



Chicago's Merchandise Mart is the site of the International Casual Furniture & Accessories Market.

HOORAY

for the Great Outdoors

TO PARAPHRASE ED SULLIVAN, THE INTERNATIONAL CASUAL FURNITURE & Accessories Market is a REALLY big show.

How big? Try 350 exhibiting manufacturers in approximately 350,000 square feet of permanent and temporary showroom space in Chicago's Merchandise Mart. Adding to its importance is that it's the only show endorsed by the International Casual Furnishings Association.

By DUKE RATLIFF

Scheduled for Sept. 21-24, the show features the Garden Accessories Courtyard, a 10,000-square-foot area that will be home to exhibitors showcasing outdoor accessories, outdoor lighting, hearth products, tabletop, rugs, pottery, statuary and more.

The Courtyard, which debuted last year, is an example of the increased interest in outdoor living. As consumers continue to look to bring the outdoors in, vendors are responding with expanding offerings in the outdoor accessories category.

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Aglo's Yacht Club from Its Disney Resort Collection



The Veracruz Collection from Pride Family Brands



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This year's show includes Roger Thomas, executive vice president design for Wynn Design and Development who will headline as a keynote speaker.

Thomas was responsible for creating the interiors of Wynn Las Vegas and Encore at Wynn Las Vegas. During his keynote speech, Thomas will showcase his hotel design work and discuss his philosophy and approach to designing outdoor spaces. He also will investigate the trend to move indoor furnishings outdoors and outdoor furnishings indoors.

"Casual is the global direction of choice for change in living, entertaining and travel, as well as fashion and food," Thomas said.

Vendors at this year's show are reacting to outdoor living trends, along with economic pressure on consumers. So attendees should expect to see more lower-priced goods.

At the same time, exhibitors will show more complete collections to suit furniture retailers who are increasingly stocking casual furniture year round. Meanwhile, look for accessories suppliers to amp up their offerings as consumers will purchase accent items to refresh their furnishings during tough economic times.

Doug Peppler, vice president of sales for Agio, said the company comes to market with items reflecting an evolution in materials and design.

"Alternative tabletops have been a consistent draw for consumers," Peppler said. "Agio continues to conduct a significant amount of research and development in order to develop new looks in stone and marble composites, as well as porcelain and glass-top tables. Another interesting shift we're seeing now is a movement toward the cleaner lines and angles for a soft, modern look."

Peppler added that the company meets these design motifs with a variety of collections, including woven and aluminum offerings. Also in the spotlight for Agio is its Disney Resort Collection, originally introduced last year.

"The [Disney] collections have successfully captured the essence of the Disney resorts," Peppler said. "The details are meticulously crafted and exude a relaxing and sophisticated appeal."

Pride Family Brands is introducing the Veracruz Collection, featuring "old world styling" at the show. The line uses a cast-aluminum canvas and intertwined elements to convey beauty and craftsmanship.

Included within the Veracruz Collection is deep seating with the all new crescent sofa and love seat as well as cushioned and sling dining. Each piece in the collection is sealed with a powder-coat finish and highlighted with a hand-applied antiquing process.

Gloster is introducing Cloud, a modular and flexible outdoor seating collection comprised of 30 pieces. Each unit is available in a choice of three fabric colors: taupe, onyx and ivory. ■