

This Old House

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THISOLDHOUSE.COM AOL KEYWORD: THIS OLD HOUSE

You don't have to be shivering in a sandy swimsuit

to appreciate an open-air shower. Even landlocked homeowners—stressed-out townies, gritty green-thumbs, suburban soccer dads—are discovering that bathing outdoors is not just practical, it's downright luxurious. That's how architect Howard Backen sees his shower (pictured below). Every morning, he's out there, lathering up to the sound of birds in his garden and the sight of mountains beyond his home in California's

Napa Valley. "It's invigorating when it's cold, it's interesting when it's rainy, and it's incredibly refreshing when it's sunny and hot," he says. Whether the goal is to wash off the day or to commune with nature, there is an outdoor shower for you. The simplest is a foot sprayer hooked to an existing cold-water spigot. The most complicated and expensive is an outdoor shower with cold and hot water, a custom enclosure for pri-

vacancy, and a built-in changing room for convenience. What's universal about any alfresco shower is that it beckons you outside. And yes, for some, it's also about the exhilaration of being in the backyard in the buff. Here's what you need to know to create the outdoor shower that best suits your naked—or not-so-naked—ambition.

•• SITE SELECTION

Determining the best location for an outdoor shower depends on how you'll use it. Luke and Allison Babcock put the foot shower at their Sag Harbor, New York, home (pictured page 117) near the front door so when the couple and their two daughters return from the beach they can spray off the sand before going inside. Others opt for a shower by the pool for a postswim rinse, or close to the back door for the resident athlete just back from a sweaty jog.

The best outdoor showers also take advantage of the natural beauty of the surroundings. For a family in Bridgehampton, N.Y., architect Nick Martin designed a shower with a mahogany enclosure (pictured page 112) that he situated toward the back of the house to offer views of a rose garden and a farm across the street.

Plumbing can also dictate site. A shower on a deck near the kit-

chen or bathroom or on a ground-floor patio off the laundry room means you can tap into existing hot- and cold-water lines. One placed in a remote cluster of trees, though appealing, requires digging a trench and running pipe to the destination.

•• PRIVACY

When designing your outdoor shower, consider how much you are willing to expose, and account for the feelings of guests or neighbors. "I encourage people to build with the most modest person in mind," says Ethan Fierro, author of *The Outdoor Shower*. The most straightforward approach is a freestanding folding screen, which works especially well on a multi-use deck where permanent walls can eat up too much space. For an outdoor shower on a rooftop of a client's home in Washington, D.C., architect Kai Tong designed a roll-up bamboo screen that's high enough for a shield but low enough not to block dramatic views of the capital. The most organic approach draws on the landscape, whether a new privet hedge or an existing curtain of trees. Keep in mind that if trees are deciduous, you may have to wait until late spring for sufficient cover.

A custom wood shower enclosure offers privacy plus flexibility to add built-ins and other amenities. To prevent mold and mildew, be sure the space is well ventilated so it completely dries out after every use. Walls should be secured to corner posts and elevated about a foot off the ground to promote air circulation. And if you decide to add a solid roof, attach it only to the posts, leaving open space above the walls. A sunny location like the poolside spot that designer Beau Clowney selected for a client's shower in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina (pictured page 117), will also help dry the enclosure.

SPALIKE AMENITIES

Just off the master bedroom of a house in California's Napa Valley, this bathhouse serves multiple functions. Behind the striped curtain is a shower with a 12-inch rain-style head for washing. The painted Douglas fir walls shield a Jacuzzi for soaking. The open-air bluestone patio is for lounging.



SPACE TO SPARE
This extra-large, 8-by-12-foot shower in Bridgehampton, N.Y., has mahogany walls, built-in teak benches, and stainless-steel fixtures. Perfect for a post-surfing rinse, it features a foot wash, hand-held spray, and oversized showerhead. The floor is hand-cut Indian stone with river-rock gravel.