



Frock Options
5 shirt dresses that can be either breezy or businesslike
D2

OFF DUTY

Crack the Code

The simple trick to just-right scrambled eggs every time **D9**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

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ALAMY (CITY); JAMES GULLIVER HANCOCK (ILLUSTRATION)

BY JANE BLACK

ON HIS FIRST DAY back in his New York City office in July, Syed Ali found his biggest challenge, oddly, was lunch. After months of reheating leftovers to eat during Zoom calls, he was looking forward to a sit-down culinary adventure. Sadly, two of his go-to lunch spots had closed. The local outpost of salad chain Sweetgreen was still there but only allowed for online orders. In the end, Mr. Ali, an urban planner, spent most of his break wandering the still mostly empty streets near his Tribeca workplace before finally grabbing a sandwich to eat back at HQ.

First-world problem? Maybe. But uncertainty about who returns to the office, when and how frequently is making it tricky to predict what lunch will look like in a post-pandemic world. Restaurants, from fast food to fine dining, have invested millions in digital ordering, pickup and delivery to make lunch quick and frictionless, and are praying that after this last annus horribilis those investments prove sound. At the same time, office workers who were stuck at home for more than a year are yearning for human contact, which means lunches that are leisurely and social—or at least require them to leave their desks.

Heading into fall, restaurants and their customers face a swirl of questions and contradictory trends. One thing is clear: Lunch, like nearly everything else in our lives, is changing. Here, a preview.

How We'll Do Lunch

As we inch our way back to some sort of office life, what will our midday meal look like? A taste of what's to come—and how much it's going to cost

Lunch is the new happy hour.

Like many office workers before the pandemic, Philadelphia psychologist Erin Hadley prioritized a fast lunch. The shorter her lunch break, the sooner she could return to her patients and get home to her young son. But starting in September, she hopes to be in the office at most two days a

week, so a leisurely sit-down lunch—she dreams of the seafood tower at the Oyster House in Center City—seems both reasonable and a key opportunity to catch up with friends. “I want to be more mindful of the time I can spend with people,” she said.

In other words, a day at the office suddenly feels less like drudgery and more like a day out. Mr. Ali, the urban planner, said that before the pandemic he often brought lunch to work. But like many professionals, he managed to save more money than usual last year—in part by not going out to lunch. Now he is happy to splurge on the days he actually goes to work.

Employers may be fueling the trend. A fun and free lunch, after all, is one way to lure reluctant employees back to the office. One day this summer, Mr. Ali's firm, HR&A Advisors, not only bought its employees lunch but surprised them with a serenade from a marching band. Danny Fuchs, the managing partner who organized the event, said his goal was to celebrate his staff and to remind them that “surprise and delight” can be part of office life: “I believe that lunch, and communal lunch in particular, can be central to community building and the future of office space in an era trending toward flexibility to work from anywhere.”

But...digital ordering is here to stay.

Alone or together, office workers will find the convenience of ordering online hard to resist. Apps

Please return to page D8

Inside



ON THE HIGH SEATS

One beach bum's quest to find the perfect chair in which to park surf-side **D4**



NO-MAN'S LANDSCAPING

Skirted tree trunks and eight other garden moves that date your yard **D6**



NEW JERSEY REVISITED

Usually mobbed sites are pleasant, thanks to still-enforced crowd control **D7**



WEATHER OR NOT

Can climate change impact a wine's terroir? Experts weigh in **D9**

DESIGN & DECORATING

BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS

LIKE SPIKY haircuts and skinny jeans, your landscaping choices will inevitably skid out of style. Even certain planting techniques are being abandoned by designers and landscape-architecture gurus.

Consider rows of ornamentals such as pansies and impatiens sidling up to hydrangea. This froufrou fantasy surged as a status symbol in the 1950s, said New York designer Laurence Carr, but is far too resource-sucking today. "Functional gardens are the way of the future," said Ms. Carr, who sees hodgepodes of "edible plants, bushes and trees, including many native plants, pollinators and medicinals," sprouting instead.

