

the markets | furniture & lighting



Ceiling Fans, Light Fixtures Get Upgrade for Outdoors

By Sharyn Bernard

ATLANTA—Outdoor ceiling fans and light fixtures are taking a turn for the better, as vendors and retailers look to upgrade styles to meet the continuing consumer trend of decorating outdoor spaces.

"It's one of the biggest growth opportunities," said Douglas Mudd, director of marketing for Emerson. "As more and more people spend time at home, [outdoor spaces] become the focus of social activity. Design is becoming more important" in this segment.

"The biggest trend we see in the outdoor lighting is toward highly styled pieces, as well as a push toward larger brackets," said Monte Hall, vice president of sales for Craftmade.

"People want to make a statement."

"The majority of new homes built in America today feature the concept of an outdoor space becoming an additional living space," said Karyl Pierce Paxton, who designs products for Savoy House. "This renaissance of outdoor living space has created new opportunities for the exterior lighting market."

Outdoor products "are becoming a huge market for us," said Patrick Wiseman, manager of Fan Diego, a four-unit store in California. In houses with open floor plans, where family rooms and kitchens open onto outdoor spaces, the trend is particularly noticeable, he said. "It's like one big open room; people want them to look similar to each other."

He said outdoor fans and lighting are two of the fastest-growing categories for the store, and top sellers include Kichler, Savoy House, Emerson and Casablanca. As for styles, he said tropical looks are declining and Tuscan-inspired designs are more popular.

In Southern California, Wiseman noted that consumers use their outdoor spaces year-round and thus are less sensitive to prices for outdoor items. "They are focused on quality," he said. "They want the best available. Most consumers are willing to spend a little more because they use it year-round."

The same can't be said for stores in other regions of the country. David Director, president of Connecticut Lighting, said consumers in his area use their outdoor spaces for only a short period of time, so they are more

price-conscious. The good news, though, is that manufacturers have responded with decorative looks at sharp prices.

"We're seeing manufacturers come out with a much wider array of product available at prices that seem to be more affordable," Director said. "They're not low-end products." But, he added, "We've definitely seen an increase in the use of outdoor fans."

Director said indoor styles made for outdoor use are becoming more popular. He cited Monte Carlo's stainless-steel unit as a good example. "Most of the manufacturers have come up with finishes to look like indoor fans, so [consumers] can carry a theme," he said. "They don't need to be blah, they can be exciting."

And even in Director's region, he's seeing more interest in outdoor products, particularly landscape lighting. "People are using lighting itself as a decorative element" to accent structures. "Business has gotten better and better every year." He said bronze is particularly popular and he has done well with outdoor fixtures by Minka, Monte Carlo, Fine Arts and Quoizel, as well as a "cool chandelier" by Murray Feiss.

The trend to massive outdoor lights has not proven to be as popular as some people suggest, Director said, adding, "It is some of what we do, but still, average size is the norm."

Hall of Craftmade agreed with Director that prices are an issue in outdoor fans. "You have to be conscious of the cost," Hall said. "It's more of a luxury item" than lighting. "But you still want something that makes a statement." And with highly stylized light fixtures, "retails are moving up a bit. There's always pressure to be competitive, but they've got to go up some when you're designing bigger fixtures with more features."

"There is somewhat more price sensitivity in the market, but that's changing," said John Pearson, vice president of marketing for Casablanca. "People used to want the least expensive fan to fit in an outdoor environment. But now people are spending a lot more money [on outdoor spaces] than they have before. Outdoor ceiling fans and fixtures will follow in that."

Casablanca currently has six styles of outdoor fans in traditional styles, but the company plans to introduce several more styles with added features, designs and finishes. "There is a large potential for growth" in the category, Pearson said. ■



Savoy House's Acropolis by Karyl Pierce Paxton was inspired by Greek architecture.

Left: Craftmade adds decorative elements and textured glass to its Frances fixture.

Top: Emerson's Westfield outdoor fan marries contemporary styling with outdoor function.



Consumers anxious to make a design statement in today's hot new home spaces are turning to highly stylized, yet affordable exterior pieces