



DESIGN Top 5 Outdoor Design Trends for Summer 2018

Say so long to 'Charlie Brown' string lights for the yard, and hello to the new style of wicker. We polled over 100 designers and landscape architects to identify what's in and out

By Catherine Romano

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11 COMMENTS



OUT



IN

PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (OUT)

OUT: Silly Strings of Lights

A number of the experts we spoke with said that in 2018, they'll pull the plug on what New York designer Mikel Welch calls Charlie Brown string lights. "Hopefully, homeowners will stroll off with this dorm-room décor like Linus with his blanket," he said. Nashville designer Chad James agreed: "They are overused and just too cutesy looking." And Raun Thorp of Los Angeles's Tichenor & Thorp warns against the unflattering glow of exposed-filament bulbs.

IN: Grown-Up Glow

"We're seeing more outdoor light fixtures with shaded fabrics," said Mr. James, pointing to the Kenroy Home Tanglewood Indoor/Outdoor Floor Lamp at right. New York designer Robert McKinley also favors a less-scattered approach: "Now I prefer randomly placed, low, indirect lighting, creating special moments and highlights." And Mr. Welch drops a string of battery-operated firefly or dewdrop lights into old wine bottles, which illuminate the table "and leave the view of the stars wide open."



OUT



IN

OUT: Inelegant Bulk

“Brown, blocky sofas and chairs have had their day in the sun,” said Chicago designer Melissa Lewis. Tina Anastasia, a partner at Mark P. Finlay Interiors in Southport, Conn., concurred that last year’s trend is tired: “Clients gravitated to a thicker frame and style of furniture, heavier weaves in a darker color.” Hulking versions of this look in iron and its ilk are over as well. “The oversize metal sofas and chairs become hot in the sun and make lounging a challenge,” said Abbe Fenimore of Studio Ten 25, in Dallas.

IN: Fine-Boned Furniture

The fading appeal of behemoth furnishings aligns with a newish décor approach that treats outdoor space as an extension of a home’s interior, said New York designer Perry Sayles. Pieces like the white oak Spindle Back Viewing Chair from Nickey Kehoe’s new Outdoor Collection, right, wouldn’t look out of a place in a living room. “Light wood furniture with linen upholstery feels really fresh and relaxed,” said Los Angeles designer Vanessa Alexander. For another example, see the lithe Henry Hall Designs chairs in the main photo above.



OUT



IN

PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (2)

OUT: Brights and Stripes

“I get it, stripes are historical and elegant...but they’re also beyond boring,” said Maureen Baker, co-founder of New York firm MDLX. Many designers said there are too many great performance-fabric options now to stick to banal motifs. As for more-ornate, bright, blatantly “decorative” patterns, designer Uma Stewart, in South Orange, N.J., warns that they can wear out their welcome: “People are investing more in outdoor décor and want it to work season after season.”

IN: Discreet Neutrals

“Folks are moving toward neutrals and sophisticated palettes,” said Ms. Stewart, who likes performance fabrics such as Kerry Joyce’s, at right. “Shades like this mellow papaya [far right] and marine [next to it] are softer than bright oranges and turquoises and more likely to stand the test of time.” San Francisco designer Kendall Wilkinson, who recently launched a line of quietly hued indoor-outdoor fabrics, likes to let the landscaping be the star.



OUT



IN

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (2)

OUT: Horticultural Jumbles

Pots with choreographed combinations of tall, medium and trailing plants can be found at every shopping center and municipal corner. “The thrill, fill, spill approach to planting containers is a tired trope,” said writer and floral designer Amy Merrick. Having recently completed an internship at England’s famous Great Dixter garden, she noted that the experts there “never, ever mix varieties in a pot.” As for vessels: “Please, no more zinc planters,” begged landscape architect Janice Parker. “Especially the cylinders that are too tall and have too small a planting width.”

IN: Singular Species

“I think that painting with larger strokes, by using masses of single plant varieties [in one container], makes for a more impactful, fresh and modern composition,” said San Francisco landscape designer Katharine Webster. Betsy Nathan of Chicago antiques gallery Pagoda Red pointed out that fewer species per pot means fewer potential problems, and noted that clients have massed these sort of plantings to define areas on patios. “The classic garden pots made of terra cotta are always in,” said Ms. Parker. “Nothing is more timeless or graceful in the garden, and you will love them more and more over time.”



OUT



IN

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES (TABLE AND CHAIR)

OUT: Midcentury Mania

The sort of thin-metal outdoor furniture—some of it cleanly midcentury modern, some considerably fussier (left)—that was popular among chic 1950s folks is losing its appeal, even though the look had a resurgence in 2017. Chicago designer Cari Giannoulis believes that last year's trend of retro-inspired outdoor furniture missed the mark entirely. "The 50s-style metal lawn chairs were kitschy, and after one season outside generally couldn't hold up to the elements," she said. For her part, Ms. Baker, of MDLX, warns that bent-wire furniture has become synonymous with cheap.

IN: Unpredictable Wicker

What's replacing those wrought-iron and bent-wire furnishings? "Natural wicker speaks of summer and shade, green lawns and fireflies—and luxury," said Ann Pyne of New York design firm McMillen. Said Houston designer Nina Magon, "The airiness in the designs causes light to penetrate through and will create shadow patterns and visual depth in your outdoor space." If you fear an overly Grandma vibe, "choose a piece in a funky or different shape," said New York designer Sasha Bikoff. (A youthful example: Soane's Rattan Ripple Console, right.) "It offers a fresh yet easy update."