

The Lake Geneva Outdoor Living Design Guide

What to settle before a contractor walks your site

This guide contains no prices, and it is not trying to sell you a bigger project. It is the set of questions worth answering before anyone walks your property, because the answers change what gets designed - and because a contractor who arrives to find them already settled can give you a far more honest number.

1. Decide how the space is actually used

Almost every regret traces back to this being assumed rather than discussed.

- ☐ How many people, realistically, on the biggest evening of the year
- ☐ Cooking out there, or carrying food from the indoor kitchen
- ☐ Seating for conversation, or dining at a table, or both
- ☐ Whether children use it, and whether that changes the layout
- ☐ How late into the evening you expect to be outside
- ☐ Which months you are actually here, if this is a second property

2. Read the ground before the catalogue

Site conditions move a quote more than material selection does.

- ☐ Which way the ground falls, and where water goes in a heavy storm
- ☐ What machinery can physically reach the work area
- ☐ Where excavated material can go, or whether it must leave by lorry
- ☐ Whether there is a level change that needs steps or a wall
- ☐ Existing trees you intend to keep, and how close the work comes to them
- ☐ Where the sun falls in late afternoon, which is when the space gets used

3. Understand what is under the surface

This is the part you never see and the part that decides the outcome.

- ☐ Ask what excavation depth is being allowed for
- ☐ Ask what base material is specified, and to what compacted depth
- ☐ Ask how the base drains, not just how the surface drains
- ☐ Ask what edge restraint is used - unrestrained edges migrate
- ☐ Compare quotes on these answers, not on the stone
- ☐ Treat a quote that will not discuss the base as incomplete

4. Shoreland and permits in Walworth County

On a lake parcel there are usually two authorities, not one.

- ☐ Establish whether the property sits within 1,000 feet of the lake
- ☐ Note that patios, walls and fire pits are prohibited in the shore yard
- ☐ The shore yard is the land within 75 feet of the ordinary high water mark
- ☐ Grade changes within 75 feet of the water are generally not authorised
- ☐ Vegetation within 35 feet of the shoreline is protected
- ☐ Confirm which authority issues your permit before design is finalised

5. Choose materials for fifteen winters

Everything looks good in year one. Ask what year ten looks like.

- ☐ Ask how the surface behaves through repeated freeze and thaw
- ☐ Stand on a sample in full sun before choosing on appearance
- ☐ Test grip on a wet sample, not a dry showroom piece
- ☐ Ask how a single damaged unit is replaced years later
- ☐ Ask whether colour runs through the material or sits on it
- ☐ Consider what maintenance the finish expects, and who will do it

6. Get the calendar right

The excavation window is the scarce resource, not the crew.

- ☐ Understand that design and permitting happen before any digging
- ☐ Agree work in autumn for a spring start, not the other way round
- ☐ Ask where you sit in the queue when the ground opens
- ☐ Allow for finishing work after the main build - it is often underestimated
- ☐ Expect a spring enquiry to be planning for the following season