

The great outdoors

2007 sunroom trends, alfresco kitchens and more

We live in Wisconsin — it's not the North Pole, but it's not exactly the tropics, either. Many joke that we have two seasons: winter and July. But what we lack in temperate seasons, we make up for in intelligence. Case in point: the popularity of sunrooms in Wisconsin is growing.

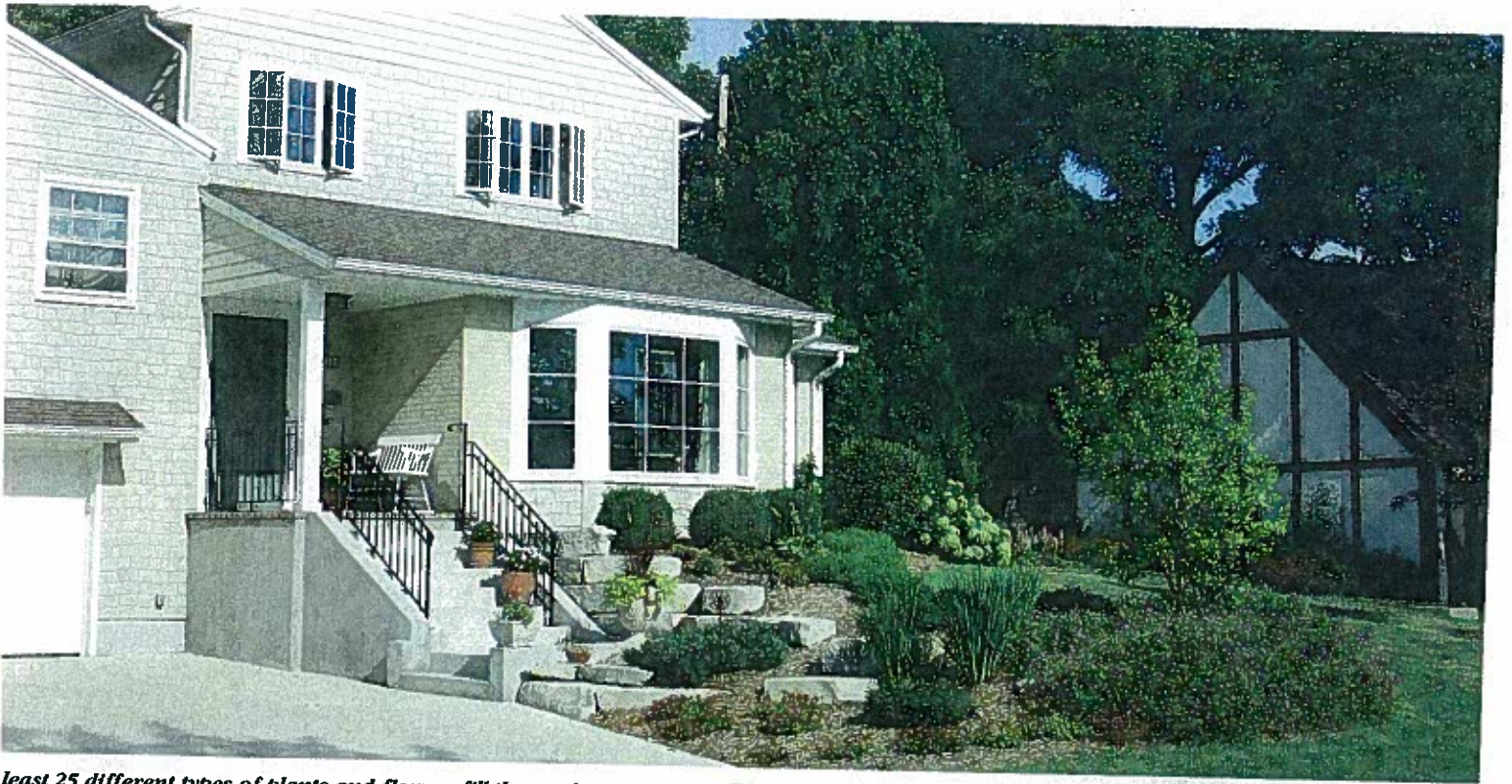
Homeowners are adding on to their homes with open, airy spaces that bring the outside in, without suffering through the elements.

