



(left) Photo courtesy of JML inc.  
(Below) Photo courtesy of Urban Patio

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## HOW TO BEAT THE HEAT

ENJOY SUMMER OUTSIDE WITH COMFY SECTIONAL SOFAS AND SLEEK DINING TABLES

BY TRACEY MACKENZIE

**WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY MOTHER AND I** would eat dinner outside on evenings when my father worked late. We would sit at a rickety picnic table that groaned whenever either of us rose from it; its tired bones always seemed about to splinter. After our summer fare of hotdogs and coleslaw, we would drink our tea while sitting on folding lawn chairs, built of aluminum tubing, strung with webbed plastic. Like everyone else's backyard furniture at that time, ours had not been designed for comfort.

I am thankful that today's outdoor furniture has evolved considerably from the old weather-beaten picnic table and lawn chairs of my youth. Comfortable outdoor rooms are now almost as common as their indoor counterparts. Wide comfy sofas, plush armchairs, oversized daybeds for lounging around a pool; all are de rigueur in a well designed outdoor room.



Photos courtesy of Urban Patio



Luxury and comfort define today's outdoor living, says Cassandra Lazanis, marketing director of Urban Patio, a Montreal store that stocks high-end outdoor furnishings. “Outdoor living has become more popular than ever,” says Lazanis.

Outdoor rooms have become an extension of the living room with sectionals and sofas that mimic those used indoors, she says, adding that stainless steel and teak pieces offer a look that is both sleek and versatile.

“Accessories are big this year with lighted furniture topping the list,” says Lazanis. “Items such as stools and side tables that are lighted with rechargeable LED lights are very popular as are the lighted pods that can be floated in a pool or simply used to light a walkway or add ambiance to the garden.”

Another popular item is the cantilevered umbrella that can rotate 360 degrees. “The umbrella is perfect for a backyard that has both a dining and lounge area as it can be swiveled from one area to the other without effort,” says Lazanis. Ethanol fireplaces that double as side tables are also gaining ground because they can be transported easily.

Jean-Marc Legault, owner of JML Inc., a Lachine-based wholesaler that specializes in outdoor furniture and is open to the public, affirms the popularity of the cantilevered umbrella and the ethanol fireplace.

His company offers a wide variety of furniture and finishes. “There are no sets at JML Inc.,” says Legault. “You will see tables with different chairs around them, each with a different finish. You create your own set by choosing the items in the size, colour and finish you desire. This way you create a set that is custom-made to fit your needs.”

Legault says synthetic wicker remains popular but adds there has been an increase in sales in such deep-seating styles of furniture as sofas, loveseats, sectionals and upholstered chairs. These pieces extend the comfort of the indoor living areas to the outdoors, he says.

“Cast aluminum is also big this year with less demand for such wood products as teak due to its continuous maintenance,” says Legault.



He cites the popularity of new furnishings made of Brazilian cherry wood, which has the same properties as teak but bears a finish that requires no maintenance for three to five years. And a line of extruded aluminum furniture offers the look of wood without the maintenance.

Legault says consumers are well informed. “Our clients come in saying that they want only 100% acrylic fabric,” he says. “They know that this is the only fabric that will last outdoors.”

Brightly coloured fabrics (yellow, orange, red and green) may also be eclipsing whites and neutrals, which are more difficult to keep clean.

And size, it seems, matters in the garden. Among dining sets, “bigger is better,” says Legault.

“Larger tables that seat six to eight people and tables that come with extensions are selling very well,” he says.