

# Great Design in the Great Outdoors

A designer's guide to creating impactful  
outdoor experiences.



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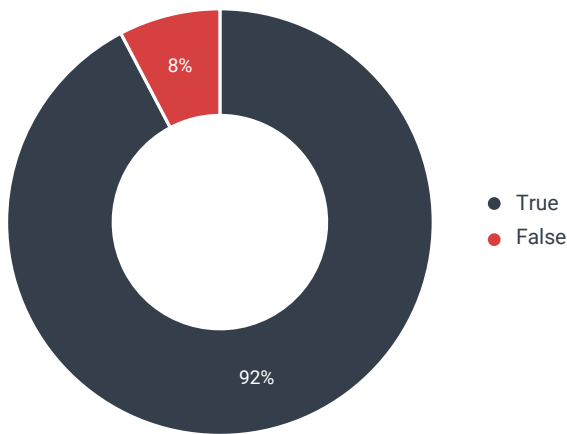
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# 01 Introduction: Our Need for Respite

As humans, our connection to nature is powerful and innate. Yet as technology advanced, we began to move farther and farther away from our natural roots. Adding to this fundamental shift, we're experiencing a life laden with stress.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this, the A&D community has recognized the value of bringing the outdoors in, but more recently also has placed an increasing focus on bringing the indoors out.

**Q: In the last 2 years, there has been an increasing focus placed on the design of outdoor environments as part of the overall context when designing a space.**



"Incorporation of well-being practices and overall sense of an individual's well being is being considered more and more. Also, clients want to recruit and retain the best talent and focusing on outdoor environments can help with this." –anonymous A&D survey respondent

"We see that clients want to activate the outdoor spaces and make them appealing to all guests." –anonymous A&D survey respondent

## Here's why:

- Client expectations are changing while demand is increasing: Clients see outdoor square footage as an extension of indoor footprint and expect additional amenities to complement the outdoor space.
- Wellness is a bigger focus: Incorporation of WELL practices and an overall sense of an individual's well-being is ranking higher on everyone's priority lists. Clients want to recruit and retain the best talent and focus on outdoor environments to help with this.
- Vertical market lines are blurring: Design is responding to how people want a space to feel, which is more comfortable, accessible, casual, and home-like or hospitality-like.
- Attracting and retaining talent is critical: Business owners want to attract employees by offering amenities that help them compete for top talent, and the design of their space plays a role.

So how does this play out in the real world? **Let's look at the research to find out.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.advisory.com/daily-briefing/2018/11/13/stress-levels>

## 02 Executive Summary

We're living in a bit of a conundrum. Despite our biological instinct to be outdoors, we live an indoor life, with an estimated 93–95 percent of our time spent inside.<sup>2</sup> Yet across every vertical, we see the benefits of the outdoors.

In **hospitality**, patrons will wait longer for an outdoor table and guests will pay more for a room with a view.

In **education**, student focus improves with outdoor stimulation, and in healthcare, patients have more favorable outcomes when they can see nature from their room.

Let's not forget that while the benefits of the outdoors are valuable to **corporate** employees (increased focus, improved creativity, etc.), all verticals have workers in them – such as hotel workers in hospitality, doctors in **healthcare**, and teachers in education.

As a result, organizations are turning to more intentional outdoor spaces that not only invite users to take advantage of the entire space, but also serve to attract people to their business, and retain employees who work there.

