

BACKYARD BARTENDING

Creating a bar on your home's back patio provides a place to experiment with cocktail creations while enjoying Laguna's blissful weather.

BY THERESA BOEHL

Roderick Reed, owner of r99 design, with a backyard bar featuring a surfboard on top

From low-key lighting to the subtle clink of ice, there's nothing quite like the seductive atmosphere of a cocktail bar. While there's no lack of places to grab a mixed drink in Laguna Beach, heading to your favorite bar could be as easy as stepping onto your own patio.

With a little creativity and design tips from local experts, you can build or arrange a custom space ideal for enjoying your favorite concoctions this spring and summer. Whether you like it shaken, stirred or blended, a backyard bar offers a private sanctuary to sip under sunny skies or twinkling stars.

BAR BASICS

Flip through any interior design magazine and you'll see a daunting range of styles for backyard bars. Roderick Reed, owner of Laguna Beach-based r99 design, says when narrowing down the options, the answer lies in your home's architecture. First and foremost, find a style that fits.

"Make the bar space harmonize with your house's architecture," he suggests. If your home gives off tropical vibes, consider a Tiki bar. For mission-style dwellings, the rustic look might be your best bet. And a contemporary home might benefit from a sleek, minimalist outdoor bar design incorporating blues and whites, he says. No matter which style is chosen, he notes, add luxury to the design.

For inspiration, Reed suggests taking a tour of some local bars to soak in the ambiance and get the creative juices flowing. The Seahorse at Pearl St. General, with its warm color palette and vintage decor, brings to mind an old-school speakeasy. Hotel bars, too, can spark design ideas and demonstrate how seamlessly a bar can blend with a property's overall look.

Designing a space that's as useful as it is attractive doesn't have to be overly complicated. You might be surprised how items you already own can be configured into an inviting area to lounge. It's all about being resourceful, Reed says.

For example, a fun, ocean-inspired look can be as simple as setting a surfboard across sawhorses to serve as a whimsical focal point and a designated place to craft drinks. Other options include using a potting bench, baker's rack or stacked crates.

Or stack cube-shaped storage units—such as those you might find at Ikea—in an arrangement you like, finishing off the look by placing various bottles of high-end liquor or even a potted plant or a piece of decor in each cube. "I



Creating a bar can be as simple as screwing together galvanized pipes, spray-painting them black and laying a wooden board on top, like this one made by designer Roderick Reed in his backyard.

think it would make a pretty smart-looking bar," Reed says.

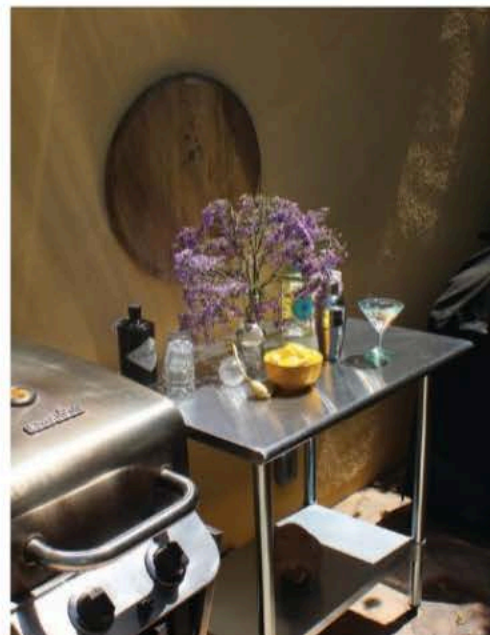
In his own backyard, Reed constructed a no-frills bar by screwing together galvanized pipes and spray-painting them black, then placing a wooden board over the top. When it's not being used as a bar, it makes a chic home for decorative accessories.

For seating options, regular bar stools will certainly do the job, but Reed says a comfortable outdoor sofa or lounge chairs will make those in your gathering feel more at ease. In terms of accessories, an outdoor rug goes a long way to help define your space. A fire pit can also create a natural gathering place to talk and enjoy your drinks.

And don't neglect good lighting, especially if your cocktail soirees will take place in the evening hours. To add a sophisticated touch, add a string of outdoor lights in a nearby tree, or even spring for a chandelier, Reed suggests. Make sure you have proper task lighting such as a small lamp on your bar to make mixing easier. And dial up the mood with accent lighting such as a lamp on a side table near your seating.

