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FIRE —
OUTSIDE



Summer in the City

The Outdoor Room trend can be found at a very high level.

By Lisa Readie Mayer

For residents of suburbia, outdoor living is easy. Just open the back door and step into an outdoor space that might be outfitted with comfortable furnishings, a fireplace or fire pit, an outdoor kitchen, dining area, cocktail bar, television, pergola, landscape plantings, and any number of other amenities. For retailers and specifiers, designing and creating such an environment is relatively easy, too, with budget often the only impediment

to delivering everything on a customer's wish list.

In the city, it's complicated. Accessing nature of any sort is difficult; creating a personal oasis is a major challenge. But some argue it's this scarcity that makes outdoor living spaces even more coveted and appreciated by city dwellers. Indeed, today, urbanites are investing in Outdoor Rooms on rooftops, terraces, balconies, and tiny backyard gardens in record numbers.

In addition to private urban residences, the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) reports the outdoor-living movement is gaining momentum in multifamily apartment buildings, office skyscrapers, hotels, restaurants, trendy bars, downtown convention centers, and other commercial spaces. It's happening in cities big and small and coast to coast, from Manhattan to Miami, Los Angeles to Louisville, Vegas to Vancouver.

Christopher Myers expects the trend to grow. Since 2005, the founder and creative director of Just Terraces, in New York City and St. Augustine, Florida, has created numerous residential and commercial Outdoor Room projects in New York, Paris, London, and other cities, and sees interest accelerating.

"We are becoming more of an urbanized country," he says. "A lot of people want to move to cities where they can walk to restaurants and find more to do. They are leaving the suburbs, where outdoor living is a normal part of life, where they're used to having a grill, a hot tub, and other features. They want those things in the city too."

Sal Finocchiaro of NYC Fireplaces & Outdoor Kitchens in Maspeth, New York, says his company has seen a 30% increase in Outdoor Room projects in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and other New York City boroughs over the last five years. During that same period, Jake Gazlay, Design director of Chicago Roof Deck & Garden, has noted "a massive trend in the development of rooftops into valuable square footage."

Beyond creating an enjoyable space for relaxing and entertaining, there is a pragmatic incentive behind the urban Outdoor Room movement. Real estate experts estimate a rooftop deck or other outdoor living space can add 6% to 8% to the valuation of a property, and cut time on the market by up to 50%.

"Balcony and rooftop outdoor living spaces increase the usable square footage of a property, adding value in a highly competitive urban real estate market," says Mitch Slater, owner of Danver Stainless Outdoor Kitchens, and Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens.

Multifamily Outdoor Spaces

This is particularly true of high-end multifamily rental properties, condos, and townhomes, where tenants increasingly expect luxury outdoor spaces. "High-impact outdoor spaces give the property an edge, and can help developers attract residents and succeed," according to Slater.

Gazlay says demand for outdoor spaces has triggered an "amenity war" among developers. "It started with tricked-out lobbies and fitness centers, but now is focused on rooftops and outdoor living areas," he says. "New-construction buildings have set the bar high and older buildings are retrofitting their rooftops into a valuable outdoor amenity. You'll notice the featured sale image for most properties is typically a glamour shot of the outdoor space. It's become a priority

for developers, and has even moved into the college housing space.

"We have transformed rooftops into lush and leafy gardens, sport-court play spaces, and hospitality-level entertainment spaces with TVs, outdoor kitchens, kegerators, and Jacuzzis," Gazlay says.

Independent rep Peter Ross, president of Home and Hearth in Sacramento, California, has been involved in "a lot" of outdoor living projects in multifamily apartments and townhome developments in the last few years.

"It's a race to the top with amenities in the common areas," he says. "They want

swimming pools, outdoor entertaining spaces, outdoor kitchens, fire pits, luxurious seating," he says. "We're seeing it in big cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Denver, as well as mid-size cities throughout the West."

