

Before Purchasing Outdoor Living Furniture – Read This

Judy Davidson, CEO and Outdoor Lifestyle Expert

Whether you're looking to outfit a condo balcony or terrace, backyard patio, pool, dock or boathouse or deck area, many clients ask these questions:

- Do I select a living room setting with sofa and chairs, a sectional, a dining set – or both?
- Would I like the ambience of an outdoor fire feature?
- Do I need chaise lounges?
- What is the look and feel I want to create?
- How much room do I have?

There's a lot to consider when creating your perfect outdoor living space.

As the trend for bringing the indoors – out continues to grow, and we look to create our dream outdoor living space, outdoor living furniture is fast becoming an important component in completing the perfect look.

Think of your outdoor space as extra square footage that will enhance your home's value by creating new multi-functional areas to relax and entertain in. A space, that flows as you go from dining to after dinner conversation to relaxing by the pool.

While the kitchen and bathroom are first on the list for adding value to your home, having beautifully landscaped areas and an outdoor living space people can just step into, is fast becoming the third most important item on the list of must-haves for home owners.

Your outdoor area can be the essence of style; luxurious, classical elegance, traditional, contemporary, chic or simply playful and fun – or a combination of these styles. Be sure that your outdoor furnishings are compatible with the overall quality of your home and landscape.

If you are investing in a major landscape project, include outdoor furnishings in the pre-planning stage to help showcase the finished space and enhance your enjoyment of it. When your landscaper or architect knows what you want in advance, it's easy for them to enlarge an area if need be to accommodate all of your needs.

Color is always refreshing, especially after a cold and dreary winter. Be creative with it. Incorporate a dash of vibrancy with colorful toss pillows. The options are endless with color, allowing you to create spaces that are warm and inviting, or cool and playful – or both.

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Outdoor Living Rooms can be furnished with generously proportioned, deep seating lounge chairs, love seats and sofas. Many baby boomers are forgoing dining sets and opting for conversation collections that include low coffee or chat tables to create the perfect setting for casual dining or hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. Fire pit tables have an area around the fire that allows for casual dining. Imagine dinner by firelight!



HOW TO DISTINGUISH THE BEST TYPES OF FURNISHINGS TO FULLFILL YOUR NEEDS

Unless you're in the outdoor living industry, it can be difficult to understand the variables in making a good buying decision. We hope the following helps.

ALL WEATHER WICKER WEAVE

High end all weather outdoor wicker, is receiving rave reviews for its beauty and resiliency. It has the look we have come to love with traditional wicker, and its styles range from contemporary to classic or rustic. It can handle lots of use, is maintenance-free, and can handle all kinds of weather conditions from the chill of the Rockies to the heat of the tropics which makes it a perfect candidate for Home or Cottage owners, and Hotels, Resorts, Restaurants, Spas, Condo community areas, and Golf courses.

Good quality all weather-wicker can remain in place year round – there's no need to store it inside. A cover is helpful in keeping off grime during the winter months, but not always necessary with quality items. Please note that not all outdoor-wicker is made of the same resilient quality.

METAL FRAMES

If you're looking for a metal frame look, look to Aluminum and Cast aluminum. Aluminum is rust-free, strong, and durable with frames available in a variety of colors. Cast iron is a product that can rust if the paint is chipped in any way. The gauge of the metal is another important factor when selecting metal frames. The thicker it is – the stronger and longer it can last.

Many styles are available from simple and understated, to elegant designs featuring ornate detail and lattice work. Maintenance is a breeze; a soft cloth and mild detergent, rinse and you're ready to enjoy. Aluminum can be left in place summer and winter, there's no need to store it: a cover is helpful in keeping off grime during the winter months, but not always necessary with quality items.

CUSHION or SLING SEATING

Sling seating is the perfect solution if you want total care-free living. It is fast drying, and although not quite as comfortable as cushions can be, the tradeoff can be worth it. There are many grades of sling material available, the higher the grade - the better the sling....and the longer it will hold its shape.

The beauty of cushions is simple – they offer luxury and comfort. Yes, they do take a little more work, but there is nothing like a cushion to sink into when you want to relax or take a nap in the great outdoors.

