

Backyard Rooms are here to stay

Personal outdoor spaces to look like interiors

The International Casual Furnishings Assn. (ICFA) is reporting that the personal outdoor spaces of 2016 look like interior spaces. The backyard room is here to stay and just keeps growing in popularity. Consumers shopping for new outdoor furnishings will find mixed materials such as teak or other woods mixed with wicker, aluminum and stainless steel, both in single pieces and collections.



Neutrals, especially gray and beige, continue to dominate the colour palette this spring, but fresh new colours add pizzazz. Citrus tones such as citron green remains strong, and celadon and mint green are emerging. Pantone's two colours of the year – Rose Quartz and Serenity – also are being used as accents for outdoor products since they work well with neutrals.

Consumers choose seating covered in faux leather that will hold up outdoors. Woodard is among manufacturers offering additional colours in Brisa, a polyurethane from Ultrafabrics that mimics leather. At Century Furniture, the Trove bench by Candice Olson Outdoor appears to be covered in tufted leather, yet it's concrete, surprising to those who take a seat. Convenience also is in the spotlight this spring with a focus on cushions and seating that dry quickly, eliminating the need to take cushions inside during rain showers. Homecrest Outdoor introduced new technology with its Airo2 modular pieces that have the look of a deep seat without any inner cushion material; it is low maintenance and fast-drying. Likewise, Century's innovative Driluxe cushions are designed to dry quickly and feature a water-repellent cover on a high-resiliency foam core that is wrapped with 100% polyester fiber. They are breathable, so only the cushion fabric casing needs to dry, not the entire cushion.

Consumers want their outdoor spaces to be relaxing. Manufacturers understand that and have created new products that will allow them to spend less time maintaining and more time lounging. ■ *Source: Casual Living*

Summer's import cargo volume to be stunted

Increases expected, but below last year

As summer nears, import cargo volume at US's major retail container ports is also on the ascent but not as high as last year, according to the monthly Global Port Tracker report released by National Retail Federation. "Last year was a roller coaster, but this year we're expecting a nice, steady climb right through the summer," explained Jonathan Gold, NRF's VP for supply chain and customs policy. "We're finally getting back to normal patterns as cargo builds up toward the back-to-school season and eventually the holiday season. Despite the year-over-year comparisons, these are still strong numbers."

Collectively, these ports handled 1.54 million Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) in February, the latest month for which after-the-fact numbers are available. That was up 3.7% from January and a dramatic 28.9% from unusually low figures in February 2015, when a new contract with dockworkers ended a near-shutdown at West Coast ports. One TEU is one 20-foot-long cargo container or its equivalent.

March was estimated at 1.35 million TEU, down 22.1% from the flood of traffic seen last year as the new contract released a backlog of cargo. April is forecast at 1.5 million TEU, down 0.8% from last year; May at 1.58 million TEU, down 2.1%; June at 1.56 million TEU, down 0.6%; July at 1.61 million TEU, down 0.5%; and August also at 1.61 million TEU, down 3.9%.

The first half of 2016 is expected to total 9 million TEU, up 1.8% from the same period in 2015. Total volume for 2015 was 18.2 million TEU, up 5.4% from 2014.

Despite high retail inventory levels and other mixed economic indicators, it was noted that overall retail sales were up 0.2% in February over January and 0.6% when gasoline, automobiles and restaurants are excluded. That was not spectacular but still up, suggesting that there is still some steam left in US consumers. They are shrugging off the gloomy global outlook. ■

Source: Home & Textiles Today

Anthropologie home growth on track

USA's Anthropologie is on pace to double sales in home merchandise - and will do so without opening a lot of additional stores. Their goal is to generate \$500 million in home sales by 2020 from the Anthropologie and Urban Outfitters nameplates.

"Developing categories that fit the customer's lifestyle and also complement the core product is a way to leverage the equity of our brands without the enormous cost of launching a completely separate business," said Richard Hayne, chairman, president and ceo of Urban Outfitters Inc. He added: "The recent [Anthropologie] home catalog has been well received, so the brand expects strong home sales to continue throughout the first half of FY 2017."

The company believes both the Urban and Anthropologie brands are approaching maximum unit potential in North America at 197 and 209, respectively. Going forward, there will be minimal new store openings, although the company will expand the size of Anthropologie stores to house bigger assortments in expanded product categories. ■

Source: *Home & Textiles Today*

Plastic handled flatware moves upscale

Defined by design & quality with colour, riveted looks, organic material, etc.

