



Live — Work — Play

INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER RICHARD FRINIER

Designer, Richard Frinier answers questions about the present and future of outdoor furnishings trends and design.

Furniture World spoke with Richard Frinier, the iconic outdoor furniture and fabric designer whose work encompasses hundreds of collections and thousands of individual product designs across furniture, textiles, lighting and accessories. These range from soft modern and contemporary to transitional, traditional and exotic forms with an unmistakable essence of understated modernity blended with neoclassicism.

Due to his extraordinary passion for and dedication to his work, Frinier has garnered over 90 design excellence and career achievement awards. He is regarded as one of the premier designers of indoor/outdoor furniture and textiles in the world for his design innovation and longstanding commitment to the design trade and home furnishings industries.

Major Trends

Question: What are some of the major trends you see in the market with regard to outdoor furniture styles, colors and utility?

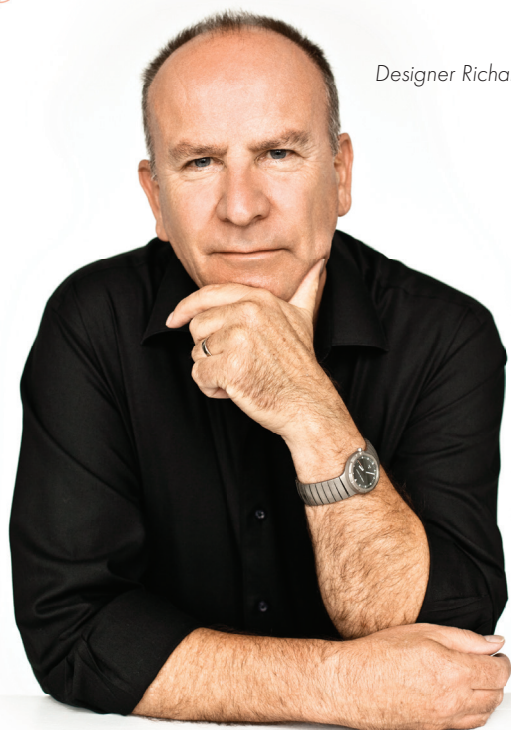
Answer: It is a very interesting time for research, design, and development to create products that meet the moment and create what comes next.

During the pandemic, people around the world were required to re-prioritize, reorganize and in many cases reinvent much of their lives. Originally, this was out of necessity, but more and more by choice and by design.

We used to talk about blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor living. Now we are blurring the lines as to how, when and where we are working and learning. This has resulted in making all of us more open and imaginative as to how we create and adapt our previously personal spaces. This is strongly influencing and fueling popular live-work-play social trends that our industry is or should be greatly benefiting from at this time and going forward.

Prior to the pandemic, major contract and hospitality furniture manufacturers and marketers capitalized on the reverse concept — making the office feel like home. It is no surprise that our interest, desire and need to transform areas of our personal spaces have found our industry blurring and crossing if not erasing these real or imaginary lines. For those who embrace this concept and trend, there is potential to increase market shares overall.

Trending Indoor & Outdoor



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blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor living. Now we are blurring the lines as to how, when and where we are working and learning.”

Question: What advances in outdoor furniture materials are or have the potential to advance the category?

Answer: Technical fabrics will be a big part of creating different options for seating design and construction. Recycled-content textiles will continue to evolve and grow in scope, availability and popularity. From a design perspective, I embrace this evolution, as it builds upon and capitalizes on the remarkable performance fabrics we all use and enjoy today.

Comfort is always key for everyone, so I like to recommend that retailers and buyers always sit-test a range of furniture styles with an array of seating options from sling to strap to cushions (thin and thick) to woven materials and wood, etc., to fully understand and appreciate the available options and differences. People often surprise themselves with their final choices when they take the time to sit-test the furniture, just as they would test-drive an automobile.

The furniture industry is a fashion

industry, so color trending is an important part of product development and not just part of the storytelling and marketing of new designs. Furniture and textile products in the outdoor category are driven by the materials we use, including

performance, viability, availability, and the ways in which we are able to transform them with various finishing techniques. People have often heard me say, “If it is trending — it is ending.” Meaning, a color trend may only last one or two more seasons by the time it is recognized as a trend. It is then seen everywhere, often followed by nowhere. Before consumers love or hate a design or its color, it is up to manufacturers, retailers, distributors, interior and exterior space designers to research, develop, sell, distribute and specify a diverse offering of products and textiles they have uniquely curated for their following - indoors or outside.

texture styles is very common and popular today. It creates a visual relief from looking at too many pieces that are all the same and it can make outdoor areas and rooms much more flexible, functional and efficient.

