

Is bringing the indoors out and outdoors in a sensible trend?

There are two parallel trends in home decor today. One is giving your outdoor recreation area more amenities. The other is bringing elements of nature indoors. Sometimes though, I think that what we do to our living space is not only unnatural, but also rather silly. Consider any section of our suburbs. We easily see the effort to bring the rooms of a home outside — to unpredictable weather, allergies, sunburn, bugs and other surprises courtesy of Mother Nature. And what about our outdoor living rooms? Long, low lounges, padded chairs, toss pillows, silk flowers in vases instead of real delphinium in the garden borders.

Not to mention outdoor showers, hot tubs and more. Visiting friends one evening, I noticed their neighbor — a blonde, Rubenesque woman — was mostly submerged in her hot tub. The deck furnishings were tasteful: weathered teak, mini-jungles in the planters, light brown bath towels and such. However, when the ample woman left the tub, she found that she was locked out of the house. Yelping for help from family members inside, the pink lady, with a wrapped tan towel around her middle, looked like a Burritts frankfurter in a bun while running around the house. One neighbor has still

more indoor amenities in their yard: a conversation group of sofas and chair around a \$400 copper dish mounted on iron stand — their outdoor fireplace. Certainly we need not mention the outdoor kitchen appliances. Beyond all kinds of stoves, grills and baking devices, some folks actually have an outdoor kitchen, whether it is a brick-walled patio or a stone grotto affair complete with small fridge and bar. Outdoor lighting is usually solar.

All these things are lovely and my problem, however, is not bringing the inside out, but bringing the outside in. Gardening alone means tracking in mud (mop), sand (sweep) and dust (sneeze). I am hardly alone bringing the outdoors in. In San Francisco, a beautiful city, although a stucco, cement and paved city, colorful and exotic flowers in planters abound. However, people there actually buy pots of grass to grace their coffee tables. Are mini-mowers next? Will we bring all the outdoor chores in, too?

In Michigan, we treasure our wildlife, we smile at a rabbit in the garden or a wading bird on the beach. However, perhaps we overdo wildlife inside. Although caged birds are no longer common, we have birds in all genres of home décor, patterned

rugs to wallpaper. My dentist has an entire flock of pewter ducks in a mobile hanging over my mouth while he root canals. His air conditioner puts them in motion.

I recently reviewed a book on North American owls. It included a CD of birdcalls: If I chose to, I could hear them with my first morning coffee. Literally, what a hoot. Still more, there are clocks for the home now that, rather than ring or chime the

hour, the hours sound off with various bird calls. Thus we might have:

“What time is it, dear?”
“It’s Whippoorwill, nearly Redpoll.”

I’m not sure where we are going, where we will want to live; and, perhaps, where we will be most suited to live. Things go round. 150 years ago, Thoreau said that we need the “tonic of wildness” and nature. And, more recently — in the 1970s, American architect Buckminster

Fuller said, “Nature is trying very hard to make us succeed, but nature does not depend on us. We are not the only experiment.”

So it is that we experiment with nature, too, in or out of homes. It’s good to keep in mind that nature is the boss, though.

That’s sensible, I think.

Sally Ketchum writes from both the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan.



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Local columnist

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