



Modern pool house by
Laura U Design Collective.

BLURRED LINES

Increasingly, outdoor elements are coming to the design inside the home, and indoor design is heading outdoors — creating synergy, along with promoting mental and physical health and wellness.

BY WAYNETTE GOODSON

Back in the feel-good '70s, a new design concept emerged when psychoanalyst Erich Fromm defined “biophilia” as “the passionate love of life and of all that is alive.” The notion hit home during a time when naturalists were making their own yogurt, enlisting in the Peace Corps and reading Mother Earth News.

Then in 1984, biologist Edward O. Wilson proposed that the tendency of humans to focus on and affiliate with nature has a genetic basis. He named his book “Biophilia.”

Today, after a global pandemic kept us all home, the term “biophilic design” has become more of a basic aesthetic than a novel idea. And more and more, we’re not only craving natural elements inside the home . . .

we’re creating outdoor spaces with all the same capabilities as the interior. Think outdoor kitchens, dining rooms, living areas — even bathrooms.

Artisan Design Studio, of Roswell, GA, noticed a large increase in outdoor-centered projects during 2020 and 2021. “I think the pandemic showed us how important to our health and well-being the outdoors truly is,” says Ryan Williams, Owner and Principal Designer.

She defines biophilia as “the love of nature.” And biophilic design has been shown to have mental and physical benefits, such as reducing anxiety.

For Laura Umansky, Founder and CEO of Houston-based Laura U Design Collective, the idea of biophilia has evolved. “Originally, the concept focused on incorporating natural elements like plants, natural light and water features into built environments to enhance well-being,” Umansky says. “Over time, the approach has become more sophisticated and holistic.”

Or as Williams explains: “Blurring the lines between indoors and outdoors means that our indoor spaces are as bright and cheerful and alive as our outdoor spaces, and that our outdoor spaces feel as lush and well-designed as our indoor spaces.”

LAURA U DESIGN COLLECTIVE: PAR BENGTSSON

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Outside In

While the term has been around for decades, there are some elements of biophilic design that we associate with it more often: Using a color palette that reflects natural hues — greens, browns, blues and neutrals — creates a serene and grounded environment, for example, Umansky says. Further, natural fibers such as linen, cotton and wool in upholstery, rugs and curtains bring a tactile, organic feel to the space.

“Modern biophilic design also incorporates advanced technology to simulate natural environments,” she says. “For instance, circadian lighting systems mimic natural daylight cycles, enhancing human health and productivity.”

Williams cites two major biophilic advancements. “Now we have building products that allow us to physically open our homes to the outdoors in a big way,” she says. “Our family rooms can be one with our outdoor living spaces with a quick opening of an accordion or sliding door.

“The second way is through the increased quality and availability of products that introduce nature inside our homes. This can be through lifelike faux plants (some of our clients forget they’re not real and water them by mistake), the use of natural materials (fabrics, wall coverings, stone and wood), as well as better quality windows that allow amazing light and beautiful views without sacrificing efficiency.”

It also helps that modern architecture and construction techniques have evolved to support biophilic interiors.

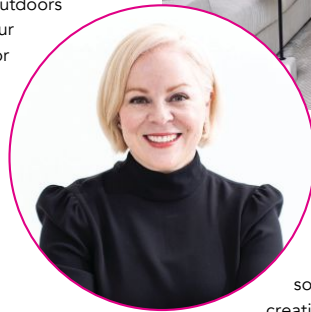
“Newer homes and enhancements to existing homes are allowing us to make seamless transitions between the indoors and outdoors,” Williams says. “We can easily move entire walls of glass to open up the home to the outdoors. Phantom-type screens can protect us from unpleasant outdoor critters without taking away our view of our outdoor spaces.”

While this type of design is aesthetically pleasing, Umansky stresses that it’s also good for our health.

“By integrating natural elements and principles into built spaces,



This living room by Laura Umansky of Laura U Design Collective brings the outside in via large windows, plants and a natural color palette.



biophilic design enhances air quality, mental health, physical well-being, cognitive function, stress reduction, social interaction and environmental sustainability, ultimately creating healthier and more enjoyable environments,” she says. Umansky uses eco-friendly and sustainable materials to promote a healthier environment by reducing exposure to harmful chemicals and supporting overall environmental health.

Indoor plants act as natural air purifiers, absorbing toxins and releasing oxygen, improving overall air quality, she says. Further, maximizing natural light exposure regulates circadian rhythms, improving sleep quality, mood and productivity. As we learned during the pandemic, access to shared outdoor areas, such as gardens and terraces, promotes social cohesion and a sense of belonging.



This open-air design by Joni Burden of J. Banks Design Group seamlessly transitions from the interior to the exterior outdoor space.



Inside Out

Designer Joni Burden became part of the Green Movement early on — not because she wanted to . . . because she had to.

“My daughter, who’s now 25, had significant allergy issues when she was born,” Burden recalls. “And it turned out that the house we were living in had all the ductwork in the slab, and it had mold in it.”

