

With a sunny climate to take advantage of, outdoor spaces have always been important to South Africans.

“While city and suburban spaces have tended to reduce in size in recent years as a result of this densification, homeseekers nevertheless continue to look for properties that allow them to take the best possible advantage of the country’s wonderful climate.”

For this reason residential property designers and homeowners tend to place a great deal of emphasis on creating the opportunity to be outdoors.

This is according to Louis Green, a residential property agent from Pam Golding Properties Hyde Park region. “Most people who live in South Africa work to take maximum advantage of the great outdoor life offered around the country, and properties that offer the means to do this tend to have a higher value,” he adds.

“Urban centres have seen increased densification which has means that properties today are in many cases smaller than they were 20 years ago, and there is much more high rise residential accommodation in centres such as Sandton,” says Green. “While city and suburban spaces have tended to reduce in size in recent years as a result of this densification, homeseekers nevertheless continue to look for properties that allow them to take the best possible advantage of the country’s wonderful climate.”

Peet Strauss, who heads up the development division of Pam Golding Properties (PGP) in the Hyde Park region, agrees, stating that most South Africans enjoy getting outside when they can, and designers of residential apartment blocks look to create outdoor spaces wherever it is feasible. This may be done through the use of sunny balconies. According to Strauss, many exclusive penthouses in high-rise developments such as Melrose Arch or The Houghton in Johannesburg have pool decks, attractive roof gardens and terraces.

“There are affluent individuals creating high-rise havens that are on top of the world, offering superb views and a way of life that is both luxurious and highly convenient. Some residents create veritable Gardens of Eden, complete with sculptures and other works of art atop these lofty upmarket developments, which may be placed on the market for upwards of R60 million, depending on where they are situated and what facilities they offer.”

According to Green, there has been a trend in the South African housing market towards developing homes on smaller properties, particularly in the increasingly popular estates, which offer residents secure outdoor living. Many people enjoy a ‘lock-up-and-go’ lifestyle offered by estate homes and don’t want the hassle of a large garden. On the other hand, there are those who still prefer the large well-manicured gardens and wide-open spaces offered in more established suburbs such as Westcliffe in Johannesburg.

“It is all a matter of personal preference and other factors such as the individual’s life stage and financial situation,” notes Green. “However, even the smallest gardens within South African homes are usually enhanced with a patio or veranda which allows time to be spent outdoors. Covered patios are popular, allowing family and friends to be entertained and stay cool out of the rays of the warm South African sun. “

“Patios are an important space in homes and provide a transition between the indoors and outdoors,” notes Green. “Some homes will make use of sliding glass panels that can be used to turn the patio into an extra indoor space and provide protection from the elements. The patio is an important feature of the home and can add considerable value to it.”

These covered patios may be furnished with wicker, iron or built-in furniture. Outdoor kitchens or bars are an important feature of some homes, but the braai or barbeque, which is something of a national past time, is obligatory and these are commonly permanently built into the patio space.

Many buyers insist on a swimming pool, which are particularly popular in places where temperatures climb high in summer and, of course, among those families who have young children. Not surprisingly, a well-designed, attractive pool can add considerable value to a property. However, Green points out that swimming pools are not universally popular, some South Africans preferring to do without the trouble of maintaining one. Others opt for an indoor heated pool as they offer greater privacy and can be used for longer periods of the year. Swimming pools that use natural eco-friendly systems to maintain sparkling clear water without the use of chemicals are also becoming more prevalent in the homes of South Africa’s elite.

According to Jason Shaw, manager of the Fourways/Dainfern office of Pam Golding Properties, no matter whether they have a large or small garden, most South Africans enjoy creating as attractive an outdoor environment as possible, because they know they are going to spend a great deal of time in this space and will enhance the value of their home.

Some individuals prefer smaller outdoor areas and use stone paving, succulents, pot plants and sculptures to create attractive, low maintenance gardens. Fishponds and other water features are always very popular and find a place in many gardens large and small.

“With smaller properties more in evidence, the best possible use is made of all of the outdoor space that is available. Many homes are built with flat

roofs and these are commonly used to cultivate gardens and create striking outdoor spaces," says Shaw.

Despite the trend towards smaller properties, many still prefer large, well-established, leafy gardens where they can entertain their children and enjoy the wide-open spaces. Just about all areas of South Africa offer the opportunity to create an interesting, beautiful garden of some kind, and not surprisingly many people take advantage of this. Well-manicured lawns and flowerbeds and large mature trees remain a firm favourite among homeowners across the country. In Shaw's view, well-maintained gardens greatly enhance the appeal of any home. Many people also make an effort to ensure their verges are appealing as they create an important first impression of one's home and uplift the neighbourhood.

"Facilities such as tennis courts and clubhouses are still sought after by those seeking an active outdoor life. In many high-end security and golf estates these kinds of amenities are commonly provided to the community including tennis courts, squash courts, clubhouses and in some cases golf courses," adds Shaw

South Africans are becoming increasingly environmentally aware and there is a trend towards homes and gardens that are more eco-friendly. Many homeowners opt for indigenous gardens using local grasses, shrubs and trees, which are more environmentally friendly and tend to have the advantage of being more self-sustaining and lower maintenance.

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