming, dining and relaxing.

"Initially, the design posed challenges due to the limited

space and the complexity," Hughes says. "Our plan for the space included not only the pool and outdoor living areas, but also the creation of a balcony and first-floor portico area that were connected to the home."

WATER WORKS

Hughes specializes in waterfalls and water walls for his design clients. For this project, he created an elegant water wall reminiscent of a Tuscan villa. The wall boasts

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Fire features and a custom gazebo border the inviting pool.



An Italian-style outdoor kitchen beckons both cooks and foodies.

bold, orange onyx stone framed by an ornate arch; it accents the walkway adjoining the interior and exterior spaces of the home.

“This was a one-of-a-kind water feature that we created specifically for that space,” Hughes says. “It includes elements of light and sound, with LED lighting behind the stone and the soothing sound of water falling on rocks at the base.”

Hughes incorporated other water and fire features to highlight the space’s waterfront vista views and created multiple rooms within the overall exterior footprint.

“In keeping with the homeowner’s wishes for the space, each area was meticulously planned to enhance the overall space and to hold elements that would encourage relaxation and enjoyment of the natural setting,” Hughes

says. “We also were tasked with integrating the ornate design style. We added large columns and arches in the gazebo area, as well as decorative tile within the pool and on the outdoor kitchen.”

LIVING ROOMS

On one end of the pool, a custom-designed gazebo sets the scene for enjoying cool breezes off the nearby water. It features deep seating inside a finished wood pergola and concrete column structure, complete with a tiled water-and-fire feature centerpiece.

At the opposite end, cooks find plenty of room to flex their culinary muscles in the outdoor kitchen complete with a massive built-in grill, generous counter space and an arching backsplash that ties in the Italian theme with a scrolled tile centerpiece.

Additional seating within the outdoor plan includes chaise lounges and upper-

and lower-level deep seating—all with an ocean view. Hughes stuck with a central cushion color to create a cohesive look.

“A single fabric selection was intentionally used to coordinate all the furnishings in the design plan,” Hughes says. “In keeping with the Mediterranean color scheme, we selected a bold terra-cotta orange. It also worked in contrast with all the natural blues found in the surrounding waters.”

Though the project presented challenges in both scale and detail, with its close proximity to the water, Hughes found they pushed him to think beyond the bounds of physical space.

“Despite the spacial limitations,” he says, “we were proud to be able to provide a full-featured design that came together to complement an equally beautiful outdoor space.”

OUTDOOR THEATERS

by Laurie Rudd



This outdoor theater created by Ryan Hughes Design Build includes a custom fire feature, an outdoor television and curved outdoor furnishings for ample seating.

CASUAL CINEMA

Outdoor entertainment expands with al fresco theaters

DURING THE 1950S, OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT was all the rage as teenagers and families flocked to the local drive-in every weekend to take in an al fresco movie.

In the decades since, the interest in fresh-air viewing has ebbed and flowed, but as all things indoor are moving out, outdoor theaters are

again on the rise with one big difference—the viewing occurs right outside our back doors. And today’s technology makes it easier than ever for homeowners to enjoy the show.

“We have seen growth in demand for outdoor theaters due to the new technology with regard to sound distribu-

tion and much better outdoor products,” says Mark Van den Broek, president, Smart House Integration. “There is a real need for that part of our industry. There are now speakers and speaker systems that rival those used indoors.”

With innovative leaps in durability occurring across

all areas of the casual category, audio/video has followed suit, and homeowners now can take advantage of the technology solutions that can live outdoors while delivering an indoor experience.

“Electronics are improving in quality every year and are becoming more cost-effective

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for consumers,” says Adrian Bartels, Cedar Springs Landscape Group. “Our customers’ outdoor spaces have become an extension of their homes, and manufacturers have created more outdoor-rated products.”

And with the exponential growth of fire features fueling an extended season across the nation, the demand for outdoor diversion only increases.

“Even in Michigan, demand has been on the rise for outdoor theater-like entertainment,” says Barbi Krass, director of design, Colorworks Studio. “With outdoor design projects that increase the footprint of the home, there is always some type of home theater or outdoor television installation.”

BACK TO BASICS

As theater technology heads outdoors, the basic elements don’t differ much from equipment used indoors. But while the nuts and bolts such as projection, screening and speakers translate indoors and out, there are numerous ways that outdoor theaters require added considerations.

