



HGTV's
Sarah Richardson

Resort to the

Outdoors

By Diane Tierney

Homeowners have come a long way since their backyards were just a patch of grass and a picnic table.

Today's backyards have resort-style sophistication and such luxurious design elegance that the line between indoor and outdoor living space is getting blurred.

With the growing trend in outdoor kitchens and natural gas grills, backyards are becoming the place to relax, entertain and enjoy family and friends. Even hot tubs have gone high-tech to defy the elements—they now have waterproof TVs, DVDs and stereo systems.

Sarah Richardson, co-creator, co-producer and host of HGTV Canada's "design inc." has seen such a movement to outdoor living that, in addition to her show and line of upholstered furniture, she's launched a line of patio furniture called Sarah Richardson Outdoor for Andrew Richard Designs.

Says Richardson, "Canadians have such a short season for being able to spend time outdoors relaxing that we want to make our environment as comfortable as possible whenever we can. We're trying to pretend we don't live in Canada."

Much in the same way today's bathrooms have been turned into hotel-like spas, she says backyards are being converted into mini-resorts.





Create your own
backyard resort with
Napoleon's stainless-steel
built-in natural gas grill,
natural gas patio heater
and stainless steel natural
gas outdoor fireplace

(Products may not be exactly as shown)

continued from 16

“People are saying ‘I work hard, my life is busy and I don’t want to have a second property to maintain.’ Instead of buying a cottage, chalet or time-share condo and spending time in traffic, people are taking that money and investing it in their backyard,” says Richardson.

“Sophisticated outdoor living spaces are an extension of just how savvy homeowners have become about all things related to home design. Designing for the outdoors is about capturing every possible moment for relaxation,” says Richardson.

She believes patio furniture was instrumental in getting more people outdoors. “The development of all-weather materials has allowed us to elevate our expectations for how beautiful a space can be. The furniture and fabrics are so durable today, that we no longer have to drag furniture into the garage every time it rains. It’s always there, ready for us when we are,” she says.

And beyond chairs and tables, there are sofas, loveseats, loungers, daybeds with canopies and more. Richardson’s line has about 25 pieces from coffee and dining tables, to three different styles of sofas. Three wicker styles and colours are available and about 50 different cushion fabrics.

When designing your outdoor living area, think about how you are going to use the space. Are you an avid gardener – or not? If your desire is to have a lush garden with fabulous plants, be prepared to spare the time (or money) to maintain it. If what you really want is a space mainly for entertaining friends and family, then consider having a hot tub, natural gas grill and spacious seating area.

“My advice is to be practical about who you are and how you are going to use the space. Most people want to be able to just walk outside and let their enjoyment begin.” Those who entertain frequently and can afford some luxuries are looking at intricate landscaped gardens, hot tubs, pools and amazing

continued 20

Sarah Richardson

is hailed as one of Canada’s foremost “stylemakers”. Best known as the Gemini Award winning host, co-producer and co-creator of design inc. on HGTV, Sarah Richardson also runs her own successful design firm and a signature line of upholstered furniture.

Her work is featured in design publications in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Sarah Richardson’s latest venture is to bring her design knowledge and distinctive style outdoors with a new line of outdoor furnishings, which you can preview by going to sarahrichardsondesign.com

Richardson shared her insights on outdoor living space with Bestthings for this story.



Sarah relaxes on the “Flared Daybed” from her new Outdoor Furniture Collection



“Homeowners want their backyards to be beautiful, and they also want it to be low-maintenance”

- Carlo Mann, Manor Landscaping

outdoor kitchens. Richardson says, “We don’t live in California or Florida, but we enjoy our summer. A natural gas grill, outdoor dining and lounge area are sufficient for most people.” Other extras like a natural gas outdoor fireplace and natural gas patio and pool heaters will certainly extend the use of your backyard by keeping you warm well into fall.

If you plan to upgrade your outdoor space in stages, consider the benefits of pre-piping your backyard for natural gas hook-ups. Look for an HVAC contractor with a licensed gas fitter. Pre-piping will simplify installation as you add outdoor natural gas appliances over time. At the time of installation you can choose either permanent or quick connect options. A quick connect is an installation option that gives you the freedom to connect and disconnect your natural gas appliance quickly and easily yourself if you want to move it or to store it for the season.

“If it’s not good quality, you’re going to be replacing it sooner rather than later,” she says.

Carlo Mann of Manor Landscaping in Guelph, Ont. has been beautifying backyards for more than 25 years. He’s also seen an increasing sophistication in homeowners’ desire for outdoor design elegance—areas of the landscape that act like individual room settings—a quiet lounge area for reading, a bar area for conversation and drinks, a cooking area and a dining space.

“Homeowners want their backyard to be beautiful, and they also want it to be

A natural gas grill makes an ideal cooking feature in any outdoor kitchen oasis or living space

For future developments in outdoor living, Richardson thinks homeowners will want a roof over their heads. “Having a roof of some kind allows you to be outside even if it’s raining. Or it creates a shady environment that allows you to stay out longer, rather than in the intense sun,” says Richardson. “I think people will want less grass too, unless they have young kids.”

