

One with nature

For the rustic look, the humble pergola has a charm of its own.

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"Think about the features you have and the kind of architecture and work from there. People come unstuck when they see something in a magazine and think it is cool, yet it is totally unsuitable for their home."

He also advises using the best-quality materials you can afford. Timber selection and finish is important. "People can go for price over quality and then they are disappointed."

REPORT SUE PEACOCK

Pergolas and patios sometimes appear to be poor cousins to today's sophisticated outdoor rooms. But factor in space and budget constraints, as well as a desire to complement a native landscape, and the humble pergola has a natural advantage.

Architect Tony Baenziger and interior designer Sue Coles wanted something that wasn't "ostentatious" when they rebuilt their Point Lonsdale beach house.

It needed to be a space that linked the outside to the indoor, where they could relax and entertain without overlooking the neighbours.

That was why it was always going to be a patio at ground level, rather than a raised timber deck. Crazy paving in Castlemaine slate has been used on the patio, which adjoins a flourishing lawn.

Although the pergola over the patio doesn't perform an important functional role, it ties together the elements of the building.

"The pergola has three posts in it - one engages the patio area and two engage the grass area [forming] a connection between the two areas," says Baenziger.

Made from oversized recycled ironbark, a durable class-1 timber, the pergola is also a showpiece of craftsmanship, thanks to the builder's decision to forgo stainless steel bolts in favour of dovetail and mortise and tenon joints.

"The pergola posts and beams are deliberately oversized so that they form part of the architecture. It is not something that has been stuck on for the sake of providing sun shade; it has an architectural purpose to it as well. It hasn't been finished in any oils, so the pergola will grey or weather naturally over time," says Baenziger.



The northern facade is a wall of glass, while crazy paving in Castlemaine slate forms the floor.

The pergola also has an automated awning, which can be extended out to offer some protection from the summer sun or light rain.

"It is hidden in the pergola structure so you don't notice it at first. But it enables us to have a table out there in inclement weather, or if it is really hot, we have some protection."

He says people building pergolas or designing patios need to think about shade at the planning stage.

"A pergola can provide you with shade, but if it is a permanent structure and you can't alter it, it can be an expensive exercise to try and do it afterwards. Thought also needs to go into the type of paving, to avoid re-radiating the sun's heat into glazing or directly into the house."

"We used overhanging eaves to overcome that problem," he adds.

While fireplaces are popular in many outdoor rooms, the couple decided not to include one on their patio - although Baenziger admits he is considering acquiring a cast-iron Morso fireplace (www.castworks.com.au) in order to roast chestnuts.

While the couple considered planting to cover the pergola structure, the overhanging

eaves provide plenty of protection for those seeking to escape the summer sun.

"In the future we will add a wisteria or vine to give it a greener look in summer," he says.

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THINGS TO CONSIDER



OPEN OR CLOSED ROOF?

This will depend on when and how you want to use the pergola. Traditional pergolas are open-roofed, with most having deciduous creepers growing across them. Shade cloth, sails, see-through acrylic roofing and even materials such as thatch are used in Australian pergolas to provide more shelter and weather protection. Some have automated shades that can be drawn across. Roof height is important, as it will influence how big and open the space feels.

WHAT'S IT FOR?

This will influence whether it is attached to the house or a separate structure, the type of materials used and roofing. Do you want to entertain, or is it primarily a quiet place to sit, read and relax?

COLOURS AND MATERIALS

Once you know what it is for, you can play with materials and finishes to create your personal pergola - one that offers warmth and protection and is a comfortable place to enjoy. Don't forget elements such as lighting, extra heating or fans and music.

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