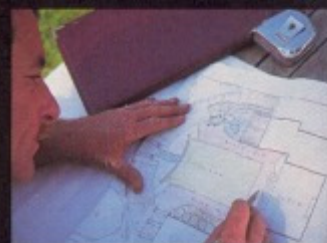


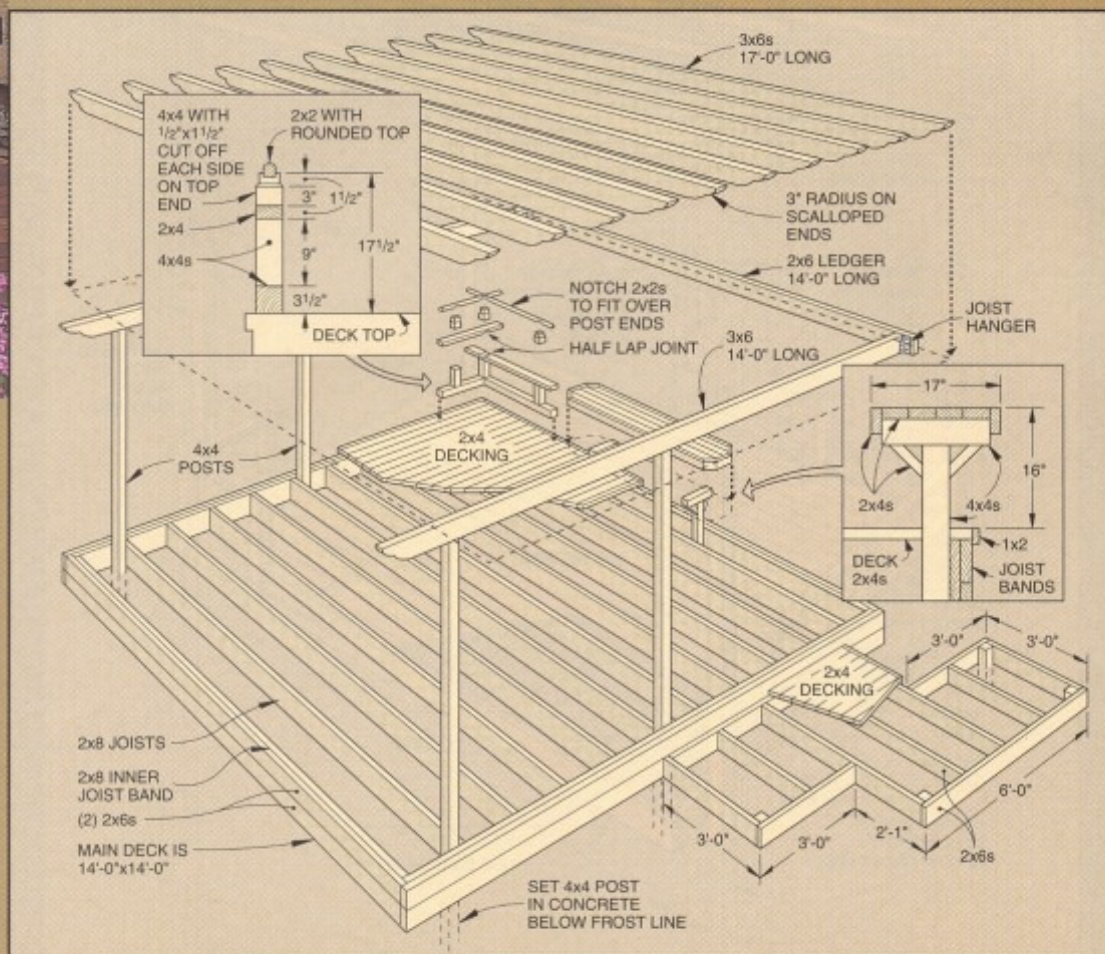
Decks with Heart

San Diego deck specialist Joe Wood cringes when he sees plain square decks with no soul—and you should, too. See how he crafts “outdoor rooms” with subtle extras and the strong character that homeowners deserve.