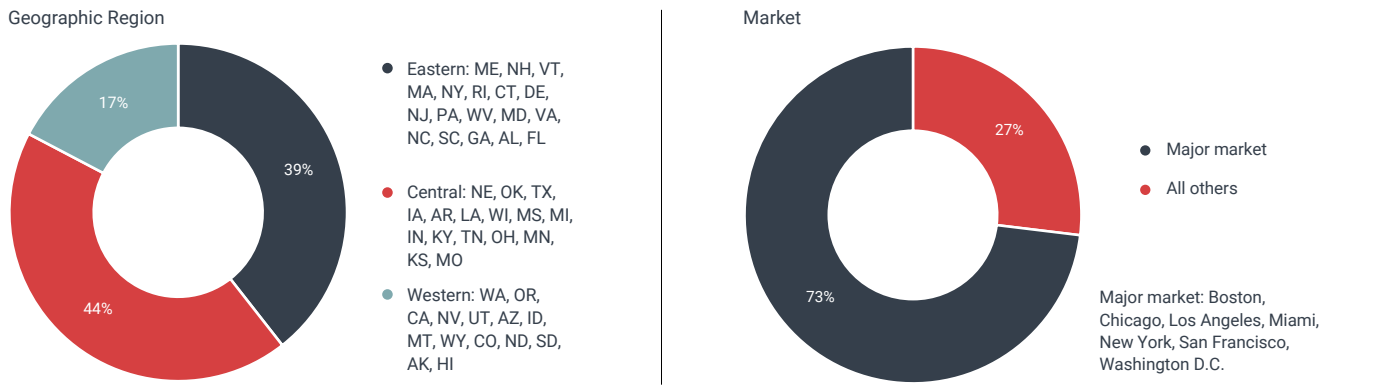
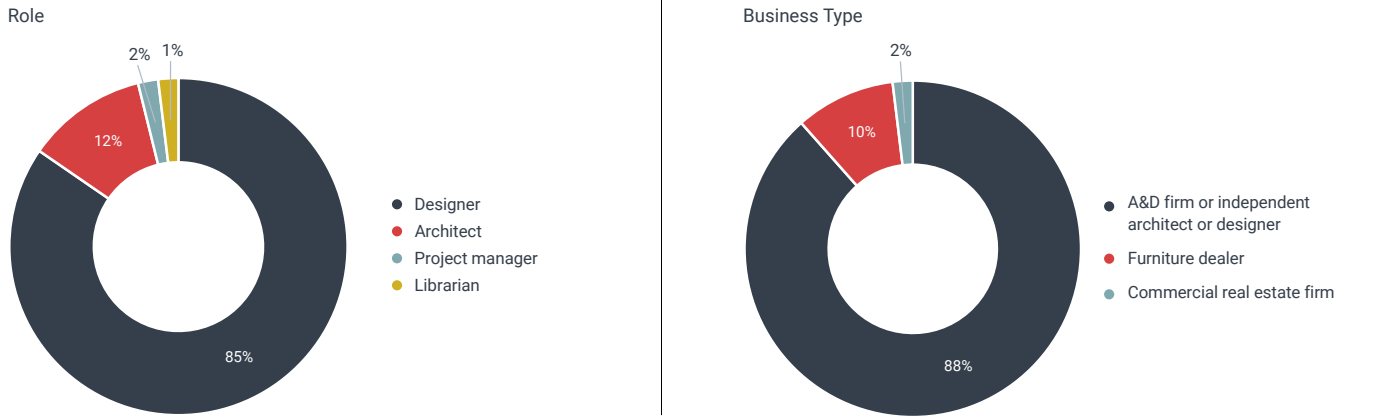
And by layering in trends such as a seamless indoor/outdoor experience, strategic use of shade and glare control, variety in space and seating types, and durable, water-resistant materials, A&D professionals accomplish that goal every day.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mappinessapp.com/>

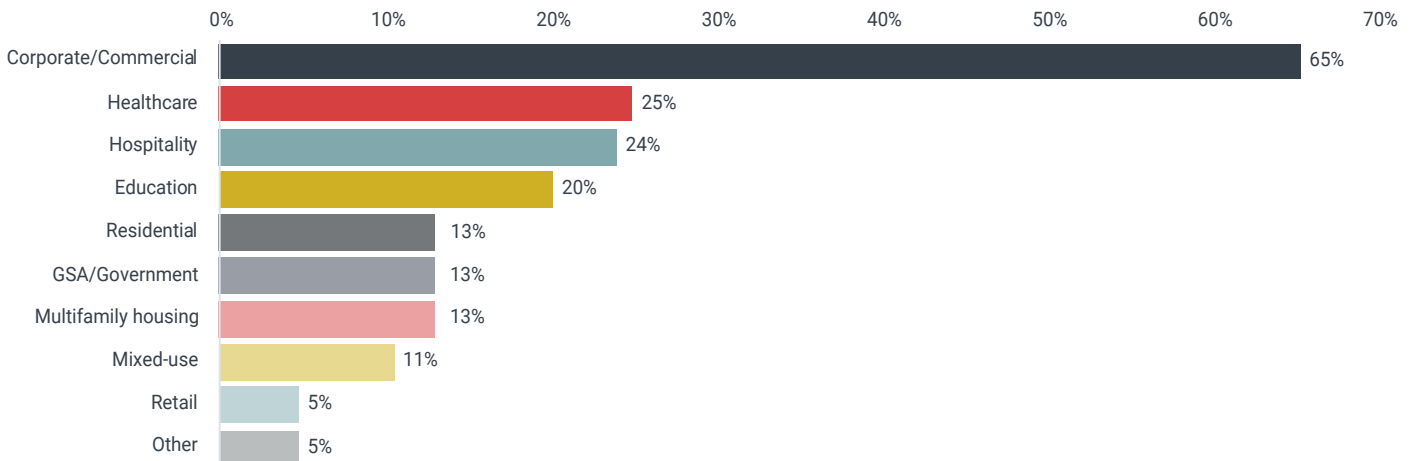
# 03 Methodology and Survey Demographics

ThinkLab, the market research division of SANDOW, surveyed 104 A&D professionals throughout the U.S. with the goal of understanding how outdoor spaces are being utilized and what products and features are most important. The results of that research are layered throughout to provide a comprehensive picture of why great design in the great outdoors is of critical importance today.

## Respondent Demographics: 104 total responses



Vertical Market (Survey respondents were able to select up to 3 primary markets as their firm's focus.)

