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Photo: Heartlands Building Company

Look to the Lower Level

Under-deck systems create dry, protected areas that flow with adjacent interior and outdoor spaces for storage and entertaining.

By Kacey Larsen

It may not come as much of a surprise, but the 2017 Houzz & Home Study indicates homeowners have a strong preference for customizing their homes. More than 80 percent of recent homebuyers undertook a renovation to customize their new house. Obviously, new homeowners are not the only people remodeling, but many of them cite waiting until they had the time or the finances (37 percent and 36 percent, respectively) before starting projects. The 2017 Houzz & Home Report also reports that when it came to outdoor projects—such as landscaping, irrigation and additions or upgrades of outdoor structures—homeowners took on an average of 3.1 projects within the space in 2016.

The 2017 U.S. Houzz Landscape Trends Study indicates 9 in 10 homeowners report major renovations or complete overhauls (48 percent and 37 percent, respectively) when it comes to outdoor projects. In good news for remodelers, 73 percent of homeowners hired a professional for their outdoor project in 2016. *Qualified Remodeler's* 2017 annual research reports the typical budget for outdoor living projects is in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 range. In fact, 67 percent of respondents to the annual survey revealed typical outdoor living budgets are more than \$15,000.

“Backyard living in general continues to expand. We see more thought put into not only the design and materials, but the features and details as well.”

Matt Breyer, Breyer Construction & Landscape

With decks, railings and post caps being the top elements of projects that remodelers are designing, building and/or specifying (63.8 percent, *Qualified Remodeler* 2017), and their clients' top motivation for outdoor living projects being “to add entertaining space” (31.9 percent, *Qualified Remodeler* 2017), perhaps it is time to start looking under the deck for additional entertaining and/or storage solutions.

“Backyard living in general continues to expand. We see more thought put into not only the design and materials, but the features and details as well,” says Matt Breyer, operating partner and lead project designer at Breyer Construction & Landscape in Reading, Pennsylvania. “This happens up on top of the deck but extends down below the deck as well, as we can often use the same footprint but double the usable space for our clients, allowing them to have some sun up top and weather protection down below.”

Breyer notes some clients come in with concepts that include under-deck areas, while others did not realize such a space could be “reclaimed” into usable storage or a living area. Similarly, Larry Brost, president of Heartlands Building Company in Chesterfield, Missouri, notes many of his company's clients have



Photo: Salter Spiral Stairs



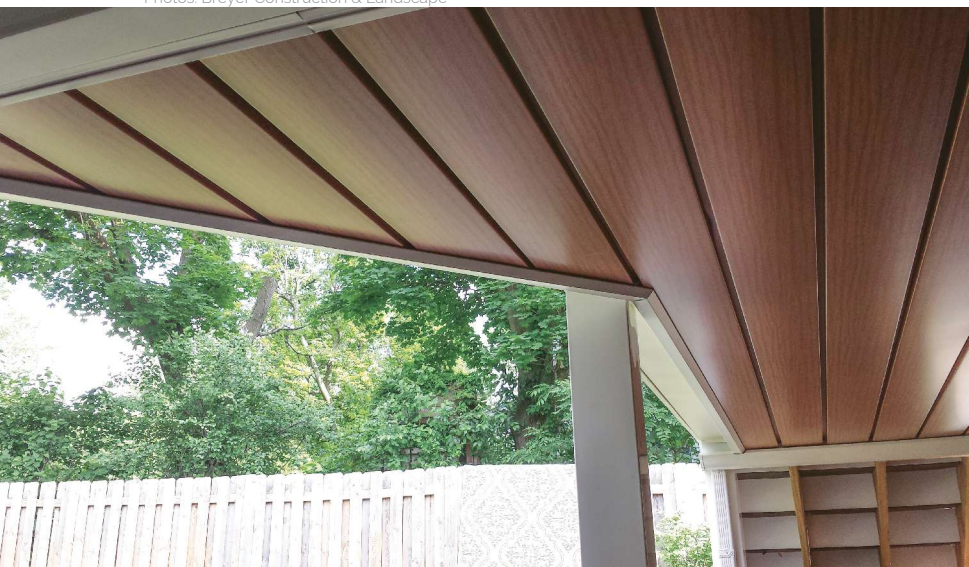
↑ Heartlands Building Company has clients seeking under-deck spaces that flow with an interior and/or adjacent outdoor living areas.

↗ How a space will be used leads Breyer Construction & Landscape to accessories and enhancements that complement the space's atmosphere.

ideas that are refined during the planning and design phase. He observes under-deck spaces being used for gathering spots, grills and outdoor kitchens, as well as storage spaces.

“When a customer contacts Heartlands Building Company, we first set up a free in-home consultation to meet with them regarding their vision and goals for their project and evaluate their setting and existing structure of the home and landscape. We also take photos and initial measurements during the consultation,” Brost says. “A driving factor to finishing the area under the deck is to have it flow with the interior space, such as a finished basement and/or flow to adjacent outdoor areas such as swimming pools, patios, fire pit, etc. It may also be the customer's desire to simply enjoy the landscape. It is very rare to finish the lower level when not complementing it with other features and improvements of the customer's home.”