Many of our clients ask if they have to bring in their cushions all the time, and while this is preferable, the worst thing that can happen is they will get wet. Please note that if the fabric is not Sunbrella, you will need to cover or bring the cushions inside. For an additional cost, clients can opt in for **fast dry foam** that dries in minutes and is perfect for poolside areas.

Tip: If your cushions do get caught in a downpour. Sit the cushions up on their sides allowing water to drain through the seams and allowing air to help them dry faster.



COLORS

You can celebrate color with a variety of furniture frame colors and outdoor fabrics. Accent your patio, deck, pool area or terrace with a dash of vibrant color using cushions, umbrellas or toss pillows.

Seating can be in a solid color with a striped back cushion, or select a neutral color and change the toss cushions to reflect the years latest color schemes. Changing the toss cushions from time to time can bring a fresh new look to your collection.



FABRIC SELECTION

Sunbrella outdoor fabrics are one of the best fabrics products in the marketplace today. They use a solution dye acrylic exclusively designed to handle all elements of outdoor weather. This is very different from dyed yarns which are coated only on the outside of the fiber.

Sunbrella fabrics are sun, stain and mold resistant, and are able to stand up to pool chemicals and suntan oil. If you've ever wanted to have white or light colored cushions as part of your outdoor design you can do so with Sunbrella fabrics.

Tip: If you find a stain on your fabric, go to www.sunbrella.com and look up their stain solution guide. They even have a solution for removing lipstick, even suntan oil!

HOW TO COMPARE QUALITY

The beauty about selecting Designer or Casual Living collections is they offer complete lines which can take you from an intimate dining area to conversation areas by offering relaxing deep seating sofas, chairs, love seats, sectionals and chaise lounges to help you create great areas to entertain in, or taking a nap in the great outdoors!

There are many different grades of outdoor resin wicker used in today's marketplace. Consumers are often confused after comparing collections with various retailers. Many find such a large discrepancy in price without much information as to why.

Although two chairs may look identical to the untrained eye, there can be many differences in the construction, composition and the materials used that affect the price. People may assume that a higher price means a better product, unfortunately, in the outdoor furnishings industry like any industry, this is not always the case.

Here is a brief explanation comparing outdoor furniture to various pricing in the marketplace. We'll use levels 1(weak) to 4 (strong).

Level 1 (up to \$750)

Many mass merchants often use their buying power to negotiate lower prices for their stores. The first major difference to note is the material used to weave all weather-wicker. The tendency is to use plastics that are typically very light and are vulnerable to fading, cracking, and splitting over time. The second major difference is the material used for the frames.

Steel and thin aluminum is typically used for the framework. The thickness of the frame is often less than 1mm to keep the consumer cost low. Aluminum is the best choice as it is a non-rust product.

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Steel, unless it is a properly treated stainless steel will rust and you will need to touch up scratches with rust resistant paint or you'll have a rust nightmare that can damage decks or patio stonework.

Customers purchasing these products simply want a good price, and are not expecting longevity or durability which makes them not too eco-friendly. Warranty may be up to 90 days.

Level 2 (\$750 – \$1,500)

Retailers at this level may not compete at the lowest price-point; they try to keep their pricing under \$1,500 for better sales. They sets are more fashion conscious and tend provide a slightly better quality product. The resin yarn used is typically better than level 1 priced sets.

The plastic or resin yarn used is a little stronger, but can tend to unravel easily due to extreme climate changes. A rule of thumb is: if you can put your finger through the weave, it will have the tendency to bend and flex in extreme heat, which can cause cracking of the yarn. The tighter the weave – the longer it tends to last.

Consumers are prepared to spend a little more at level 2, meaning they do expect some longevity, durability and style when purchasing these products. You can expect a fairly decent product and a minimal warranty.

Level 3 (\$1,500 - \$2,500)

This is the trickiest area for consumers. Patio stores used to focus on carrying a wide range of products that were considered specialty items not available at the mass merchant level. Some retailers continue to provide better quality despite increasing pressure to lower prices, and many have started to purchase inexpensive lines offshore.

China has become so accessible, that retailers can easily order container loads of inexpensive furniture and dress them up with fancy cushions to charge higher prices. China does produce very high end lines, so don't be put off by made in China – the length of warranty usually indicates if the product is well made – or not.

