

Converting Your Backyard Dreams into Outdoor Masterpieces

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- Patio Roofs
- Composite Decks
- Arbors
- Ponds
- Outdoor Kitchens
- Fire pits
- Outdoor Fireplaces
- Water features
- Concrete Finishing

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Outdoor Living The Do's and Don't's of Outdoor Design

America is moving outside.

The backyard is quickly becoming an extension of the family living room and Mom and Dad are putting up big dollars to decorate it to the max. Somehow, a gas grill, a picnic table and a good stand of Bermuda just aren't enough anymore. To be fully family-functional, today's backyard needs everything from putting greens and pools to hot tubs, fire pits and special outdoor flat screen TVs.

Nationally, homeowners are expected to spend more than \$40 billion this year on their new outdoor living areas. In fact, it is not unusual, even right here in the Tulsa area, for single projects in the most affluent areas to cost up to \$300,000.

So does it pay off to spend as much money renovating a backyard as it costs to buy a house? Debbie and Chris VanDenhende with Chinowth & Cohen's Executive Home Team explained that in today's market place, luxury homes are expected to have a professionally designed outdoor living space. "The family sitting on the front porch has moved to the backyard, where entertaining ranges from birthday parties to Final Four watch parties. Outdoor spaces are moving up on the priority list of required spaces and can be the deal maker for a home on the market.

Investing in the right plan can definitely add value to your home, but check with a professional and make careful choices," they said.

Where do you start? Where should you invest the most money? Doby and Jo Ann Franklin, owners of Franklin & Sons Deckmasters, are specialists at helping families design outdoor living areas that are as potentially profitable as they are useful. We interviewed them on the hottest outdoor ideas as well as the most important "Buyer Beware" issues for your outdoor living area. Relying on many years of experience, they helped us pull together the following "you-gotta-stop-to-consider-this" information.

Making Your Plan

Things to Consider with 10 of the Most Common Outdoor Living Projects

1. Sprinkler Systems – Probably the most basic first step to adding value to your yard is to install a sprinkler system. Today's homeowners expect it and it would be a negative to the value of your home not to have one. Besides that, you are going to love what it does for your yard. Don't invest in lots of landscaping without one.

2. Decks – One of the most common and useful improvements for yards with uneven sloping or with any drainage issues is to build a deck. Doby says that it is generally believed that homeowners can anticipate a 70 percent return on this investment. But buyer beware, decks made from the wrong material can not only lose their value quickly, they can also create a maintenance nightmare, requiring yearly treatments.



For years, the standard decking material was treated lumber or redwood, but new composite material providing much higher life has all but taken over the decking industry. "Don't let the higher price scare you. Though they generally run 25 percent more than wood decks, composite material is cheaper in the long run. You should make up the investment in approximately 5 years. They not only will last longer, you don't have the expense and trouble of re-staining the lumber every year. The better composite decking requires little or no maintenance, only a light cleaning with a hose every season," Doby explained. "But not all composite decks are created equally," he said. There are basically two different kinds, soft com-

posites and hard composites. The soft composites have a lower tensile strength than their counterpart, making them more likely to shrink and expand. Because of this, they tend to get wavy during the high heat and therefore it is necessary that they are set further apart (3/8 inch gap instead of 3/16 inch gap). This gives the deck floor a tendency to feel spongy with you walk on it. The bigger gap also becomes a hazard for any guest wearing high heels. Soft composite decks also require more cleaning, even hand scrubbing in some cases to avoid mold.

Doby also explained the importance of proper foundation construction for your deck, encouraging the homeowner to demand the use of #2 KD Kiln-dried treated southern yellow pine. Non-kiln-dried pine can twist as it ages. He also says that homeowners need to demand the use of ceramic-coated screws instead of nails. "They hold 3 times better," he insists, adding, "I've never put a nail into any deck I've built."

3. Patio Roofs – Patio roofs can be a great investment, especially for patios on the west side of the house. They provide an instant source of shade, require little or no maintenance and they add immediate value to your house. As opposed to arbors, they provide solid protection from the rain. Though generally more expensive than arbors, Doby has a construction method which dramatically reduces their cost, making them about the same price as your typical arbor.



