Decor Score: Garden room living is taking root everywhere

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: We are dying to add an outdoor living room to the back of our house. My husband is passionate about his garden and we have a pergola where we often entertain during warm weather. The trouble is, there's not very much of that where we live. Our next thought is to attach a greenhouse to the Great Room, but the contractor has warned us that energy costs will be huge. Can you give us any other suggestions?

A: Suggestion No.1: Insist that your contractor update his research. Not all greenhouses are profligate with energy, not in these days when we're all thinking "green."

GARDEN ROOM - This conservatory lives up to the name by using high-performance, ultra-insulating glass that conserves energy and cuts heat loss and gain. CNS Photo courtesy of Marston & Langiger.
In this photo, you are looking for a "conservatory" that promises to live up to the name, using high-performance, ultra-insulating glass that conserves energy and cuts heat loss and gain. Not only is the glass smart, but the conservatory's structure is made of wood cut in the first African forests to be certified as "green" by the Forest Stewardship Council. That's due to the insistence of Englishman Peter Marston, the personable founder and owner of the manufacturer, Marston & Langinger (www.marston-and-langinger.com).

Now available worldwide, the "garden rooms" are pricey - think $150,000 - $300,000 on average - but each is custom-built and comes with a project manager who oversees construction on sites as varied as a rooftop in New York, a pool side in the Ardennes, even Rockefeller Center, where it sheltered the International Orchid Show last month.

Equally pleasant under glass, this year-round family room is dressed for dinner by candlelight and furnished with eco-sensitive pieces from the Marston & Langinger collections. The company even developed a line of non-toxic paints for its buildings and furniture.

All of which leaves little doubt that people can live in glass houses without throwing stones at Mother Earth.

Q: What to do about the truly awful black-and-pink tile in our master bathroom? It runs about shoulder-high down one wall and around the corner. The tub and shower on the other side have white tile like the floor. I can live with that, but not the black-and-pink horror.

A: Steal a little legerdemain from designer Karla Trincanello, who faced a "horror" of her own in the upstairs bath she has made over in the Metcalf Estate. It is starring through May 31 as a designer showpiece in Rumson, N.J. She and her Interior Decisions design team (www.interiordecisions.com) had a carpenter build wood paneling right over the offending tile. Decked out with a crown moulding on top and decorative detailing, then painted white, the paneling looks indigenous to the bath - and much better than the old tile beneath.

Karla's team had another noteworthy trick up its sleeve for the large bedroom next door. It divided the room with a built-in wall, using crown and floor mouldings to blend it in with the existing architecture. A curtained, arched doorway in the new wall leads to the newly minted dressing "room," which gained extra space when the designers took off the doors of its double closet and slipped in a dressing table instead of ordinary storage space.

Spring brings designer show houses into bloom all over the country. Heed my cry: Take a notebook when you visit. Ask questions, make notes, sketch ideas that appeal to you. The professional tricks and tips you bring home can be well worth the price of admission. (For more information on the elegantly revived 1929 Metcalf estate, go to www.statelyhomesbythesea.com.)

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