Gazlay says some cities have mandated or incentivized the creation of Green roofs on buildings to help meet energy goals, absorb storm water runoff, and reduce the urban heat-island effect, giving the trend another push. "Incorporating a beautiful and enjoyable rooftop amenity for residents also satisfies the Green-roof requirement, so it's a win-win," he says.



Roof top design by Chicago Roof Deck & Garden.

Challenges and Complexities

Outdoor Rooms in city settings may offer spectacular views, but they can present design and construction challenges that would never be an issue in a typical suburban backyard project.

Often the first hurdle – particularly when retrofitting an older building – is getting approval from a building's condo or co-op board. "There are different laws in every city and different bylaws in every building, governing what you can and

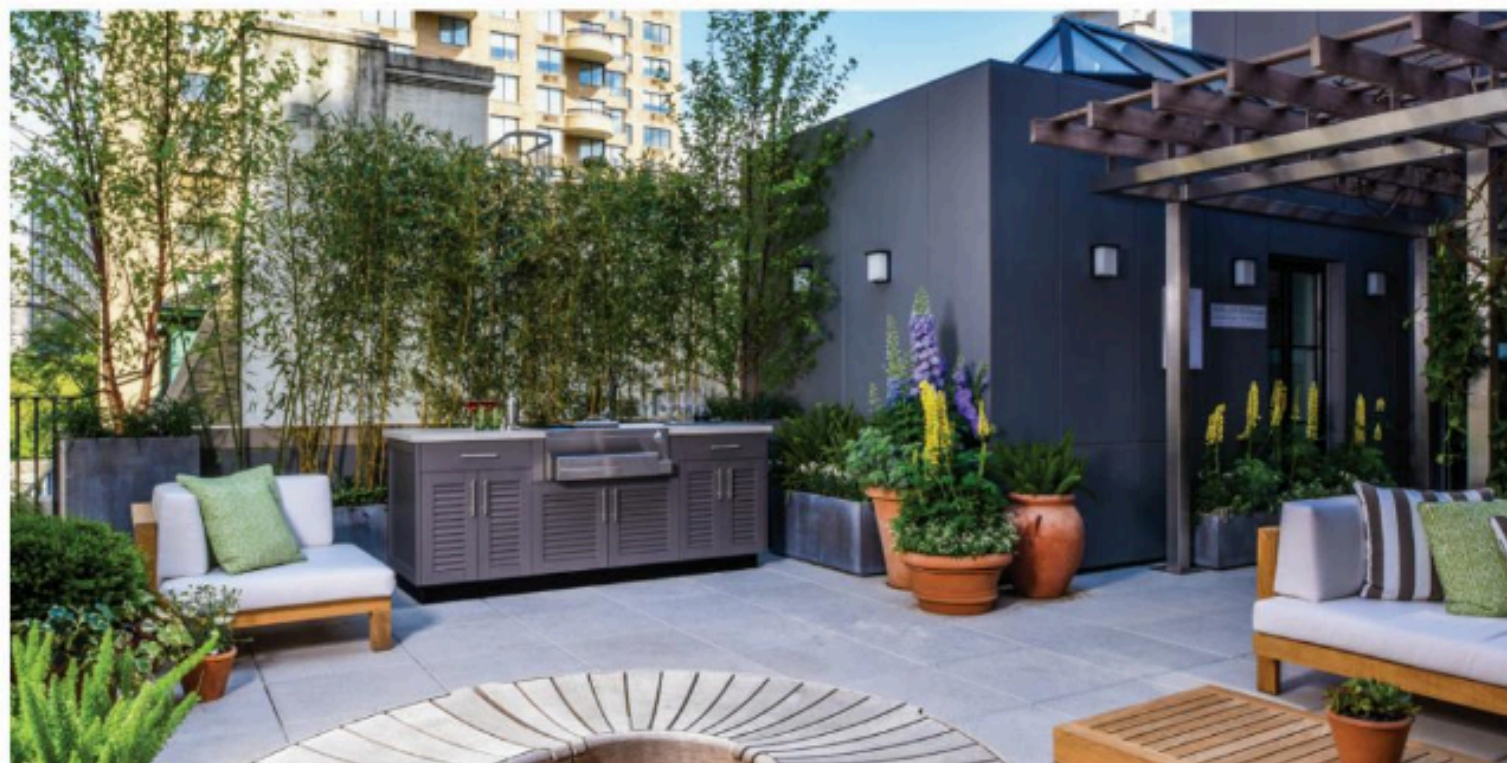
Some buildings require flood tests to ensure projects drain properly, and insist on sound abatement to mitigate noises and vibrations from hot tubs, water-feature pumps, and other elements.

