

PAULA AGIUS and KATJA CASSAR of the boutique architecture firm **Atelier Maison** describe different ways to create usable space of the 'forgotten room' – the outdoor space, however limited it might be, that most homes have.

Life in the southern Mediterranean generally means good weather practically all year round, though this past winter was something of an exception. But beyond that, we tend to take the sun and the sky for granted, and because they are always (or almost always) there, we tend not to be as inclined to embrace outdoor space as people are who live in countries where the sun and warmth are in short supply.

Any outdoor space, no matter how tiny, can be transformed into an extension of the internal living space, cosy and inviting just as you would expect of the indoors. We have all been subject to the moods of the weather, dragging sofas and cushions in and out, and many find that off-putting, besides which it is not possible, in most homes, to use precious space to store cushions and furniture which have to be brought in when the weather is bad. So the best solution is to spend a bit more money on furniture made especially to withstand the elements.



Veranda of a Corsican house designed by Gilles Terrazoni Architects.

THE 'FORGOTTEN ROOM'



Designer Nani Marquina's Ibiza retreat.



Roof terrace designed by Ludovica and Roberto Palomba.



Ercol daybeds upholstered in bright patterns sit beneath a tented structure on a terrace with a beautiful view.



The southern Sicilian home of the architect Laurent Buttanzzoni.

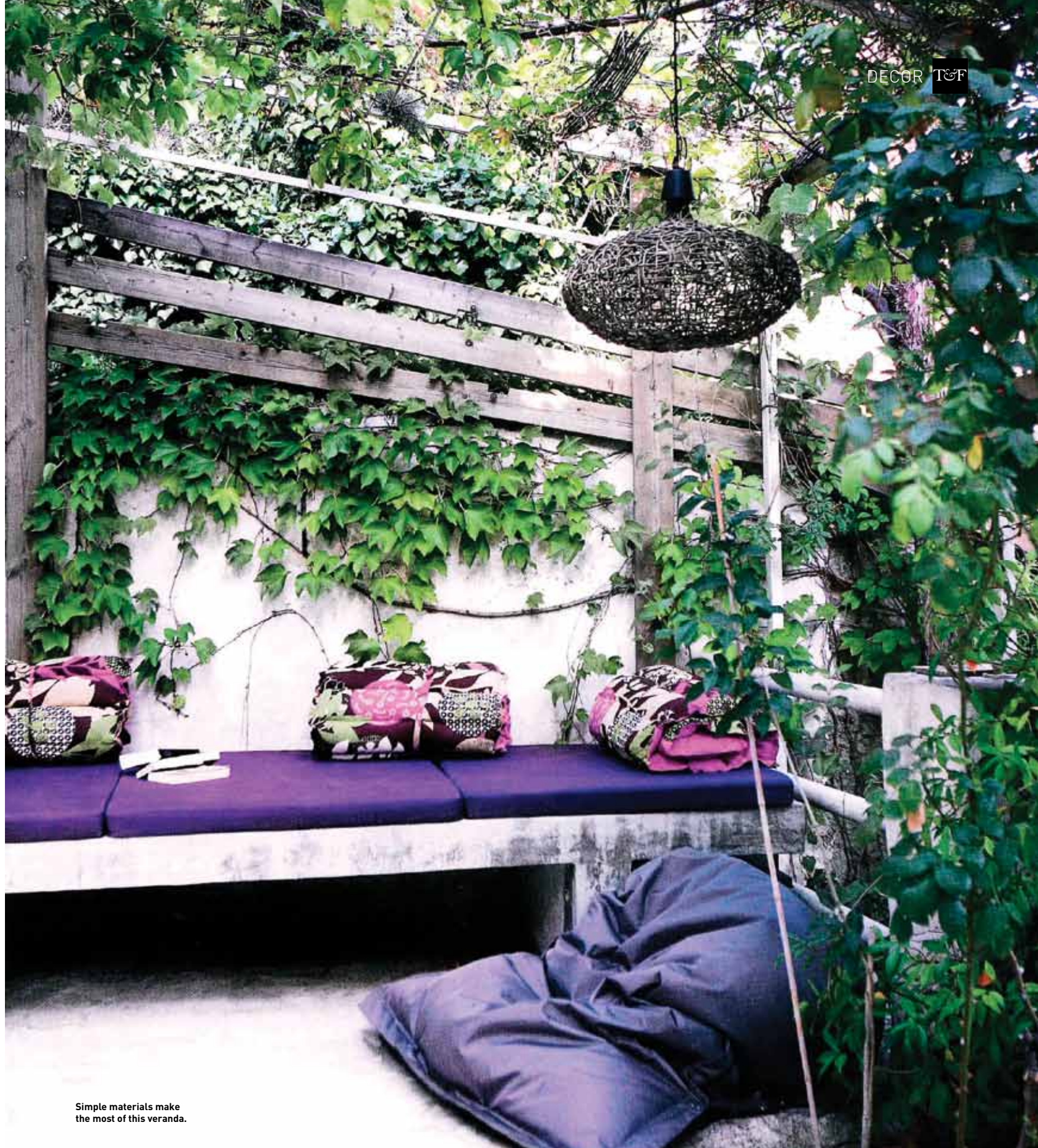
You can complete your outdoor room with some weather-proof 'wall art', in the form of recycled cement tiles or reclaimed stained glass window panes, or even upcycled pieces of old ironwork. Look for colours and patterns that work well together.