"If you have a built-in outside light ... just turn it off," he adds. "Most people have a bulb that's too bright or not bright enough."

If you're worried about whether your bar



Reed suggests looking to the home's architecture when designing a backyard bar so that its style blends seamlessly with the rest of the property.

setup can endure harsh weather, from dry heat to the occasional rainstorm, Reed says it's not difficult to find furniture and accessories made specifically for the outdoors. But given our mild climate, many of the materials you normally keep inside will work outside as well. "We've all



Light, fresh cocktails like margaritas and mojitos are perfect for enjoying outside in the warmer spring and summer months, says Jonathan Moreno, bartender and supervisor at The Rooftop Lounge.

seen pictures of Italians or the French at a dining table enjoying cocktails under a big tree, you can do the same," Reed says. "Bring your dining table outside next to your bar for a good place to eat and drink."

No matter how you choose to build and decorate your cocktail oasis, don't hesitate to use every inch of the area available.

"If you've got a small space, make a big bar," Reed says. "Don't think of the bar as this one little piece of furniture. The bar is the destination."

DIY MIXOLOGY

Once your backyard bar setup is squared away, it's time to toast to your new space with some concoctions inspired by the freshness and vitality of the season.

Jonathan Moreno, bartender and supervisor at The Rooftop Lounge at La Casa del Camino hotel, says light, fresh drinks are the way to go as summer approaches. Margaritas and mojitos are always a hit, especially when they're made with a tropical twist—think hints of coconut or pineapple.

"Since it is warming up, I think everyone's doing a lot of 'spa cocktails.' Something super refreshing, whether it's cucumber, mint [or] basil," Moreno says. "Light fruits, heavy herbs, probably topped with soda water."

For example, The Rooftop Lounge serves a cocktail called White Linen, made with

Hendrick's gin, St-Germain elderflower liqueur, lemon juice, muddled cucumber slices and lemon, finished off with a splash of soda water. Another invigorating option is what Moreno calls a Refined Gimlet, which starts with even portions of lime juice and turbinado sugar combined with gin or vodka and shaken with either jalapenos or basil; it's not a signature drink at Rooftop, but can be requested by those in the know.

When the sun sets and cooler breezes arrive, switch to a drink that takes the chill off.

"I love a nice Old-Fashioned," Moreno says. "Something with a little depth in spirit will always warm you up."

Quality ingredients are crucial for superb cocktails, but so are the right tools and gadgets. To level up your cocktail game, start by using glasses specifically intended for your mixture.

"Different glassware does have a spot in the bartending world," Moreno says. For instance, a coupe glass, ideal for anything served without ice, makes for a sultry presentation. "The coupe has beautiful, nice long legs. [It's] nice and rounded, almost [like a] martini glass," he adds.

Also handy are bucket glasses, also known as rocks glasses, which are recommended for serving spirits. For cocktails, plan to have double Old-Fashioned glasses on hand, which are slightly larger.



SPRING SIPS

WITH FRESH, MUDDLED FRUIT AND TART CITRUS FLAVORS, THIS LIBATION MAKES THE PERFECT SUNNY AFTERNOON REFRESHMENT.

BLUEBERRY MINT LEMONADE

Servings: 1

- 1 1/2 ounces Casamigos Blanco tequila
- 1/2 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 6 fresh blueberries, muddled
- 8 mint leaves, muddled
- Lemonade or soda water to top off

Add all of the ingredients—except the lemonade or soda water—into a shaker with ice. Shake, then pour through the strainer into a glass. Top with lemonade for a sweeter version or soda water for a lighter version.

Other must-haves are a shaker, muddler and a strainer, Moreno says. A strainer will ensure no particles end up in your drink. "It's that double strainer that really makes the cocktail come together," he notes. Invest in a jigger to measure your ounces accurately and a mixing glass for stirring more spirit-forward cocktails such as an Old-Fashioned.

"If you want those fresh [fruit] oils on top of your cocktails, I would do a nice peeler as well," Moreno notes.

Keeping your bar accessories free of sugary residue and protected from weather and wear and tear is crucial for backyard mixologists.

"Keep everything very clean, just to say the least," Moreno advises. "Every single time, after the first use: rinse, wash, clean and start all over again." LBM