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The Country Home Issue

All hands on deck

THE BARBECUE'S OUT, THE FAMILY'S OUT – AND OUT GOES THE TRADITIONAL TRELLISED PLAYPEN LOOK

by KATHE LIEBER

Stephan Beaulieu and his team from Patios et Clôtures Beaulieu created this deck for Beaconsfield residents Sarah and David Black. It consists of several separate but joined areas. The open area at the far end is connected by what Beaulieu calls a "catwalk" to the porch area, where the kitchen's sliding doors issue onto stairs that descend to a patio. There is also a screened porch, which allows for insect-free dining.

Photo by Gleb Gomberg

"You can freshen up an indoor room by painting the walls a different colour but deck design needs to be timeless."



Photo by Jean Blais

THE INSTANT THE WEATHER WARMS UP, MONTREALERS drag out the deck chairs and dig out the barbecue. This year's early spring (let's draw a veil over that wintry hiccup in April and the flakes that fell on Mother's Day) had us shedding boots and parkas and making a beeline for the backyard earlier than ever.

Today's deck is nothing like the crowded playpen look-alike of the past, which barely had room for a basic barbecue and bistro table. Thoughtfully designed, outfitted with all the accoutrements of gracious living, the deck extends the visual flow of the home, providing an area for family relaxing and entertaining, day and night.

Stéphan Beaulieu, who owns Patios et Clôtures Beaulieu in Pierrefonds, has seen many trends in the 12 years he's been building decks and fences. He relishes the consultation process that kicks off every project.

"I tour the inside of the home and ask many questions. Not everyone can visualize what they want, but once I sketch it on paper, it's amazing to see their reaction."

He likes to think "outside the box." In fact, his own living room features a tree, used as a support post for a catwalk above. Custom features such as privacy screens are popular for compact city backyards, he says. The traditional trellis has largely been replaced by such features as horizontal boards and angled pieces that mimic the look of shutters.

Another trend is opening the deck visually to the trees and flower beds in the backyard. "We reduce the visual impact of railings by using materials like aluminum spindles on a wood railing for a sleek, transparent look." Tempered glass panels let parents keep an eye on kids playing in the garden or in the pool. »

This deck, available at Urban Patio, comes in pieces, which are easily assembled like a parquet puzzle. Homeowners can assemble the pieces atop asphalt, concrete, unistone or even a lawn for an instant deck.

Keeping it up

Michel Mayer of Patio Teint knows a thing or two about decks. His company specializes in staining, cleaning, sanding, stripping and maintaining decks constructed from a wide range of materials.

As in real estate, “location, location, location” is critical for decks. Direct sunshine can damage a deck, as can a humid location. Proper ventilation under and around the deck will extend its lifespan, says Mayer.

Despite the name, treated wood still requires staining for UV protection and waterproofing.

“Eco” cleaning products are somewhat safer for the environment and workers’ health, but concentration is the key. Mayer believes that in the hands of skilled workers, “80 per cent of regular products are as good as “green” products.



Sarah and David Black had a hot tub installed at one end of the deck. Beaulieu installed metal spindles around the deck to reflect the design of the wrought iron fence that surrounds the back yard. (Opposite page, top) The screened porch was built to create an al fresco dining area that would be insect-free.

Photos by Gleb Gomberg

Multi-level decks are popular but “levels have to be well thought-out,” Beaulieu says. “Every area must be useable space. Is there room for the cook to cook at the barbecue, room for guests to walk around?” Safety is crucial, as is storage. Some designs incorporate a fireplace, extending the use of the deck at both ends of the season.

Beaulieu likes to take the long view: “You can freshen up an indoor room by painting the walls a different colour but deck design needs to be timeless.” As the population ages, it’s important to keep mobility issues in mind, making wide, deep stairs and safety railings important features.

Dominic Tedioso, president of Ipedex in Laval, notes that Montrealers are increasingly using their decks as Europeans do, “with everything from fireplaces to outdoor TV screens and projectors so they can

watch games or movies outdoors. The deck basically becomes a summer living room.”

Beaulieu recently completed a project for Beaconsfield residents Sarah and David Black that includes a glass-sided catwalk and pergola with shutters, oriented for angles of the sun at different times of the year. Beaulieu is partial to red cedar, which he prizes because it resists cracking and ages well – a properly maintained deck will last as long as 30 years. However, builders have many types of wood to choose from today.

Tedioso extols the virtues of Ipe wood from Brazil, which is five times harder than treated pine or cedar. Ipe requires no maintenance. Aging naturally to acquire a silver patina, it can be oiled to preserve the original rich brown colour. The price is slightly higher but, Tedioso adds, the wood’s longevity and low maintenance “makes up for the cost.” ♠

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The deck was built along the 50-foot width of the back of the house. Beaulieu built the catwalk to allow light through the basement window. The louvers on the pergola were installed to control the amount of light that fills the kitchen. "Before we had the louvers, there was so much light that by mid-afternoon, I'd have to close the curtains," says Sarah.