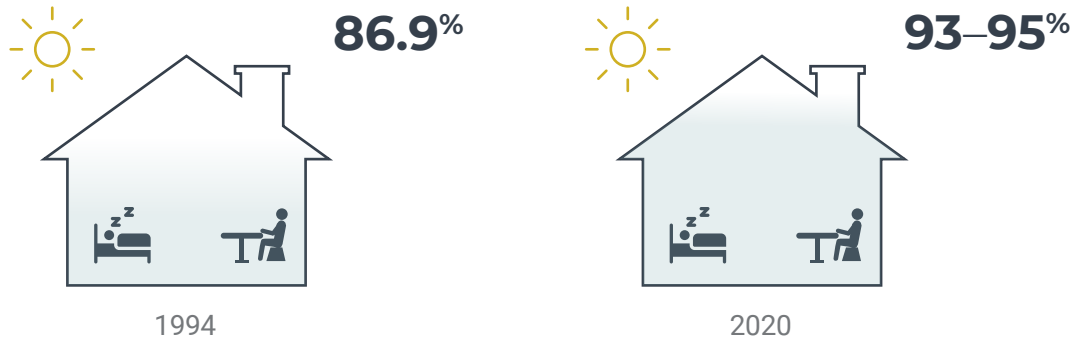


# 04 Benefits of Outdoor Environments on the User

We need the outdoors now more than ever.

## Total Time Spent Indoors: 1994 vs. 2020

Source: *Time* magazine



The typical indoor setting limits our access to natural light. In response, we supplement with artificial light, which is known to distort natural circadian rhythms associated with sleep.<sup>3</sup>

## Nature is the answer.

But can adding an outdoor space really help people?

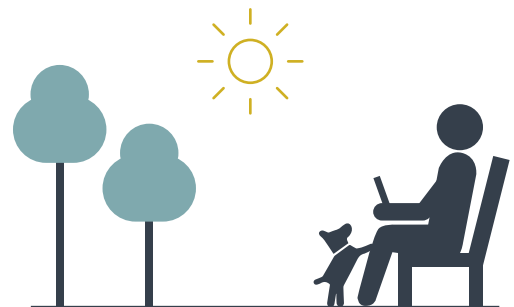
A study by L.L.Bean<sup>4</sup> showed us that 86 percent of people want to spend more time outdoors during the workday. Yet only 8 percent of them actually get outside to work in an integrated way. And since 65 percent of respondents say their job is their biggest barrier to getting outside more, it begs the question, **why can't we make time spent in the outdoors productive?**

The study found that an outdoor work space that properly accounts for needs like power, connectivity, and shade increased user productivity by 300 percent, while simultaneously improving work performance by 50 percent. What's more, 92 percent of people felt happier while they were outdoors.

## The Benefits of Working Outside

Source: L.L.Bean

- 300% increase in creativity
- 50% increase in work performance
- 92% of people feel happier outdoors



<sup>3</sup> <https://time.com/4306455/stress-relief-nature/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.llbean.com/shop/files/180619\\_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf?nav=C9tX-517153](https://www.llbean.com/shop/files/180619_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf?nav=C9tX-517153)

And if that's not enough, here are a few facts about the impact nature has on the body.

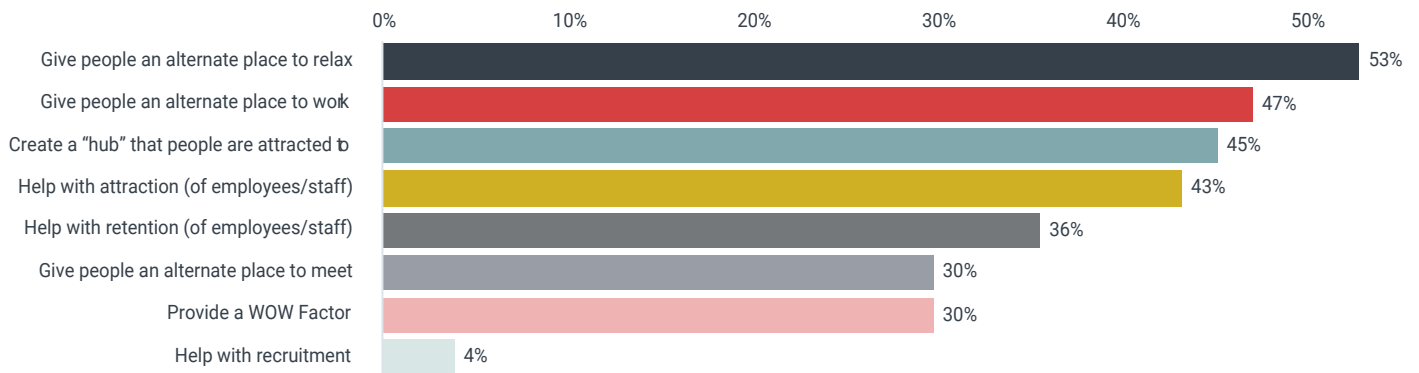
“ Our bodies relax in pleasant, natural surroundings because they evolved there. Our senses are adapted to interpret information about plants and streams, not traffic and high-rises. ”

–National Geographic

**Outdoor environments equate to happier occupants.**

According to the Thinklab Outdoor Experiences survey, here are the top 3 reasons that aesthetics of outdoor spaces contribute to the success of the overall built environment.

