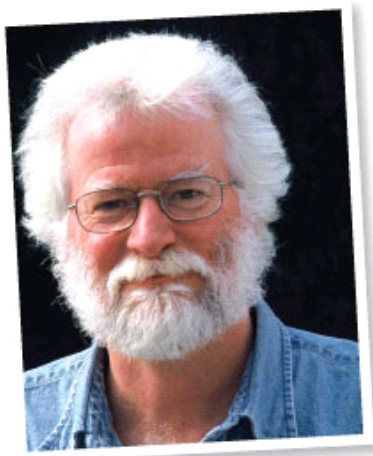


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Enlightened Lighting and Dry MOATS

John Friel



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Amazingly, it's Outdoor Rooms time again. And again, This Space conferred with Joyce Burkholder, buyer for Penn Stone, a wholesaler serving designers and builders in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. When it comes to stone, they rock. But hardscape is just the beginning.

"We service the landscape industry," Joyce said, "And we're also there when it's time to decorate the new space."

I'm a plant guy, leery of landscapes that are all hardscape. Stone and steel demand redeeming, softening flora. Joyce agrees: "Every outdoor living space needs container gardens." Penn Stone sells a wide range of planters (some self-watering) and hosts demonstrations on mixed-container design.

Another peeve: Excessive lighting. Decades ago, I moved from city to country. Far from streetlights and gridlock, I loved the stars hanging thick and low in inky skies. Manmade light was mostly the faint glow of distant towns and small fires in a nearby campground.

Within 10 years, without relocating, we were suburbanites. My steep, stony acre was surrounded by subdivisions. The stars were dimmed by floodlit decks and dusk-to-dawn lights.

Why escape civilization's banes—crowds, noise, glare—only to replicate them? We're all a bit like allergy sufferers who moved to the desert to escape pollen and pollutants, then gradually recreated what they'd fled: lawns, shrubs and sprawl. Phoenix's air is among America's worst now, thanks to exhaust fumes and imported ash, mulberry and bermudagrass.

That's a stretch and a digression, but light pollution is a true blight. Low-mounted options make paths and stairways safe without obliterating starlight and moonglow. Penn Stone carries "better brands" of outdoor lighting, Joyce said, including marine-grade lamps—indoor-pretty, but outdoor-impervious.

"The trend continues to be people creating very homelike spaces outdoors," Joyce told me, "Taking the

indoor environment and transplanting it.” Fine, but whose indoor environment includes floodlights?

As I type, I’m just home from a wet weekend of canoeing and camping. Our impromptu “outdoor room” was dubbed the MOAT—“Mother Of All Tarps.” Eight of us waited out shower after shower after deluge under it. Lighting consisted of lanterns, headlamps and a big smoky fire.

I know giant tarp sales don’t make GC owners salivate, but our MOAT might as well have been the White House porch. When rain is so persistent it feels like a personal assault, luxury is a dry butt and a chair to park it in.

Defying rain is fun at home, too. Penn Stone’s elegant solution: TUUCI, The Ultimate Umbrella. Infinitely superior, functionally and aesthetically, to our MOAT.

Fire features are perennially popular, for good reason. Fire is ambience, warmth and entertainment—caveman TV. Sleek propane appliances bring it at the flip of a switch, but the ultimate is the smokeless wood-burning Breeo firepit, Amish-engineered dual-walled magic. I’ve never paid over \$50 for a firebowl, but after a lifetime of dodging smoke I want one of these.

A factor not to overlook is surface coverage. I’m in the Susquehanna River valley, where everything drains to Chesapeake Bay. New impervious surface over 500 sq. ft.—just 20 ft. x 25 ft.—requires a stormwater runoff plan. That crucial step isn’t cheap, but neither is removing flagstones.

“Philosophically, we’re very plugged into the environment,” says Joyce. The owners are active in the local Conservancy and Penn Stone offers pervious pavers that can offset some precious footage.

Fire, foliage and a way to foil rain—what more does one need? Sorry, wrong question: Outdoor rooms are more about wanting than needing. But when bringing the indoors out, please find ways to keep most of the light in. The neighbors will thank you. **GP**

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