4. Outdoor Fire pits and Fireplaces. – Though nothing may be more alluring than a fire pit or outside wood-burning fireplace, Doby says you should at least consider the instant enjoyment of gas log systems; Open fireplaces can be smoky, create a fire hazard, and a distraction, if placed in the wrong place. Also make sure they are properly drained so you don't have a puddle instead of an inviting fire pit.

5. Outdoor Kitchens – Outdoor kitchens are quite the rage and they typically add value to your home. They can be as "simple" as built-in gas range and preparation station, but can also include refrigerators, smokers, sinks, Jenn-Air® ranges and even chillers for wine bottles. Counter tops are often made of stamped concrete, granite or flagstone. But beware; though gran-

ite is great for inside, it tends to fade in the sun. Shop around on quotes for your kitchen. Contractors prepared to use pre-cast concrete kitchens can still customize your kitchen while reducing costs and installation time.

6. Water Features – Ponds, Bubblers and Waterfalls. One of the most popular accents right now is to create a waterfall that cascades into a hot tub and ultimately then falls into a swimming pool. No matter their size or complexity, waterfalls and bubblers create relaxing sound, enhancing the beauty of your outdoor living space.

Koi ponds may be unique and entertaining, but Oklahomans should think twice before investing in them. The very common Blue Heron loves them as much as you do and can quickly eat up hundreds of dollars of fish. Pond owners often resort to covering the ponds with nets to protect their fish from the hungry birds.

7. Gazebos – “When designing gazebos, consider using rough sawn Douglas Fir instead of Cedar. It is 2x

stronger, looks and stains exactly like, yet is considerably cheaper. In fact, you can get a rough sawn Douglas Fir open-beam patio roof for the same price as a cedar arbor,” Doby insists.



8. Concrete Finishing – Concrete can now be artistically stamped and colored to resemble slate, tile and other solid surfaces. It is both cheaper and easier to install.

9. Televisions– Though they are popular for the most luxurious outdoor

living areas, the common complaint is that they are not bright enough to produce the good results of an inside set.

10. Swimming Pools – Pools may or may not add value to your home, depending on the type of pool you have and the buyer’s personal likes and dislikes. Custom-made pools are thought to add the highest value. However, be sure to count the costs of maintenance, chemi-

cals, and water. You need to really use a pool to make it a good choice for your outdoor space.

Choosing a Contractor – 22 years of experience in this industry has taught Doby the importance of hiring only contractors who are members in good standing with the Better Business Bureau. “Insist on seeing liability insurance certificates and check all references. Get a list of their past jobs and talk to the homeowners where they have worked. Talk to the local Home Builders Association for references. Be cautious of those who want more than 50% upfront. Never pay 100 percent upfront. And maybe most of all, hire someone who listens to your desires and dreams for the living space. This is your dream, not his. Get what you want, not just what he is accustomed to building,” Doby instructed. 🗨️

Doby & Jo Ann Franklin
Franklin & Sons Deckmasters
918.745.0985
www.tulsadecks.com



Doby Franklin has a passion for woodworking and craftsmanship. Through his company, Franklin & Sons Deckmasters, he is able to help people fulfill their dreams for an outdoor living area that suits their lifestyle. Following a successful career with the world’s largest lumber and plywood company, Doby took his love for working with wood into various fields of construction, carpentry and cabinetry. However, after building everything from bus barns to bookshelves, he realized that his greatest passion was to build custom decks, patio roofs, gazebos, arbors and other outdoor masterpieces. Through these projects, he is able to combine the beauty of natural landscapes with the art and craftsmanship of uniquely designed structures that merge both form and function, a gift he attributes to his Creek Indian heritage. Doby and his wife Jo Ann live in Tulsa and are active in their church and community. They have built their reputation and company on their ability to listen to their customer’s dreams of what how their new outdoor living area should look. Then using their experience, the couple helps the family to fine-tune the details of the plan. The result? Happy customers and new friends. “That is what it is all about,” says Doby.

- Over 22 years experience and over 400 completed projects just in the last three years!
- Ten year’s experience as northeastern Oklahoma’s premier provider of decks, gazebos and arbors.
- Franklin & Sons are craftsmen (not contractors) who understand value.
- From basic to exotic, Franklin & Sons has the knowledge and experience to handle any deck, patio roof, gazebo or backyard project.
- A commitment and passion towards their work that reflects pride and artistry.