According to Scott Humber, CEO of Lakeside Development in Mequon, sunrooms have gained popularity because they are an extension of your home. Due to the nature of our climate, a screened-in porch sits empty most of the year, while a four-seasons sunroom is a family favorite.

"These days, we have the ability to make a room that is full of

windows cozy and warm, not drafty and cold," he says. "Using good quality materials is the key. Foam insulation, quality glass and heated floors are all ways to keep a sunroom comfortable. This is a room where you are likely to be in your stocking feet and relaxed."

Richard Frozé, owner of Frozé Design Build in Milwaukee, sees Milwaukeeans adding on to their homes not only as a wise investment, but also for their mental and physical health. "We have six months of gray days in Wisconsin, and sunrooms help the spirit and mind by bringing more light into the home on a daily basis," he says. "People are able to regenerate with light." Recent reports have even touted that increased exposure to sunlight during the long winter months will help guarantee a good night's sleep.



At least 25 different types of plants and flowers fill the gardens that surround the house, including seven hemlock trees, fairy tale bushes, Blue Forest junipers, leaping meadow ornamental grasses, Annabelle hydrangeas in blue and white, dragon blood tree, Roseanne geraniums and ivory halo dogwood.

^ An outcropping of huge Lannon stone rocks in front of the home add texture and anchor the free-flowing garden design.

^ A brick patio leads visitors into the backyard, adorned with flowers, fountains and a serpentine lannon stone wall.





Photo courtesy of Four Seasons Sunrooms

Other sunroom benefits include making the neighboring rooms brighter and, of course, increasing the value of your home when it comes time to sell.

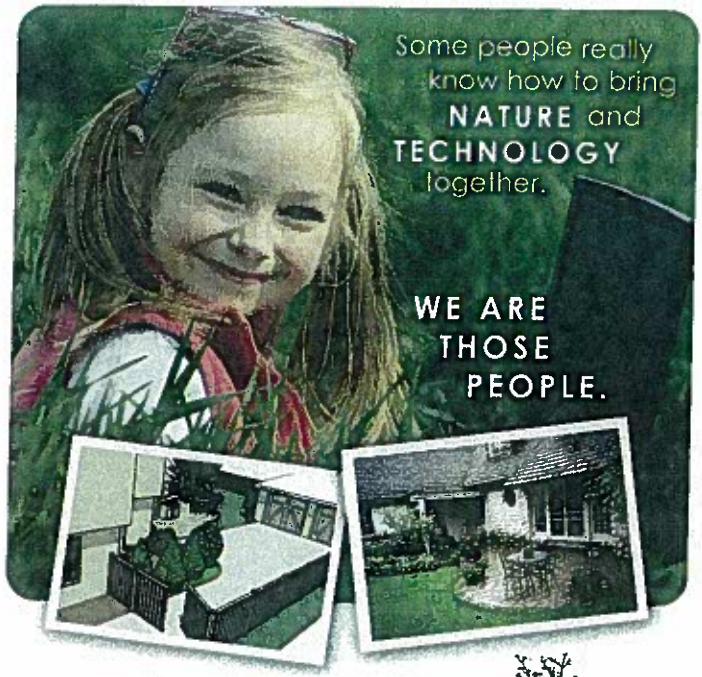
"A sunroom is always a wise investment, because you are not only adding more space to your home, but you are creating more light and better views of your yard and surroundings," says Chris Egner, lead designer at Four Seasons Sunrooms in New Berlin. "A glass-roofed sunroom will give you a better return on your investment than a room with a ceiling because of its uniqueness and the amount of light it brings to the space."

What should you consider before building a sunroom? Experts agree that, ideally, a sunroom should get as much sun as possible (which means southern exposure is best), be located in the main flow of the house and homeowners should use a

reputable contractor who will ensure the room will not be drafty or have a leaky ceiling. Oftentimes sunrooms are not outfitted with curtains or blinds, so you should consider what your neighbors will see, as well.

