

The balcony might be the biggest room in your condo — use it well

Outdoor space. With condo units shrinking, balconies seem to be getting bigger



CONDO TRENDS
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There was a time when a high-rise balcony was considered a nice-to-have — a brief respite from a stuffy kitchen for a breath of air and maybe a bit of a view.

It was a thin ledge to park your bike and maybe a couple of plastic chairs. Not to mention that a barbecue was outright forbidden.

Times have changed, and outdoor space is considered an important component of the amenity package, as developers and condo purchasers alike have realized the benefits of the modern condo balcony.

As condo units become smaller, balconies, it would seem, are growing bigger. Now typically as much as six feet deep or more, they've become an extension of your suite.

Newer buildings are even supplying gas hookups and watering hoses, encouraging people to take it outside.

A whole industry has sprung up around outdoor balconies, patios, terraces and rooftops.

Now you have so many choices of what to do with that space. Specialty shops provide a whole range of products: Outdoor dining furniture, couches and lounge chairs, waterproof TV sets and wireless speakers, storage units, planters, "sunbrellas", space heaters and even fireplaces.

Stylish and comfortable, the new breed of furniture can be left outdoors all winter long. Settings made by Woodards in Florida can handle the heat and humidity of the Everglades, and can handle Canadian winters too, says designer Kim Jones.

Her company, Design Solutions, has outfitted the rooftop patio at The Shores condominiums, a Fernbrook-Cityzen project in Oakville.

"I personally brought up some Woodard furniture from Florida. They get through the Toronto winter no problem. I've had mine sitting outside now for three years."

Toronto's condoterraces.



Outdoor table and chairs set by Woodards of Florida at the rooftop patio of The Shores condos. KIM JONES

From the Indoor Gardener

Vertical gardening a hit

Sky-high gardening has always been a hit with condo dwellers.

The host of HGTV's Indoor Gardener, Denis Flanagan says that vertical gardening is very trendy right now.

"Most people have limited space on condo balconies or terraces and using things like trellises, like obelisks, like hanging plants, will optimize the amount of space that you've got," he advises. "There's all sorts of wonderful selections now for climbing things that need a support, that give you sometimes up to eight, 10 feet of colour on a balcony."

com specializes in outdoor floor coverings including such exotic woods and finishes as Ipe, Jatoba, Cedar, Cumaru, Tigerwood, Azek, Gossen and TimberTech. These materials can be applied right over concrete to transform your balcony into a deck.

Even in this chilly weather, condo dwellers can still take advantage of the great outdoors. Even though con-dos regulations prohibit residents from burning actual

wood on balconies, outdoor fireplaces are becoming a new trend.

"The ethanol fireplaces are fabulous, although they don't put out a lot of heat," explains Jones. "But you can buy very inexpensively nowadays, these heaters, so you can have the beauty of the ethanol fireplace and then you have a heater that stands over top of you that you can plug in, so you have the warmth and it is quite comfortable."



Viva Designs two-seater and single lounge from Fiber Living in Toronto on display at the 2012 Home and Garden Show. DUNCAN MCALLISTER/FOR METRO



Hanging garden by Urban Forest Planter. DUNCAN MCALLISTER/FOR METRO



Jigsaw Lamps by Mr. Lamp Shops. DUNCAN MCALLISTER/FOR METRO

Required notes on closing

I was supposed to sell my condo last week and my lawyer was informed by the other lawyer representing the purchaser that there were items on the title that needed to be removed before they would consider closing.

I had a long talk with my lawyer, who clearly stated that none of the issues raised by the purchaser's lawyer were valid points to avoid closing a transaction.

The issues raised by the lawyer were that there were agreements registered on the title that she would not accept because the title was not clear.

My lawyer disagreed but in the end, there was no money on closing day. What would you suggest?



LEGAL MATTERS
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It appears as though your purchaser was trying to wiggle out of the deal and using their lawyer to attempt to do so.

Once a transaction is firm, the only way a purchaser can get out of the deal without serious repercussions is to find a valid problem with the title to the property.

The lawyer must have raised a number of questions about old registrations on title that cover all the units in the building.

These agreements/registrations cannot be removed by one owner without the entire condominium agreeing.

It appears as though the purchaser's lawyer was blowing smoke.

You and your counsel need to threaten loss of the deposit and potential damages because of their inability to close the transaction.

Hopefully, your solicitor has responded in such a manner.

Follow Jeff Cowan on Twitter @Cowan_Law or on the website at cowanlaw.ca