Spaces that might appear to be uninspiring, even if located below street level or overlooking a dull view, can be converted with some imagination. Make use of terracing and vertical walls, and elements which help lead the eye upwards to the sky and natural light. The shrubs you choose should have varying shapes and heights and form a delicate prettiness when gathered together. Colours like white, pink and lilacs help harmonise the look.

Use colour, too, on walls or in fabrics. If you colour-paint a wall that can be seen from the inside of your house or flat, you are taking the colour inside – but in a subtle way.

One of the easiest things to do to connect the inside with the outside is to use the same flooring material throughout, giving the space a natural flow from the inside to the outside and vice versa.

If you have the space for it, and the inclination for gardening, you can create your own small greenhouse by recycling an old cupboard and replacing the solid wood doors with glass ones. You will need to protect the wood with marine varnish, though, or it will disintegrate between the damp winters and searing hot summers.



Simple materials make the most of this veranda.

On a chilly yet mild evening, you can light up a fire bowl, which can be a DIY project, and enjoy the warmth of an open fire.

With the busy lifestyle most of us have, it is important to find a nucleus of calm, after a hard day's work, and this counts when we are surrounded by the man-made. Even a tiny patch of greenery helps you find a sense of calm and tranquillity.

If you do not have the time to take care of plants and flowers, just a single evergreen tree that will survive all elements or different types of succulents which are hardy yet colourful help in creating a pleasant outdoor space.

You can afford to be less perfect when it comes to the outside, giving the space a more organic development, using recycled materials and objects, which just feel right outdoors. Outdoor solutions are usually more cost-effective. Left over indoor elements like wooden beams and tiles can easily be recycled for use outside.

Don't forget the roof. Although it is typically used as a place to hang out the laundry, you can rethink that and reinvent your roof as a terrace. Maltese roofs are flat and so ideal for this purpose. A few wooden deckchairs and some cushions will do the trick at the basic minimum.



A Milan apartment by Paola Navona and Stefano Baccari.



A tiny courtyard shouldn't mean small furniture - use fewer chairs and bigger ones, and bright textiles add charm.



Keep a simple wooden greenhouse interesting with patterned glass windows.

The outdoor space checklist

- ✓ Scents from candles or evening-fragrant plants and herbs
- ✓ Colour
- ✓ Comfortable seating
- ✓ Natural light (or lantern-light after dark)
- ✓ Sound - from the movement of the plants in the breeze and running water
- ✓ Different textures
- ✓ Reflective surfaces

A cast concrete bench is the ultimate in weatherproof seating that doesn't need to be stored anywhere and can withstand the elements. The cushions you add to soften it will have to be brought indoors, but you can solve that simply by choosing cushions that work well indoors anyway, and so don't have to be stored but can instead be scattered on your sofa and armchairs. Cast concrete can also be used to create a shelf for plant-pots and outdoor ornaments can be placed. Foldable chairs and tables can be stored beneath. If concrete isn't your thing, you can always clad your bench in marble or plaster it and paint it any colour you want.

Decorate your outdoor space with aromatic potted plants, like rosemary or lavender; add a few candles in glass jars (or splash out on lovely lanterns and candleholders) and enjoy your no-longer-forgotten room.

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Materials that work well outdoors

- Bamboo • wooden decking • stone metal • glass ceramic • terrazzo slate • marble canvas • concrete wrought iron wicker • rope