We polled scores of pros for what else counts as passe landscaping these days, and got their picks for what to plant instead.



▲DATED Popular in the 1980s and '90s, triple-tiered fountains recall Italian piazzas in a way that would have been appealing to Tony and Carmela Soprano. Beyond outmoded, the flourish condemns you to a life of fighting the algae that grows in them, said Miami architect Kobi Karp.

UP-TO-DATE A sculpture can solidify the relationship between a house and its plot, Mr. Karp said. "Purchase a piece with large scale and mass," he said. "A smooth piece with some curvilinear aspects can make a striking juxtaposition against informal planting and foliage."

DATED Los Angeles interior designer Susan Davis Taylor's clients used to pave paradise, opting for a concrete or flagstone pool deck "leaving very little room for natural grass or garden spaces."

UP-TO-DATE Lawn that is brought right up to the pool coping creates a resort-like beauty. Lounges and chairs sit on minimal hardscaping and look as if they are on the grass, said Ms. Taylor. The platforms "protect the furniture from water damage while leaving a luscious green yard that goes to the pool's edge."

DATED "Red mulch in planting beds was a very unfortunate trend," said Miami-based landscape designer Fernando Wong, who noted the choice was born at Walt Disney World in the 1960s and crept throughout suburbia from there. The hue is not really orange or red, he said, "just some bizarre in-between, like a bad dye job."

UP-TO-DATE Mr. Wong seeks out chemical-free options that add nutrients to the soil, like mini pine-bark mulch. The top dressing is "nothing more than shredded pine tree, and easily found at most garden centers," he said.

DATED Carleton Varney, president of Dorothy Draper & Co., based in Palm Beach, Fla., would give all the overt outdoor ornamentation that peaked in the 1990s—like fanciful bird baths, globes and angel statues—the heave-ho.

UP-TO-DATE "These days it's much more chic to have a pared-back garden that embraces natural beauty," he said. Installing a surface-



SKIRTING ISSUE At the foot of trees, naturalistic plantings like these in New South Wales, Australia, trump outmoded rings of species.

Envy-Provoking Greens

For a yard neighbors covet, avoid these dated landscaping trends—from red mulch to tiered fountains



level bird bath with the still water of a small pond is preferable for Mr. Varney today, especially a copper specimen that will patina over time. "You will still enjoy the benefits of having a bird bath without having it be a focal point," he said.

DATED The Algerian and English ivy that dominated facades in the 1950s and '60s "makes a good rat hotel," said James Lord, principal of San Francisco landscape architecture and urban design firm Surfacedesign. Ivy also creeps under siding, and its little rootlets exploit and expand cracks in mortar. Mr. Lord added that the climbing clinger—installed to replicate an East Coast prep look—also pushes out indigenous species and strangles trees.

UP-TO-DATE Mr. Lord would re-create the eye-candy appeal of climbing vines with their less-grasping cousin, twining vines, because they shimmy up supports like cables instead. He favors passion flower and trumpet vine in the Bay Area, because they're "all seasonally more interesting than ivy, and won't undermine the integrity of your wall."

◀DATED Foundation planting—shrubs and trees so close to a home's footing they appear to choke it—can cause mold on siding if greenery gets too big, make home repairs thorny and raise hell with your home's base. John VerDerBer, landscape designer at his family's Aquebogue, N.Y., nursery, never positions flora closer than 3 feet from a foundation.

UP-TO-DATE "High-end clients want to see more of their houses, so we plant larger trees at the corners and dwarf specimens between, or we plant perennials and grasses, not shrubs, around the house," Mr. VerDerBer said.

▼DATED In the 1990s, landscapers plopped boulders onto grounds to add dimension—and unsurprisingly, the big stones sit there still. The problem, said Cara Fox, owner and lead designer for the Fox Group in Holladay, Utah: "So often, they aren't authentic to the topography of the land."

