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## While we're staying at home, our outside living areas become the focus



A Room and Board Palm sofa and Adara fire pit set a modern, indoor living tone on the patio. (Courtesy of Room and Board)

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As spring turns into summer, the innate desire for fresh air and natural surroundings is all the more pressing. In the age of social distancing, people are looking beyond the confines of their four walls at their yards, patios and porches. And if you are like most, you are surveying a scene that isn't measuring up.

In a recent [survey](#) for the top outdoor furnishings association, a resounding 88% of respondents said they were dissatisfied in some way with their outdoor space, citing a lack of style, function or comfort most often. Overall, the survey found that 56% planned to buy at least one new piece of outdoor furniture this spring.

Home furnishings makers are up to the challenge as they create more pieces with an indoor look and feel, thanks in large part to significant advancements in weather-resistant materials.

"It's really been evolving as each season passes, this seamless transition from indoors to outdoors," said Jackie Hirschhaut, vice president of the [American Home Furnishings Alliance](#) and executive director of its outdoor division, the [International Casual Furnishings Association](#), for which the survey was conducted.

"With everything that's available now, all the touches and details, it really cements the idea that people want to have the same kind of comforts as the living room in their outdoor living spaces."

We've come a long way from the plastic-weave, fold-up aluminum chairs and the stiff,



OW Lee's Marin collection of deep seating sofa and chairs surrounds the sleekly modern Forma fire pit. (Courtesy of OW Lee)

uncomfortable fabric cushions of the past. Innovations have led to quality performance fabrics on outdoor upholstered pieces that are stylish, soft and durable.

"Fabrics are a lot better now," says Deborah Glikman, owner and chief designer at Los Angeles-based [Urban Oasis Landscape Design](#).

For the "living room look," outdoor-ready, fully upholstered pieces and deep-seating chairs and sofas can be found at retailers such as [Room and Board](#), [Pottery Barn](#), [West Elm](#), [CB2](#), the design portfolio and job site Coroflot said in its [Outdoor Furniture Trends and Market Glance](#) for 2020.

[OW Lee](#), a longtime manufacturer of high-end outdoor furniture, fire pits and accessories based in Ontario, is known for its quality, indoor-type pieces for outdoor spaces. A look at the manufacturer's wish lists in the International Casual Furnishings Association's survey also reveals a generational gap of sorts: Millennials are more than two times more likely than boomers to have a sofa or a sectional on their OW Lee shopping lists, and favor décor pieces such as rugs or throw pillows over boomers as well.

Hirschhaut notes that overall, people are combining different materials and styles for a more eclectic look.

"Just as few consumers these days purchase indoor furniture in sets, people are mixing their styles outdoors as well, and manufacturers are stepping up their game with combinations that might include teak, wicker and vinyl, all in the same space for a more layered vibe," she said.

### A new kind of 'hangout'

So while upholstery elements are getting their due, natural and faux-natural woven materials are still a standard on patios and porches. "As consumers seek to appeal to all their senses outdoors, texture is the name of the game," Hirschhaut said.

A fun way to mix in a textured woven piece is with a hanging or swing chair, which are popping up in abundance among many of the outdoor furniture makers' spring offerings.

Bohemian, contemporary or modern, these seats usually feature natural or resin rattan, wicker or bamboo most often in the pod shape of the timeless Egg chairs. Some hang from a beam or other steady structural element; others are sold with their own stands.



Mercury Row's Valletta swing chair, made of synthetic rattan, is available on Wayfair. (Courtesy of Wayfair)

Wayfair has more than 100 options, from simple designs to seats for two. As Hayneedle [points out in their Trend Watch](#), the hanging furniture can find a home "on the patio, porch, and, yes, even your living room."

An added bonus: The swaying motion of suspended chairs can have a calming effect and improve your mood; they have been used for years in sensory therapy settings.

The eye-catching statement piece that will have people clamoring to claim the "good seat" on your patio.

### Attracted to the flames

Beyond seating and accessories, fire pits and stylish outdoor lighting are the most sought-after items of those who plan outdoor space improvements, according to the International Casual Furnishings Association [survey](#).

Available in an incredible array of styles, sizes and material types, fire pits are on many homeowners' must-have lists. Hirschhaut said of their allure: "Once you sit at one, you're going to want one in your own space. ... They are a real focal point, you circle around it, roasting marshmallows, enjoying time together."

Fire pits "extend the season and our desire to spend time outdoors," she said.

For Glikman, the type of fire pit, size and materials used all depend on the clients' style and tastes.

"They are among the most requested items I get," Glikman said. "A lot of people want something special, tied into the rest of the design."

### Let there be light

Glikman says lighting serves three purposes in outdoor spaces: safety, functionality and ambiance. It's the last one she enjoys the most: "Lights make everything very magical at night."



Lights add some drama in the Cheviot Hills backyard of Deborah Glikman, owner and chief designer of Urban Oasis Landscape Design. (Photo by Deborah Glikman)

While Glikman uses path lights for safety and, more often lately, café lights for design reasons in certain settings, "most of the rest of the lighting I do is invisible."

The latest in "invisible lighting" are LED strip lights, which use newer and still-evolving technology to illuminate key elements in the yard or home. These lights are bendable with adhesive backing and come in cool, natural or warm white, as well as most colors. Besides illuminating walkways for safety, you can use the lights to line patios and awnings, or put them on the underside of tables and chairs, under the counters of built-in outdoor kitchens and grills or along or under stairs and railings. Because they are waterproof, they also can be used as landscape trim and around pools.

"They are a very modern touch," Glikman said. "If you use them right, you can get a really cool effect, like of a bench or other object floating."

When it comes to lighting trends, the [Mom's Design Build blog](#) puts it simply: "Sleek, minimalist, linear lighting will be all the rage in 2020."

### Outside work

Making your patio or porch more inviting now has another upside. Remember those days in school when the teacher would say, "It's so nice, why don't we have class outside?" You're working from home, you have wireless and a laptop — why don't you work outside?

It would be easy to convert your outdoor dining table or built-in kitchen and counters into a usable work command center, outdoor materials maker Belgard points out in a [blog post on 2020 trends](#). With any outdoor work setup, you'll want to ensure you have the proper lighting and charging outlets; Wi-Fi extenders in the home also are an option to improve your reach to the backyard.

"The main thing you'll need is some kind of shade to see the computer screen and so you aren't sitting in the sun all day," Glikman said.

As for the trend, "I've already seen it," Hirschhaut says. "As we spend more time inside, we will be looking for ways to be outside."

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