

YESTERYEAR'S YARD

Postwar patio furnishings popping up at mainstream retailers

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This Memorial Day, you can celebrate the way your grandparents did: with a backyard straight out of Ozzie and Harriet's neighborhood.

Retro patio furnishings, once the territory of specialty retailers such as Restoration Hardware, have gone mainstream.

Meijer, Lowe's and Sears, along with a variety of garden stores, offer everything from gliders to gazing balls that mimic the outdoor look of the postwar era.

"Interest in this has grown enormously," said Nicki Huggins, a California designer whose company, Retropatio, restores metal gliders from the 1930s to '50s. "I've been doing this for 13 years now, and I'm actually shocked at the number of inquiries I get."

Part of the appeal for a vintage look might lie in the quest for serenity during a turbulent time.

"All this uncertainty might have people looking back for security anyplace they can get it," said Julie Moir Messervy, a landscape designer whose recent book, *Home Outside: Creating the Landscape You Love*, features retro furniture on the cover.

"One way is to look back to that postwar way of life of our grandparents and parents. There's a lot of nostalgia for that."

And part of the appeal might be that some retro furniture is fun, with a rainbow of colors that stand out amid the beiges, olives and browns of present-day patio sets.

"When you think of outdoor life, you want to play and shine -- so why would you want it to be boring?" said Huggins, whose Web site (www.retropatio.com) showcases a wide sample of



A gnome adds a nostalgic touch to a garden.



refurbished vintage furniture.

Huggins, whose glider and chair sets sell for \$1,795 to \$1,995, said vintage outdoor pieces are increasingly difficult to find.

Some can still be tracked down at used-furniture stores and by combing the Web.

The Short North furnishings store Flower Child, 989 N. High St., has a wide selection of outdoor furniture and accessories from the 1950s, including a metal outdoor "hotel chair" designed by Ohioan Viktor Schreckengost.

Yet owner Joe Valenti cautions: Such pieces are not as plentiful as they once were.

"It's harder to find this stuff because people realize it's valuable and worth keeping."

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A little deja vu

You can party like it's 1959 with these retro outdoor furnishings, available from various retailers:

Metal chairs

Bounce back into the postwar years with Meijer's Tulip chair: an all-metal seat with U-shaped legs that supply a hint of spring action. Available in a variety of swingin' '50s colors: \$69.99 (on sale last week for \$62.99). Lowe's offers a similar product called the Garden Treasures Retro Dining Patio Chair, in blue or green with a white frame for \$35.

Gazing balls

Many garden stores and nurseries carry this staple, which actually dates to Victorian times but remained popular well into the 1960s. Oakland Nursery offers a wide selection of balls and stands, ranging from the classic metal reflecting ball for \$25 to elegant \$60 art-glass balls. Stands range from \$25 to \$48.

Metal gliders

Revisit the 1950s with metal two-toned furniture that would look in keeping with any well-kept yard half a century ago. The Strader's Garden Centers location on Riverside Drive carries several pieces, from individual chairs and tables (\$140 for a table-chair set) to the classic two-seat glider for \$200.

Wrought-iron furniture

The classic "dogwood" pattern has been around for more than 30



years and comes in a variety of furniture, from chairs to chaises, gliders and swings. This chaise, made by Meadowcraft, is on sale for \$358 at Seasonal Concepts in the Graceland Shopping Center.

Wrought-iron trellises

Trellises come in a variety of sizes and ornamentation. Oakland Nursery offers stand-alone cone-shaped trellises decorated with birds for \$150 or \$200, depending on size. They can be paired with a "distressed" wrought-iron bench for \$400 that looks like it fell out of a sepia photograph.

Garden gnomes

Gnomes and elves can still be found lurking around garden and patio shops. Strader's Garden Centers sell the classic dunce-cap, full-beard model for \$47.

Grills

OK, 1950s grills may not have come with four propane burners and halogen lights, but this Kenmore "retro grill" wouldn't look out of place next to vintage metal furniture. The grill comes in vanilla, forest green, dark blue and, of course, cherry red, for \$500 (on sale last week for \$400).

Beer chute

Slide a six pack of cans down this 1960s-era plaid beer tube. It's one of several vintage outdoor pieces available at Flower Child used-furniture store in the Short North. Other pieces include a Kenmore charcoal grill (\$149), a green metal "hotel chair" (\$42) and a red child's version (\$39).

Drink coolers

Keep the beverages -- and the guests -- cool with a 1950s diner look. The steel patio cooler cart holds a few dozen cold ones, comes in several colors -- including fire-engine red -- and includes a built-in bottle opener. Available at Sears for \$180 (on sale last week for \$153).

"You want to play and shine -- so why would you want it to be boring?"

Nicki Huggins
designer



A vintage grill from Flower Child can heat up an outdoor soiree.