thoughts from joe



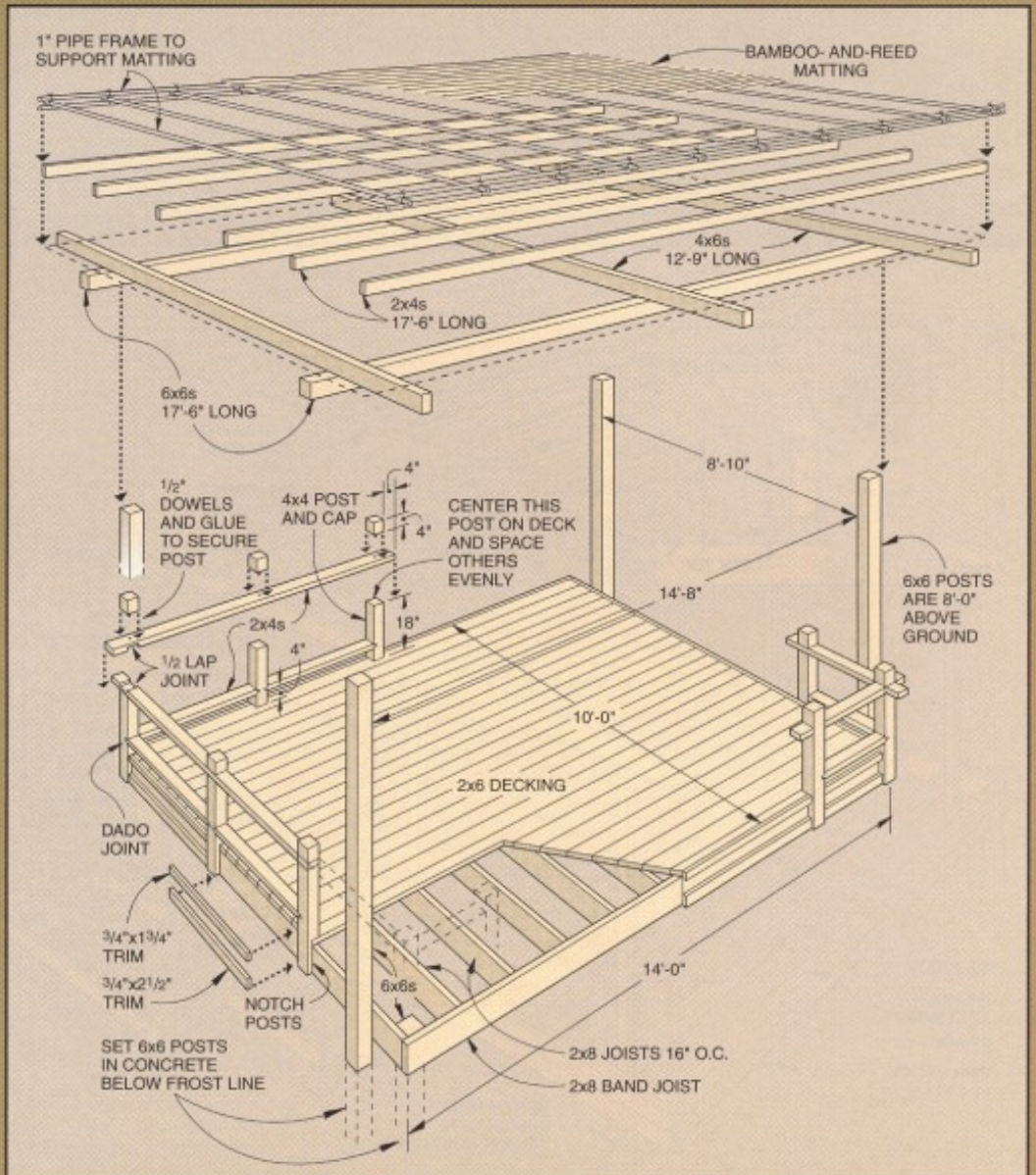
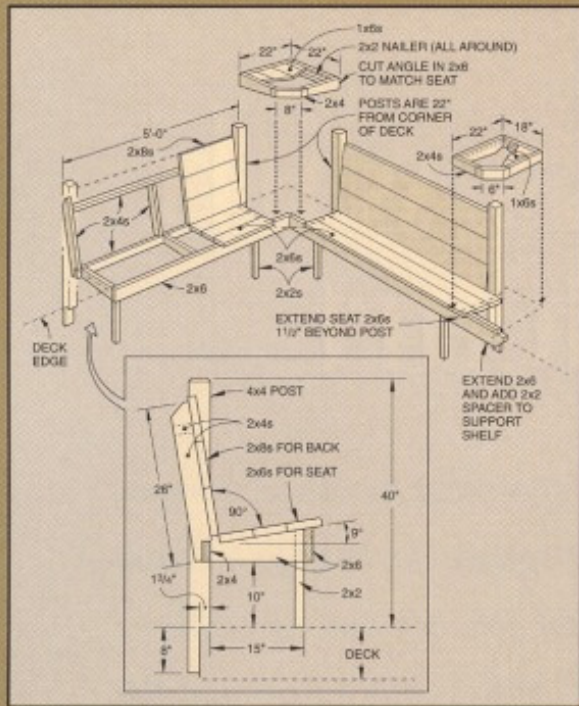
“I approach my design as an artist. Most builders have lost the old ways. I learn a lot of things from old resources, from early on. And I was fortunate to apprentice under some ‘old timers’ when I started out. It’s a lost art. For instance, if you sheath the bottoms of posts with a 2-inch copper strip, it forms a potent fungicide as it oxidizes, and the post won’t rot at the ground. That’s a thing from ancient times.”



