Rising Star Navigates Guest Editor Issue
Bathroom & Kitchen Trends from Milan
Blending Indoor & Outdoor Living
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WHAT HOMEOWNERS WANT

In this extension of their interior, clients today are looking for more than just a place to unwind; they also want a personalized space. New products, including fire features, cooking appliances and certain technologies, can enhance this.

“To create the full outdoor living experience, we’re seeing homeowners incorporate a larger variety of options and activities into their spaces,” said Stephen Schroeter, senior vice president of sales, marketing and administration for Napoleon. “Increasingly, homeowners want to bring the comfortable, indoor living experience to the outdoors, so almost anything typically indoors is now migrating to the outdoor living experience.”

Depending on the client’s lifestyle, options like a bar, a large TV or even an outdoor pool table can be incorporated and used regularly for entertaining, watching a big game or just socializing.
Fire features, particularly gas-fired options that emit less smoke, are especially popular for lighting ambiance. Unconventional and personalized additions – like a yoga garden or a bocce court – are more easily included outside because of the versatility of a backyard. Consumers are also installing nontraditional, built-in cooking options that cannot work or fit inside, such as a tandoor oven, a smoker or a flat-top grill.

“Food is also driving the trends we’re seeing in outdoor kitchens,” said Russ Faulk, chief designer and head of product for Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet. “Homeowners are craving authenticity in their cooking, so they are gravitating toward products like dedicated wood-fired grills, smokers and pizza ovens with intense heat.”

TECHNOLOGY’S PLACE

The outdoor kitchen and living space might be intended as a place to unplug, but that doesn’t mean technology is lacking. Instead, items like speakers, outdoor theaters and televisions are designed to be easily disguised. These elements can create ambiance for an outdoor event and offer more versatility for the space – enticing homeowners to spend more time outside.

“Technology can definitely enhance the outdoor living experience, especially if it contributes to ease of use and improves upon memorable moments,” said Schroeter, explaining that products like wireless digital thermometers that monitor food or a gas fireplace can allow the host to spend less time cooking and cleaning and more time enjoying their guests.

Recent lighting features, particularly LEDs, are other technological advancements that add both atmosphere and safety to the outdoors. The right lighting will brighten up steps or debris on the ground, which helps limit falls. Fixtures for the outdoors have expanded in variety and style; more decorative options like sconces, bollards and pendants can complete an environment.

“The night provides the opportunity to feature interest and texture by [how] you illuminate objects in their environment,” said Robert Sonneman, founder of Sonneman – A Way of Light. “Bright light shone into a black space creates a high degree of harsh, high contrast. Subtle light reflected off architectural textures, trees, plants and rocks provides dramatic visual richness in the surrounding darkness.”

ENDURING MATERIALS

When incorporating an outside living area, one of the most important considerations is the choice in materials. Even if the project is in an ideal outdoor environment, everything needs to include extremely durable and low-maintenance features.

“When a client is thinking about a renovation, I always encourage him or her to make sure not to skimp on materials – this may mean building a deck with a compost material over wood or using a higher-quality stone for a patio,” said Chip Wade, owner of Atlanta-based WadeBuilt, a design and construction firm. “In the long run, investing in the right materials will save money down the line.”

Options that use heavy-grade stainless steel, a strong fiber and resin or are available with a cover provide longevity in outdoor spaces. According to Jared Becker, vice president of design and marketing for Walker Zanger, porcelain tile is at the forefront of flooring materials for the outdoors because of its durability and ability to mimic other materials.

“In terms of floor tile, homeowners are searching for a low-maintenance, lasting tile that includes an anti-slip option for outdoor use,” said Becker. If the budget allows, including a protective ceiling like a pergola or creating a partially enclosed California room will also add value to the home. Including these shielding measures is especially important in more extreme environments, where despite the challenges, more homeowners are requesting outdoor spaces.
The Bera & Beren Collection from WALKER ZANGER offers a complete solution for porcelain flooring in both indoor and outdoor projects. Available in natural and structured finishes in both standard and large sizes across a range of neutral colors, the collection mimics fine-grain Portuguese and Spanish limestone.

“These clients will want to design with attention to their particular extremes,” said Gregory Thomas, Eugene, Ore.–based architect and design consultant with the Neil Kelly Co. “In the Southwest, designing to work with prevailing breezes can help with cooling an outdoor space. In the Northeast, designing to block cold winds and providing convertible wall panels that can be put in place seasonally will add warmth during the shoulder seasons.”

**THE FUTURE OF THE OUTDOOR SPACE**

With a larger variety of climates and demographics considering outdoor spaces, the trend of creating more spaces unique to the client will continue. Homeowners in urban areas will look for ways to include outdoor experiences in smaller spaces, and more traditionally indoor activities – like watching sports – will move outside. Manufacturers will likely continue catering to requests for more personalization, including finishes and looks that usually appear inside.

“We used to see a very narrow range of styles and selection of materials and finishes, but the outdoor kitchen designs of today have never been stronger or more diverse,” said Faulk. “The range of design styles is broader than it has ever been.”

Highly durable materials that emulate more delicate ones, like wood-look porcelain tile for the outdoors, will advance in detail and accuracy. Advances in temperature control, like the ability to circulate some of the indoor heating or air conditioning to a protected outdoor space, are also likely. This will allow more consumers of all environments to enjoy the outdoors more.

“From an electric grill on a cart with a bistro set, to a full-blown kitchen design that ties into a pool, lounge and covered dining area, outdoor living is versatile, fun and the new hub of the home,” said Kelly. “Outdoor spaces encourage authentic engagement among family and friends and a new level of wellness for all who partake.”