

OUTDOOR FLOW APPEAL

Whether you're after a higher rent, value or selling price, a deck or a patio will add plenty of X factor to your property for prospective tenants and buyers. By **Carolyn Brooke**

A TIDY AND functional outdoor area will help your property appeal to more people. Some tenants won't mind paying a little extra rent for it either.

Balancing, quality and cost is a key challenge to any property investor when doing work on rental properties. While you want a finish that is functional, durable and looks good, you don't want to break the bank unnecessarily, you have returns and cashflow to think about it after all. When planning an outdoor area, it's important to find a contractor that delivers quality and doesn't cut corners but still offers a competitive price.

The best starting point is to have a plan and know what you want. Think about how big you want the area to be, the main purpose of the area (for instance, entertaining or extension of living), any privacy or shelter and what the area is most suited to (consider land contours and sun angles). Keep in mind that north-facing is ideal as it achieves all day sun.

Draw a sketch of what you want before even approaching contractors and be very clear, it'll likely help the contractor quote better.

Think about different material options and discuss them with your contractor. For decks it's usually pine, Kwila or Vitex timber while patios will likely be poured concrete or pavers.

DECKS

Ingo Thony of Thony Builders says building a deck is most often about having an entertainment area, or to make the most of views.

"Kiwis love outdoor areas where they can sit on a deck and have a BBQ."

Costs will depend on size but a basic deck about five square meters big and one metre off the ground built to the Building Code might cost around \$7,000 for quality materials and labour.

Ingo often ends up being called in to fix DIY jobs or jobs where people have taken "short cuts". Cheap materials and poor workmanship are usual problems.

Safety and compliance are also factors. A deck has to hold up more people per square metre than a house so a deck needs to be stronger and even better built.

"If you don't know the rules, regulations



Decks are a cost-effective way to add value to your rental property



Anti-slipping agents can be applied to outdoor walkways and patios

CONCRETE CAN LAST INDEFINITELY BUT PROBLEMS ARE DIFFICULT TO RECTIFY SO GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME

and everything it can be a death trap.”

A deck can be built up to 1.5 metres without a permit but anything over 1 metre requires a handrail. Always opt for a high-grade and treated timber. Other basic requirements include having 5mm gaps between timber pieces so water is able to get through. Stainless steel bolts also protect against corrosion.

“Today if you build a proper deck to code, it should last 30 to 40 years,” he says.

“Get someone who knows what they’re doing and make sure it’s all done properly as there are plenty of cowboys out there who will do the work for a cheap price.”

Ingo also recommends asking contractors for an itemised quote to show exactly what you’re paying for. Ask for references or pictures of previous work also and if the contractor has a website then check it out.

Kwila and Vitex timber are popular at the moment and are generally harder wearing than pine. People are also opting for hidden bolts, screws and nails along with glass or aluminum balustrades.

Most people use a clear or natural stain on the finished deck and just apply it themselves. For ongoing maintenance the deck should be re-stained every two years. Also be wary about waterblasting decks as the pressure can eat into timber and make it rot faster. Ingo recommends soap, a hose and a brush to clean it.

Keep in mind that existing but weathered decks can be rejuvenated through companies that do professional restorations, cleans, re-stains and re-oils to help with removing stains, old paints, moss and lichen. Again make sure you use reputable contractors.

PATIOS

Cameron Greig of coloured concrete specialist Peter Fell says people opt for concrete for its look, long-term durability and cost.

“Concrete is pretty much the most cost-effective hard surface you can get.”

A coloured, sealed and cut patio costs about \$100 to \$120 per square metre all up when starting with a grass area, not including any demolition or removal work, if required.

Cameron recommends sealing concrete. Sealed concrete looks better for longer as the sealer adds luster and gloss while protecting the colour and the surface from dirt and stains. Fine powder ingrained in the concrete gives it its colour. Stains can



Good design and good execution are key to a job well done

be hard to get out of concrete so best to try and prevent them altogether.

Concrete shrinks when it dries so there is always a chance it could crack but a good contractor should try to minimize the risk.

“Everything is subject to a degree of workmanship,” he says.

“There is no perfect material, everything has its pros and cons.”

It’s really important to use a good and reputable contractor and not to take short cuts to save a bit of money.

“The trick for landlords is to find that balance between quality and cost.”

Concrete is typically 100mm thick and metal mesh should be the standard. If

opting for concrete with polypropylene fibres in it then still use mesh, he says.

One of the biggest problems Cameron sees is people not maintaining concrete.

The seal should be reapplied every three to five years and the concrete should be kept clean. Keeping in mind that concrete in south-facing areas of the house can get dirtier quick. Waterblasting is okay but don’t be too vigorous.

Weeds don’t grow up through concrete which is another benefit.

Choosing a colour for your concrete, will come down to the space. A lighter colour in a darker space can help to introduce light while you don’t want to use a too light a

colour in a large, open, really sunny area as it can become glary. The richer neutrals, sandstones and charcoal ranges are generally most popular for patios.

A good design and good execution are key to a job well done. Concrete can last indefinitely but problems (like cracking or staining) are difficult to rectify so it must be done right the first time.

The smooth and nice-looking finish of poured concrete often surprises people, he says.

“People’s perception of concrete is not necessarily a reality.”

Your contractor should ensure that the surface is sufficiently textured so there is no slip risk but if you are particularly concerned choose a textured or slightly textured option. Anti-slipping agents can also be applied.

Old and dirty driveways and patios can be rejuvenated with cleaning and sealing products. Or a tinted sealer could introduce some colour, keeping in mind that sometimes a new surface coating may not stick if surface is contaminated or has the remnants of an existing coating. Existing concrete can also be altered to create a new look through cuts or textures.

Pavers are another option for outdoor areas. They have durability and the aesthetics qualities similar to concrete. Generally they come in sizes of 300mm, 450mm or 650mm. Pavers can also be lifted for maintenance and shouldn’t crack but can cost more per square meter than concrete. ■