“A typical outdoor theater is comprised of a large screen or flat panel, projection system, anywhere from seven to 20 speakers, and whatever media source, which can range from a Blu-ray player to DirecTV,” says Eric Thies, founder, DSI Luxury Technology, which focuses on modern technology solutions for the entire home and has seen exterior technology on the rise.

Beginning with the screen, options are available in pull-down or lift-up models. “People want large drop-down screens or infinity pools with pop-up motorized screens,” Thies says. “We also



As part of the overall outdoor living and landscape plan, this outdoor theater by Cedar Springs Landscaping projects the latest technology and plenty of the homeowner’s personality.



SmartHome Integration has seen greater demand for outdoor theaters that have speakers and systems rivaling those used indoors.

have used waterproof large-screens to create what we call ‘dive in’ theaters.”

The speaker element in outdoor theaters also requires advanced technology and creative installation.

“We have seen a big desire for really high-performance outdoor audio systems with speakers that look like lights and subwoofers are buried in the ground,” Thies says. “We are even doing pools with underwater speakers.”

Projection units, which have seen an uptick in popularity, offer a wide range of styles and complexities while requiring the greatest protection from the elements.

“The way that (one of my projection projects) was built included a climate-controlled structure and the projector was in the building,” Krass says. “The nine-foot screen was a piece of glass and the media was projected from the rear.”

With this installation, Krass noted that watching the unit in bright sunlight didn’t pose a problem, as the system’s protection included installing an overhead glass door that closed the entire system off from the elements.

But the tricked-out system isn’t the only way to go. For many outdoor audio/video applications, the basics of screening, sound and projection can be accomplished as simply as the installation of

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an outdoor-safe television and sound bar. Available from numerous sources, these televisions are built with powder-coated aluminum bodies to protect the inner-workings from dust, snow, water, humidity and salt air.

BUILDING THE THEATER

Basics covered, building a true outdoor theater experience requires more than just mounting a television and some speakers. Like outfitting any outside space, the outdoor theater requires the same thoughtful consideration in its design and execution to create an area that mimics the indoor experience.

"It is important, especially in the case of major outdoor living designs and substantial budgets, that items such as speakers and other equipment are aesthetically pleasing," says Ryan Hughes, owner and designer for Ryan Hughes Design Build. "You do not want to build a beautiful outdoor space and then see large bulky speakers hanging on a wall. We work to hide them in the landscaping or recess them into



This outdoor theater by Colorworks Studio in Michigan was built to combat the elements with a complete structure to protect the system, including rear projection equipment and glass screen.

lanai ceilings."

Size matters, too. The scale of the space, and how many guests it should accommodate, are key considerations when building an outdoor theater. Also important? How the room fits in a client's outdoor environment.

"How big, or how many do you want to seat, and does it make sense in your environment?" are questions that I discuss with my clients," Van den Broek says.

And just as important as space is location. From the proximity to neighbors to

how the sun hits the area, the location of a home theater's footprint is crucial in designing a space that works for outdoor entertainment.

"How we deal with the sun is a major consideration," Van den Broek says. "You have to trick it."

For his installations, "tricking the sun" can include a shade structure for the television or the construction of an umbrella-like canopy structure. A recent installation included a wooden façade that wrapped around the television with an ac-

companying Bimini top that could be opened and lifted for full shade cover.

Playing nice with the neighbors is important, too. This involves not only sound, but also screen placement.

"The design of an outdoor audio system can give the customer a great experience and still be mindful of their neighbors," Bartels says. "We work at positioning speakers so that they are directed into the outdoor space rather than projecting out toward the neighboring properties."

No matter where it's placed, the outdoor theater has a tendency to become the center of the alfresco entertaining area.

"We typically design the outdoor theater as its own destination in the outdoor living space," Hughes says. "However, we always plan for the theater area to be visible from all other areas of the outdoor room. Since outdoor living revolves around entertaining, the theater should be the epicenter of the space."

THEATER TRENDS

Just as with indoor theater systems, the trend for outdoors follows the model of bringing a near-professional



Designed by Ryan Hughes, this dramatic outdoor entertainment lounge features custom sight and sound built within the walls, with four, 60-inch televisions.