thoughts from joe



“A well-designed deck should be like an outdoor room, and I don't mean an empty rectangle. I like to have ‘areas’ on my decks: social areas; sun and shade areas; a place to sit and relax; areas for a view, if there is one; and private areas, especially if there is a spa. You create these areas with steps, multilevels, screening, seating, and planters. Overhead structures, railings, and trelliswork add interest and architectural detail and also help to define areas.”






Deck specialist Joe Wood “floated” this Japanese-style deck on a gravel lake. He fashioned the Shinto-style railings after an ancient temple he saw while researching. “It took me days to figure out all of those cuts,” he says.



Ancient roots underline the fresh, new look of this redwood deck, San Diego deck builder Joe Wood’s answer to a bare backyard that needed a lift. Rather than come up with something new, he adapted some centuries-old basics from Japanese style, such as focal points and serenity.

“I consider Japanese style the ultimate for outdoor projects, especially the Shinto style whose goals are purity and simplicity, qualities often missing in modern life,” Wood says. “I’ve studied it for years, and it’s just so deep. Often, every stone has a name and a reason. The things in the design sometimes aren’t obvious. You just know that it feels good.”

This 14×14-foot deck feels good because seating is positioned for the best view. It has an overhead structure to create a safe, enclosed feeling—not to provide shade. And a zigzag “bridge” crosses the gravel, which Wood raked flat to symbolize a placid lake. The deck seems to be peacefully adrift on it, creating a big sense of relaxation in a small yard.



Wood typically designs decks so the seating areas are sheltered from the high-noon sun. This bamboo-and-reed ceiling protects the entire deck all day.

Only filtered sun dribbles onto the comfortable new redwood deck behind this San Diego home. In an area where an open gathering space could get blasted by the sun, Wood's design of this deck and landscape maintain a breezy, resort-style setting.

The deck floats on a gravel lake and includes the extra touches of a mounded "bonsai island" and three island stones. Though only 10x14 feet, the deck offers contoured benches with tabletops and yields enough open space for a group of people, a hammock, or a play area for children. A low Shinto-style railing defines the deck without closing it in.

Wood built a fujidana (Japanese-style post-and-beam arbor) over the deck. The bamboo-and-reed roof shields the sun and also defines the space.

"[The homeowners] wanted to open up an unused area that was a weedy lawn," Wood says. "Now the deck describes an area to sit and relax."