**Q: The aesthetics of outdoor spaces are important to contributing to the success of the overall built environment because they:**



**Top 3 Reasons Aesthetics Are Important in Outdoor Spaces**

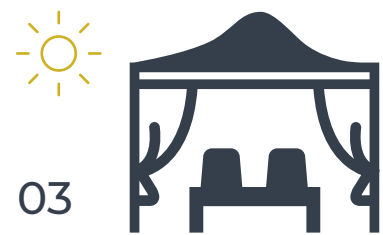
Source: ThinkLab Outdoor Experiences Survey



Outdoor spaces are most important to the overall design because they give people a place to relax



followed by giving people a place to work



and creating a hub that people gravitate toward.

And while this is all well and good for the occupant, we all know that **money often speaks the loudest**, so the impact on a company's bottom line is of equal importance when considering an investment in an outdoor space.

## 05 Benefits of Outdoor Environments on the Entity

### Capitalizing on usable outdoor space boosts the bottom line.

Economically, commercial sales prices rose 6 percent nationally in 2019.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, lease terms are shrinking, from 20 years – now nearly extinct – to 10 years, and even as low as 5 years for fluid industries like technology.<sup>6</sup>

The result? A shift from blank lawns to furnished outdoor spaces, or empty rooftop arenas that transition to outdoor havens.

Across every vertical, we also see a social media or technology tool that speaks to the need for beautiful outdoor spaces.

Now let's take a look at how each vertical is impacted, and the direct return on an investment in outdoor space.

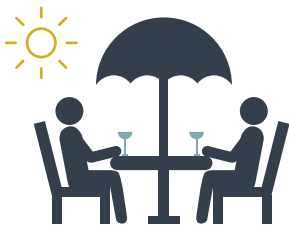
### Hospitality: Outdoor space equates to free marketing and boosts in sales.

In hospitality, experience is everything. Whether you're traveling for business or pleasure, we all have expectations for our stay. And though they differ – a business traveler may prefer a strong Wi-Fi signal and ample desk space, while a guest on vacation may crave a beautiful, unobstructed view and a relaxing outdoor pool – both consider the environment when booking travel.

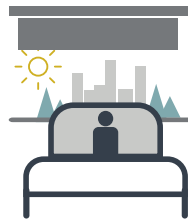
Yet regardless of whether they are traveling for business or pleasure, one study<sup>7</sup> found that guests will wait up to an extra 30 minutes just for an outdoor table at a restaurant, and another found that people are willing to pay up to \$30 more for a room with a view.<sup>8</sup> Which is why so many hotels, in addition to restaurants, are expanding to the outdoors.

### Outdoor ROI in Hospitality

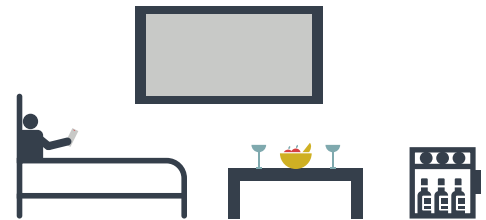
Source: Cake from Sysco, Terrapin Bright Green, and Gallup



**30min.** Restaurant guests will wait up to 30 min. for an outdoor table



**\$30** Hotel guests will pay \$30 more for a room with a view



**\$185** Hotel guests will pay \$185 more/visit on amenity upgrades, food, and beverages

Repeatedly, a study by Gallup<sup>9</sup> showed a strong link between customers' engagement levels with a hotel and the amount of money they spend there per visit – to the tune of \$185 per visit on things like upgrades, food, beverages, and hotel services.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.screaltors.org/commercial-real-estate-prices-still-trending-up-in-2019-q1/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://insights.thinklab.design/maximizing-the-impact-of-design-in-an-ecosystem-of-shrinking-leases>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.trycake.com/blog/3-ways-outdoor-dining-boosts-restaurant-popularity/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.terrapinbrightgreen.com/report/economics-of-biophilia/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.justlux.com/lifestyle/leisure/feature-1967887.php>



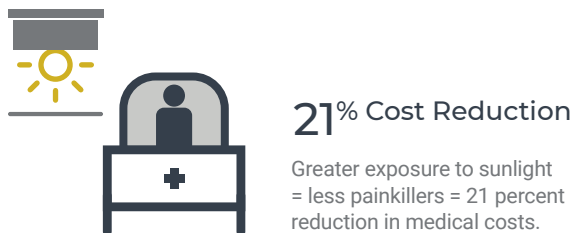
## Healthcare, education, and multifamily experience: Outdoor space can boost results.

