

This year's new outdoor furniture reflects sophistication of the city

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Yes, we know it is January. And in many parts of the country that means snow and ice and hibernating inside. But it's also a time when many wise homeowners start to plan decks, patios and outdoor kitchens. They know it takes some time to design, work with contractors, get permits and build the outside room of their dreams. Better to get in line now than to wait until warm weather to start and not have the project done until the first snow flies next fall.

Also, some retailers are already pushing the snow blowers to the back of the store and displaying the newest trends in outdoors furniture. We may not be ready to see sun umbrellas, but we can dream, can't we? So what will we see this year?

Bill Herren is the creative director for Woodard, a manufacturer of quality outdoor furnishings that was founded 150 years ago in Owosso, Mich., and is still going strong there today. Herren points to a plethora of mixed media materials in this year's furniture. That includes combinations of cast aluminum frames, teak, upholstery, natural wicker, manmade wicker, iron and even concrete.

"Colors are leaning more towards the gray neutrals with splashes of color thrown in by adding accessories or throw pillows," said Herren. "Design is trending towards the soft contemporary style, although transitional and traditional still have their places.

"Comfort reigns supreme. As people use their outdoor spaces as extensions of their homes, they spend far more time there dining, relaxing and entertaining," said Herren. "This means the seating and scale must be comfortable. Even more than with interior furnishings, durability of outdoor furniture is expected."

We have all been there. We buy new outdoor seat cushions or natural wicker, which should not be left outside in the elements for long periods of time or in inclement weather. We swear we will take the items indoors if we know a storm is coming. But then one day we are away from home when the rain comes or we are just busy and forget or don't care. Pretty soon we start to tolerate green mold.

But don't skimp when it comes to outdoor furniture. Sturdy, weather-, mildew-, and sun-resistant materials are so important unless you don't mind replacing cushions and umbrellas every year or two if they are not protected from the

But how does a homeowner balance buying high quality, expensive furniture that won't be replaced for a number of years with a current look?

**"Comfort reign supreme."
- Bill Herren, creative director, Woodard**



"The easiest way to refresh a space is to change the color palette with new cushions and accent pillows," said Herren. "A quick switch can take a seating area from blah to ahh or summer

to fall. Some collections are actually designed for reconfiguring. Our Metropolis sectional has seven components that can be combined into designs or arrangements. Go from sectional to individual chairs in minutes. It's the ultimate in creating a personal space that works for your changing lifestyle."

Black and brown finishes continue to be popular. Of course white is classic, but not the top choice right now. Also watch for multi finishes to make furniture look like wood or something that is weathered or vintage. Woven pieces are everywhere.

Benches are big, with or without cushions. A bench for two is promise that someone you care about will sit next to you. Beanbag chairs and poufs are fun and move outdoors this year in durable fabrics. Woodard offers an outdoors accent pillow that looks like a big striped beach ball. Clever! Colorful pillows carry an added importance as a decor kick because of all the gray as a main color.



The Woodard Metropolis sectional brings a new level of sophistication to outdoor furniture.

Photo Credit: Woodard

We no longer want to just sit outside or lie in a hammock. We want full-sized daybeds, some with canopies and curtains. Lounges and sectionals tend to be larger, many with overhead features so it looks like you are sitting in a big basket. Blame it on the resort and cabana crowd who want to duplicate the look back home. Skyline Design offers a covered U-shaped sectional so large it

could serve as temporary housing.

This year prints and patterns are often boldly geometric, botanical or seaside. Botanical fabrics include florals and lots of soft, romantic flair. We can't seem to get enough of the ocean or lake look even if we live on top a mountain. Look for blues and light greens, whites, mermaids, seashells and sand dollars as main fabric colors and accents.

And because cheaply made outdoor furniture is falling to the wayside, we'll see more details even in the minimally modern styles. That means braiding and edging on furniture cushions that adds a bit of sophistication to the piece.