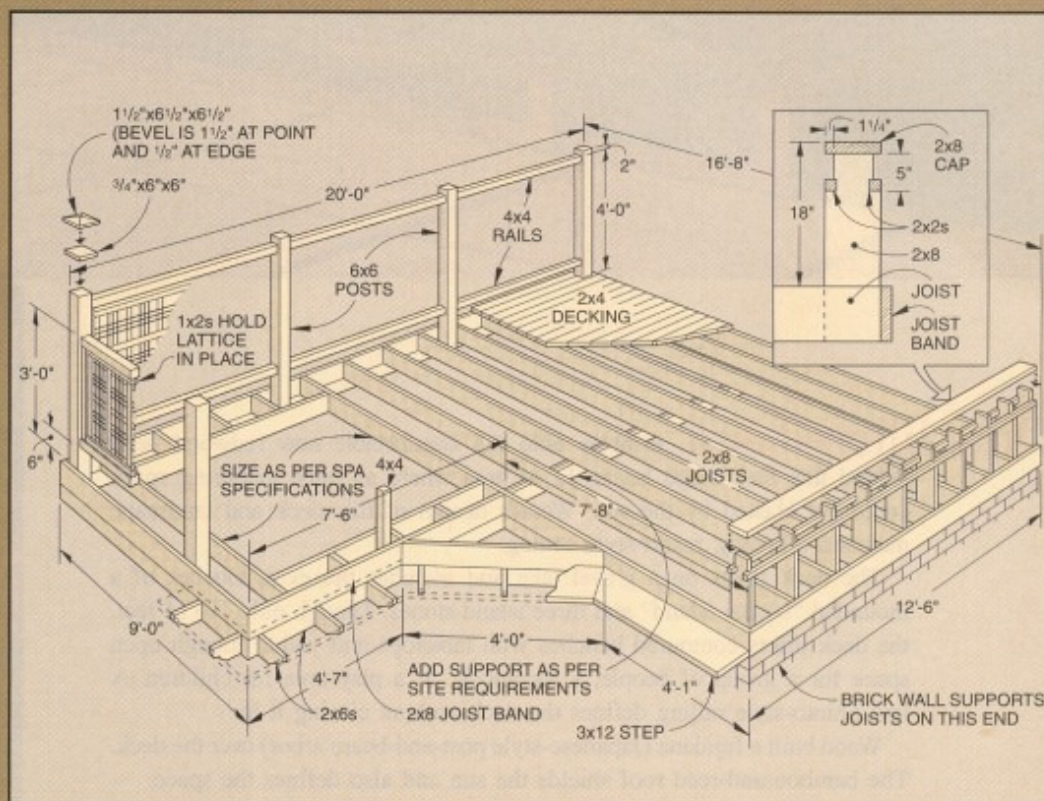
thoughts from joe



“For a beautiful deck, ask a lumber-center manager to recommend at least two builders who design as well as build. Listen to their ideas, and hopefully, find a builder enthusiastic about your project. It’s important to put money into design. Custom doesn’t always mean ‘grand and expensive.’

You can have a great smaller custom deck at the same cost as a big-but-ugly deck.”

Though railings are required if a deck is elevated about 3 feet (30 inches in California), Wood thinks of railings as opportunities on *any* deck to add architectural detail and personality. This railing also works hard by shielding the spa from more public areas.



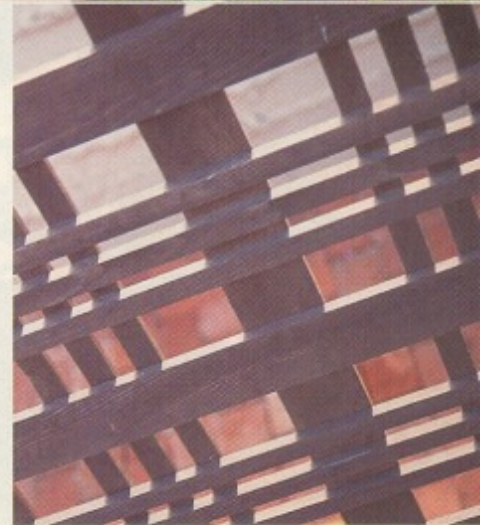



Getting stared at isn't the most enjoyable way to relax and savor an ocean view, but this is what these homeowners faced with their exposed deck and spa off of the side of the house. Wood solved the problem by designing a railing that simultaneously balances openness and privacy. To provide extra interest, the screening steps down when it turns the corner.

The railing on the more private side is low and simple.

"This is an example of using Japanese style subtly, not having it look Oriental," Wood says. He used natural materials, such as stone and redwood, and designed railings with bold, straight horizontal lines that have a shoji-screen effect. The curved patio and angled deck stairs play off of the grid.

Much of Wood's work is based on traditional designs, which has required years of study and practice, "but imagining my forefathers' nods of approval has kept me on my quest," he says.





Because this space was tight, Wood used an umbrella instead of a structure overhead. The umbrella can be put away as needed to open the view of the sky.