Why China many ask. If not produced in China, affordability would be out of the question for purchasers of outdoor living furniture and that includes high quality, outdoor designer furnishings.

Also, If a line doesn't sell well in year one, a retailer may not purchase it again, which makes replacing a broken piece next to impossible, and the warranty useless.

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I've had many a client spend up to \$2,500 for a set and then find they can't replace a broken chair or table and waste precious time looking for replacements, which often can't be found, or, the fabric used on the set has begun to fade and there is nothing to replace it.

Consumers must also be careful and ask what fabric is being used for the cushions and umbrellas. Can they select their fabric, is there an additional charge, or is it "what you see is what you get?" **Warranty** tend to run from 1- 3 years.

Top Level - Level 4-5 (\$3,000 and up)

This is highly durable designer furniture that can last for decades. You'll be able to choose from a wide array of styles and designs from contemporary or classic elegance, to fun and playful or traditional and timeless.

Products used in high end design tend to be materials that will require a minimum of care, provide years of use and maintain a luxurious look. Storage is fabulous with higher end collections as they can be left in place year round – even in extreme climate conditions. **Warranty** tends to run 3 years and up.

The collections Ambience Outdoor Furniture (levels 3 and 4) offer go above the standards offered in traditional outdoor furnishings, so high in fact we have them in luxurious 5 Star Hotels, Resorts and Restaurants. If these furnishings can withstand high use in these commercial settings with little to no maintenance in extreme temperatures– imagine how well they will function in your Home or Cottage.

Ambience Outdoor Furniture offers outdoor living furniture that goes beyond industry standards in the following areas:

1. The non-rust aluminum or stainless steel frames are 1.5 - 3mm instead of the traditional 1mm or less available. Our frames are well braced much like expensive interior furniture, and the frames will not break easily due to heavier weight or high energy children.
2. The color, strength builders and all weather protection is blended together in vats and then becomes the tight all-weather wicker yarn - not something that is painted on that will peel off due to time and weather conditions. Our all weather wicker weaves are hand weaved in Indonesia.
3. We offer Sunbrella fabrics that are fade, mold, stain and chlorine resistant – and will stand the test of time and use. When purchasing higher end outdoor furnishings, consumers have an advantage in that they can custom select the fabric of their choice, often at no extra cost.



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4. For the pool area, bar-height tables and chairs and luxurious chaise lounges can create a beautiful resort like setting. For the ultimate in shade, a cantilever umbrella is a great choice. These umbrellas can cover many areas in a full 360 degree rotation and can complete the look you desire. Specialty items that make a bold statement include double chaise lounges and daybeds.



5. Hi end cabanas, pavilions or gazebos provide more than just shade, they make a fresh bold statement each time you and your family or guests enters your outdoor space.



Remember the old adage:

Buy once – buy right

I often recommend to clients, who prefer the higher end look and feel of higher end outdoor furnishings but feel the cost is too high, is to begin by investing in a couple of pieces each year and allow their collection to grow as their needs grow.

Designer collections can take years to be developed; therefore they remain in the marketplace for many years. This allows you to add to your collection when you are ready, unlike less expensive sets which come and go from year to year and need to be replaced more often.

CONCLUSION

We hope you found this article helpful. If you're ready to head out and create a beautiful outdoor oasis, consider these 5 tips:

1. Create a binder you can take with you while shopping
2. Take pictures of all the areas you want to furnish, also take pictures of your house
3. Create a floor layout (even a rough sketch will do). Measure areas. If you have a deck, measure the height of the rails, steps etc.
4. Select pictures from magazines of looks that you might like to create
5. Think about colors you might like to use

If you would like more information about our products and services please contact us. Our team offers friendly, helpful advice. Call or email us for more information. We love what we do and we're here to help.



Live Love Laugh - Outdoors

Judy Davidson is CEO and Outdoor Living Lifestyle expert of Ambience Outdoor Furniture. Judy and her team have been helping clients achieve their perfect outdoor space for over 20 years.

Clients include: Home and Cottage owners, Hotels, Resorts, Restaurants, Condo Associations, Architects, Interior designers, Landscapers, Builders and Developers and Golf courses.

Here's to a happy and carefree summer.

May your outdoor living room, provide the space to create memories that will last a lifetime.

Judy Davidson

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