Flash forward to today, and her firm, Hilton Head, SC-based J. Banks Design Group, takes on a global portfolio of interior design projects that translate resort living to the home — and the home to resort living. As its Founder, Executive Chairman and Creative Director,

Burden prides herself on fostering an inside/outside design direction.

“Creating spaces that you walk in the front door and seamlessly blur the lines between indoor and out is something we’ve been doing for 30-plus years,” Burden says. “I would say we have been more of an inside out-focused firm from the beginning, because we’re dealing with resort communities all around the country and in other foreign countries.”

TOP: LAURA U DESIGN COLLECTIVE; PAR BENGTSSON; BOTTOM: LC4B PHOTOGRAPHY | MARAVILLA LOS CABOS

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A point of pride for Burden is that she had one of the first LEED-certified privately owned buildings in SC, and today her office and showroom are in a LEED-certified office.

Designing for both the interior and exterior are like shifting sands to Burden, and she uses typically inside products on the outside — and vice versa — thanks to improvements in outdoor products.

For example, she sometimes places outdoor dining chairs in indoor spaces. "If you have a vacation home on the ocean, for instance, people are going to come in with wet bathing suits," she says. "Normally you have guests, you have children and grandchildren, and there are some beautiful outdoor chairs."

Conversely, Burden recently designed outdoor banquettes for Summer Classics using a new formulation to allow for outdoor cane, typically only used as an indoor material.

"One thing I had not been able to find in the industry were outdoor banquettes," she says. "We all love eating at banquettes and having banquettes up against the kitchen. And I thought, 'Let's take something we love indoors and let's put it outside.'"

Outdoor fabrics now have such a nice soft hand that they're being used on indoor sofas to help mitigate stains and enhance durability. And Burden raves about how far outdoor advancements have come in both fans and lighting, which are now not just utilitarian pieces but are available in stylish pendants, sconces and chandeliers — not to mention outdoor TVs.

"And I would say everyone is interested in a fireplace outside or a fire pit," Burden says. "That's one element that everyone asks about."

Another interesting request: outdoor bathtubs.

"It might have a shower beside it," she says. "Or it may be part of the outdoor bathroom . . . So it opens up, if you're in the woods or in a place where you don't really have to worry about people, and it can be closed if you need to, but it's the fact that you're outdoors taking a bath."

Even Blurrier

Thanks to modern blueprints, kitchens now open up to the outside. "Our kitchens are positioned so differently now than they were 30 years ago," Burden says. "We all know the first transition was opening up the kitchen to the dining and family room, for instance, so everyone could cook and hang out."

"Now I see [indoor] kitchens that are positioned for the view and then open up to an outdoor dining and cooking area. Outdoor kitchens are huge . . . They're a big plus in our markets. So just taking that whole indoor kitchen, dining and living space and making sure that it lines up with the outdoor kitchen, dining, living and fireplace is a whole new consideration for floor plans."

While functionality is always key with blurring the lines, so is the flow between the two spaces.

"I really believe that the interior look and the exterior outdoor furniture should relate," Burden says. "And fortunately, we can do that now. You can have a traditional interior with traditional exterior furniture, or a



Designer Ryan Williams of Artisan Design Studio pushes open accordion-style doors to allow the interior to blur into the exterior fifth room, complete with an outdoor fan and a television.

contemporary interior with contemporary exterior, and we can mix it. You can mix your outdoor furniture, which is something that's new and fun. It's not something you could do even five to seven years ago, and now you really can."

Williams agreed that outdoor furnishings have come a long way since their early days of wrought iron, aluminum and plastic.

"The advancement of outdoor furniture, in both quality and design, means that we no longer have to compromise the look of our outdoor furniture in order for it to endure exposure to the elements for many years," she says.

"Outdoor-rated furnishings and accessories are finally catching up to the beautiful and comfortable items we can source for the indoors."

These advancements will increasingly blur the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. "Modern designs often feature seamless transitions between interiors and exteriors, such as retractable walls, indoor gardens and large windows that open up to outdoor living areas," Umansky says.

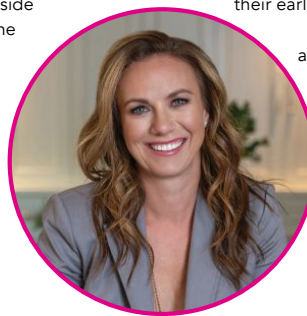
How can the lines be blurred even further? Maybe by not having any at all.

"I think we're actually going to be able to have houses that open up and function, where people have thought through all the mechanics and the automation," Burden says. "As that progresses, we'll see many more options where your indoor living becomes your outdoor living pretty quickly."

"It's almost like it's not two separate spaces because the house can be planned for the weather and other elements," she adds. "I think that's pretty exciting."

For Williams, inside-outside design is here to stay.

"I don't think we'll ever go back, and I can't wait to see where our love and appreciation for the outdoors takes us," she says. "I'm thrilled that vendors are taking notice and answering our call for resources to help our clients live in the outdoors as much as possible." **FLD**



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