

SHOPPER

Breaths of fresh air

BY LINDSEY M. ROBERTS

Recently, a pair of homeowners approached landscape designer Gina Benincasa and told her that they were sick and tired of replacing their outdoor furniture every few years. “Build us something that will last forever,” they said. For these clients, a stone bench and granite-topped table were the solution to a common challenge: choosing outdoor furniture that can weather the dog days of summer — and beyond. Not all can afford custom work, so we asked Benincasa, who works for D&A Dunlevy Landscapers in Poolesville, for the rundown on the metal, wood, and plastic furnishings for decks, patios and balconies. First, she says, there’s metal, which is probably the most durable but can be expensive. (And be aware of the differences between powder-coated metal, which makes for a long, colorful life, and painted metal, which

is less expensive but will require more maintenance, Benincasa says.) Second, there’s wood, mostly teak, “which definitely withstands the test of time.” And then there’s wicker, which is a weave that’s now made of better, longer-lasting stuff than in the past. Last, there’s plastic, which can be trendy and fun, but might need to be replaced more often. If the rule applies anywhere, it’s here: You get what you pay for. “We definitely go for things that are going to stand the test of time — and sometimes those things are expensive,” D.C. landscape architect Leslie Gignoux says. Additionally, when furniture is out in the elements, nothing is maintenance-free. Powder-coating needs cleaning with mild soap, paint can need repainting and wood can need sanding and staining. But it’s not all bad news when it comes to living en plein air. As homeowners increasingly consider their outdoors as an additional living space, manufacturers are responding with better-quality furniture and a growing selection of materials, fabrics and colors. To help you sift through all the options, we offer 14 pieces that will be ready to party for years to come.



● When it comes to teak, Gignoux says that you can’t go wrong with the British companies Barlow Tyrie and Kingsley Bate. “They have lovely, classic lines,” she says. The Mendocino dining table from Kingsley Bate, in a rectangular or square shape, has the kind of elegant, flexible design that works well with traditional or modern chairs (\$880-1,200, www.wayfair.com). For more teak options, Robert Archer of Archer Modern in Cady’s Alley also recommends the Australian manufacturer Harbour Outdoor and Design Within Reach.

WAYFAIR.COM

BALLARD
DESIGNS

● For a small balcony, go with the tried and true: a set of chairs and a bistro table. “They work well for coffee and breakfast in the morning for two people,” Gignoux says. Ballard Designs has charming sets of steel cafe folding chairs, powder-coated in six colors: black, blue, light blue, orange, green, and white (\$179 for a set of two, www.ballarddesigns.com).



● For those who really want to create true living spaces outdoors, manufacturers are providing more attractive, more comfortable pieces. Consider Room & Board’s Bryant sofa: deep cushions covered in weather-resistant fabric soften a steel-and-wood frame. Gignoux cautions buyers to pay close attention to the quality of any sofa frame, as one can always replace fabric. And make sure the frame is comfortable without the cushion, she says, in case the seat needs to be used when the cushions are wet (\$2,999, www.roomandboard.com).

ROOM & BOARD



● Add some variety to a deck full of teak and metal with the clay Carilo garden stool. Glazed in blue, it is a colorful perch for plants or drinks — or unexpected guests (\$139, www.crateandbarrel.com).

CRATE AND BARREL



● The wicker weave is made more substantial with Grandin Road's Rizza outdoor chair, constructed of all-weather aluminum instead of traditional rattan and powder-coated with resin in nine colors (\$299, www.grandinroad.com). "The aluminum powder-coat is a lot lower-maintenance than teak, as teak will gray over time," Archer says.

WEST ELM



GRANDIN ROAD

● The modern-angled Gehry cube (designed by architect Frank Gehry for Heller) would work well on a balcony with a bistro table, chairs, and maybe a planter or two, Benincasa says. "I think it's cool; it's fun," she says. "Anytime you can get color into the outdoors, it adds a little something." The 19-inch-by-20-inch cube can serve as a table or stool and comes in eight colors (\$250, www.roomandboard.com).