In my opinion, people should spend time in the outdoor spaces they plan to create after removing or moving aside any furnishings that are already there. That helps them more easily imagine and visualize how they want to use these open areas, what they want to replace, add, edit away or simply reconfigure and refresh with new fabrics. The smallest of spaces can be transformed into a personal retreat — even if it is just one chair and a small table on a balcony. More open and generous spaces provide a blank slate or stage upon which to build the outdoor experience each person dreams about for themselves, their family and friends. People don’t need to do it all at once. Adding to a space over time is a mindful and successful approach that also provides retailers with an opportunity to follow up and assist customers.

Designing Outdoor Spaces

Question: Is there a significant difference between how consumers should approach furnishing their outdoor and indoor spaces?

Answer: Mixing and matching furni-

Retail Displays

Question: How might outdoor furniture manufacturers and retailers’ better mer-

chandise and display outdoor furnishings?

Answer: I cannot emphasize enough the importance of visual merchandising and display as well as photography. Because we only have so much space here to share ideas, I will emphasize that if a manufacturer or retailer does not have talent inside their company to realize their brand visually, they need to research, identify and hire the very best people who can bring this to them and their following.

The use of CGI photography is spreading rapidly, and some do it better than others. It is not just about layering furnishings with an ocean or mountain view in the background. It is about creating visuals that draw people in and evoke emotion and experience. I am starting to see this with a few, usually high-end, brands. Again, if you do not have in-house talent, you must bring in new talent to do it right.

For retailers, I highly recommend that they make sure the products they purchase for stores and showrooms are made by brands with the best marketing, visual display and merchandising assets. An old adage comes to mind, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

What's Missing Today?

Question: In a 2016 Furniture World interview you told us. "Over the course of my career, I have approached design as an art historian, always looking for what came before and what is missing, including indigenous cultures that had not yet been influenced by international style." What do you see that came before and is missing right now that is likely to affect what consumers will find at retail in the coming years?

Answer: I have been practicing my craft for over 40 years. In that time, I have seen a lot of design cycles, market launches and trends come and go. Yet, there are still voids in the marketplace. I am always in search of what is missing and, on a journey, to imagine and realize what can be.

I am humbled to have created designs

that have resonated with others and either remained in production or been around for many years. Two of these designs, Daydream and Orbit, created for DEDON, each celebrate an approximately 20-year anniversary. They've been re-imagined with intriguing new weave patterns and contemporized colorways launched at the 2023 Milan Furniture Fair.

When you ask what has come before that may be missing right now, I think these designs may be the best answer coming from me because in many ways they represent escapism. People tell me

Pictured Below: ORBIT | Richard Frinier for DEDON. Image courtesy of DEDON.

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that these designs instantly draw them in, emotionally transporting their minds and spirits by either giving them a space in which to relax alone or visit with a friend or two under the sun or stars. During the pandemic, people wrote to me to thank me and send me pictures of themselves and or their children working or studying in their Orbit or Daydream lay around daybeds — making their time in quarantine less of a problem and more of a great experience.

Eclectic & Curated

Question: Another quote from our 2016 interview was, “Today, more interior designers are looking at outdoor furniture and asking, ‘How do I make my client’s outdoor areas, balcony, rooftop, or screened-in room look more eclectic

and more curated like the rest of the house? How do we mix this up and still make it look attractive?” Do you see retailers and consumers more willing to give this idea consideration?

Answer: It really depends on the retailer and their following. If a retailer’s customer base desires or requires these features to enhance and complete their live-work-play home environment, then the industry, retailers and distributors need to be ready to meet the moment.

If a customer wants to be able to watch movies or sporting events with family and friends outside, that feature can become an important focal point for an outdoor room with outdoor screens

For my own spaces, I am a less is more individual. One home and studio is modern, minimalist and open to nature.

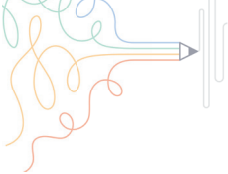
It is located in a rural area with a fully integrated home automation system that includes lighting and music elements that are infinitely additive and do not compete with nature. In our other home, a classic California Mediterranean style in a coastal city, our outdoor space has virtually no automation by design in keeping with the original mood that is laid back, simple and romantic. It represents a less chaotic time and lifestyle. The simplicity of the place encourages gatherings that are more conversational and less sensational.

Design Inspiration

Question: What sources of information such as shows, trend forecasters, magazines, intuition, etc., do you use to inform

Pictured below: DAYDREAM | Richard Frinier for DEDON. Image courtesy of DEDON





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and need to transform areas of our personal spaces have found our industry blurring and crossing if not erasing real or imaginary lines.”

your sense of what you should be doing next in terms of design?

