

By Margo Smith

# Small Spaces

After years of creating larger and larger furniture for Outdoor Rooms, the patio industry is beginning to notice the need for smaller-scale furniture for condo, apartment and sunroom uses.

**D**oes size matter? Is bigger really better?

Until recently, the casual furniture industry certainly seemed to think so. Over a number of years the dimensions of many outdoor furniture groupings seemed to be ballooning in sync with the expansion of the economy. During this period, the size of furniture pieces grew from large to absolutely enormous. One saw dining chairs with Papa Bear dimensions and cushioning – lounge chairs sufficiently capacious to hold two sitters with ease – sofas with depth and length that seemed fitting for a family reunion – dining tables that seemed to go on forever, and extra-wide double chaises with full canopies and a table in between.

While these good-looking collections provided sumptuous comfort, those homeowners not blessed with a sizeable patio or terrace were unable to take advantage of these super-sized offerings and their considerable style. Condo and townhouse dwellers and others with limited outdoor space found far fewer choices that met their needs and tastes on the floors of local casual specialty retailers.

However, that is now changing. Demand for good-looking, small-scale furniture is growing, and, a number of manufacturers and savvy retailers are paying attention. European companies, such as Kettler, always have offered a good selection of smaller scale products. In Europe, effective use of space and a minimalist design sensibility have always been in demand. "This has always been what we offer," said Mike Sosnowski, Kettler's national sales manager. "It's

ideal where space is an issue, and that also makes it perfect for many contract situations. However, U.S. retailers have not always seen this as a trend." Kettler began selling in the states in 1981.

Telescope president Henry Vanderminden said, "I do think that consumer use of this category is increasing." Even in Glen Falls, New York, a town with a population of around 15,000, "they converted an old paper mill into vertical living and it is very popular. We're seeing this move to vertical living in suburban and rural areas, not just in metropolitan areas," he stressed. One



Fairfield deep-seating / Agio.

way that Telescope addresses this demographic, said Vanderminden, is with the company's vast selection of counter and bar-height groups. "Every one of our collections has a counter and bar-height component." These pieces have smaller sling and seating areas, ideal for balconies and compact areas.

Dean Engelage, former president of Woodard, and Heidi Ford, vice president of marketing, said that Woodard noticed this trend about three years ago. "There has been a focus on balcony-scale furniture," Engelage commented. "Because, as the population ages, you have more

**Affordable housing is going to be more of the thing. Baby Boomers are moving into smaller spaces which require a smaller scale of furniture. A lot of furniture that would apply to Outdoor Rooms doesn't apply to those spaces.**

— Cap Hendricks, President Tropitone



Castelle line for balcony living / Pride Family Brands.

OPPOSITE PAGE: At left, balconies in Marina City, Chicago, Illinois.