



Focusing On Functionality When It Comes To Designing A Small Rooftop Space

Two landscape design experts weigh in with their recommendations for creating a usable area.

Amirah Zaveri
06/15/2017

With summer right around the corner and the weather warming up, you may be taking a second look at your sad, dilapidated rooftop space and imagining how you can transform it into an inviting and relaxing area. For small rooftops especially, it can be challenging to know where to begin and how to narrow down design elements. To help navigate the field of options, ESTATENVY spoke with two landscape designers to get their advice and top tips for refreshing a small rooftop.

First off, it's vital to imagine how the area will be used once it's finished. What will it primarily be used for - entertaining? Family gatherings? Gardening? Second, when picking a design,

stick with one overarching theme. If the rest of your home has a modern decor, keep with that style for the rooftop space.

Be Practical

Sean Kelley, owner & designer at Reveal Design in Chicago, says the functionality of the rooftop should come first, meaning its ultimate purpose is to block water and the weather. Two top priorities should be investing in a retractable shade and easy-to-maintain decking. Retractable shade in particular is great for smaller spaces as you can add coverage over areas on sunny days. When it comes to the rest of your checklist, Kelley says think of the bigger picture.

“Start with the uses of the deck first - seating, lounging, grilling spaces - before getting hung up on the aesthetically pleasing details like planters, TVs, green walls. After deciding on uses, think of weather functionality. In the summer, shade is needed! Whether you use an umbrella or Pergola, even a small rooftop space needs coverage from the sun in the heat of summer,” says Kelley.

Especially in the city, privacy is a concern when rooftops are side by side. That’s why tall Shrubbery and vertical gardens are good options when trying to block a direct view into the space. But Kelley says don’t go overboard.

“You don't need to fully block views to feel private. Implied privacy is often better on the eyes and the pocket book,” says Kelley.

Maximizing Space Efficiency

Craig Jenkins-Sutton, co-owner of Topiarius in Chicago, says that it can be easy to get ahead of yourself and incorporate in elements you don’t need or buy items for space you don’t have.

“For small rooftops, you need to remember that you are going to have to make some compromises. Make a list of your highest priorities, but be willing to cut out the pizza oven,” says Jenkins-Sutton. “The biggest space hog on a roof deck is a large outdoor dining table. We typically encourage our clients to use a smaller table for family dining, but then to use it as a buffet for larger gatherings.”

Finding the right furniture may be the biggest hassle when redesigning. Most outdoor furniture is designed for larger areas and can look bulky and oversized when put into a smaller section. Instead of looking for individual chairs, adding cushioned benches running alongside the edge of the space with built-in storage is a great alternative.

Plants always make a space feel cozier and inviting, and are wonderful to incorporate into any

section of the home. However, taking up unnecessary floor and table space with potted plants is not a good use. Instead, save room and settle on hanging planters that hang from existing furniture. For those with a green thumb, vertical gardens are a good way to go and easy to setup.

Photo courtesy of Topiarius.