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THE OUTDOOR ISSUE

MAY 2026

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Paul Lafrance on Outdoor Living & Well-Being

YOUR PRE-GARDENING RESET WITH ASIA NELSON

COHESIVE OUTDOORS

Bringing Your Exterior Elements Together

By Designer Jessica Cinnamon



Most people don't set out to "design" their outdoor space, they add to it over time. A pair of chairs one year, a few planters the next, maybe some lighting when it starts to feel like something's missing. At a certain point, it becomes clear when a space just isn't working. Not because any one piece is wrong, but because nothing is really connecting.

That's where cohesion comes in. The most compelling outdoor spaces aren't necessarily the most elaborate, but they are the most considered. Every element, from materials to lighting to greenery, feels like it belongs. It's less about decorating and more about creating a space that reads as intentional from the moment you step into it — or in this case, out.

A well-designed outdoor space always starts with direction. For this, I take my cues from the home itself — the undertones in the brick, the colour of the siding, the trim detail you might not notice until you stop and really look. These are the elements that should guide everything else. From there, I build a palette that feels grounded and natural. Soft neutrals and warm, earthy tones create a calm base, while deeper accents — charcoal, forest green, even a hint of terracotta — bring in depth without overwhelming the space.

What makes it all come together is repetition, used thoughtfully. When a tone quietly reappears across planters, textiles, and smaller details, the space starts to feel cohesive rather than pieced together. It's not something you necessarily notice right away, but you feel it.

Material selection is where that cohesion really takes shape. Outdoor spaces benefit from a mix of materials. This keeps things layered and interesting, but balance is everything. I often encourage clients to let one material lead. That might be warm wood underfoot or in furniture, grounding the space, while metal and stone play supporting roles. When everything competes equally, it can feel unsettled. When there's a clear hierarchy, the space feels calm and resolved.

Outdoor kitchens and prep areas are often where balance can shift. They're functional by nature, but they still need to feel connected to the overall design. Surfaces, especially, should relate back to the architecture rather than feeling like an afterthought. I like to pull tones from existing elements — stonework, trim, even the subtle variation in brick, so everything feels integrated.

Porcelain surfaces like those from Laminam are something I come back to often. They're incredibly durable, which is essential outdoors, but they also have a refined, understated finish that works with a range of materials. Whether used on a countertop or as vertical cladding, they help create a seamless transition between zones, so the cooking area feels like a natural extension of the space rather than something added on later.

Greenery is what softens everything, but it's also where restraint matters. You don't need endless variety to make an impact. In fact, repeating a few plant types often creates a stronger visual rhythm. I think of it the same way I approach fabrics indoors: you're building layers, but they need to relate to one another. A series of similar planters or a consistent plant shape can guide the eye through the space and add dimension without clutter.

Lighting, though, is where the atmosphere really shifts. It's one of the most overlooked elements, and yet it has the ability to completely change how a space is experienced. I always approach outdoor lighting in layers. A soft ambient glow from overhead fixtures or subtle wall lighting sets the tone, while more focused lighting highlights key features like pathways, landscaping or architectural details.

Pathway lighting, in particular, should feel intuitive. When it's done well, you don't really notice the fixtures themselves, you just feel guided through the space. It becomes part of the overall rhythm, reinforcing the sense that everything has been considered.

PRO TIP: When you're planning pathway lighting, avoid lining fixtures up too precisely along the edge. Instead, offset them slightly so the light falls more naturally across the path. It creates a softer, more inviting glow — and feels far less like a runway. Warm bulbs are key here, and consistent spacing will keep everything feeling calm and intentional.

In the end, a cohesive outdoor space isn't about getting everything "right." It's about making sure everything



relates. When materials echo one another, when colours feel connected, and when lighting and greenery are layered with intention, the space starts to hold together in a way that feels natural.

It's often the quieter decisions that have the biggest impact. These are the details that shift a space from something that simply exists to something that feels resolved. And once it does, you notice it immediately — not because it demands attention, but because everything "belongs."



Jessica Cinnamon is the award-winning Principal Designer and founder of Toronto-based Jessica Cinnamon Design Inc. Her firm is a multi-disciplinary design studio that has become known for creating stylish and well-curated interiors. They provide complete bespoke design services throughout Ontario, Canada and the United States. @Jessica_cinnamon_design jessicacinnamondesign.com

