



Simon Upton

Trend Report

AD PRO's 2023 Outdoor Forecast

In this member-only report, AD PRO goes deep on the current and future state of alfresco living

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Are we in our outdoor living era? Take a stroll through a furniture market—be it in Milan or High Point, North Carolina—and the answer is a clear, resounding yes. And it shows no sign of slowing down: Experts expect it to swell by billions of dollars between now and 2028. This activity can be a boon for designers, but it's a lot to keep up with. Add in client calls, site visits, install days, administrative work (it's tax season, after all!), and the countless other tasks that make up a designer's agenda, and what hope would there ever be for browsing the newest outdoor trends? (Let alone maintaining a sane weekly schedule or striving for a four-day workweek....)

So let's lighten your load, shall we? Here, we gladly present AD PRO's 2023 Outdoor Forecast, a member-only trend report covering the most-asked-for features in gardens, yards, patios, and poolsides now. To compile this data, reporter Jesse Dorris turned to leading names in landscape—from Orchid Show darling Lily Kwong to Roman and Williams' beloved collaborator Thomas Little—and gathered best practices for sustainable planting, notes on trending amenities (including our favorite, the outdoor kitchen), and more. We've also compiled a stylish spread of products that have captured the attention of AD editors.

After you've finished our outdoor forecast, be sure to check back on May 18, when we serve up our next trend report on AD's most requested topic: the kitchen. Come hungry.

*Until then,
Lila Allen, Senior Editor, AD PRO*

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William Abranowicz, Frank Frances, Miguel Flores-Vianna

🏠 Let's Take It Outside

> The amenities your clients will be asking for, according to the pros—from bee-friendly gardens to plunge pools

From the time humans learned how to build homes, we've contemplated and complicated the borders between inside and outside. We've turned land around homes into manicured gardens and used modern technology to transform wild meadows into uniform lawns. Today, whatever borders remain have collapsed, a process hastened by a pandemic that kept many of us traveling no further than our own backyards. Interior designers and landscape architects shaped green patches into patios; patios into entertaining suites, complete with kitchens, wet bars, and screening areas. Pools became full-blown oases. Once-dorky lawn games became crazes (looking at you, pickleball). At a time when the world seemed to shrink, the grounds around our homes expanded until they could be most anything.

Times change, but experts think this shift is here to stay. "Even if you start to travel again, it's obvious that our homes are our sanctuaries," says Brooklyn-based designer Brook Klausling, whose alfresco design for Athena Calderone recently scored a feature in *AD*. "We need them when the world asks us to stop communing in [public]. Outside is a safe space."

And it's never been more stylish. For a project in Palm Beach, clients asked designer Mary McGee for a pair of cabanas that transformed their property into multiple destinations. "We like cabanas because they make an outdoor space feel enclosed—more like an airy, nature-inspired tented room. We designed one spot in the house's central courtyard," she says. "It can easily be accessed from every room on the first floor. It was essential to have a sitting area right off the main house for easy entertaining and a place to enjoy evening drinks and visits." The second cabana was the only new structure on the property. "We made it architecturally look like it belonged to the original house and placed it by the pool because it is on a lower level of the yard, and my clients wanted a covered seating area to watch their kids swim."



At gallerist Shulamit Nazarian's abode in LA, custom outdoor sofas by John Williams in a Janus of Cie fabric encircle a cocktail table by Ten10. Studio Shamshiri handled the project's interiors, while Terromoto oversaw landscape design. Stephen Kent Johnson

Clients without in-ground swimming locales might consider a plunge pool. “They’re seen in top resorts around the world, so there’s no better way to make the home feel like a personal resort,” says Karen Larson, cofounder of Soake Pools, a purveyor of small-scale precast pools. “They provide a focal point and become a gathering place and [an] oasis for cooling off—or heating up, depending on the season.”

That kind of year-round thinking is growing in popularity, according to McGee. “Clients now have dedicated spaces for outside living during all seasons,” she says. These spaces are “designed for summertime dinners and lounging but don’t shut down when fall rolls around,” she adds. Since plunge pools—a Soake specialty—have smaller footprints, Larson says, “They leave space for other beautiful outdoor features for gardens.” Such features often include entertainment amenities, Taylor Shanahan of Oakland’s Redmond Aldrich Design says. “Lately, we’ve had more pickleball requests than ever before!”