Space limitations can restrict the size, scope and selection of elements in urban projects. According to *The New York Times*, the average Manhattan balcony is 50 sq. ft., terrace, 650 sq. ft., roof deck, 748 sq. ft., and brownstone garden, 676 sq. ft.

careful consideration and orchestration from steps A to Z."

"Everything takes a lot more effort," adds Myers. "It's not like you can pull the truck into the driveway, unload it, and walk it around to the backyard. Everything needs to be brought up in an elevator or by crane."

And then there's parking (or lack thereof). Finocchiaro estimates his store racked up \$10,000 in New York City parking tickets last year alone. The line item, along with



Kips Bay Showhouse in New York by Denver.

can't do," says Myers. "Some buildings are very cooperative; others don't want anything on the roof because they're afraid of the added weight or the potential for flooding from the irrigation system. There are sometimes issues between residents; one neighbor wants privacy fencing on their terrace, and another complains it blocks their view.

"Companies like mine are go-to resources because, after 15 years, we are used to the process of board approvals and building permits, and we know how to make peace in the building," says Myers.

Engineering studies are often required to determine how much added weight the roof or terrace will support and whether structural reinforcements are needed.

Expectations and demands of rich-and-sometimes-famous clientele can be heightened – and quirkier – in cities, according to the experts. "One lady wouldn't let us arrive to work on her rooftop space until 10am when the nanny got there," recalls Finocchiaro.

Delivery logistics – rarely given more than a cursory thought in suburban projects – present unique challenges in urban locales. "Creating an Outdoor Room in an urban environment requires well-thought-out job sequencing," says John Algozzini, director of Design for K & D Landscape Management in Rockdale, Illinois. "The size of delivery trucks; how much material can be stored on site; rush-hour traffic – they all need

greater umbrella and liability insurance requirements, is part of the overhead cost of doing business in the city, he says.

Urban projects also take longer to complete. "Timing is the number one bugaboo and biggest source of tension," says Myers. "Most call in April and want the space ready for a Memorial Day party. Between engineering studies, board approvals, and wait times for custom pieces, it doesn't happen fast in the city."

"The timetable from design and permitting, through project completion is usually much longer than customers expect," agrees Gazlay. He says the process takes at least four to five months, but often eight or nine months, or even longer, depending on complexity and scope.

Outfitting the Space

Just like suburbanites, city dwellers want a haven where they can relax and entertain outdoors. But the considerations that inform the selection of Outdoor Room elements are very different in urban projects.

The view, of course, is often the focal point of the design and dictates the selection and placement of all elements in the space. But given a rooftop's harsh microclimate, with strong winds between skyscrapers and unfiltered sun exposure, extending the use of the outdoor space is "typically priority one," according to Gazlay. He says this might involve incorporating an overhead structure for shade and shelter from the elements, as well as a fire pit, fire table, fireplace, or heaters to add warmth during chilly conditions.

Weight is another key factor. Elements must be heavy enough (or secured) so they won't blow off onto the street below, but light enough to travel in an elevator and be supported by the roof or terrace. For these reasons, materials like faux-stone, veneers and porcelain, are popular in urban projects, as are lightweight modular cabinetry systems for outdoor kitchens.

Gazlay says an outdoor kitchen is a "must have" in urban alfresco entertaining spaces. "It may be as simple as a freestanding or built-in grill, or as complex as installing every appliance and detail found in an indoor kitchen," he says.

