

# tune into trends

Here are a few highly anticipated trends in outdoor furniture and accessories that you'll want to keep an eye on.

By Dominique de Bruin and Don Eberly

Each September, retailers, buyers and designers flock to the Windy City to attend the International Casual Furniture & Accessories Market held at the Chicago Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Ill. The Casual Market features more than 350,000 square feet of exhibit space for attendees to learn about new and innovative outdoor furniture and accessory trends.

"Casual Market provides retailers and

dealers with valuable trend information to help them ensure they are meeting the changing needs of their customers," says Jaclyn Kelly, senior director of marketing for the International Casual Furniture & Accessories Market/MMPI.

"The combination of new, consolidated showroom floor plans, temporary exhibitors in the Market Suites and the Garden Accessories Courtyard, will allow attendees to easily navigate the show

and help them make informed decisions about stocking future inventory for their stores."

Manufacturers from all over the globe are eager to showcase their latest and greatest outdoor furniture and accessory products based on customer feedback and consumer demand. This year, there are many highly anticipated trends that lawn and garden retailers and buyers will want to watch. Here are just a few.

## Industrial Style on the Rise

While traditional outdoor furniture and accessories never go out of fashion, contemporary, industrial-style designs are all the rage right now. Many retailers are looking to complement their inventories of traditional outdoor items with those that have a more edgy, sleek appearance. Not only does this include furniture, but the category also comprises fire pits.

Outdoor fire pits designed with an industrial flair create the illusion of simplicity and sophistication for modern lifestyles. The signature industrial style oftentimes incorporates strong, angular shapes, metallic colors and an overall sense of working practicality. Manufactured with new and innovative technologies, outdoor fire pits that exude functionality and rusticism are in high demand among consumers.



OW Lee: Aero Fire Pit

## Bolder, Brighter Prints

As outdoor rooms continue to gain popularity with upticks in real estate and renovation, homeowners are looking to recreate the look of indoor living spaces in their outdoor settings. This includes grounding furnishings with area rugs that are designed with larger prints, bolder patterns and brighter colors. No longer are consumers satisfied with mundane solids; they want and crave stylish rugs to balance decorative deep seating furniture collections.

Fashionable area rugs can add depth and texture to outdoor living rooms. Bigger patterns and striking prints tend to define spaces, creating more personable sitting areas. Brighter hues are mood lifters and can instantly generate positive emotions. Several top rug manufacturers are designing area rugs to not only be fashionable, but also to exude performance enhancing qualities. Numerous Casual Market showrooms and exhibitors will display rugs with technologically advanced materials to ensure they are mold- and mildew-resistant and UV-stabilized.



Couristan Inc: The Dolce Collection

## CONSUMER TRENDS

### Intimate Chat Areas

Homeowners are looking to create intimate chat areas in their outdoor spaces, and many of them are migrating toward investing in crescent-style deep seating collections. This type of seating arrangement allows for better visual connections among seated guests, as opposed to more angular setups.

"The curving design creates a conversation-friendly orientation," says Steve Lowsky, president of Pride Family Brands, a company with a permanent showroom at the Casual Market. While crescent-style seating vignettes are not a new trend, they are certainly gaining more momentum this season. "The response to this 'circular' trend from retailers and consumers has been tremendous," says Lowsky. When paired with complementary outdoor fire pits and accessories, crescent-style deep seating collections offer a true sense of livable luxury.



Pride Family Brands:  
English Garden Collection



Pelican Reef: Panama Jack  
St. Barths Loveseat Collection

### Curved for Comfort

The restyling of armchair rests is becoming more prevalent among many manufacturers expanding their new outdoor furniture collections for 2014. While designing comfortable and casual furniture is nothing new, more and more companies are developing methods to push the notion of "extreme relaxation." This includes researching and cultivating

ways to ensure each part of a furniture piece is designed to emanate comfortability.

To fit the natural curve of the human arm, manufacturers are designing armrests constructed with bowed silhouettes that create an ergonomic effect. Moreover, curved lines combined with wider widths and longer lengths provide extra room for resting. This can help eliminate stress on the neck, back and shoulders. The combination of these characteristics gives retailers the opportunity to strategically promote outdoor chairs and benches based on accumulating demands for comfortable, ergonomic furniture.



### ON THE COVER — INSPIRED

When it comes to new trends, "I try and push my clients out of their comfort zone by showing them a few different options. One is always the safe option where I know they will feel more comfortable. The other option might be more unique and interesting and something that they probably wouldn't consider on their own."

"Many times the more interesting option is what really stands out in a space and when combined with the other elements, it gives the room that extra WOW factor. I feel strongly that this is what my clients hire me for and more times than not, they go for it."

-Mark Haynes, [www.MarkDesignFirm.com](http://www.MarkDesignFirm.com)

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TUUCI: Plantation MAX Cantilever

## Customizable Shade Systems

Another hot new trend that will be seen at the Casual Market this year stems from shade manufacturers embracing consumers' desire to fuse design aesthetics with sound engineering for more customized appeal. For example, some top shade companies are producing parasol stands from high-grade aluminum while offering a wide selection of hardwood finishes. The aluminum provides strength and durability to help withstand weather elements. Conversely, hardwood finishes are used to create a visually attractive shade system that can blend

seamlessly with outdoor seating and dining collections.

"By offering an extended variety of hardwood finishes that incorporates the durability of aluminum with the refined look of wood encourages the use of customized shade products," says Amy Hudwalker, marketing manager for TUUCI.



Gloster: Bella Armchairs and Side Table

## Versatile Material Combinations

By popular request from retailers, manufacturers are providing more options for the "mix-and-match effect." This includes combining different materials to produce outdoor furniture collections that can be used in a variety of different settings, including traditional, transitional and contemporary. For example, the marriage of powder-coated aluminum frames with teak slats creates a chic look and can be used in a multitude of patio, deck and landscape applications.

The advantage of selling these types of ensembles is grounded in the fact they enable homeowners to invest in outdoor seating that combines modern styling softened by the warm tones of teak.

As the seasons change, these exterior spaces can be dramatically altered by simply swapping outdoor cushions, fabrics, lighting and accessories, even for consumers who maintain the same furniture for a few years. At retail, this can translate to a more diverse and broader product offering for consumers.

To learn more about the upcoming International Casual Furniture & Accessories Market or to pre-register to attend the market in September, visit the show's newly updated website at [www.casualmarket.com](http://www.casualmarket.com). **LGR**

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