No longer relegated to the patio or picnic, plastic-handled flatware is evolving from an opening price point business to a more upscale one defined by fashion and high quality. Many



of the newest plastic-handled flatware designs cater to the more sophisticated consumer and are garnering more interest from traditional and specialty retailers on a year-round basis, vendors say. There's no doubt that in the U S market the consumer perception of this category is very different than the perception in Europe, and in large part that is because of the way that U S plastic-handled flatware brands market the product—as a cheap alternative to stainless-steel flatware. Vendors feel, there is another

approach that allows them to take advantage of the manufacturing innovations being made and present a very different product to the consumer which will be appreciated for its design sensibility and not just for low price points. Once you've changed the dialogue from a 'product material/low cost' definition to one of 'great design/cool product' then retailers will notice because we will have given them an opportunity to differentiate. A basic business still exists in off-price and mass markets, but some vendors feel it is not a growth category. They see this business as stable with flat results going forward.

Two distinct segments in the market - the basic business is where some retailers are elevating their offerings after the entry level suffered from what he called "a race to the bottom" in quality, and the casual elegance segment, where purchases are still driven by entertainment occasions or seasonality but also by consumers looking for products to better fit a casual lifestyle. There is a high level of sophistication in the casual elegance category - bold colour, eye-popping patterns, whimsical design and textures, and recreating looks of exotic materials are innovative trends. Multicolor is big and consumers love sets that offer a variety of colour. Riveted looks, simulated wood and other organic materials are also popular. Plastic-handled flatware offers retailers fashionable and popular products at a variety of price points. It gives retailers many merchandising options to meet the demand for casual dining. As customers are looking at the table with more fashion sense they are more willing to look at a wider range of flatware. French manufacturer Sabre is one of the leaders in this category. It has been making handcrafted—not injection-molded—acrylic flatware for more than 20 years, always with an eye on fashion. "This is the biggest change in our world. If turquoise is the trend in ready-to-wear, it is a trend in flatware," said company founder Francis Gelb. "We look at fashion. But inspiration can come from anywhere. It has become a much trendier market than it used to be." Right now, Sabre's new two-toned looks are popular and the gingham patterns for which has been known have taken second place to solid colours. In the U S it sells to stores like Barney's and Bergdorf Goodman and a host of high-end specialty stores.

New manufacturers have been drawn to the field. Quid Novi, founded in 2014, produces fashionable, printed plastic-handled flatware that it says offers the same styling and details of expensive European plastic-handled flatware at 50 percent less than its European counterparts. It features an "Xtra wash" technology that guarantees long-lasting colours even after hundreds of trips through the dishwasher. They offer nine patterns in three colours. ■ Source: *HFN*

Home and interiors colours for 2017

9 distinctive signposts lead to specific colour palettes

Colour expert Lee Eiseman discusses nine distinctive signposts leading to specific colour palettes that will help you meet customers' demand.

1 Native Instincts

At one point in time, the term native applied to a specific indigenous culture. However, style-wise, current and future forecasts point to a homogenous mix of design and colour where a piece of Native American pottery is quite compatible with a Turkish kilim carpet and/or a Columbian artefact. Palette includes earthy tones such as neutral tan, copper metallic, bright gold and warm brown.

2 Florabundant

This palette is filled with rich floral hues. As in most floral arrangements and in natural settings, varying shades of green provide the perfect complementary background to more vibrant tones in the palette - Pink Yarrow, Chrysanthemum, Red Dahlia and Baton Rouge along with Scarlet Ibis, a deep purple Winter Bloom and the metallic shade of Rich Gold.

3 Acquired Taste

In both food and surroundings, an acquired taste means an appreciation for the unusual, the unique, or the distinctively different. In terms of colour this means a mixture of colours and/or textures that are not commonly seen together such as Orange Chiffon, Amberlight, Etruscan Red, Pale Gold, Mulberry and Branded Melon.

4 Day Dreaming

In the demanding world which we live in, this palette can fulfil its literal meaning as a 'series of pleasant thoughts that distract our attention from the present'. The colours that evoke those thoughts are often light and seemingly weightless, as if to relieve the heaviness of day-to-day stresses and include Serenity Blue, Blue Glow, Plein Air and a Nile Green contrasted with 2016 Pantone colour Rose Quartz and Yellow Iris. A creamy beige and off-white are the necessary neutrals finished by a silver metallic.

5 Forest Bathing

Encouraging a healthy lifestyle is a stress reducing palette inspired by the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku or Forest Bathing. Studies have shown that a contemplative walk in the woods that reconnects a person with nature or, at the very least, surrounding oneself with greenery, is relaxing and restorative, elevating our mood. This palette includes several shades of green and blue-green such as Willow Bough, Moss, Silt Green and Hydro.