Humber says there are two main types of sunrooms — an airy Florida-style room, decorated with a light, bright aesthetic, and the Organic style, using wood, stone and earthy materials to offset the contemporary feel of the glass.

"People need to find what is right for them and their home," says Humber. "We can use stone and brick to match the outside of the home, and natural materials can really warm up the room. Other people are looking for something bright and airy to perk up their home. We work with our clients to find what is suitable for their family and lifestyle."



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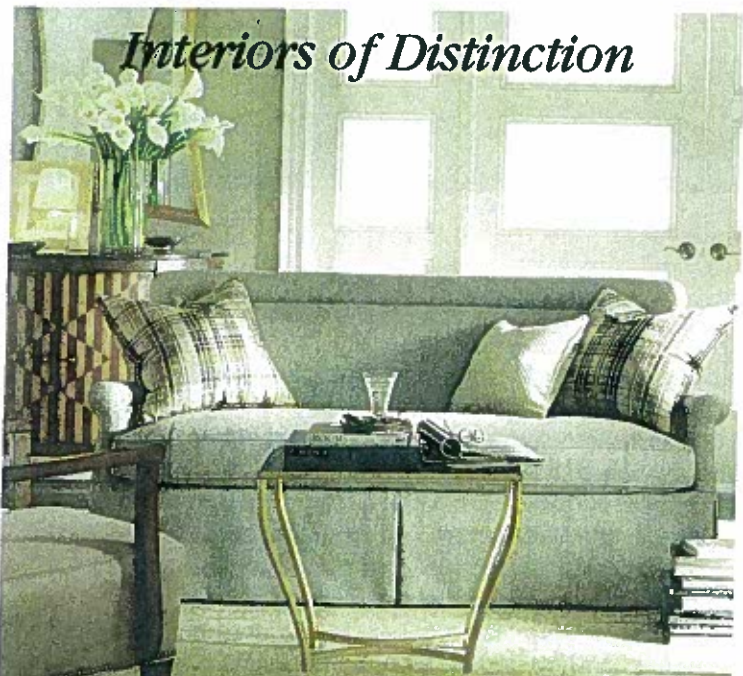
Sunrooms can be costly due to the abundance of glass and heating requirements, which often includes heated floors. But, according to experts, homeowners should consider the resale value and the higher quality of life at home. Frozé compares sunrooms in Wisconsin to swimming pools in Phoenix – desirable not only for the resale value, but as a pleasurable addition to daily life as well.

"People are putting more and more money into their homes," he says. "As daily life becomes increasingly more hectic and demanding, the home has become an institution of refuge. It's a space to unwind and recharge your batteries to start it all over again the next day."

The addition of a sunroom can mean new life for the adjacent backyard as well. From hot tubs to swimming pools and firepits to built-in grills, homeowners are seeking to enjoy their backyards for entertaining and relaxing.

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– Chris Egner, lead designer at Four Seasons Sunrooms



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Joe Fredrickson, owner of Creative Earthscapes in North Lake, says, "The backyard is an extension of your home. It's an outdoor room that is a great spot for entertaining." While people are looking for privacy in their backyard, Fredrickson advises, "It's a 'soft' privacy, nothing jarring like a tall fence or solid wall, but using shrubbery to create a space of your own."

Homeowners are choosing lower-maintenance yards and simpler gardens to cut down on the amount of work required to maintain the yard. "People are looking to enhance their living space, not their workload," he says.

What are the top backyard trends for summer 2007? Outdoor courtyards, fireplaces and built-in grills are bringing the cook out of the kitchen and into the great outdoors. Portable gas heaters are also a top pick for prolonging the season by introducing heat in close proximity. Full-scale outdoor dining areas, as well as spa-like hot tub retreats, also are allowing homeowners to utilize the outdoors as a functional extension of the home.

"One of the fastest growing trends in the appliance industry is outdoor entertaining," says Kelly Rigdon, president of Kennedy-Hahn Appliance. "Patio and deck decor is no longer just a lonely stainless steel grill on a cart. People are outfitting their patios as an extension of their kitchen, accessorizing with a full complement of cooking equipment, custom marine-grade cabinets, outdoor rated refrigerators, and even wine storage units and beverage shelves." ❏