Squishing a deck

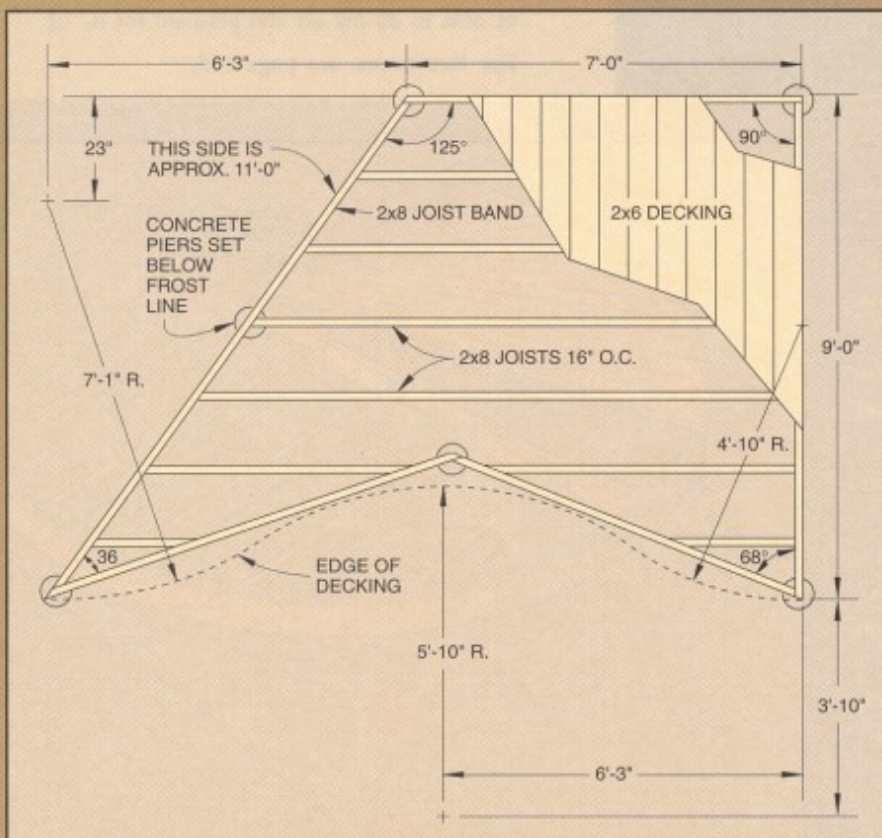
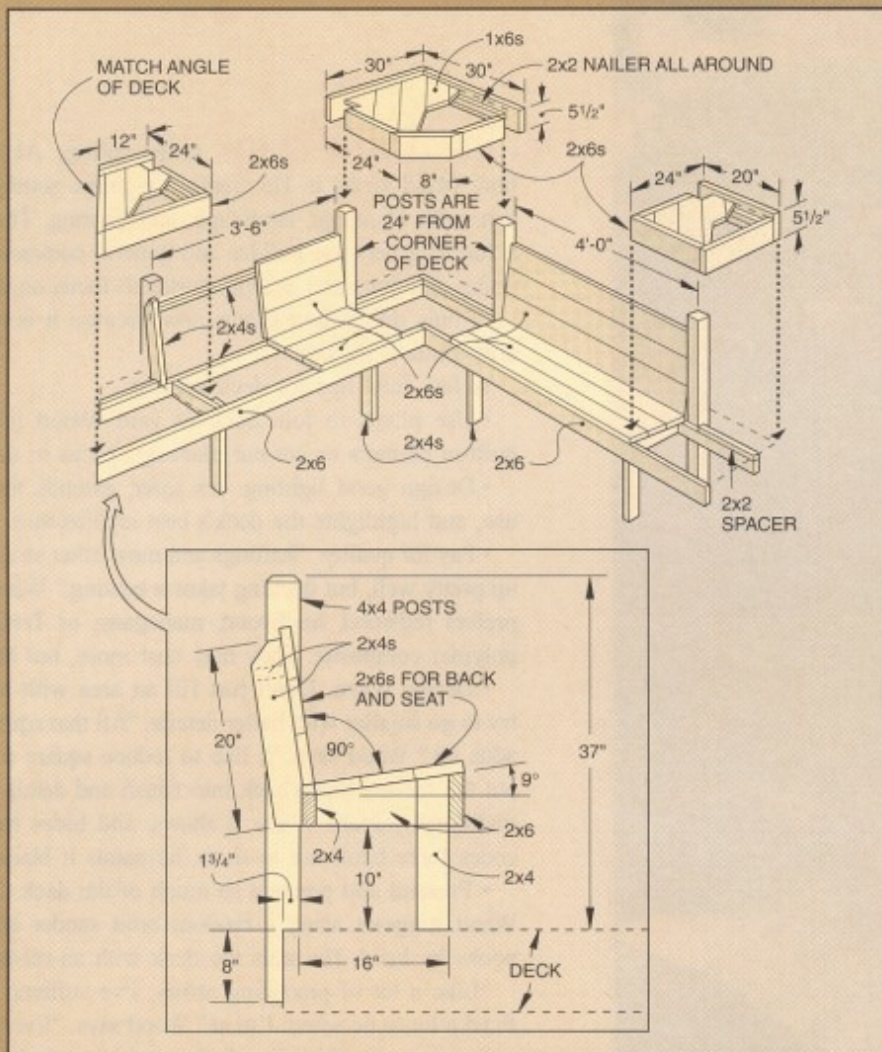
into the tiny yard of a condo is no easy feat, especially if you add the wrinkles of an odd-shape corner lot and an existing free-form patio slab that needs to be incorporated.