She also believes there will be an increasing interest in multi-function features such as small pools for relaxing that turn into swim-against-the-current pools for exercising. Or, swimming pools with waterfalls and fountains that are just as much an architectural feature as they are a place to swim. “There’s a lot of cross-over in design now,” she says.

With outdoor living products, Richardson says avoid the temptation to get the look for less and instead look for quality. “Anything that’s left outdoors needs to be durable – whether it’s furniture, appliances or anything else.”

low-maintenance. Lawn and garden care is usually reduced to the absolute minimum,” he says. “So for gardens we choose shrubs, trees, perennials and native Ontario plant species that don’t require much upkeep.”

Stone and interlocking brick patios are more popular in his business than wood decks and poured concrete. “After a stone patio is laid, there’s no further care required,” he says. “If the preparation work is done right, you shouldn’t have weeds growing between the stones or shifting pavers. But if there is a problem, you just replace or re-set the stone.”

continued from 20

Garden architecture such as gazebos and arbours provide additional character and often a focal point to a yard. “Also, water elements such as ponds and waterfalls are increasing in popularity because they are attractive and the sound of water is soothing,” he says.

Mann says lighting options are expanding to extend the amount of time homeowners can spend outside. Options range from tiny lanterns to light a walkway, to stair inserts for safety, to tall lampposts. With low-voltage or solar-powered types available, there’s lighting to suit any budget and style.

To dress up your outdoor living rooms, a variety of décor accessories are gracing backyards much in the same way they do indoor rooms. Elizabeth Law, owner of Elizabeth Interiors in Burlington, Ont., a 32,000-square-foot store of furniture and accessories, sells planters, urns and statuary that add attractive ambiance to outdoor spaces. Choose from a variety of unique items ranging from formal, Egyptian-style obelisks to whimsical wall plaques that are purely for décor aesthetics and yet weather-resistant.

If you lack a green thumb and garden care isn’t in your budget, consider the many great imitations available. Law’s realistic-looking, indoor/outdoor shrubs and trees look lush year-round no matter what the weather. Choose from small round globes that look like pruned cedars, majestic seven-foot spirals that look like junipers, or formal square hedges that imitate boxwood. Topiaries and bonsai styles are also available. There’s a great imitation to suit your garden style from country to classic, and they will always look perfect since they are made of a durable PVC-type material.

You can also conserve water by installing artificial grass. Now available for residential use, Artificial Grass and Landscaping of Stoney Creek, Ont. can install a perfect turf for about \$10 per square foot.

Ivan Couto, president, says, “Most homeowners buy our artificial lawns because they like the time-saving aspect of it—not having to mow or water saves time and money. The bottom layer of the turf carpet is a rubber mesh and the grass is stitched to it. The mesh and rubber granules are made from recycled tires, making it an environment-friendly option too.”

The turf is rolled out and fastened to the ground with landscaping spikes. You can choose a solid green blade colour or a two-toned combination, which some people think looks even more natural.

“Rainwater percolates through the mesh layer and ensures that there are no puddles,” says Couto. Sunlight does not fade or harm the grass. The fibres have a UV coating and can withstand sun, heat, animal urine, wind, snow, salt and ice. It’s safe for children and pets too.

Says Richardson, “With so many TV shows showing how easy entertaining at home can be, we’ve become more casual about it. Our approach to entertaining is more about spending time with people who are important to us and recognizing that it doesn’t matter what you are serving, but who you are with. What’s important is that you are willing to invite people into your personal space. That’s really the gift,” she says. 🍷

For more information contact **HGTV Canada’s design inc.** or **Sarah Richardson Design** at designinc.ca or sarahrichardsondesign.com

Manor Landscaping at 519 763-0634 or manorscape.ca

Elizabeth Interiors at 905 333-6670, 888 846-7845 or elizabethinteriors.com

Artificial Grass and Landscaping 905 643-5000, 1 877 88-GRASS or aglgrass.com

Napoleon Products at napoleongrills.com

Natural Gas Products at uniongas.com



Manor Landscaping backyard renovation featuring a built-in natural gas grill

Natural Gas grillingFACTS

- Grilling with natural gas costs much less than using propane. Based on April 2007 rates, if you grill 70 times a year your natural gas cost would be \$28 compared to \$95 for propane (based on a 20 lb. tank)
- A natural gas grill gives you even heat settings without hot spots
- Natural gas is lighter than air so it will rise into the atmosphere in the event of a leak
- A quick connect natural gas hook-up means connecting, disconnecting and relocating the grill is easy

grillingTIPS

- The average cook requires 400 sq. inches of grilling area
- Side burners, cutting boards and extra shelves on the inside of the grill make cooking a full meal more convenient
- Stainless steel is considered to be top quality material for a grill
- Choose a grill with two burners for better heat distribution and control, and a built-in thermostat helps ensure your meal is cooked
- A drainage systems that gets rid of fat and drippings helps avoid flare-ups
- You can convert a propane grill to natural gas; ask your retailer