In Palm Beach, this cabana designed by Mary McGee features a variety of seating options and lighting fixtures, making the space feel like a true outdoor room. The furniture is upholstered in Perennials fabric. James McDonald; styled by Mieke ten Have

The desire for full-scale “outdoor rooms” is still strong, designers report. To furnish the cabanas, McGee relied upon interior expertise. “I didn’t purchase traditional outdoor furniture,” she says. “I mixed up vintage powder-coated metal pieces with vintage rattan and added Italian wicker chairs with metal legs. Those also weren’t outdoor chairs, but I love the look.” The right mix of furniture, McGee explains, keeps a setting surprising rather than like an “outdoor” cliché. “To create the feeling of an actual room, we mixed in rattan side tables, a pair of palm lamps made out of white powder-coated metal, wicker ottomans, and even a rattan chandelier,” she says. For cohesiveness, she upholstered all the sofas in the same Perennials outdoor fabric. “That helps with the elements of Mother Nature,” she says.

Shanahan also sings the praises of the new outdoor fabrics. “For the longest time, only solid and striped fabrics were available for preparing palettes,” she says. “Now we have a wide variety of beautiful floral patterned options that help make outdoor design feel more interesting. We try to use colors you can find in nature, like blues, creams, and rusts.” And, of course, greens. “Every house should have a small secret garden where you can set up a table and chairs,” McGee says. Her Palm Beach clients “chose a small walled-in courtyard in front, tucked away with plumbago, lushly planted palms, and greens. I placed an inexpensive bistro table for two that I found on Amazon, and two comfy green rattan chairs I found in New York. The green of the rattans mixes beautifully with the lush landscape, so it doesn’t jump out.”

Some clients want to escape all indoor-outdoor boundaries. For a Montana abode, Redmond Aldrich’s Chloe Warner explains, the residents wanted “the landscape to truly become the architecture.” So she carved out discrete areas: “There’s a spa surrounded by woods; a ‘cowboy cauldron’ [hanging firepit area] inside a thicket of trees; hammocks for napping; and, of course, a heated loveseat zone for snuggling.”



Chez Michelle Nussbaumer with a terrace off the poolhouse that is set for alfresco dining. The arrangement contains 1900s chairs, a stone bench with vintage fabric pillows, and star lanterns from Ceylon et Cie. Douglas Friedman

Others desire something a bit more cosmopolitan. Lily Kwong, the designer behind this year's New York Botanical Garden Orchid Show, reports that her clients are embracing the ambitious and unexpected over a traditional residential approach: "We've integrated a mural into a vine-covered back wall in Brooklyn Heights, and [we've] worked with a client in Long Island to develop a sculpture garden in their front yard using earthworks and undulating topography."

Though a total integration of indoors and outdoors may sound desirable, it's entirely climate dependent, explains landscape architect Thomas Woltz. "I often suggest, as a gentle conceptual alternative, making really good indoor spaces and really good outdoor spaces," he says. "Only in a few climates can you dissolve entire walls of a house and flow freely back and forth without insect invasions, small mammals making themselves at home, and destabilizing the climate control of the interior spaces." What's more, without careful planning, the abodes may simply no longer function. "I have seen many houses equipped (at great expense) to open up entirely," he says, "but [they've] been closed since the Certificate of Occupancy [was issued]."

"I always try to work with 'borrowed scenery', which is very much an East Asian landscape tradition known as *shakkei*. This ancient technique incorporates distant scenery into the garden design, knitting together desired elements into the larger natural context."

— Lily Kwong

Working with the architecture of one's home can, in fact, be an opportunity to decide what can be seen outside—and what can be seen *from* outside. "Every client, especially in major cities, is worried about privacy screenings and viewsheds," Kwong says. "I always try to work with 'borrowed scenery', which is very much an East Asian landscape tradition known as *shakkei*. This ancient technique incorporates distant scenery into the garden design, knitting together desired elements into the larger natural context." In other words, framing exterior views can create vantage points without compromising personal (or architectural) safety.

Clients are longing for gardens that support the floral design of their interiors, says Thomas Little of Brooklyn's Urbangreen, the firm behind several of Roman and Williams' beloved outdoor tableaux. "Our ideas about flowers for the home garden are changing. There are so many things we can cut and put in a vase [beyond the regular roses]. Seed heads from grasses, a multitude of flowering perennials, meadow flowers like goldenrod, fast-growing annuals like cosmos and zinnias and sweet alyssum are excellent choices for cutting gardens." All naturally offer a burst of color when popped into vases for bedside nooks or outdoor tablescapes. "If your landscape is filled with bright-colored bougainvillea," McGee says, you otherwise "don't need much color. I think it's more elegant to let nature take center stage."



