

The garden room at one hair salon is just that. *Emma Summersby* reports on a salon with outside styling stations

BREATH OF FRESH HAIR

This year's summer might have been a washout, but clients at the Fairfax hairdressing salon in Staines certainly made the most of what little sunshine there was – by having their hair done in the outside salon.

When Stephen Fairfax moved into his salon in Laleham village, Staines, Middlesex, he decided to make the most of the garden there, by turning it into another spectacular area of the salon. "We built an extension at the back of the salon which we called the garden room," he says. "It opens up into a courtyard which is basically an outside extension of the salon."

To create the external styling stations, full-length outdoor mirrors made from a weatherproof resin were installed, and outdoor plug points fitted to the decking to supply power to each station.

For clients who want to take shelter from the sun, there is a gazebo on one side of the courtyard. But this is no flimsy garden gazebo; this is a chic and stylish canopy, with chandeliers in the centre. "It's a really large area. There's a large dining room table and some sofas under the gazebo – it is spectacular," says Stephen.

On a dry day most clients'

choose to sit outside and make the most of the fresh air, and having an outdoor area adds to the overall ambience in the salon. "From lunchtime onwards we serve gin and tonics and a choice of wines, so our clients can sit in the fresh air and relax with a cool drink or a choice of coffee if they prefer," says Stephen. Jazz music plays in the background.

Stephen also had the bright idea of teaming up with the pub next door to offer food. "We have a lovely pub next door which serves great food," he says. "Our clients can have lunch bought in from the pub while their colour is processing." The partnership has proved beneficial to both businesses – clients get the opportunity to have a bite to eat while the pub gains extra customers.

As well as being a quirky feature in the salon, having the additional garden area means there are five extra seats available in the summer. "It really extends our salon and allows for more clients," says Stephen.

The outside area has provided an ideal setting for client events. "This year we had a Virgin Vie representative come along one evening. It worked brilliantly – we did the hair in evening styles, and Virgin Vie did the make-up. We lit the garden with spectacular lighting and everyone sat outside."

Cool summer evenings aren't a worry; Stephen has invested in outdoor patio heaters which take off the chill instantly.

Each of the salon's 19 team members thoroughly enjoys getting out into the fresh air. "It can get very stuffy and hot



The sociable atmosphere in the courtyard attracts regular clients who just pop in for a coffee under the gazebo



with all the dryers and straighteners, so it's lovely to have an outdoor extension," says Stephen.

A specialist concept company was hired to supply all the plants and containers used to create the garden.

"We rent all the plants. At the beginning of the summer we visit the supplier's centre and select them. Then they come and plant them all for us," says Stephen. At the end of the summer the company takes away the plants and pots, clearing the entire area. They have even supplied a centre piece for the courtyard in the form of a water feature, and a trough filled with herbs and vegetables.

"It was wonderful and gave some brilliant scents. Best of all, it is all low maintenance and the majority of the plants just require watering," adds Stephen.

The cost of the courtyard area was approximately £20,000, which, says Stephen, was well worth the investment.

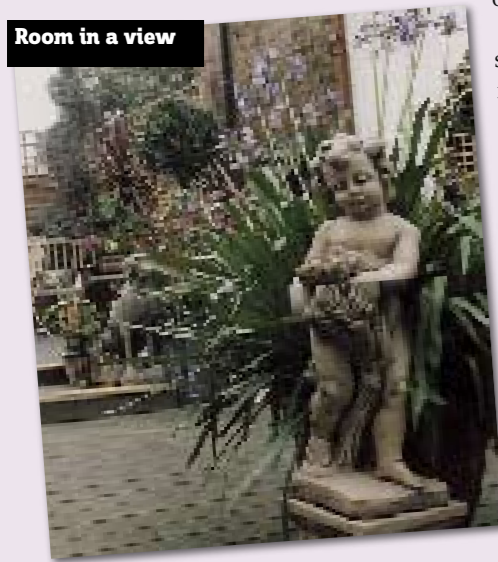
Fairfax has a 'no children' policy and the emphasis is very much on relaxing and enjoying the overall experience. "Having a courtyard certainly helps clients switch off."

Because there is such a sociable atmosphere in the courtyard, regular clients will often pop in for a coffee and sit under the gazebo. "We also have coffee tables outside the front of the salon which look very Parisian. Clients often just come by for a coffee if they are passing and we wouldn't dream of charging them for it," he says.

Although the salon is located in a small village the courtyard has helped attract new clients. "It's a real talking point," says Stephen.

The whole concept of using the outside of the salon has proved extremely beneficial. "On days when we can't use the courtyard we've lost nothing, but it's been well worth every penny. So many shops have yards that they don't utilise and they could be doing so much more with the area," says Stephen. **HJ**

Room in a view



Clients can sip a gin and tonic while listening to jazz music in the Fairfax garden