According to Myers, a grill is the hub of an urban outdoor kitchen, and some clients even opt for a second specialty grill or smoker. However, he says one element is often intentionally omitted from city projects: an outdoor sink. "It's very expensive to tie into the building's sewer system and install thermally-treated lines," he says. "So we try to discourage sinks."

Fire and housing codes, which vary from city to city, dictate the fuel source for grills and fire features. "Natural-gas hook-ups are allowed on rooftops, balconies, and terraces in New York City," says Myers, "but propane is forbidden." Many cities prohibit charcoal and other solid fuels, while electric grills and fireplaces, and gel-fueled fireplaces and fire pits, are generally accepted.

"At the risk of sounding like Captain Obvious, scale and utility are major drivers when selecting what goes into a small urban

Outdoor Room," according to Algozzini. "I try to incorporate elements that are multipurpose and multifunctional. For example, if the client wants a fire pit, I'll recommend something portable that can be moved out of the way for a party, and I'll have a solid top made so it can function as a table when not in use."

spaces must be ADA-compliant. Danver has responded with modular outdoor kitchens in wheelchair-accessible cabinet heights, and Lynx offers an ADA-compliant grill with a lower profile, side-mounted handle, extra insulation at the front, and greater toe-kick clearances on the cart base.



5th Ave New York rooftop from NYC Fireplaces & Outdoor Kitchens.

He notes that, unlike sprawling, in-ground suburban gardens, urban Outdoor Rooms rely on planter boxes and other vessels to hold flowers and greenery. "Containers for rotating annuals are my clients' most-requested element," Algozzini says.

"Containers dictate plant selection, from the shape of shrubbery, to the height of flowers, right down to the size of the root ball," adds Myers. "You can't bring huge trees and plants into an urban environment." *The New York Times* reports bottom-heavy plants such as evergreen trees, are more practical on roof decks and terraces than "lollipop-shaped" trees that might blow over, and drop leaves. And, according to Houzz, Green "living walls," vine-covered lattice panels, and large potted plants are often incorporated as room dividers and privacy screens.

In multifamily properties, all elements in common outdoor living

Because storage is not needed in communal outdoor kitchens, Danver recently introduced its Post & Panel System with stationary panels that look like premium cabinet fronts, but don't open for storage. The panels weigh and cost less than traditional outdoor cabinetry, and are easily removed and replaced if damaged.

Fire pits are desired in multifamily common spaces, but Finocchiaro says, "they are tough to include because codes require double-glass or other protective insulation. It's easier to do a fireplace in a public space."

Design Aesthetic

People everywhere want an Outdoor Room to look, feel, and function like an extension of the indoor living space. In the city, that often means incorporating luxury materials, high-end furnishings, and fine design. "Residents have spent a

great deal on their interior spaces, and they want the same level of detail outdoors,” says Myers.

The website Houzz reports the majority of urban outdoor-living “ideabooks” share common design preferences: contemporary styles, sleek lines, space-saving elements, and gray, white, and black color palettes.

Although Algozzini describes his urban backyard projects as having a “less-definable style,” with “sophisticated, transitional designs” and mixed materials, Gazlay says most of his urban clients are interested in a contemporary-industrial aesthetic.

“They are open to pushing the envelope in terms of new materials, finishes, and systems,” he says. “Outdoor products have dramatically changed from five years ago. Styles and aesthetics have become really

innovative and high end. We’re now seeing more outdoor-rated decorative items and accessories like you would find indoors.”

That includes outdoor kitchens. According to Slater, modular cabinetry systems are increasingly preferred in urban spaces, because they closely resemble the sophisticated, contemporary cabinetry found in interior kitchens. Finocchiaro says his modular outdoor kitchen customers typically choose sleek, flat-panel doors, and powder-coat finishes.

According to Myers, besides looking cool, a modern aesthetic serves a practical purpose in urban spaces. “Clean lines are easier to clean,” he says. “It’s amazing how much soot and dust collect in a city environment. Wicker furniture and rustic elements have nooks that are hard to keep clean.”