In both healthcare and education, the benefit of outdoor space directly impacts the results of the guests. For example, in healthcare, patients with greater sunlight exposure required fewer painkillers, leading to a 21 percent reduction in medication costs.<sup>10</sup> In education, students note de-stressing benefits when they live in student housing with a view – so much so that students at Purdue University were willing to pay \$1,500 per month in rent for a luxury campus apartment full of amenities and a view vs. \$270 for the average dorm.<sup>11</sup>

And in the world of multifamily living, the return on investment is just as easy to recognize, as people see the value of living in homes with access to outdoors. For example, some landlords can increase rent by 30 cents per square foot for units with a rooftop view.<sup>12</sup>

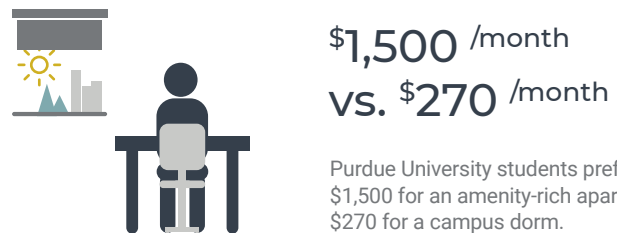
### Outdoor ROI in Healthcare

Source: *The Globe & Mail*



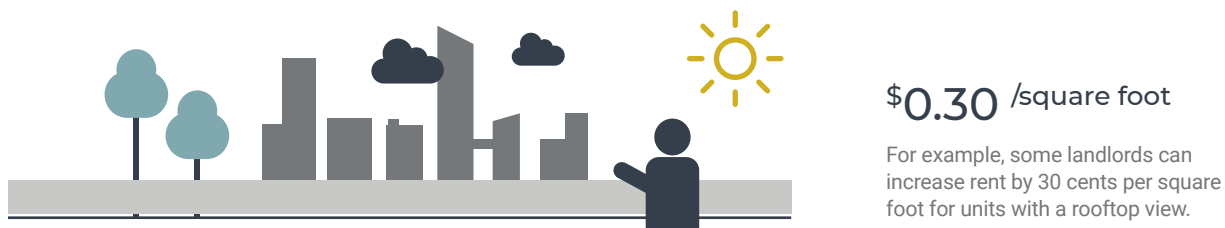
### Outdoor ROI in Education

Source: The Hechinger Report



### Outdoor ROI in Multifamily Housing

Source: REJournals



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/the-hospital/better-by-design-how-a-hospital-room-can-help-patients-heal/article16748288/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/luxury-private-student-housing-further-divides-rich-and-poor-on-campus/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://rejournal.com/amenities-the-next-generation-how-to-add-considerable-value-to-multifamily-buildings/>

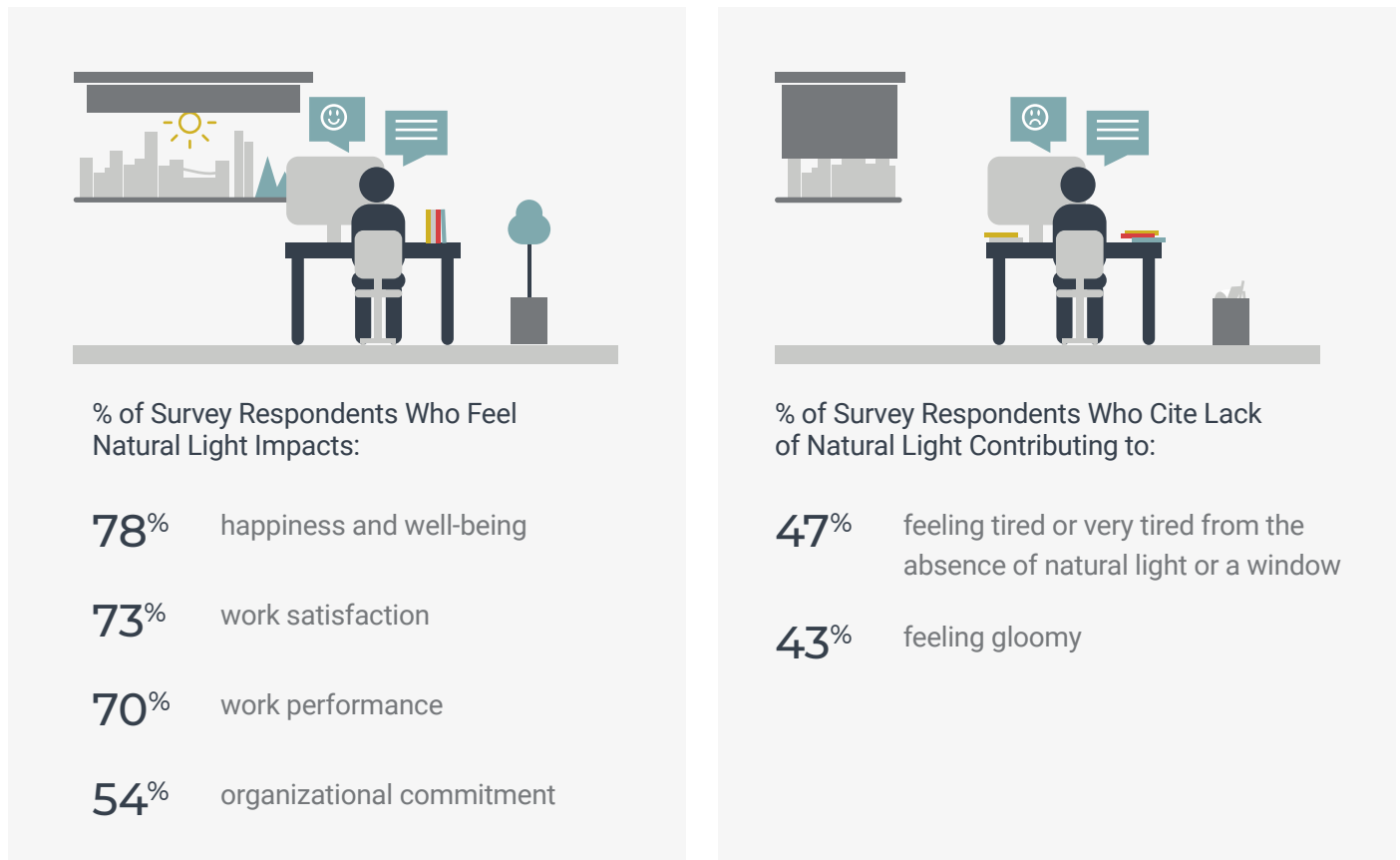
## Work place: How to craft a more productive workforce while attracting and retaining talent.