Another cabana supplies additional shaded space in the backyard of the McGee designed Palm Beach home. "I didn't purchase traditional outdoor furniture," she says. "I mixed up vintage powder-coated metal pieces with vintage rattan and added Italian wicker chairs with metal legs. Those also weren't outdoor chairs, but I love the look." James McDonald; styled by Carlos Mota

Woltz says his clients also long for some stage setting. "[Clients] see that the landscape can function as a work of art. A garden is not necessarily begging for objects," he says. One sculptural tree can be a bright star. Little recommends starting with what's already there. "We recently designed a garden where [an existing] climbing hydrangea has been trained over the last 20 years to become a living artwork of trunks and clinging vine. It is frankly most interesting in winter when the leaves are off and the dramatic graphic is evident against the three-story walls of the house." Little is also fielding requests for that time of year. "Do potted plants outside that come into the house in winter," he says. "Geraniums and begonias are excellent choices for this. There's nothing quite as comforting as bringing the garden in as the [weather] cools and we are forced to spend more time indoors."

Plantings can offer actual, and not just aesthetic, sustenance as well. "A frequent request is for productive gardens that are beautifully designed and that can supply substantial quantities of food for the household," Woltz says. But he notes, "If these are *truly* productive gardens, then clients have to be ready for them to look like working landscapes. In other words, empty rows at times, seedlings at other times, and rows of leafy greens appearing picked over." If that's too much to handle, Little suggests a more humble herb garden. "Consider hanging and drying herbs and flowers for the home," he says. "Not everything floral has to end up in a vase. Hanging flowers last longer and are memories of a certain afternoon spent picking and gathering and just being happy."

“There’s nothing quite as comforting as bringing the garden in as the [weather] cools and we are forced to spend more time indoors.”

— Thomas Little

For those willing to put in the effort, though, Woltz says, “The benefits are enormous. Clients desire bee-friendly gardens, as the public has become far more aware of the severe plight of not just the honey bee but all varieties of pollinators. The productivity of the garden will be a direct result of the health of the pollinator diversity in the garden.” And if that sounds a little like a lot of work for uncertain results, why should the garden be different from life itself? “Plants are living things, not chairs, or two-by-fours to be specified,” Kwong says. “A project might specify three cherry trees and each will look radically different from each other.”



In her hydrangea-flanked outdoor room, Emma Chamberlain embraced plush low-slung chairs with buttery, yellow upholstery. Christopher Sturman

That’s the whole point. “I’m at my best when a client asks for the landscape to highlight what’s unique,” Woltz says. “That might include specific plants, fruits, trees, perennials of local renown, or perhaps reflect the cultural memory of the place.” Woltz adds that concepts might evoke the ways of life of indigenous people or early settlers. Regional materials, like local stone, brick, or stucco, can also express the spirit of a place. “Landscape is not just gardens that surround the house, but rather the entire setting of the project, including drives, planned vistas, artful grading, and earthworks,” he says. “When these are developed collaboratively, the results are palpably harmonious.” They make a house a home.

“A good landscape project has poetry and improvisation to it,” Kwong says, “and sometimes interior designers or architects who work in a more defined, precise world aren’t comfortable with that.” Not to mention clients. “It’s very humbling to work directly with nature, because for all our science and skill, oftentimes we are at the mercy of the growth habit and properties of the plant material. Certain vines will only grow so fast, this flower will only bloom in that month, and if you want that tree it’s going to drop fruit and stain your walkways.” There’s a beauty in not knowing what will come, she says, especially given the way of today’s world. Go out and get your hands dirty, she says. “Accept the messy, unpredictable glory of it!”

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At the LA home of gallerist Alex Teghe-Walker vibrant fuchsia flowers adorn the surroundings of an outdoor dining area. Sam Frost

Spotlight: Outdoor Kitchens

> **Outdoor dining is now a year-round affair. Here's how to design the ultimate space for cooking, serving, and celebrating outside**

Dining alfresco was an age-old pleasure long before the pandemic, of course, but those dreary years and our subsequent gradual return to a new normal has only strengthened the appeal of supping while sunbathing or stargazing.