Developing More Urban Outdoor Living Business

Designing and building urban Outdoor Rooms from conception to the cocktail-party-finish, requires a specialized skill set that many retailers say is beyond their capability. But there is significant business potential in partnering with specifiers.

“It’s imperative that retailers be ready to support urban designers with products tailored to these spaces,” says Myers. “Retailers don’t have to be able to handle the entire project – we are experts in that. But they need to be hyper-aware of the specific needs of urban Outdoor Rooms.”

Finocchiaro says NYC Fireplaces & Outdoor Kitchens partners with landscape architects, designers, architects, and builders, supplying grills and outdoor living products on custom-built projects, as well as installing modular kitchens from Brown Jordan and Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet. “We have a reputation now, so they reach out to us,” says Finocchiaro. “And, we call on them, too. We do a lot of Instagram marketing targeted to (specifiers).”

Gazlay says the designers at his firm stay abreast of outdoor living trends and products by monitoring social media, and attending trade shows and industry functions. “Many industry partners come in to our office and present education sessions for our staff, or we meet with furniture vendors in their design studios,” he adds. “Every season we add to our library of vendors.”

Algozzini reads trade publications, and relies on retail and distributor partners as product resources. He finds continuing-education classes and lunch-and-learns offered by industry associations, manufacturers, and distributors beneficial – particularly during his slower season from December through February.

On a hot day last summer, New York City-based gel fireplace manufacturer Hearth Cabinet, invited architects, interior designers, developers, and contractors for a “lunch-and-learn” (and a glass of Frosé) on indoor- and outdoor-hearths approved by the city’s fire and building departments.

Finocchiaro has developed an additional revenue stream by offering monthly maintenance services for common-use outdoor kitchens in



Roof top design by Just Terraces in New York City.

multifamily properties. The retailer deep cleans grills, inspects them for damage, and makes necessary repairs. He says replacement parts can bring in up to \$3,000 per year per project. "These grills take tremendous abuse," he explains.

Wish Lists

Urban outdoor living experts say the availability of products designed with the scale, functionality, and desired aesthetic for urban projects is growing, but some needs are still unmet. Here is their wish list:

Finocchiario would like to see more durable, commercial-quality grills that can stand up to the rigors of a multifamily installation. "The residents are paying a premium for the apartment, so they want a high-end grill, but we definitely need something more heavy-duty with easy-to-replace parts," he says. He says more options for linear, modern outdoor fireplaces are needed, as well as fire pits with protective glass to satisfy safety codes in multifamily and commercial settings.

Gazlay says there is a need for outdoor products that can withstand extreme weather fluctuations in the Midwest. "So many customers come in with ideas from California and Arizona that we can't do because it won't survive," he says. "In addition, multifamily developers don't want to deal with cushions. They want durable, heavy-duty, comfortable sling furniture that looks good, stays clean, and won't get blown around on a roof deck." He says his team has also noticed a market for quality, non-combustible decking systems beyond porcelain tile and concrete pavers.



Myers, too, wishes for advanced flooring options. "We need a simple, lightweight surface that could be placed atop an existing roof without damaging the membrane, and has a raised pedestal system to create a flat grade," he says. "It would save so much time. There's a lot of potential in flooring."

He says there is also untapped potential in high-end protective covers. "It's a harsh environment 40 floors up," Myers says. "It's windy and abusive, and


these beautiful pieces of furniture and appliances are taking a beating. We get custom covers made for our clients, but they cost a fortune. People don't want to be looking through the sliding glass wall of their luxurious living room at awful, baggy, zip-tied covers on the terrace for four months of winter.

"There is a need for beautiful, modern covers in a neutral material, designed to be skin tight for a sculptural feel. Manufacturers should really consider creating covers that would be nicer to look at."



He suggests that retailers consider providing ongoing Outdoor Room maintenance services for urban dwellers. "Our clients tend to travel a great deal and might have multiple homes, so they aren't there every day," says Myers. "They need someone to check on the hot tub, re-program the outdoor lighting for daylight savings time, make sure the flowers look great, service the grill, oil the wood furniture, even take the pigeon nests out of the plants. It could be a huge business."

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