6 Raw Materials

The ongoing dedication to the reuse and repurposing of materials from nature and industrial resources plays a big part, as does the health and wellness movement. Colours include various grey tones, light and dark, Oil Yellow, Faded Denim, Guacamole, Winter Twig, Argyle Purple and Zephyr Pink.

7 Graphic Imprints

This palette starts in black and white, often shaded with grey. Contours, geometric shapes and texture add dimension. Colours include Blazing Yellow, Dazzling Blue, Prism Pink, Fandango Pink, Opaline Green and Orange Popsicle.

8 Reminiscence

Providing a sense of nostalgia and stability in this age of digital innovations, this palette includes shades such as Maritime Blue, Sepia Tint, Dusty Blue, Rattan and Parchment. For a modern update these colours are mixed with a murky Martini olive and Bird's Egg Green, or Sugar Almond and Valiant Poppy.

9 At Ease

This palette is the essence of subtlety. A variety of neutrals both cool and warm blended with muted tones, the colours are arranged in a way that seems effortless. Shades include the lavender grey Sea Fog, Orchid Haze, Twilight Mauve, Warm Sand, Zen Blue and Sea Angel. ■

Source: *Home & Textiles Today*

Tableware trends at Ambiente 2016

Minimalistic look with a riot of juxtaposed colours

The Dining area at Ambiente this year was characterised by a rich variety of products and a striking polarity in terms of the colours, patterns and textures used. Stringent purism and monochrome design, for example, came face to face with playful floral motifs or strictly graphic patterns. Tactile polarisation in surface design means that a variety of contours and finishes can be seen, ranging from completely smooth, or velvety soft, to textured surfaces and patterns. What this means for the colour worlds of this year's Ambiente is that a riot of colours, including red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple, are juxtaposed with a colour palette that conveys a minimalist look.

Taking its lead from Pantone's trending colours, Rose Quartz and Serenity, the spectrum ranges from white and cool smokey grey tones to beige hues, and ends up with a deep dark blue. Among the bright, vibrant colours, the presence of different shades of green, even including a turquoise blue shade, is particularly striking. These are placed next to, or combined with, each other in an unconventional way. The colours mint, pink, and antique pink, as well as fuchsia, and even orange, provide accentuating points of contrast. And this year there is a deliberate move to introduce contrasts by using different levels of brightness as well. Colours with a naturally high level of luminosity can be easily toned down. Thus, an orange, for example, can change into a rich apricot or it can be used alongside as an additional shade, and smooth surfaces with matt velvet finishes are able to exude their own tactile quality.

This wealth and variety of colours is complemented by metallic colours and materials. Copper as a material was already emerging as a major trend last year and this is clearly reinforced this year. A further trend to emerge is product quality and authenticity, which is continuing to improve, as well as product sustainability, which is manifest in long-lasting design and new materials. The manufacturers of the Dining products are addressing these issues by using more eco-friendly materials as well as rapidly renewable raw materials. The theme of energy efficiency, in the case of cooking pans and food processors, for example, is becoming increasingly important in this context.

And finally, the theme of portability continues to play a prominent role at Ambiente 2016. Products geared to the takeaway market (or food 'to go') are becoming increasingly refined in their function and more ambitious in their design. Furthermore, products 'to go', in the broadest sense, implies the fusion of indoor with outdoor life. This is where the boundaries and crossovers become more blurred and the products are subject to higher and more sophisticated aesthetic demands. ■ *Source: Tableware International*



Pier 1 to dip their toe in new home textiles category online

Pier 1 Imports is ramping up its home textiles business on its Pier1.com website into an untapped category for the channel. During the home good specialty chain's presentation on the Raymond James 37th Annual Institutional Investors Conference, president and ceo Alex



Smith singled out bed and bath as poised for ongoing growth online.

"What the online business has allowed us to do is expand categories and skus. So we launched an online-only, top-of-bed business about 18 months ago – that continues to grow very robustly," he said. "And later this spring you will see us dip our toe in the water of bathroom products, so we'll start selling towels, shower curtains and a limited amount of bathroom furniture."

This expansion falls in line with Pier 1's grander efforts to continue enhancing its omni-channel initiatives and better bank on key customers.

That is not to say Pier 1 doesn't plan to fine-tune its store count again this year. "We closed a number of stores at end of last fiscal year – predominantly low-volume and single market," Smith said. "We will continue to judiciously prune the size of our business, but understanding that 95% of our sales touch our store in one way or another, so we will do it very, very carefully and thoughtfully." ■

Source: Home & Textiles Today