Future Work place surveyed 1,614 North American employees to discover how to attract and retain top talent. Here is what the survey uncovered:

- Employees said that access to natural light and views improves their overall happiness and well-being (78 percent of respondents), work satisfaction (73 percent), work performance (70 percent), and organizational commitment (54 percent).
- More than a third of employees feel that they don't get enough natural light in their work space. 47 percent of employees admit they feel tired or very tired from the absence of natural light or a window in their office, and 43 percent report feeling gloomy from the lack of light.<sup>13</sup>

### Outdoor ROI in the Work Place

Source: *Harvard Business Review*



In today's competitive landscape, one more variable comes into play – the ability to **attract and retain the very best talent**. And since two-thirds of respondents<sup>14</sup> from a recent Harvard survey said that a work place focused on their health and well-being would make them more likely to accept a new job or keep the job they have, designing a work place that provides access to the outdoors checks off a lot of these items.

Now let's take a look at some creative approaches to making outdoor space a true asset for a company.

<sup>13</sup> <https://workplacetrends.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-Employee-ExperienceFINAL08-072.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://hbr.org/2019/08/survey-what-employees-want-most-from-their-workspaces>

## 06 Attributes That Make Up the Best Outdoor Experience

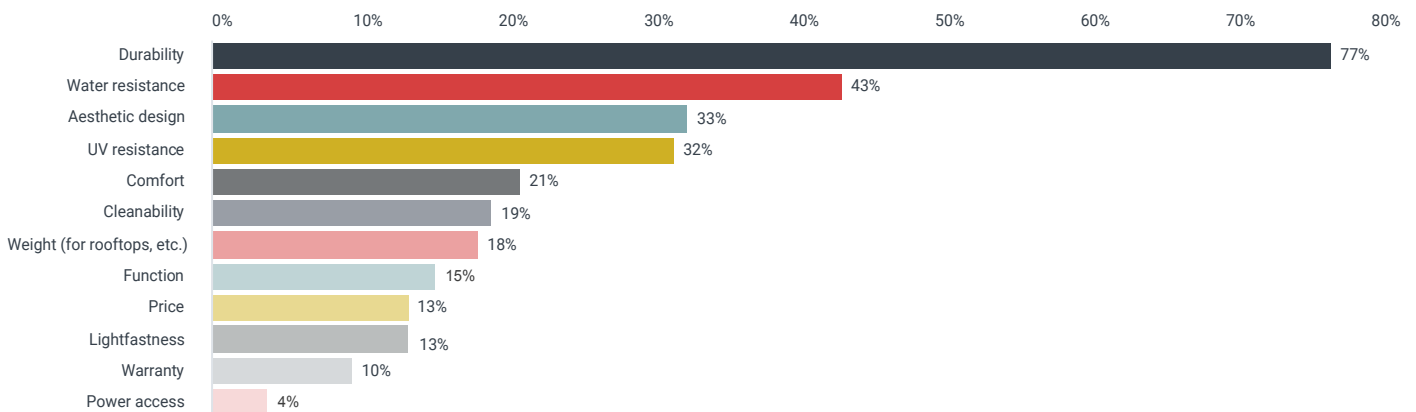
### Considerations when designing exterior environments:

Across all verticals, there is one common denominator: the need for shade and shelter.

To seamlessly incorporate the elements we love from the indoors (comfortable work setups, manageable temperatures, etc.), we must first accommodate for sunlight. Then we can turn to layering in the other elements that make an outdoor space great.

This chart shows the most important criteria for specifying products in outdoor environments.