UP-TO-DATE Ms. Fox prefers to install equally substantive bushes with a similar scale. Ideally they would be right for the area's hardiness zone, the USDA standard for determining if a plant can thrive in a location. For zones 4 through 8, which cover



most of the U.S., that would be quick-growing hornbeam hedge or bush, "which can be trimmed to any scale," she said.

▲DATED With the flounciness of a rococo ball gown, florals that ring tree trunks in rainbow circles are now more musty than must-have. "The plants are too orderly," said New York designer Chris Shao.

UP-TO-DATE Mr. Shao would color outside the lines, loosen restrictive delineations and sow a mix of native species in a comparatively fluid style for a more contemporary tree skirt.

DATED Geometrically spaced drifts of a single species have held sway for two decades, but they're not getting a second glance from Sutter Wehmeier, principal of Base Landscape Architecture, in Portland, Ore.

UP-TO-DATE Mr. Wehmeier prefers vegetation that "injects a hint of wildness without getting disorderly," such as regionally appropriate ground covers and wildflowers that will seasonally pop up and recede "like fireworks."

Is Comfort Worth Blobbiness?

YES LOS ANGELES fashion designer turned furniture maker Sam Klemick admits that before she could appreciate the appeal of the poofy Big Nap chair she created, even she had to live with it a while. The ecru canvas chair for Otherside Objects, inspired by Maison Martin Margiela's 1999 Duvet coat, might look like a comforter draped over a seat frame, its conical legs almost comically detailed with prominent fabric ties, but Ms. Klemick believes people are prioritizing comfort these days: "We need levity and joy and a soft place to land when we get home."

Chicago interior designer Marshall Erb concurs. "Everyone is looking for their perch," he said, "a place for your coffee, a corner with a blanket for watching a movie, a place to work from home, take a nap." Mr. Erb sees a resurgence in silhouettes from the 1970s and '80s, like the seats by Italian designer Tobias Scarpa that resemble tufted marshmallows. To create a "nice tension," Mr. Erb juxtaposes such nebulous seats with natural and classic elements. A smushy Togo Ducaroy chair, with its big earthworm-like segments, looks more at home against linear Parisian-style wainscoting and geometric accents, he said. A square, petrified-wood coffee table or a piece of black-and-white abstract art would offset the distinctive shape without vying for attention. When Ms. Klemick posted the Big Nap chair on Instagram, it sold within hours to a friend who used the pillowy seat to soften a living room with a low, boxy tweed couch. The buyer conformed to Ms. Klemick's advice to let the large chair "steal the show."

NO THEIR WOMB-LIKE form makes them good for dozing, but elegant these unstructured chairs are not. "They can feel oppressive," said London interior designer Mary Graham of the burly seats' tendency to dominate a room. Robust chairs in simplistic shapes are best left to tech-startup break rooms and hotel lobbies, she said. "You can have comfort and good design, but I don't think chunky comes into the equation," said Mrs. Graham, who prefers a dignified silhouette that evinces craftsmanship. "If I want to jump into a duvet, I am going into my bedroom."

Bulky mechanical recliners—like the bone of contention between aesthete Frasier Crane of the eponymous '90s sitcom and his dad—don't get a pass either. Mr. Erb can otherwise work with a zaftig chair, but the seats that become a lounge with the thump of a lever sacrifice design for comfort. "Where these [puffy] designs go wrong is in most recliner showrooms. It's difficult to find an attractive candidate," he said.

As for actually sitting in an outsize seat: "The depth of these things is insane and glut-tonous," said New York-based designer Melissa Bowers, who noted that chairs more than 30 inches deep are proportionally incorrect. "No one's legs are that long." To sit upright, you have to pack pillows behind your back. In addition, these tubby perches overwhelm standard doorways, requiring specialists to break down and reassemble the chairs. Said Ms. Bowers, "In New York, we always have to call the Couch Doctor." —Yelena Moros Alpert



◀ Odea 2 Chair, \$6,320,
Roche Bobois,
212-889-0700

▶ Hero Lounge Chair,
\$1,070,
industrywest.com



◀ Groovy Swivel Chair, \$429,
pbteen.com

