

Features

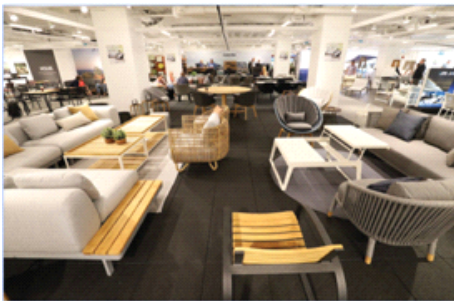
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Have a Seat

Chris Beytes

Rest assured, you'll see nothing even remotely resembling a Woolworth lawn chair at Casual Market Chicago, the outdoor furnishings show held every year at McCormick Place in Chicago. Green Profit visits the show each year not so much to find specific products, but instead seeking overall trends—how furniture manufacturers think consumers will want to furnish and decorate their porches and patios for the coming season.

Here are six trends we spotted ... or, in three cases, didn't spot.



1. Mixed materials. An ongoing phenomenon, this is the combining of wood, metal, fabric and even ceramics, as well as mixed colors and textures, in one design.

Above, left: Mixing is in, matchy-matchy is out.

2. Hip shapes with traditional materials. As manufacturers mix materials, they also seem tuned to creating more interesting, modern shapes from traditional materials. Teak gets sleek and woven resin gets less boxy and more curvaceous or angular.

Above, center: The striking Aviva High Lounge Chair from Louis Osier Co. Is it comfortable? I don't think that's the point.

Above, right: This set from International Home exemplifies the how traditional materials meet fresh shapes. It also shows the typical neutral color palette seen throughout the show.



3. Better poly furniture. Furniture made from recycled plastic has always turned us off for its shop-project appearance—like everything is constructed from 1x4s. Boring! But it's definitely getting better, with more material dimensions, more styles, nicer colors and hidden fasteners.

Above, left: The Farmhouse Collection from Wildridge features turned legs and a pretty woodgrain-look top.

Above, center: This set from Daybreak could be high-end wood. Note the lack of visible fasteners in both sets, another improvement manufacturers are making.

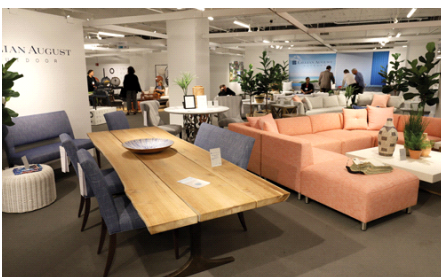
What we didn't see

4. Cast aluminum. It's what's on the author's patio, but apparently he is out of style. We don't recall seeing a single exhibitor of cast aluminum. Perhaps that's because it's so ubiquitous at retail, it's no longer show-worthy—like looking for Coke or Pepsi at a New Beverage trade show.

5. Traditional teak. I saw a bit, but not much, and nothing in the way of truly traditional shapes, like English garden benches. If I saw such shapes, they were crafted from plastic (like the set from Daybreak, above).

6. Tropical prints—and nary a single monstera leaf! Here's the shocker: We walked two full aisles before spotting any upholstery sporting a tropical foliage motif. Mostly we saw gray and beige, with few patterns. Even the throw pillows tended toward understated blue or burnt orange. Yet nary a banana leaf pillow or palm frond cushion or monstera rug despite the consumer houseplant craze. Odd.

Above, right: This set at Classic Rattan, with its vintage Hawaiian shirt look, was one of the few we spotted with a tropical foliage motif.



A newcomer to the category is Lillian August, who used Casual Market Chicago to launch her first outdoor line, which stood out for its live-edge table and living room-look, deep upholstered pieces. **GP**