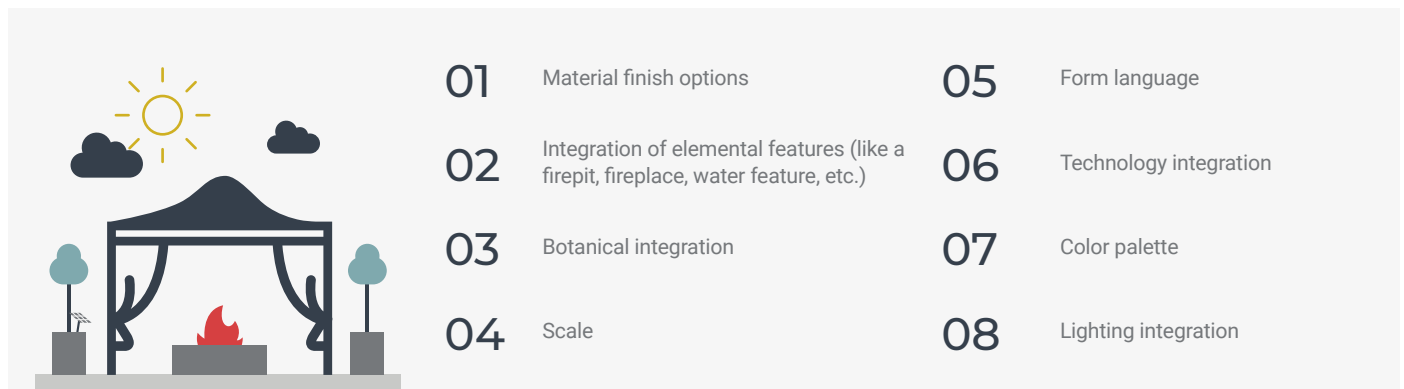
### Q: What are the most important elements to consider when specifying product for outdoor spaces?



While these elements speak to important considerations, let's not forget the "WOW factor." As this infographic indicates, material finishes, integration of elemental features (like fire pits, water features, etc.), and botanical integration are the top design elements that make a statement.

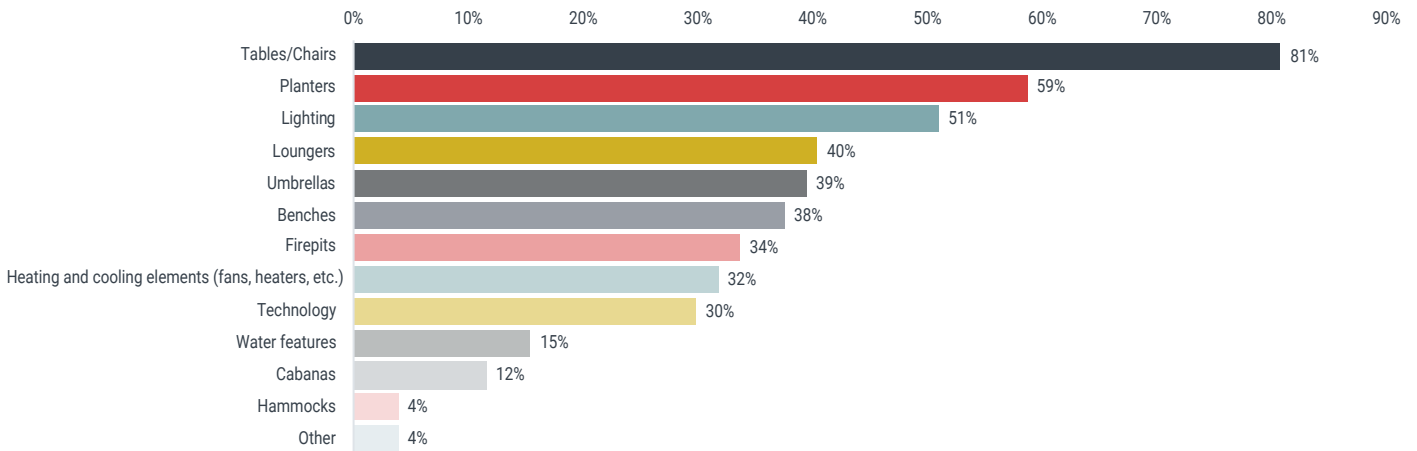
### Top Product Design Elements That Create the "WOW Factor"

Source: ThinkLab Outdoor Experiences Survey



The top 3 products for impactful exterior environments include tables and chairs, planters, and lighting.

**Q: Key products to include in the design of impactful outdoor environments:**



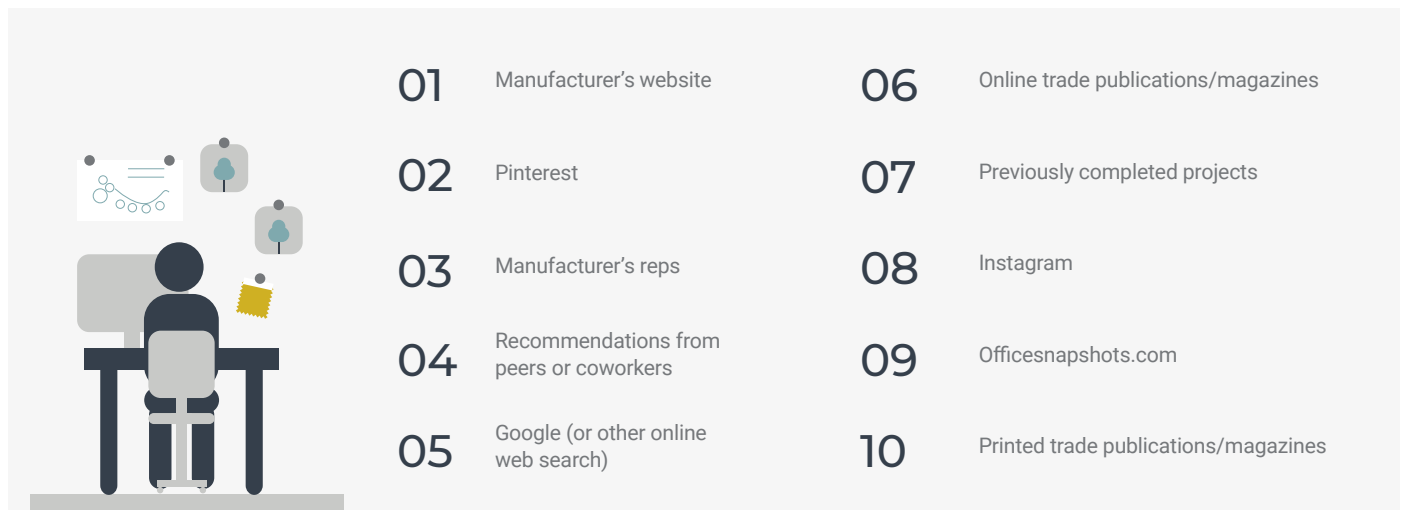
**Outdoor space: Current inspiration and trends.**