By letting the ends of the decking overhang the supports, Wood could cut them into curves to follow the flow of the patio. He also kept the deck low to smoothly blend the two areas. Although small, about 7x9 feet, the deck meets the relaxation needs of the empty-nester couple. Built-in benches and a 2x2-foot corner table provide seating and dining areas without space-eating tables and chairs in the deck's center. This also preserves easy, open traffic flow, essential in a small space and something Wood considers in all his outdoor rooms. Because existing walls created privacy, Wood kept the redwood deck open to enhance the sense of space.

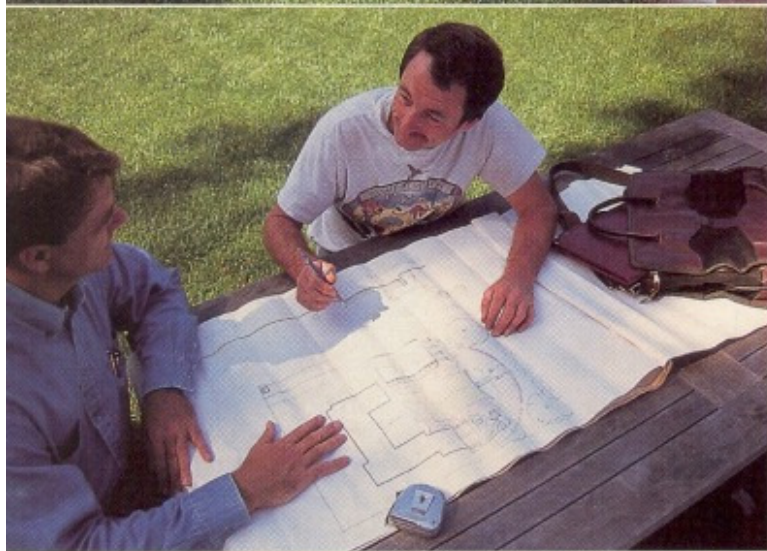
Finally, the couple wanted to enjoy the space, not maintain it. So Wood anchored it in drought-tolerant plants and easy-care stepping-stones and pebbles.



thoughts from joe



“One of the hardest things is to find an overall theme. I take cues from my clients’ art and furnishings. If there’s a definite architectural style to the house, I’ll go to the library to research it, soaking up the details and feel. I’ll often make three trips to the site and work closely with the clients, bouncing ideas off of them. I try out ideas on paper. The design can take days and it is often agony. But if you work hard it will happen, and you’ll have a beautiful project.”



Decks don't stop at the railings. At least, that's how Wood views it. He creates the entire setting when he can, with plantings, landscape, and lighting. Though he is a fourth-generation builder and general contractor, he quit doing additions and second stories to focus on decks.

"I only do outdoor things now because it is such a creative outlet," he says.

A few final tips for deck success:

- Use plants to join deck to yard. Wood may include built-in planters or cut-out planting spaces in the decks.

- Design good lighting. It's safer, extends the hours of use, and highlights the deck's best architecture.

- Pay for quality. "Railings and most other structures hold up pretty well, but decking takes a beating," Wood says. He prefers redwood, hardwood, mahogany, or Trex, a wood-polymer composite. They may cost more, but last longer.

- Design down. Don't just fill an area with a deck, but try to go smaller with better details. "All that square footage adds up," Wood says. "I like to reduce square footage and put the money saved back into finish and details." He uses traditional joinery where it shows, and hides hardware. If codes force hardware to show, he paints it black.

- Presand and pre-stain as much of the deck as you can. Wood suggests using a random orbit sander and sanding nooks by hand. He seals the deck with an oil-base stain.

"Like a lot of practicing artists, I've suffered and sacrificed a lot to be where I'm at," Wood says. "Everything else comes second to building decks, and I just feel fortunate to be able to do my art and get paid for it." □

For Resources, see page 115.

Wood works closely with clients and analyzes the site to come up with designs. This plan for a half-circle sunburst deck balances the patio space and makes the most of the shade and view. "Everything in the garden radiates away from the pattern in the brickwork, so the 'viewing deck' will also have a radiating theme," he says. Wood uses formulas to find exact measurements. An easier but less precise method would be to set stakes and bend laminate through them to create the perimeter arc. The decking could be measured and nailed to fit.