These days, homeowners are making reservations in their own backyard all year round. "During COVID, we started making the outdoor areas seasonless," McGee says, "with built-in fireplaces and firepits that start getting used in fall and winter." And clients love it: "They drink morning coffee, sip hot chocolate, and roast marshmallows all winter."

It's never been easier to gorge yourself on outdoor kitchen appliances. But if those poolside beer fridges and wood-fired pizza ovens are starting to feel like leftovers from years gone by, designers have other ideas. "With lots of cooking taking place outside," Redmond Aldrich's Shanahan says, a client might need not necessarily an appliance, but a new fixture. "We've started including outdoor lamps near the BBQs or smokers. That way, you can see what you're grilling."

Or perhaps clients might consider forgoing the new toys. "We have people requesting silverware drawers for outside," Klausung says. He remains skeptical: "Nobody needs that. I believe in luxury but think it isn't created by maximalism, but rather by good style and comfort." McGee agrees. "Our outdoor areas are divided into spaces—one for dining and relaxing and another with [a] firepit and super comfy lounge chairs that you could stay in for hours. And we don't get fussy with outdoor furniture. It doesn't have to be precious."

But it should be thoughtful. Room & Board recently launched its first outdoor kitchen product range, including a modular cabinet set made of recycled plastic in collaboration with Loll Designs. There's also a handcrafted Parsons table made by Sielaff with tops of mesabi black granite or marbled white quartz. Such products echo clients' requests to repeat materials used in their primary kitchens for their outdoor spaces. "The same wood used to make their kitchen cabinets or the stone of the countertops," Little says, "can be repeated in the outdoor kitchen."

And with outdoor lines expanding across the board, the same manufacturers can appear in both places too. Danish legend Fritz Hansen, for instance, has expanded its outdoor Skagerak brand with a chair and table that complement designer Aurélien Barbry's popular Plank bench. All are made of 100% FSC-certified teak and would look handsome in an interior dining room, but in the elements they will patinate into a gorgeous silver-gray.

It's all well and good for outdoor kitchens to embrace the look and feel of their inside counterparts. Why stop there, though? Clients are hungry for garden-to-table setups. In recent years, "A lot of people brought edible plantings into their gardens for practical purposes and for something to do and pass the time," Little says. "One of the really great things that came from this was the embracing of growing from seed." He sees this type of labor as an antidote to the frenzy of instant gratification. "I like to think that the garden and working in it is the opposite of that," he explains. "We are asked to follow nature's timelines, not our own, and in some small but very profound way, the waiting and wanting for our crops to come to harvest changes us and makes us appreciate the food we eat a little more."

The hands-on experience might expand dinner guest lists too. For Kwong, clients might “focus on creating wildlife gardens that provide food, water, and shelter to our insect and animal friends. I’ve been trying to design for the more-than-human-world, not just thinking about aesthetics but focused on habitat. It’s an uncomfortable practice in our image-obsessed world, but often letting our landscapes grow a bit more wild is the best thing for the larger ecosystem.”

And if the thought of event-planning for local packs of furry friends makes you want to join the party, McGee has got your back. “If a pandemic hits, my clients just take their cocktails outside, so socializing never shuts down,” she says. Cheers to that.

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Meadow gardens exude an air of effortless, unkempt beauty but can take serious work. Expect at least three years for them to reach maturity, landscape architect Thomas

Take It Slow

> One of the most in-demand landscape treatments, the meadow garden is a lesson in operating on Mother Nature’s timetable

The 20th-century dream of rolling green lawns has long been the ideal, but—increasingly—clients are telling landscape designers that they long for something green in the ecologically attuned sense of the word. Thus the current blooming of the meadow garden and patches of land devoted to native species that are friendly to pollinators which change across the seasons. “It’s incredibly exciting that clients seem to be ready to leave the lawn behind, an outdated legacy of suburban expansion and European garden design,” Kwong says. “I’ve seen front yards that once provided no habitat, food, or resources for pollinators and animals be replaced with thriving meadows and even food forests!” Meadow gardens are deceptively simple: On the ground level, they can look refreshingly unplanned. Beneath the surface, though, they take careful orchestration.

Design firms [Weiss/Manfredi](#) and [Reed Hilderbrand](#) recently renovated Pennsylvania’s [Longwood Gardens](#), adding new plantings and buildings across its 17 acres. The project’s biggest lesson? “Start small,” says Longwood Gardens president and CEO Paul B. Redman, a precept easily scaled down to home projects. “Meadows are dynamic spaces full of biodiversity that are both beautiful and beneficial.” But, he adds, “When planting, one of the most important keys to success is patience.”