During a designer's process of programming their list of top considerations and key products to include in a space, they naturally want to be inspired.

Our research suggests that inspiration for outdoor products is most often found on a manufacturer's website, followed by this rundown of the rest:

**Sources for Outdoor Product Inspiration**

Source: ThinkLab Outdoor Experiences Survey



In terms of trends impacting outdoor environments, most respondents cite a variety of space and seating types, comfortable seating, and a seamless indoor/outdoor experience.

Yet when planning for an outdoor space, considering timeless elements can be just as important as specifying for trends. Because of this, every outdoor space should include the following elements:

# A Specifier's Guide to Designing For the Outdoors

A one-page checklist for creating an outdoor space that's as visually enticing as it is productive!

## Initial Space Considerations



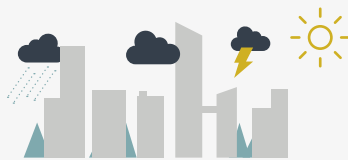
**Create a seamless indoor/outdoor visual experience**  
More comfortable residential or hospitality-like look and feel



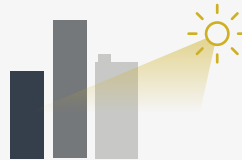
**Provide occupants with a variety of space types (together or alone)**



**Consider flexibility of use**  
Create an ability for the environment to double as a work space



**Consider the climate**  
Temperature  
Weather patterns (hurricane, flood zone, etc.)  
Wind  
Beach proximity (salt, sand, bird droppings, etc.)



**Understand building orientation to the sun**  
Sun protection  
Shade protection  
Glare considerations



**Provide power and Wi-Fi access**

## Product-Specific Considerations for Weather-Friendly Furniture

### Tier 01

**Durability:** How long should this product last in this environment?

**Water resistance:** Can this product stand up to rain, snow, etc.?

**UV resistance:** Will the product fade with prolonged sun exposure?

### Tier 02

**Comfort:** Will people enjoy spending time here? How long should they stay in this particular environment and does this product support that?

**Cleanability:** How easy is it for a cleaning crew (perhaps with limited or no instructions) to properly maintain this product?

**Weight:** Are there any weight restrictions to consider (rooftops, etc.)?

### Tier 03

**Technology/power integration:** Does the product support power and Wi-Fi needs?

**Automated product controls:** Is there a way to control the product via technology? Should there be?

**Anti-theft:** Are there concerns with this product "walking away"?

Source: ThinkLab Outdoor Experiences Survey

## 07 Conclusion

Across every company, we see one common goal – the desire to be the best it can be. For some, that’s measured on a profitability scale; for others, guest satisfaction is king. But across the board, the atmosphere of a space plays a major role in achieving that goal.

Today more than ever, the A&D community is tasked with an important goal – incorporating outdoor spaces into the footprint of design to transform an environment into a place people want to be. We need spaces that lure us in by appealing to our intrinsic passion for the outdoors. **Nature is in our DNA. But style, amenities, and function are ingrained into our current state of mind.** Fortunately, products for exterior environments today are merging the two, resulting in outdoor spaces that speak to our soul ... and bolster the client’s bottom line.



### About ThinkLab

The research in this paper was created by ThinkLab, the research division of SANDOW, and sponsored by TUUCI.

At ThinkLab, we combine SANDOW’s incredible reach within the architecture and design community with proven market research techniques to uncover relevant trends and opportunities that connect back to our clients’ brand and business goals in a thought-provoking, creative, and actionable way. Join in to know what’s next at [thinklab.design/join-in](http://thinklab.design/join-in).



### About TUUCI

For over 20 years TUUCI has been creating the most innovative, unique, and stylish shade platforms in the industry. Founded with a passion by Dougan Clarke, TUUCI was born from the marine industry. This means every single parasol, lounge, and cabana they create has been meticulously engineered to perform without question, in any environment. Beyond simply performing, they also turn heads as TUUCI products are built with an unparalleled sense of style and design not seen anywhere else in the world.