

# Enhance Your Life With an Outdoor Shower

After a weekend of plumbing, site work, and carpentry, you can wash up in your handiwork

BY BRIAN PONTOLILO

## **For the minimalist.**

*This shower is as simple as it gets. The fixtures are mounted to a cedar board set into the shingled wall. Decorative gravel enhances drainage, and a few well-placed stones provide a natural surface for standing. For this design, a bathing suit or private yard is required.*

**A**fter four years of remodeling my house, I'm starting to tackle the punch list. It's easy to look back and criticize my decisions, to wonder what I might do differently if I ever remodel a house again. One thing I'm certain I would not change is my outdoor shower. This project cost under \$1000—which could have been less had I done the plumbing myself—and added invaluable convenience and joy to my life. When I'm covered in dirt after a long day of work, I can now leave it all outside. And walking out to shower in the morning, where I can hear songbirds and watch the sun rise, sets the right tone for my day. Here's what you need to know to get the plumbing and site work right, as well as some inspiration for your own outdoor shower. □

Consulting editor Brian Pontolilo showered outside this morning.

**A window to the ocean.** This cedar surround provides plenty of privacy, so the designer framed a view of the ocean in the distance. The rafters above provide style but still allow plenty of sunlight and moonlight to illuminate the shower. The spaced ipé decking lets water drain to a bed of gravel below.

want to include some lighting for showering at night or early in the morning, but Mark suggests not placing the lighting too close to the shower because it will attract insects.

Choose durable materials, but keep in mind that even the most weather-resistant materials will patina faster and potentially richer than expected if the shower is used frequently. Include shelves and other conveniences to hold shampoo, combs, soap, towels, and the like.

Shower flooring can be wood (ipé and mahogany are Mark's favorites), stone, or another slip- and rot-resistant material such as tile or synthetic decking. While Mark suggests avoiding fir or pressure-treated material for flooring because they splinter, PT is a good option for structural elements.

Remember that while the shower may be used only for a few months of the year, it will be part of the landscape year-round. Finally, says Mark, "because you will be naked outside, it's worth taking the time to build something that you will feel comfortable in."



## SURROUNDED BY STYLE

Captured on all sides by sandy beaches, and inhabited largely by vacationers, Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard have a high ratio of outdoor showers to households. Mark Hutker, FAIA, an architect with offices on the Vineyard and the Cape, has been designing outdoor showers as part of his homes for decades. His projects (shown here) are not only inspired, but they offer practical lessons.

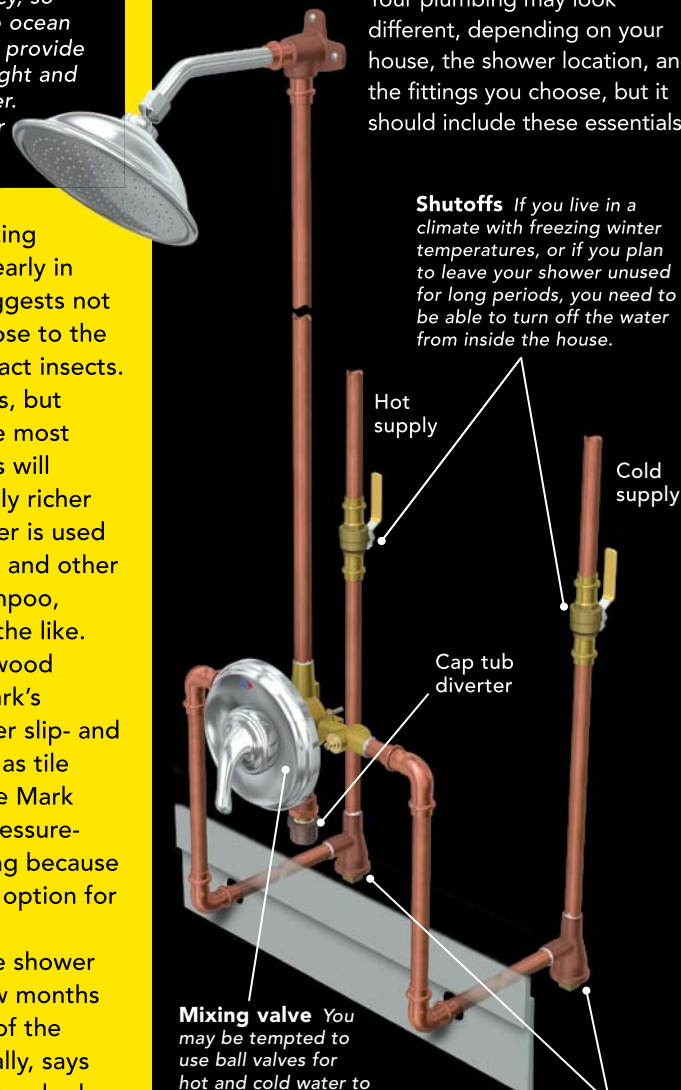
If the shower is to be placed against the house, Mark recommends a sunlit location and avoiding the house's inside corners. This will provide plenty of open air around the shower for drying and minimize how much of the house gets wet.

Next, consider the view from the shower. You may plan the shower to expose an open view to the natural landscape, a framed view of gardens, or a vast view to the sky. You may

**Pergola on deck.** Away from the house, this shower provides privacy within the context of a pergola. Hot and cold supply lines run under the deck, and the mixing valve is captured in a simple box that also provides a shelf for shower necessities.

## PLUMBING ESSENTIALS

Your plumbing may look different, depending on your house, the shower location, and the fittings you choose, but it should include these essentials.



**Shutoffs** If you live in a climate with freezing winter temperatures, or if you plan to leave your shower unused for long periods, you need to be able to turn off the water from inside the house.

**Mixing valve** You may be tempted to use ball valves for hot and cold water to save money, but hot water is dangerous, and a proper thermostatic mixing valve includes scald protection and may be required by code.

**Drains** Water sitting in pipes can cause damage during freeze-thaw cycles. It's important to be able to drain the lines. Here, Ts with threaded plugs are used.

**Gray water** Drainage is important, even if it's just to prevent water from pooling at your feet. A few inches of gravel might be all that's needed. If the house or basement is at risk of getting wet from the runoff, consider adding an underground gutter (shown) or a French drain that leads to daylight. Some jurisdictions require that you capture your gray water and direct it to a sewer or a septic tank.