Meadow gardens develop on nature’s timetables, not those of designers. “It will take a minimum of three years to establish,” Woltz says. “It requires maintenance to keep out invasive plants that will overrun the meadow in short order.” The best management tool for most meadows is fire, he adds, as it aids renewal and germination of native plants. For obvious reasons, that may not be legal or desired in some environments. Some elbow grease is also necessary: “The landscape will need to be mowed every one to three years to prevent trees from growing,” Redman says. “Wind and birds will bring unwanted seeds, so attention to these from the first year on is time well spent.” Despite these issues, Woltz says, “meadow gardens sequester carbon through deep roots and provide diverse wildlife habitat. There are few landscapes more beautiful.”

The key, Kwong says, “is always *right plant, right place.*” Native plants have the home field advantage. Once you understand what they need, Little says, “They are just easier to maintain and keep alive because they belong there.” Kwong’s clients agree. “More of them are definitely requesting native plantings, thank goodness. They vastly reduce water usage, pesticides, and restore a sense of place to our environment.” Their appeal is not only political, but aesthetic, Woltz notes. “With attentive design, most climates in the US can support a beautiful palette that will naturally belong in the landscape. There is a stunning array of native plants, so people should not buy into ideas that native plants are unruly.”

Neither are they unattractive. Klausing has designed five meadow “suites” for the upcoming Warren Hotel in Tribeca, which he says will consist of “very lush, naturalistic English countryside moments” when they reach full bloom. “The brand has great taste for classic comfort and we are going to respect this with the perfect gardens to complement [the building].” They’ll just take a little time and effort, like all good design does. “It can be quite daunting,” Little admits, “but I would also say [to] let parts of your property go wild and see what comes in and surprises you.”

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Jenna Peffley, Miguel Flores-Vianna, William Jess Laird



Jenna Peffley, Miguel Flores-Vianna, William Jess Laird

Spotlight: Working With the Weather

> Landscape architects opine on designing for—and with—a climate in crisis

"I begin every garden design with a story," Little says. For American gardens, the story isn't necessarily a pretty one: At the time of writing, almost 30% of the lower 48 states in this country are in drought. Each week seems to see another American city set records for extreme heat, cold, or other wild weather. When thinking about landscape and outdoor design, climate change needs to be a major consideration.

"If someone is renovating their garden space," Kwong says, "native plants are a great place to start." They tend to have adapted to the climate they call home, so, despite its changing, they may well need less water after their establishment period. "They have also coevolved to support insect and bird diversity," Woltz says. "Relying on the ancient ecologies that have withstood climate extremes for millennia is a good start."

Next step? Evaluating their actual home. For parched areas that nonetheless do offer ground for planting, Little recommends drought-tolerant plants. "Lavenders, artemisias, sedums, and Russian sage are all excellent," he says. Urban environments are more challenging. "For containerized plantings, if people can invest in an irrigation system at the outset, they will conserve a lot more water. Sound plant selection can minimize water usage and create islands of green."

Some water is mandatory, however. Cisterns and barrels can harvest rainfall with minimal effort; attractive ones can add interest to the garden, and less appealing ones can be tucked underground. "They are a terrific idea to offset the use of treated drinking water in the garden, which is a terrible waste of resources," Woltz says. In cities, rainwater infiltration systems may allow water to flow into and through the subsurface soil. "They are becoming the law in many places," he says, "as the cumulative benefits can recharge aquifers and reduce risk of the flowing and scouring of streams and rivers from storm intensity."

They are an elegant solution, Kwong says. "I'm seeing a lot of designers using green space—swales, for example, which are shallow, gently sloped channels often lined with rocks and vegetation used to trap sediment and other contaminants." While we're at it, why not make the swale a garden itself? "Rain gardens are another beautiful stormwater management solution, reducing runoff through native plantings with deep root systems and berms."

It might sound complicated, but finding solutions to problems is what designers do. "Clients hire a good design firm to help facilitate a space that adds beauty to their lives," Klausing says, "giving them a place to venture out of the house and find refuge." Shelter from a storm, in other words. "As the weather grows more extreme," Kwong says, "we must begin leading with ecological thinking and then build the project from there."

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