

Four Season Patio Design Tips

Solar Access

Sunshine is one of the most important elements to have on your patio, especially in cooler weather. Can you locate your patio so it has solar access in all seasons?

- ✓ Consider developing your patio on more than one building side if you have the option. The building itself can offer exposure or protection from the sun and wind, creating a choice of microclimate for your patrons.
- ✓ Lightweight furniture can easily be moved into the sun, but heavier furniture may not. Consider how the sun moves throughout the year when choosing furniture and designing your layout.
- ✓ Are there opportunities to reflect light into the patio space from your own building or surrounding buildings?



▲ Lightweight furniture is easy to move as the sun changes position throughout the day. Bright blankets are out for the taking, and a saturated wall colour creates a warm atmosphere.



▲ A permanent awning protects the patio from the elements. Adjustable, transparent curtains provide further protection from wind and blowing snow, while allowing visual access to the patio. String lights brighten the space.

Shelter

Awnings can be an attractive part of your store front, and protect from snow, wind and rain.

- ✓ Is the awning or roof constructed to be useable in all seasons, including winter?
- ✓ Does your patio provide protection from wind, while preserving visual access? Edmonton's winter winds come mostly from the NW to W directions. Wind behaviour in the urban environment is a complicated science, but the presence of wind screens and vegetation can reduce wind on your patio, keeping your patrons warmer. Awnings can also provide protection from windy downdrafts if your patio is located near the base of a tall building.

Snow Storage and Removal

Snow can be a beautiful visual feature on your patio, but clearing it off pathways and furniture can be labour intensive. Thoughtful design can help.

- ✓ Prevent snow accumulation – If your patio furniture is protected from the snow, you can quickly bounce back into business when a warm winter day strikes.
- ✓ Plan for snow storage – How will snow be removed? Where will it be stored? Do you have space for stored snow to be incorporated as a decorative element on your patio?

Cloth and antique windows are mounted in the gaps of the wooden pergola at Café Bicyclette, and the base of the walls were packed with snow. Permeable materials like cloth and screen can dramatically dampen wind. What a creative and beautiful solution to reduce wind on the patio while preserving visual access.



Light and Music

Light can serve as a visual beacon to show your business is open, and add to the winter beauty of our streets. Warm lighting is important - cool tones given off by fluorescent light can be harsh against the pale winter canvas.

- ✔ Is your patio creatively and appropriately lit for winter darkness? Snow reflects light very well, so it is important to not over-light snowy spaces.
- ✔ Music can serve as an audible cue that your patio is open, and create a lively atmosphere. Keeping volumes below bylaw limits will keep your neighbours happy.



▲ LED lanterns created by Dylan Toymaker softly light the snow at La Cité Francophone/Café Bicyclette.

Amenities

Amenities are the details that contribute to character of the winter patio experience. Many elements are easily changeable. Your location and the identity of your restaurant can provide design cues to work with when creating a four-season patio.

- ✔ Comfortable materials - Materials with a higher insulation value are more comfortable to sit or lean on in cold temperatures (imagine sitting on a wooden bench or straw bale versus a bare metal chair). If metal furniture must be used, blankets and seat cushions can help protect patrons.
- ✔ Customer control - Research indicates the more control we have over sources of discomfort (such as wind or cold), the more we might be able to tolerate. On a cold day, if patrons have many ways to control their thermal comfort such as blankets to put on their laps, heat sources to choose their distance from, and shelter to take, they may be better able to tolerate colder conditions. Do your patrons have to ask a staff member for a blanket, or are they openly visible for the taking? How much choice and control does your patio offer?
- ✔ Heat sources - Heat sources are a great patio amenity, and should be chosen to suit your patio design. Propane heaters require tanks to be refilled, and locked in secure locations when not in use. Overhead electric heaters can be more costly to install but are space efficient, and are easily turned on and off. A wood burning fire is an alluring, classic heat source, but smoke can bother neighbours, and fire wood costs can add up. When choosing the right heat source for your patio, consider patio design, and initial and ongoing costs and labour.



▲ Colourful canvas tents provide a pop of colour and a little protection on the winter patio at The Drake Hotel. Wood seating is comfortable to sit on in cold temperatures, evergreens bring nature and colour to the patio, and a gas fire place and heaters offer patrons several sources of heat.

Aesthetics

Warm colours and a natural setting can make your patio feel more inviting in the colder months. Thermal comfort research suggests people tolerate cold and windy conditions better in natural settings, than unnatural settings with no visible nature.

- ✔ Vibrant, saturated colours can visually warm up a space.
- ✔ Use of native vegetation that is colourful in the winter such as evergreens.