

ITINERARY



[HOME]

Living in a Bubble

Four years ago, when England's winter fog and rain left him weary, outdoor-product designer Wayne Farmer began thinking about bubbles. Instead of being stuck inside all season, wouldn't it be nice to have a warm, dry, clear-walled cocoon that felt like outdoor seating?

Farmer sketched some ideas, tested prototypes and started manufacturing his creation, the **G-Pod**, in 2010. The product debuted in the United States this June. Inside, it's a nature-framed sitting room, sleeping quarters or dining area, depending on the configuration. Outside, the spherical structure resembles an oversized garden sculpture. ➤



"We're actually creating our own code with U.S. customs, because nothing describes this," says David Kim of Mars Lab, the company importing the G-Pod. "It's not a greenhouse. It's not a prefab building or structure."

Dubbed the "British lounge" by Kim and his colleagues, the G-Pod brings Farmer's bubble concept to life with arcs of stainless steel and layers of laminated, weather-treated Norwegian spruce. Sturdy, tinted polycarbonate and acrylic panels between the arcs filter ultraviolet rays while keeping the outdoors in view. The doors and windows on two large stationary styles open and close for ventilation; two smaller models feature an always-open entrance, but the spheres can be rotated to avoid rain, wind or direct sunlight, and there's also an optional canvas closure with zipper doors.

At approximately 11 feet wide, the larger 14-seat Diner and 10-seat Summerhouse models offer customizable color, floor and tabletop options. A 20-watt solar panel comes standard to power lights inside the pod. These two models are also equipped to receive electricity — that means warm-climate customers can connect an air conditioner.

The compact Lounger, with seats and tables that convert to beds, and the smaller Seater model occupy about as much space as a patio set. Each accommodates up to six people. Cushions in these open-door styles incorporate the same water-resistant materials used in yachts.

Creative owners are capitalizing on the G-Pod's functionality and flexibility by using them as home offices, personal libraries and backyard observatories. Others anchor spheres on rooftops to take advantage of panoramic views. No backyard? No problem. Tuck a pod inside a loft apartment for space-within-a-space coziness.

"What's important to understand is that the G-Pod mimics its environment," says Kim, referencing the reflective window panels and simple, modern design. "It blends into its surroundings." \$14,995 to \$34,995; www.thegpod.com —RENEE BRINCKS

Outdoor Living: A Timeline



1600s: British builders complete the Tree House at Pitchford Hall, now considered one of the world's oldest existing tree houses.



1813: Johann Wyss publishes *The Swiss Family Robinson*, the tale of a shipwrecked family who create a tree house on a tropical island.

1990: Life on the prairie goes plastic with the Little Tikes Log Cabin, a popular children's playhouse that quickly becomes a backyard favorite.



1993: Tennessee minister Horace Burgess begins work on a 10-story, 10,000-square-foot tree house constructed with salvaged and recycled lumber.

2002: Four friends launch the Small House Society, which provides resources for those interested in small, sustainable living spaces. Founder Gregory Johnson moves into a 140-square-foot home the following year.



2012: The G-Pod arrives in the United States.



Cucumber gazpacho with Greek yogurt and yuzu from Maria's Light Menu

[HEALTH + FOOD]

On the Light Side

Washington, D.C.'s

upscale Italian hot spot **FIOLA** (www.fioladc.com) is perhaps best known by locals for its decadent lobster ravioli — a dish that doesn't exactly scream *health food*. But Maria Trabocchi, the chef's wife and Fiola's director of special events, is changing the game with Maria's Light Menu — a three-course lunch (\$24) offering lighter dishes. Now, guests can enjoy delicious, healthful Italian meals without feeling like they're missing out. Here, she shares her tips with us:

AMERICAN WAY: How did you come up with the Maria menu?

MARIA TRABOCCHI: While I love my husband's passion for food, I always knew I didn't want to be big just because we have a restaurant. So we developed this menu. He cooks, I taste; I see myself as the customer.

AW: What kind of dishes does the Maria menu offer?

MT: It's light and feminine, but not boring. Everything has color. It's like shoes: You have the plain flip-flops; those are Caesar salads. Or you can buy the gorgeous Yves Saint Laurent colored pumps; that's our

blood-orange salad with fresh basil and hazelnuts. It's so pretty!

AW: What should diners look for to stay healthy?

MT: Simple cooking methods — no sauce. Ask questions, like how it's cooked. Go with fish. But it's opportunity cost. You can have that piña colada on the beach, but then maybe you sacrifice at dinner. And make a plan: On Mondays, have something green for dinner. On Tuesdays, fruit for dessert. If you see the ingredients on the menu, ask them to prepare something special for you, like a tomato salad.

AW: Anything to avoid?

MT: Anything fried, or with butter or cream. But it's not that you can [never have it]. Deprivation makes you miserable. It's about portion control. Try everything ... a bite of calamari, a half slice of cake. You don't need the whole thing; take the rest home.

AW: Any last tips?

MT: Make the right restaurant choice. There are healthier options at smaller, family-owned restaurants with organic menu items. —KATE PARHAM

OUTDOOR LIVING: FROM TOP: LUCINDA LAMBERTON/CORBIS; BUYENLARGE/GETTY IMAGES; JAE S. LEE/AP IMAGES; DANIEL BUXTON