Photos: Breyer Construction & Landscape



Matt Breyer says a panel under-deck system can be added after a deck is built. Ensuring the deck and under-deck work in long-term harmony is critically important.

CONSIDER USE

How a homeowner plans to use an under-deck space factors in quite a bit when it comes to finishes and materials, not to mention budget, Brost notes. If being used for storage, the finishes are more modest; but when an under-deck becomes a main outdoor living space, such areas might include fireplaces, spas and grilling and bar areas. “Much consideration during the design

process and listening to the customer’s desires early on is needed to maximize the comfort of a lower level area,” he says. “Our lower levels are normally finished nicely, and are inviting to gather and enjoy the great outdoors.”

While under-deck spaces are perhaps great in concept for an additional outdoor space, obviously there are some homes and landscapes better suited for such an area. “Headroom from the ground up to the deck’s frame is typically our greatest limiting factor on incorporating something under a deck,” Breyer says. “Generally, if there is less than 5 feet of clearance, it’s not worth pursuing unless the client’s needs are unique. Also, we prefer not to create finished living spaces unless there will be about 7 feet of clearance under a deck—less than that and it might be okay for occasional storage that’s dry and secure, but it will feel cramped for entertaining.”

Both Breyer and Brost mention ceiling fans and heat sources as features that can further the enjoyment of an under-deck area year-round. They add that TVs, grills and refreshment areas can turn spaces into entertainment areas. Breyer paints the picture, asking, “Is there a better way to enjoy a light snowfall than sitting in an outdoor room, protected from the bulk of the weather, perhaps lounging in a hot tub while burgers cook on [a grill in] the built-in kitchen?”

Under-Deck Systems

While there are many under-deck systems available in the market—and various situations and projects necessitate certain types—we compiled a quick overview of the specific under-deck systems Matt Breyer and Larry Brost mentioned that their respective companies use.

- ▶ The **Trex RainEscape Deck Drainage System** directs water away from a deck and into a water drainage system. Made with rugged plastic and ultra-violet inhibitors, the under-deck system protects the structural integrity of a deck while keeping rain, snow and debris from passing through into the area below. If installing in areas such as a perimeter or to a brick or stucco surface, Trex RainEscape caulking can be used to adhere the material if Trex RainEscape tape will not stick. Visit trexrainscape.com for more information.
- ▶ The **Haven Underdeck System** is all-aluminum construction, and the company manufactures every major component of the under-deck to the measurements of a project’s deck. Designed so any panel can be removed without disturbing the surrounding panels, the classic under-deck panels provide a smooth, flat finished appearance with more than 27 solid colors available; upgrades to a beadboard or wood-grain embossed finish are also available. The company offers screen systems, faux beams, arch details, recessed lighting and more. Visit havenunderdeck.com for more information.
- ▶ **InsideOut Underdecking** is made from titanium-aluminum alloy, and its locking frame and panels—when attached with the recommended ceramic-coated screws—can support up to 20 pounds per square foot. Available in 12 finishes—five wood finishes and seven matte finishes—the pre-engineered ceiling system accommodates construction of screened porches, ceiling lights and fans, and more. The company offers a limited lifetime performance warranty against any and all material defects as long as a deck is intact. Visit insideoutunderdeck.com for more information.

CHOOSING AN UNDER-DECK SYSTEM

While the goals for an under-deck space—as well as the accessories or finishes, privacy components, and enhancements to complement the existing home and area—are important, the actual under-deck system plays a big factor too. “Some ceiling systems work better for accessories than others,” Breyer says. “Your client’s needs, the finished ceiling appearance and the installation style will all influence what accessories can be allowed—or if the accessories and options are the driving force, then that might limit the ceiling system options.”

“The decking above is important to consider. Some have greater ventilation needs than others, and this may limit your drainage options or require additional work above to allow the deck and under-deck are finished to work in harmony long-term,” he continues. “Generally, we like a built-in membrane system, [Trex’s] RainEscape or the like, for a deck that won’t get a lot of topside debris, but [that] requires the greatest fixture or finish flexibility down below. A panel system—Haven Underdeck, InsideOut or the like—offers easier long-term maintenance and the ability to add it after the deck is constructed, rather than during construction.”



In addition to ceiling fans and heat sources, Heartland Building Company says adapting with a screen enclosure is also an option for an under-deck space.

Brost agrees, noting the parts used for an under-deck system vary based on design and materials selections. “The InsideOut system has worked well for our customers,” he says. “The DuxxBak is a decking board with a built-in drain system, which works well and allows for varying lower-level-ceiling finish to no finish at all.”

Again, there are many factors and considerations that play in, but under-deck areas can provide many of the benefits often cited with detached structures—such as protection from weather and entertainment space—within the same footprint of a deck space. | **QR**

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