

STYLE

DESIGN COUNSEL

On designing an outdoor space that looks like you and no one else.

WITH ERIN GATES



"I strongly believe that a home provides a canvas on which we can illustrate who we are," writes Erin Gates in the introduction to her *New York Times* bestseller *Elements of Style* (Simon & Schuster, 2014). "Your space should look like you and no one else." We asked the founder and principal designer of Boston-based Erin Gates Design (elementsofstyleblog.com) to share more of her thoughts on designing an outdoor space.

When it comes to my style... I'm a mixer. My style is a blend of traditional and modern, new and old, high end and mass market.

To create an interesting space you have to... combine elements of many price points and styles. Otherwise it can look cold and harsh.

My favorite furniture for an outdoor space is... a grouping of comfy chairs around a coffee table. Nothing is more conducive to talking, laughing, and enjoying the outdoors.

In my backyard I have... four fabulously cool chairs from IKEA around a funky-looking garden drum table. We sit there all summer long.

My favorite part of my personal garden is... the incredible wisteria growing up and over a trellis I put over my back door. When it's blooming I

could sit and stare at it all day. It's so romantic and charming.

It's worth it to splurge on... good upholstered seating. Buy a great sofa once that will last you a long time, not three cheap ones that last a year each.

The best design tip I've received is... to buy only what you love. Don't buy something just to fill a space or because it's on sale. It'll end up in your recycling bin or on the curb.

A common mistake I see people make is... not considering how they will actually use their outdoor space. Don't give up valuable real estate to build a big outdoor kitchen if you honestly never cook outside.

The best places to find containers are... Terrain, Charleston Gardens, Frontgate, Ballard Designs, and Restoration Hardware.

I help clients home in on their personal style by... having them fill out a questionnaire about their lifestyle. We also tour their home (and even their closets!) to see which colors and patterns are repeated.

The best place to find furnishings is... antique shops and fairs, for one. That's where I've found amazing vintage Brown Jordan and other designer outdoor furniture. Vintage patio furniture is so well made. I turn to Brown Jordan for modern brands too, as well as Janus et Cie, Restoration Hardware, Ballard Designs, Frontgate, and Kingsley-Bate.

My favorite outdoor piece is... an old Brown Jordan solid aluminum dining set I inherited from my grandmother. I had it repainted in car paint for durability...and I found out it's worth a fortune!

The design resource I consult most is... Pinterest. It's the best source of inspiration out there now.

Always invest in... furniture covers for inclement weather. Even with durable outdoor fabrics, rain and sun will do a number on them fast if left uncovered.

I use outdoor fabrics from... Sunbrella and Perennials fabrics, plus other indoor/outdoor fabrics from Christopher Farr Cloth, Duralee, Kravet, and Lee Jofa. There are such great patterns, prints, and textures that are super durable yet look and feel great—even velvets!

When decorating an outdoor space, I always... add throw pillows to chairs and other seating. It may seem frivolous on a patio, but it cozies it up in a big way.

Gates loves the classic blue and white patterns on this Painted Planter from Frontgate (frontgate.com). "It's a bit unexpected for an outdoor application and a fun way to add color," she says.



This Amalfi Deep Tuxedo sofa from Janus et Cie (janusetcie.com) seats three. "This collection is one of my favorites for its delightful details and timeless look," Gates says.



Gates likes to add throw pillows to outdoor seating. Pillow cover available from Spark Modern's Etsy shop (etsy.com). Carnival Outdoor fabric by Christopher Farr (christopherfarrcloth.com).