

Add a little steam to home life with a sauna

By [Molly Millett](#)
St. Paul Pioneer Press

The trend in steam is to take it outside and give it its own little house, for that hot-cold relaxation experience.

Outdoor saunas — a growing trend in America's back yards — now look as sophisticated as guest or pool-house cottages, with upscale woodwork, roofing, windows and even porches with bench seating.

Amenities include changing rooms and showers, sound systems, built-in bars and romantic lighting.

To reflect the idea that the outdoor sauna is moving from cabin country to city lots, one manufacturer — Saunatec — markets its new sauna houses under the monikers "Metro Series Sauna" and "Suburban Series Sauna."

"Traditionally, you'd find outdoor saunas deep in the woods or at the lakes, but now they're moving into our urban back yards, and people want them to look good," says Mark Raisanen, national sales manager for Saunatec's Helo Sauna and Steam and Finnleo Sauna and Steam.

Raisanen says most of the structures are selling in urban settings. Many of them serve as a poolside accessory and for entertaining.

"The biggest reason for the growth of the outdoor sauna is the trend of backyard living," says Raisanen. "We have customers using these as pool houses or the changing room as a storage shed or a potting shed. It becomes a mini-entertaining or utility house, not just a sauna."

But the decked-out structures easily can cost double what a simpler sauna built inside a home costs — after all, there's siding and roofing to consider. If you want a sauna house, prepare to spend about \$5,000 to \$30,000, depending on the bells and whistles (Saunatec's range from about \$8,000 to \$16,000).

But why not stick to an indoor sauna, which provides more privacy in an urban setting?

"Percentage-wise, we don't sell as many outdoor units as we do indoor, but people who like the outdoor ones usually like the ambience that comes with them," says Don Kariniemi, co-owner of Airmist Sauna & Steam, another company. "They like to fire up the stove and chop the wood (electric units are also available), enjoy the soft steam and then just step outside the door to cool off and enjoy nature. It's a really relaxing way to spend a couple of hours."

That hot-and-cold combination is key to the authentic sauna experience — heating up in the sauna and then cooling off in the lake, pool or snow is one of life's truly invigorating experiences, sauna fans insist.

"I like to walk up to the building and smell the fire and see the smoke, and then cool off by walking outside and looking at the stars or rolling around in the snow," says Alan Steiff, who has outdoor saunas at his home and his cabin, and who also sells sauna supplies at his business, Northland Brick and Fireplace Supply.

Although Saunatec introduced its upscale outdoor saunas only a year ago, Raisanen predicts sales will heat up like, well, a sauna.

"They're currently less than 10 percent of our business, but they're going to be one of our main products within a couple of years," he says.

But don't tell the Finns, those sauna purists, about the "trend" of the outdoor sauna. The Scandinavians have been using such houses for longer than America has been in existence.