

HOUSE & GARDEN



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Turned out nicely

This summer's crop of outdoor furniture is the embodiment of smart design and unabashed comfort

A funny thing has happened to garden furniture: it has become comfortable. Not so long ago, the sector was dominated by straight-backed benches strewn with meagre cushions, or spiky wicker objects that creaked complainingly. In terms of design, the most one could expect was inconspicuousness.

Over the past decade or so, though, there has been an improvement in form and function. Thanks to a combination of new construction techniques and materials (such as the artfully woven resins featured in these pages) and a distinctly Mediterranean, laid-back aesthetic, this season's best furniture is durable, attractive and ergonomically shaped. These outdoor sofas, loungers, tables and chairs are places to linger; items built not simply to fit into your outside space, but to enhance it, with bold, sometimes audacious, design. A marketer might coin the term 'outdoor luxury' to sum up the trend.

Outdoor sofas embody this movement towards unbridled comfort – and size is everything. Woven resin provides the perfect material for curved, sensual forms. Westminster's large yacht-shaped 'Lunar Daybed' features, ingeniously, a fan-like attachable hood, which can be pulled up for sun protection. Barlow Tyrie's 'Dune', meanwhile, envelops its



occupants within its shell-like form. Even loungers constructed from wood and steel – two of garden furniture's most traditional materials – promise unprecedented comfort. The capacious 'Double Chaise Longue' from The Heveningham Collection features a sumptuous buttoned cushion on an elegant metal frame (the range's armchair is pictured opposite). The 'Palm Lounger', from Harrods, comprises a series of cleverly curved wooden slats arranged like a Diplodocus's vertebrae – only more comfortable to snooze on.

Chairs are similarly accommodating. The low-clung seats from Evitavoni's 'Ego' range are wider than the most generous armchair. The elegant 'Cordoba' range from Lloyd Loom (to which a sofa has just been added) is constructed with a waterproof yarn around a steel frame, and topped with plump cushions – just the thing for day-dreaming away a summer's day. Vincent Sheppard's 'Gigi Lounge' chair is similarly inviting, with an angled bowl shape and attractively pared-down, un-fussy design. Summit's 'Rockler' rocking chair, which takes the form of a pleasingly simplified armchair and features distinctive circular armrests, is perfect forolling in the shade.

For dining, Gaze Burvill's 'May Throne', with a curved back and wide arm rests, is comfortable enough to avoid the need for cushions. (The company produces a children's version of this seat, and also a 'Meander' love-seat, with two chairs intriguingly conjoined to face in opposite directions). Also good for alfresco dining are chairs from Westminster's 'Apollo' range, which are formal enough for a special occasion, yet relaxed enough not to want to leave in a hurry.

The accompanying tables express corresponding concessions to comfort and visual appeal. The baroque swirls comprising the base of the 'Norsebury' table are positively flamboyant. Vincent Sheppard also offers appealingly curvaceous tables, including the sculptural, woven 'Nimes' and 'Deauville' styles and the 'Siena' table, with its expertly worked legs.

Even benches, not usually associated with design imaginativeness, are exhibiting both structural ingenuity and sympathy with the human

Clockwise from opposite page, top Lloyd Loom's 'Cordoba' range. Chairs and 'Norsebury' table base from The Heveningham Collection. Benchmark's 'Blooming Bench'; The 'Siena' table from Vincent Sheppard. An armchair from The Heveningham Collection in shower-proof fabric

