

MANSION GLOBAL

Designing a Rooftop Entertaining Space

It's about picking the right plants, and creating an outdoor area you'll want to spend time in

By Jennifer Tzeses
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This urban oasis imagined by Halsted Welles for at 200 East 21st Street in New York City includes a lush garden and comfortable seating to take it in.

ALFA DEVELOPMENT

Designer's Corner



Each week Mansion Global tackles an interior design topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week we look at how to create a beautiful and impressive rooftop space.

A rooftop is an urban oasis ideal for both entertaining and relaxing alike.

Part garden, part outdoor living, a rooftop can really be anything you envision. To help create your dream space, follow these tips from the pros.

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Consider Form and Function

"Your rooftop should be an extension of your home and reflect your lifestyle. For example, we are big on hosting, so placing a large central table in the center of our rooftop was an obvious choice. After a large dinner party, of course, we need our downtime as well, so we designed a built-in sectional couch for more lazy days.

"Before we decide on the layout and material choices, we ask ourselves what are the functions of the space and how do we want ourselves and our guests to move in it. Then, according to functions, we'll play around with materials and heights to create different zones and moods.

"It is important to choose materials that age well so the space looks better as the years pass. Simplicity is key, as rooftops can often be regarded as secondary spaces and bear the brunt of housing objects you're not ready to part with.

"Essential features should include shaded spaces, a hammock or another fun element to set apart the roof from the main home, as well as string lights to create an intimate and festive environment as the sun sets.

"Consider strong and durable teak, ipe or a treated pine flooring with an anti-slip surface, as some woods and ceramics become very slippery when wet."



Designed by Emma Shahr, this spacious rooftop takes its cue from native plants and offers multiple areas for dining and relaxing.

Suzie Cohen Levinson

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—Emma Shahar of Craft and Bloom design studio in Tel Aviv

Create a Plan for Landscaping

"It's always important to notice the path of the sun and the orientation of your terrace space. There are very specific plants that will do well in sun, semi-shade or full shade. It is best to follow these principles.

"You do not have to always do perimeter plantings. Mix things up and bring some to the center of the space. Creating outdoor rooms on your terrace, if you have the room, can be done by grouping planters around dining furniture or living furniture. Be sure to have something beautiful framed by any windows that look out on the terrace. It is nice to see the surrounding areas through waving plumes of ornamental grasses.

"Plants that do well along the seashore and exposed areas with inclement weather will all do well on a rooftop. For taller evergreens, I like to use *Juniperus robusta*. This plant takes an enormous amount of weather abuse. They have a strong structural shape and are a beautiful deep dark green. Ornamental grasses, bamboo, Russian sage, butterfly bushes and even roses will take to a rooftop, as well as other forms of evergreen Juniper and spireas, a lovely small flowering shrub that comes in a full range of pink and white flowers.

"A garden isn't complete without trees, so plantings of crab apples, Japanese maple, or weeping cherries will add interest in all seasons. And they look so beautiful at night with soft uplighting. It's ideal to have two feet plus depth to grow trees.



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Patterned stone paving, pops of color amid a dense garden scape, and oversized sculptural elements create a jungle-like dream designed by Janice Parker atop a New York City Building.

Alan Barry Photography

-Janice Parker of [Janice Parker Landscape Architects](#) based in Greenwich, Connecticut

Pick Plants Carefully

"Choose plant species that are hardier to at least one-to-two zones colder than yours.

"If you have the space, and can include a planter large enough, definitely consider small trees to add to the rooftop. Avoid broad evergreens that can act as sails, catching strong winter winds. Remember that the bigger the plant, the bigger the pot.

"If you have a larger planter and don't want to weigh it down with excess soil, place non-biodegradable styrofoam beneath the soil.

"Drainage in planters is critical. If planters hold too much water, plants will drown, and the planters themselves may crack in the winter as ice expands.

"Think about plants like grasses that are conditioned to handle dry conditions and hot sun. Further, let the dead foliage persist all winter for interest and texture."

— Jennifer G. Horn, RLA JHLA/Jennifer Horn Landscape Architecture in Arlington, Virginia

Take Cues From the Surrounding Environment

"The key to successful landscape design is to observe and listen. For example, for the urban outdoor spaces at [200 East 21st St.](#) in New York City, we drew inspiration from the natural ecosystem of the environment—we observed everything from sunrises and sunsets to the patterns of the wind on site in order to properly understand the ecological and architectural context."

"To maintain the space's commitment to sustainability and 'greening the city,' we took into great consideration the leaf area index, which assesses how many leaves one can fit

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in a given area, as the more leaves there are, the greater their cooling effect will be. We utilized creative solutions, such as incorporating vertical walls as a vehicle for certain species to grow upward and maximize their growth.

Waterproofing is also important to keep in mind when planning an elevated urban outdoor space. ...One solution I am particularly proud of is that we were able to create a rainwater collection system on the roof to harvest natural storm water and repurpose it to irrigate the plantings.”

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