

EYE FOR DESIGN

Approaches to creating great-looking decks

Adding an Al Fresco Shower

by Ron Cascio



Outdoor showers are a great fit for deck builders. Whether a private refuge for outdoor-loving clients or a place to rinse off salt and sand at a beach house, the design considerations are similar: privacy, convenience, sunlight, water resistance, and drainage.

Of all the features I design and build into my projects, the most used and appreciated seems to be the outdoor shower. It's a practical amenity, allowing your customers to rinse off before heading indoors, and — with a few design considerations — it can be a welcoming refuge, as well.

The ideal location for an exterior shower offers both privacy and easy access from the home. Outside the master bedroom, overlooking the backyard is a common spot. The path between the shower and the house

should be a hard surface, such as decking, so bare feet stay clean.

To extend seasonal use as far into the cooler months as possible, position the shower so it has a southern exposure that gets direct sunlight. You can also add a solar water heater, which can be as simple as an old water tank painted black and installed in full sun.

The shower can be mounted either on a deck or at ground level. For deck mounts, we hang a custom-made, galvanized drain pan below the joists and build in a removable deck panel for maintenance access to the drain. Ground-level shower stalls are built on a drained concrete slab.

Both designs should provide proper drainage away from structures to an appropriate location such as a French drain or a favorite landscape planting. You should check with the local health department to be sure this sort of gray-water drainage is permissible, and if so, you should advise clients to use soaps and shampoos that don't pose a risk to exposed flora and the general environment.

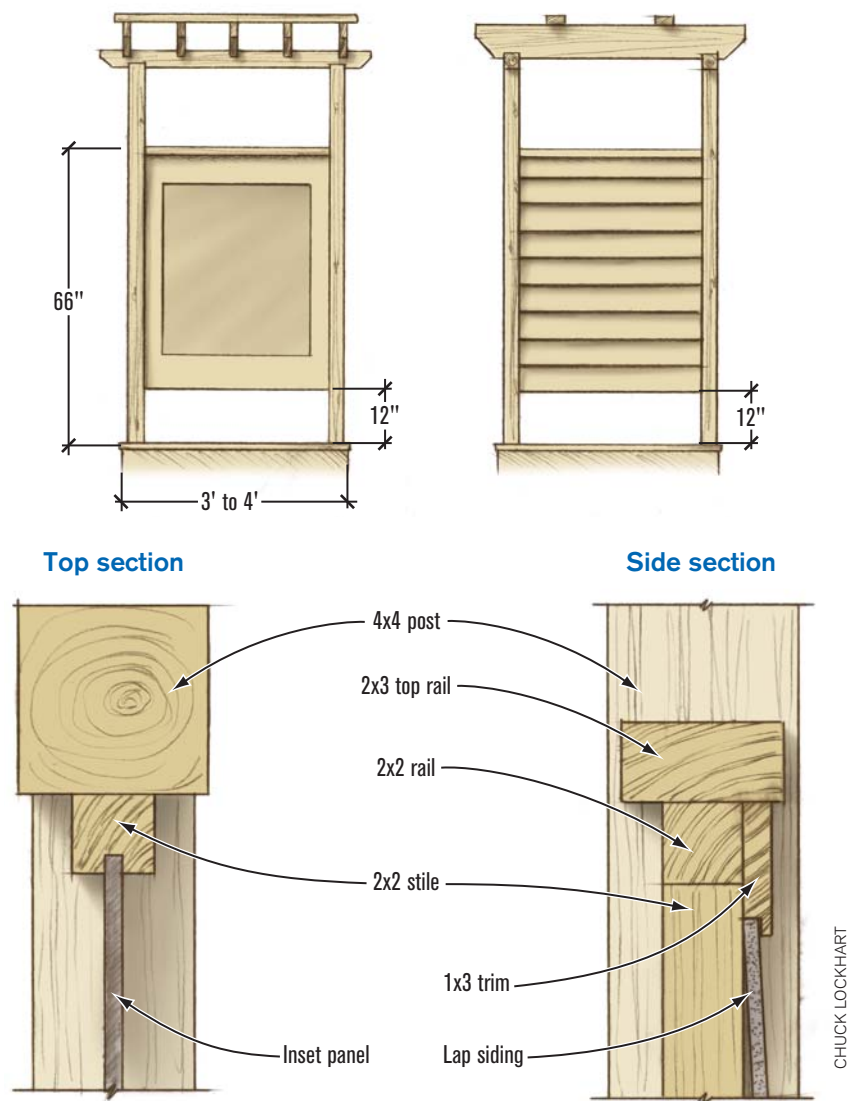


Appropriate drainage is a must. Local health codes may require the drains to lead into the sanitary sewers. Many areas, however, allow gray water to drain to a simple drywell. For below-deck systems, the author has a local sheet-metal shop fabricate a galvanized-steel drain pan.



Access for cleaning debris, such as wind-blown leaves, is crucial. A simple hatch lifted by way of a thumbhole is all you need.

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The dimensions of an outdoor shower are important mainly to preserve privacy. It may be necessary to adjust them depending on, for example, the proximity to a nearby upper-story window.

Interior dimensions should be no smaller than 3 feet square and no larger than 4 feet square; showers bigger than this feel too spacious and lack a sense of privacy.

I use a variety of materials, chosen for looks and durability. The concealed framing is treated southern pine, and the exposed framing and trim look great when crafted with western red cedar or ipe. These woods can also be used for the panels; I've used copper sheet and fiber-cement siding, as well.

It's likely I'll use a PVC product, such as Azek, at some point.

The frames consist of 4x4 posts and top rails, with tight lap joints to help defy racking. Panels and a door, of 2x2 frames with either lap siding or inset panels, are hung between the posts. Stainless steel lag bolts and screws secure the various parts. ❖

Ron Cascio and his company, Chestnut Creek, design, build, and consult on green projects on Maryland's Eastern Shore.