





Perfect patios

By Tamara Oberholster
Photographs by Yolande Fouche

South Africans love their patios. From farm-style stoops that wrap around the entire house to verandahs purpose-built for a family braai, the country's sunny climate and penchant for outdoor living makes the porch one of the most used areas of the home. We look at three winning reader patios and what makes them work.

Johannesburg architect Victoria de la Cour says the essence of a great patio is a space that captures the sun when you want it, but also provides shade and protection. The challenge in designing the perfect patio, she notes, is that patios often prevent light from flowing into the house.

"Patios then become the sunny spaces and people want to enclose them so that they have more space and a lighter room. Then they realise they still need an outside space, so they add another patio," she says. "This is a big problem in Johannesburg, where old houses with a covered stoop have been enclosed to add floor area; then another

covered outside space is required. An additional challenge is the actual space available is often narrow, which makes furnishing the patio difficult and furniture tends to get wet."

Seamlessly stylish

This was Victoria's major project in her own practice. "The house had a shabby deck, which was at a lower level to the rest of the home's living area," she explains. "It was west-facing and had very little overhead cover. There was an amazing view, but the sun beat into the living areas due to insufficient shading, so the blinds were often drawn."

READER HOMES

Victoria set out to create a more seamless interface between the inside and the outside by making the deck level with the internal floors of the house. "I introduced a rim-flow swimming pool on the view edge, which reinforced the beautiful view and highlighted that beautiful line where the water touches the sky and the sky is reflected in the water. I layered the space so that there were areas of full sun and areas of shade, and used different shading structures to moderate light in different areas."

In the north-west corner, a vertical timber screen was introduced to provide privacy from the neighbouring property and create a protected corner away from the sun. "The horizontal pergola tucked in under the existing roof overhang rather than extending into the main structure," Victoria says. "Further layering was introduced, with a solid portion of roof over the seating area. This changes to a permeable pergola in front of the north doors of the dining room."



Victoria's tips for homeowners looking to build a winning patio

- ▶ The patio should be placed so as to optimise light, cross-ventilation and view.
- ▶ It should create an interface between the house and the garden, not cut one off from the other. "I often encourage my clients to imagine their living space as a patio instead of duplicating a living area outside," says Victoria. "Where large tracts of glass can be folded away, there is often no need to add another outside covered area and the landscape can be brought closer to the living areas."
- ▶ A patio should have adequate screening to give privacy where needed. If space is tight, clever selection of furniture can help optimise the space. "Never put oversized items into a small space; it will just feel cluttered," advises Victoria. "If space is abundant, allow for different zones: lounging, eating, braaiing and so on. If you have a braai on your patio it is a great idea to have water close by, so a prep bowl or tap come in very handy."
- ▶ If you have the choice, ensure the roof is adequately insulated to prevent heat build-up. A ceiling fan may be useful in this regard.
- ▶ Make sure you understand the movement of the sun around your outdoor space, as this varies dramatically from morning to afternoon and summer to winter. Having moveable or retractable screens or blinds can help to provide shade at different times of the day or year.
- ▶ If you have furniture with cushions, protect these from the weather by creating a place to store them nearby.

DIY dream come true

Wilma Den Hartigh and Stephen Buchanan built this dreamy spot in their garden with their own hands. Along with their young son Matthew, they now enjoy the fruits of their labour most evenings and weekends.

"We thought about building a patio onto our house, but were worried about blocking the sun from shining into the rooms," says Wilma, adding that "we didn't really want to get contractors in".

Instead, the couple decided to use an area of the garden set further away from the house and to turn their patio dream into a shared DIY project. They began by excavating the area by hand over their weekends. "It was hard work, but fun. I lost 6kg during this project," laughs Wilma.

"It's become one of those long-term projects," says Stephen. "We've done it bit by bit; from the digging to the paving, finding the railway sleepers and then the chandelier, which we bought in [the town of] Cullinan in northern Gauteng."

The garden space is shaded by deciduous trees in summer and, once the trees lose their leaves in autumn, is sunny in the cooler winter months. It's also the perfect entertainment space, with a low built-in bench along the walled flowerbed and space for extra chairs to be pulled in. Wilma and Stephen have created mosaic artworks to add a personal touch to the space. They also added other small decorative elements, including lots of candleholders and even a mirror ball to catch the candlelight.





Ultimate entertainment environment

This serene space has been developed by a family based in the Gauteng city of Roodepoort, who bought the property based on the maxim 'location, location, location'. The old farmhouse stood on a large, open piece of land and has been extensively renovated over 20 years.

The initial patio was created 17 years ago, but the outdoor portion was recently redesigned. It was made level with the undercover verandah area and a roof structure added to protect it from the elements. The exposed trusses are an attractive design feature, while the double-volume space with its glass panels ensures it blends well with the indigenous garden.

This expanded entertainment area has proved useful for the large and informal family braais that are hosted six times a year. The patio spills out onto the lush lawn – complete with swimming pool, rockery and dam – and the family spends sunsets and summer mealtimes watching the scores of birds enjoying the garden.

The timber balustrade, made from the old linings of an inclined mine shaft, serves the dual purpose of keeping the five dogs out of the area when necessary, as well as providing a wall to lean against when seated on the long bench in the patio lounge area. Additional comfortable seating is provided by an inherited leather lounge suite, complete with colourful scatter cushions.

Glass doors leading into the house, as well as the expanding security gates, slide into wall recesses to ensure a wide passageway into the home. Careful lighting, tasteful potplants and candles enhance the tranquil mood and give this classy verandah a refined finish.



Victoria's advice to improve your existing patio

- ▶ Choose furniture correctly scaled to the space.
- ▶ Add blinds or vertical screens to provide shade, and ceiling fans to circulate air in hot spaces.
- ▶ Make use of low walls as sitting areas (possibly widen them to create a comfortable seat).
- ▶ For an open patio with no solid roof covering, use a permeable overhead structure (pergola) to provide shade, but not full weather cover. Deciduous creepers can provide much-needed shade (and fantastic spring displays) in summer, while allowing the sun in during winter.
- ▶ Use decorative elements and plants to bring life to your patio. Introduce vertical planters for herbs, or hanging gardens in sunny areas. ♦

Get in touch

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