

LANDSCAPE FEATURE

CREATING AN OUTDOOR ROOM EXPERIENCE

Pat Fox of Aralia Garden Design takes a look at the potential of outdoor spaces and how they can be used to increase business opportunities.



Pat Fox, Aralia Garden Design

THERE is a growing trend within the leisure industry towards the creation and utilisation of outdoor spaces. Many, if not all of us, are aware of the huge increase in interest that the general public are showing in the development of their domestic gardens. The world renowned Chelsea Flower Show extended their timings by one day this year as a reflection in the number of people wishing to attend the show. You only have to switch the TV on to see the growth in garden makeover programmes

that are proving so popular with the general public. It appears that we, the public, now want to spend more of our leisure time outdoors, and, we expect to spend it in well-designed outdoor spaces. It is also a documented fact, that the UK climate, particularly in the South East, is predicted to have increasingly hotter summers and milder winters (Source: The UKCIP02). The resulting outcome is an extended period whereby we can effectively use our 'outdoor rooms'

Some astute local businesses have switched on to the fact that they can maximise their business potential by taking this trend on board and making it an integral part of their business plan. The Host Restaurant, based in Bishop's Stortford, has developed its roof terrace over the last few years. The new eating space has become an overwhelming success and is now considered to be one of 'the' special places to dine. The owner, Simon Cottam, has created an outdoor space that is both attractive and functional. The roof terrace encompasses huge, linked canopies, with under shade heaters, which offer protection from the rain and cold. More recently, Host has installed external glass windows, which act as windbreakers, further reducing the effects of any inclement weather and extending the areas use. This is then combined to great effect with a minimalist planting scheme of topiary into sleek, silver planters.

Another restaurant that has created a fabulous outdoor space is The Chequers, Matching Green. Over the last few years it has been

developed from a small local pub into an exciting, contemporary restaurant, with a sumptuous expanse of deck, for stylish 'al fresco' dining.

What makes both of these restaurants special, is that they have both defined their external space in such a way that it has expanded their business exponentially. Not only have they increased the potential number of covers, resulting in increased turnover and profit, but they have also created an experience that is personal to their restaurants. It is the personal nature of these spaces, which draws their clients back, time after time.

Aralia Garden Design, a local company based in Hatfield Heath, would look forward to talking to local businesses about how their outdoor spaces could be developed into profitable, contemporary spaces. It is not only restaurants that could benefit from this treatment but also any business that offers a leisure experience for their clients, i.e. golf clubs, country clubs, leisure centres, pubs and bars etc.

Even the tiniest courtyard can

be turned into a magical space. Clever use of planting can make walls disappear, mirrors can be used to create an illusion of depth and overhead structures can create a real outdoor room experience. Business owners may even wish to consider an outdoor private dining space for the purpose of entertaining influential clients. The photograph opposite demonstrates how a private dining facility can work as an outdoor room, both during the day, and also at night. The natural rays of the sun create daytime shadows, whereas overhead lighting, combined with up lighters and wall lanterns, are utilised, to provide a dramatic and powerful setting for nighttime use.

These entertaining areas can be designed to reflect the nature and style of the companies business, or they can be designed in a style, which assists with the directional positioning of the company, i.e. contemporary and quirky to say 'we are different to the rest'!

Space is of a premium and we should be trying to make any space we control

really work for our businesses. If we can unlock the potential of our outdoor spaces, we will not only improve the experience for our clients, but we should also be able to increase our longer-term profits.

To find out more please contact Aralia Garden Design on 01279 730 040 or E-mail: pat2fox@aol.com

