

AN EARLY SPRING BRINGS THE OUTDOORS INTO FOCUS

When it comes to furnishing a home, context is everything. That goes for the outdoors, as well.

Although some disparate decorating styles may co-exist, indeed, quite dramatically, there can't be a total disconnect. Which is why new homebuilders today are designing outdoor spaces as an integral part to the overall scheme, not as an amenity to be added later.

At least one catalyst that bolsters the indoor-outdoor connection we've seen underscored in magazines is the National Association of Home Builders' Best in America Living Awards, which last year gave top honors to a town house in Plymouth, Mass. What was so appealing is that the home wrapped around a courtyard with an outdoor fireplace. Heather McCune, former editor of Professional Builder magazine and now marketing director of Bassenian Lagoni Architects in Newport Beach, Calif., told the Chicago Tribune that the judges regarded the recognition as a "sea change in design."

For California-based, award-winning designer Richard Frinier, it's simply an evolution.

"For me, the outdoor room was never really a trend; rather, it is a lifestyle," says Frinier. "People are returning to the pleasure of entertaining at home, which has been fueled not only by resort-at-home trends, but by the many food and cooking shows inspiring people. This means they have to have wonderful indoor and outdoor living spaces to complete the experience."

As outdoor rooms have evolved in the last few years, the most sophisticated spaces now include areas for entertaining, cooking and lounging, with water and fireplace features. Stylish decorating preferred.

At the very least, there must be some consistency, if not compatibility, in scale, palette and finishes.

John Gidding, host of "Curb Appeal" on HGTV, knows more than a thing or two about that. His advice is simple: "One important thing about (house) facades, is to never be trend based," says Gidding, speaking not just about a front exterior, but side and back as well. "Be true to the architecture." Spoken like the Harvard-trained architect he is.

"Keep an eye on the facade and plantscape to create a color story," says Gidding, who advises taking cues from the home's architecture, such as metal finishes -- "the hardware on a door." He also likes to introduce color and shape by integrating planters, especially sculptural ones. He often modifies off-the-rack terra cotta pots for example, with paint.

The latest designs from outdoor furniture and accessories manufacturers feature a wide range of decorative styles, shapes and materials. Wood choices abound, from the ubiquitous teak to rich mahogany,



Besides its clean, crisp lines, this modular sectional sofa, part of the Elements collection designed by Richard Frinier for Brown Jordan, wins multiple style points. Its frame is covered with a handsome, textured mohair fiber Resinweave, complemented with square and rectangular knife-edged pillows. An optional sliding tray provides interest in a contrasting powder-coated aluminum and tonal color. The upholstery is a new Classic Linen designed by Frinier for Sunbrella. One sofa is 64 inches wide by 36 inches deep and 26 inches high. Credit: Brown Jordan

in ranges of finishes that include weathered taupes and grays (tones also are emerging in fabrics) like those that fit the Belgian modern interior looks so popular at Restoration Hardware. Weaves in resin or synthetic wicker lookalikes continue to push the envelope, with herringbone, sweaterlike and open meshes that add intrigue to shape. Metals run the gamut from sleek and shiny or matte stainless steel to oxidized looks and flamboyant brights in powder-coated enamels.

"The addition of accessories such as pillows or throws are an easy way to add a punch of color," says Gina Wicker, creative director for Sunbrella fabrics.

Area rugs also add color and pattern, if you choose, as they also define "rooms." With a rich array of styles (at Pottery Barn this spring, there even are extraordinary outdoor "kilims" hand loomed in typical colors, in stripes and vibrant diamonds, woven in polyester yarns), consumers are loving the no-fuss features, so a good number of rugs designed to withstand sun, dirt, stains and mildew, are now go-to options indoors, especially in high traffic areas and even in formal dining rooms.

Some tend to be a bit more playful with color outdoors, while others stick to neutral comfort zones. But when color is monochromatic, say all blue, green or plum palette that is fairly quiet, the hues almost act as neutrals without a jarring neon orange or lime green. That said, a jolt of color can be fun and even whimsical, as in a baroque style table in acid yellow whose cabriole legs and elaborate carving -- in resin! -- are an unexpected counterpoint to a straight-lined gray sofa at Horchow.

Try, as some do with interiors, teaming a set of colorful chairs around a neutral table. Gloster Furniture demonstrates with its Asta collection. The sling seats on the chairs are interchangeable to suit your mood: from a citron yellow to orange to a blue that could match the sea and window frames on the island of Mykonos, to more subdued neutrals -- 10 shades in all.

Consider mixing materials, such as

wovens with wood or metal, to relieve what could be monotonous all-matching suites. From wicker lookalikes in resin or other synthetic fabrics, some in sophisticated patterns such as herringbone, to lacey open weaves, this category lends texture and even subtle color.

One outdoor trend that's gained traction and is clearly here to stay is modular seating. Just as it has become a popular go-to option indoors -- particularly in family rooms, where extending seating and offering stretch-out options like chaises -- it makes perfect sense.

"Sectional seating continues to grow as a category," says Frinier, "because the pieces are designed to be versatile and flexible. You can change configurations from day to day to fit your plans for a large family gathering or just for everyday living requirements."

With an amazingly warm and early spring in most parts of the country, no doubt that many already have gotten a jump on sprucing up their outdoor spaces. Being outdoors is, for many, re-energizing.

"I like just about everything about relaxing outdoors," says Frinier. "Everything feels fresh and alive. Even if you just sit out five minutes a day, you feel connected to the day. You think about where you've been and where you want to be."

Sources

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