

MARCH 2019

CASUAL

OUTDOOR INTELLIGENCE.
OUTDOOR STYLE. OUTDOOR FUN.

Living



THE
GRILL
ISSUE

Exclusive Research
Grill Sales Trends



Libby Langdon, John Cialone, Michelle Plachter, Breegan Jane, Jane Dagmi and Jennifer Bringle at OW Lee's designer panel.

THE IMPACT OF *Designers*

Interior designers are transforming the exterior space

By *Jennifer Bringle*

Of all the changes to the outdoor industry over the last decade, one that seems to only grow in scope is the influence of interior designers. Visit most any market showroom, and you're bound to hear about the line's designer-friendly options—read customizable and available for one-off orders. And the markets themselves have put considerable weight toward drawing these all-important buyers.

"We have seen a tremendous shift in the way market operates over the last two decades, and increased designer attendance is certainly one of the top contributing factors," says Tom Conley, president and CEO, High Point Market Authority.

"We've seen manufacturers shift their entire business model to become more designer-friendly, opening up new revenue streams while also broadening product selection for designers. It's been a very positive change for market, as well

AS OUTDOOR SPACES BECOME MORE CURATED AND THE OPTIONS FOR DECOR BECOME GREATER, THE USE OF DESIGNERS IN RESIDENTIAL, AS WELL AS CONTRACT APPLICATIONS, BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT.

—*Tim Newton, Watermark Living*

as the overall industry."

as the overall industry."

With a more sophisticated and informed consumer base thanks to the prevalence of design media such as HGTV, Houzz and Pinterest, the appetite for outdoor spaces with a bit more panache than the usual matchy-matchy patio group has put designers in high demand.

"We see design professionals as an important and growing segment for outdoor and casual furnishings," says Tim Newton, president, Watermark Living. "As outdoor spaces become more curated and the options available for decor are greater, the use of designers in residential, as well as contract applications, becomes more important."

For the casual category, designers represent a previously untapped source



of revenue, particularly for high-end manufacturers and those nimble enough to offer custom options. And even retailers get in on the action, with savvy store owners partnering with interior designers on both residential and contract projects or even hiring them on staff to offer design services to their customers.

“We focus on this with designer-inspired accessories, furnishing designs and fabric selections,” Newton says. “We also accommodate this segment with our designer-friendly looks and the ability to mix and match our product offerings. We also hand-craft custom cushions in Florida. Designer options can be added to cushions without an up-charge, including contrasting welt, buttons or ties.”

Casual companies are joining forces with designers, too, for licensed lines like the Barclay Butera collection for Castelle, and for partnerships like Polywood’s new Design Ambassador program. Inaugural ambassadors Shayla Copas, Angelo Adamo and Farah Merhi will collaborate with Polywood on a variety of projects over the coming year.

“We believe the collaborations with our design ambassadors will take our merchandising to the next level,” says Megan Pierson, SVP of business development, Polywood.

Also recognizing the importance of designers, trade shows like High Point Market, Casual Market Chicago, Atlanta Market and Las Vegas Market added programming and events centered on

designers. During the last Casual Market Chicago, theMART’s Design Center hosted Designer Day, which was just the latest part of the center’s year-round outreach to the design community.

“The desire for sophisticated and thoughtful outdoor living spaces continues with no sign of slowing down,” says Beth Hicks, managing director, marketing, The Design Center and Casual Market Chicago. “The Design Center at theMART has 50 showrooms dedicated to outdoor furnishings that work with designers year-round for custom projects. As a result, we remain committed to offering programming created with designers in mind.

“For instance, in March 2019, we host the Outdoor Design Conference—a one-day event dedicated to designers and trends/techniques around outdoor spaces. That commitment continues with Casual Market Chicago, welcoming over 250 exhibitors this September. It’s a natural fit to invite designers to experience the latest trends and product launches during the show.”

And Atlanta, High Point and Las Vegas offer a spate of educational sessions that allow designers to learn, earn CEUs and immerse themselves in showrooms they might not ordinarily visit.

“Designers shop market differently than retailers, and also have different expectations in terms of educational and social offerings,” says Conley. “Their interest in making market more of an experience—with a balance of product,

education and networking—has had a transformative effect.”

Casual companies capitalize on that trend with designer events. At the winter Las Vegas Market, OW Lee hosted a discussion with *Casual Living* and *Designers Today* featuring designers Breegan Jane, John Cialone, Michele Plachter and Libby Langdon on creating continuity between indoor and outdoor spaces.

“Designers are an important avenue of business for OW Lee, and a lot of them are learning how lucrative the outdoor room can be,” says Leisa McColister, vice president of marketing, OW Lee. “We market our brand to designers and educate them on the differences between indoor and outdoor. We also encourage designers to work with specialty dealers to ensure the best service and smooth delivery.”

Watermark Living hosts an outdoor design event in April (*see below*)—further proof the designer impact on the industry isn’t merely a passing trend—it’s a business shift that’s here to stay.

WANT MORE?

Casual Living Editor in Chief Jennifer Bringle moderates a panel discussion with designers Libby Langdon, Christopher Grubb and Stephanie James on “Exterior Design: How to Create a Curated Look,” Sunday, April 7, noon-1 p.m. in the Watermark Living showroom (205 S. Main St.).

Lunch will be served. Space is limited; RSVP to lrudd@laurieruddpr.com.