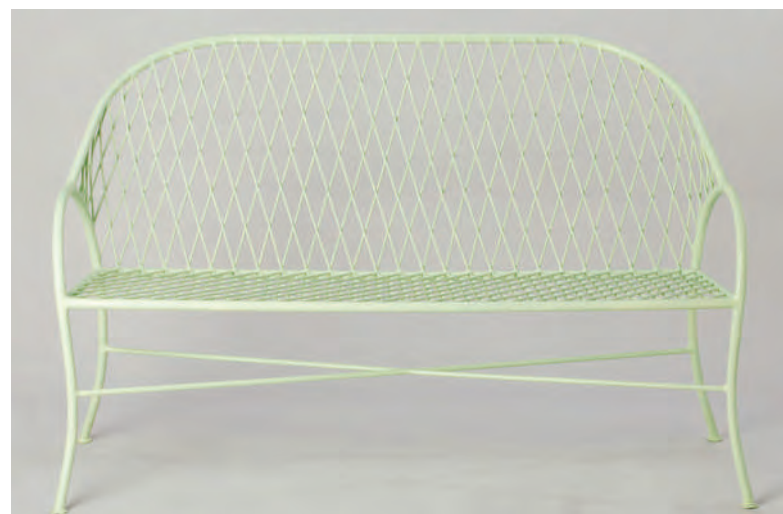
SCOUT REGALIA

● If you're looking for a spot to unwind after work, Gignoux recommends a simple seat and a place to put your feet, such as West Elm's teak and all-weather wicker Catskill outdoor chair, with optional matching ottoman. "I think that the lounge-and-ottoman combination is better than the chaise lounge almost," Gignoux says. "It's the perfect way to relax at the end of the day" (\$199-\$399, www.westelm.com).



ROOM & BOARD

● Fresh off its debut at New York's International Contemporary Furniture Fair, the SR foldable table by Los Angeles's Scout Regalia is ready to help maximize small outdoor spaces. The 26-inch-by-36-inch table folds up for storage or for hanging on a wall with optional hooks. When hung on the wall, it also operates as a magnetic whiteboard. Benincasa notes that though powder-coated steel is extremely durable outdoors, no furniture is maintenance-free: Wash occasionally with mild soap and water (\$250, www.scoutregalia.com).



TERRAIN

● Look beyond the expected furniture sets and don't be afraid to mix and match. Think hammocks, rocking chairs and benches. "I like finding unusual benches in a corner of a garden," Gignoux says. Try Terrain's Jardiniere bench, made of iron and painted mint green (\$598, www.terrain.com) for a fanciful feel. (Benincasa notes that painted metal furniture won't last as long as powder-coated metal furniture, but it usually costs less.)

● Terrain's lattice-back iron chair has a light galvanized zinc finish that ensures it won't rust when exposed to the elements. As a bonus, it's weightier than plastic. "We've seen people requesting substantial furniture for their rooftops, so it can't blow away," Archer says. "Weight is a factor" (\$248, www.terrain.com).

SHOPPER CONTINUED ON 12

The 'in' look outside

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JANUS ET CIE

● Gignoux's favorite source for outdoor furniture is Janus et Cie in Georgetown. She says that the owners will happily give advice on an outdoor furniture layout and even set up a layout for you to preview before purchase. Gignoux says she has used virtually every piece from the store in her clients' gardens, including the die-cast aluminum Forest side chair, which has won numerous awards, including the 2010 Red Dot Design Award (\$627, www.shopjanusetcie.com).

● The picnic table has had a long run as the outdoor table du jour. If you don't have time to visit barn sales and hunt down a fun vintage one, the Beer Garden outdoor dining collection (\$140-\$230, www.worldmarket.com) is the next best thing. It's made of acacia, which is somewhat less durable than teak but a good budget alternative.



WORLD MARKET

● One way to protect your outdoor furniture and make it last longer is to cover it or bring it indoors during winter. What makes Suzanne Kasler's Directoire bar cart a particularly nice piece is the fact that it can function beautifully indoors, Benincasa says (\$469, www.ballarddesigns.com). It can even be stocked inside and then brought outside, to lessen any back-and-forth while entertaining.

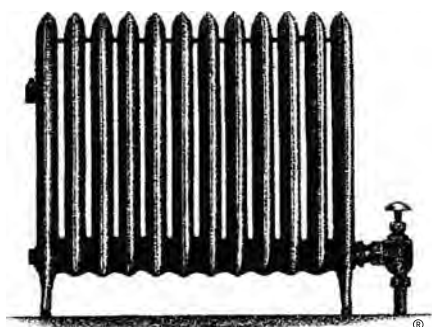


BALLARD DESIGNS



BALLARD DESIGNS

● Store off-season cushions in Ballard Designs' gray Castine storage bin, which also doubles as extra seating (\$449-\$549, www.ballarddesigns.com). The bench comes in a small or large size and is made of is all-weather rattan over powder-coated aluminum. In the past, Benincasa and Gignoux say they wouldn't have recommended wicker, but both say that today's wicker is partially made of manmade materials and therefore lasts longer.



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localliving@washpost.com

Roberts is a freelance writer. She can be found at www.lindseyroberts.com.