Answer: I have always had an eye for design and a desire to travel, so I maintain a keen awareness of the global marketplace. While I do appreciate the work of others making new and interesting designs, this is not where my ideas come from out of respect for them and for myself.

Ideas have always come easily to me — often outside the studio during or after a long walk, a drive along the coastline or drifting and dreaming in the pool. I like to have a cappuccino and enjoy a half hour to sit in the garden in the afternoon sunlight where I then find myself working through design engineering challenges in my mind. It is often the limitations that lead to innovative breakthroughs.

All of the designs I create are imagined and intended for the individual brands I work with. And while it is my job to bring designs to them, it is very much a collaborative effort. For me, design is neither a commodity nor interchangeable across clients.

I believe that good design is able to make an emotional connection with others when it is perceived to have a soul. It draws us in and speaks to us. It moves us because it is evocative if not provocative. The best designs are unique and innovative — worthy of someone buying and making them a part of their home.

The Next Generation

Question: You are well known for your support of programs that invest in the future of students who will design the next generation of outdoor furniture designs. Can you comment on your passion for doing this?

Answer: I am compelled to introduce young designers to our furniture and textile industries and more specifically to the outdoor sector as a viable and rewarding path to consider and explore. In my opinion, the outdoor category remains one of the most dynamic and growing industries.

While I have served as judge or juror for various professional and student design contest panels, I support design students directly by rewarding their talents through scholarship funds to go toward their education in a meaningful way. The monetary prize for the winning student in our 2023 ICFA / Richard Frinier Design Competition has been raised to \$5,000 for the winning student to further inspire their participation and support from schools and professors. The winner is afforded the opportunity to enhance and advance their creative skills by imagining, visualizing and presenting a winning design to perhaps illuminate the future of outdoor living. In addition to design education funds, they receive an all-expense-paid trip to Atlanta to attend the Casual Market at

the AmericasMart, get an introduction to industry leaders, mentoring time, attendance at the 2023 ICFA Annual Meeting for their award presentation, and also experience media exposure for their participation and winning design. See <https://www.icfanet.org/richardfrinierdesignscholarship> for more information.

I am always happy to see the designs the students bring, what inspired them, how they present and articulate their designs, and how they create a story around their concept.

New Casual Show Venue

Question: Do you have any comments about the new AmericasMart venue for the Casual Show in July?

Answer: As someone who attended all but a handful of the casual markets when it was held at the Merchandise Mart in a town where my mother was born and a place I always enjoyed visiting, I am grateful for the history of the show, the many people who have been a part of it for all of these years and for how much a part of my own career the show has been. While I will miss having it there, I also look forward to the change in venue. Especially post-pandemic, I believe that this is a great time to create new experiences, successes and memories starting in July of this year.



RETWEED | Richard Frinier for Sunbrella
Image courtesy of Sunbrella®



REFLECTIONS | Richard Frinier for Sunbrella — Image courtesy of Sunbrella®



Current Projects

Question: What kinds of interesting projects on the fabric and furniture design side have you been working on since we last spoke?

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Answer: Recent textile collections I have launched with Glen Raven/Sunbrella® include RETWEED and REFLECTIONS. My inspiration for RETWEED was to blend the textural surface design and styling of vintage tweeds with an updated Mid-century modern aesthetic using Sunbrella's unique recycled-yarn content in compelling ways to bring these designs to life. It has been rewarding to see this collection generate so much interest in the marketplace and to be praised by high-level design trade organizations for the work that went into them. Gratefully, we have received multiple awards including the International Casual Furnishings Association's design excellence award for Best of Category, the Industrial Designer's Society of America's IDEA Award, Interior Design magazine's Best of Year honoree, and the Chicago Athenaeum Museum's coveted GreenGoodDesign® and GoodDesign® awards respectively

along with inclusion into the museum's permanent archival collection.

Our newest textile collaboration launching now is REFLECTIONS inspired by my deep appreciation for the artistry of weaving. These textural constructions and patterns celebrate the spirit of craftspeople around the world. REFLECTIONS also incorporates Sunbrella's recycled-yarn content intentionally infusing random irregularities which add incredible depth, richness and originality to the constructions, textures, patterns and colors. These unique characteristics become a subtle symbol of the inherent beauty found in perfectly imperfect things we see in nature, hand-woven objects and across the spectrum of recycled-content goods so important and popular today.

On the furniture side, I am designing new indoor/outdoor designs for several of my clients, which I will look forward to sharing with you in the future.