

Outdoor Kitchen Design

By Carol Lamkins, CMKBD, CID

Outdoor Kitchens have become one of the hottest trends in the past 5 to 10 years. The backyard is an extension of the home's living space. Outdoor kitchens invite casual summer entertaining and recreation by bringing the cooking and dining into outdoor living spaces. These kitchens can range from simple cooking configurations to fully equipped spaces. There is a plethora of appliances and products to choose from that are approved for exterior use.

Interior design services are being sought out by the homeowner to ensure that the total design is functional, aesthetically pleasing and visually consistent with the rest of the home. A professional interior designer can give the space the "WOW" factor that will satisfy most critical homeowner.



Thomas J. Story

Here are some points to consider when planning the outdoor kitchen:



1. Consider the location.

- Keep the outdoor kitchen close to the indoor kitchen if the homeowner is going to be transporting dishes and foods prepared indoors
- Pass-through windows to the kitchen are handy for efficiently transferring food and serving ware before and after the meal
- It is crucial to consider the best views and sight lines when choosing placement for the outdoor kitchen, especially at the dining table and bar areas
- Privacy from neighbors can be obtained by screening views with trees, hedges and shrubbery

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- Place the outdoor kitchen under existing shade such as that from trees and vines as they ventilate easily and as an added bonus, vines and trees "transpire" to evaporate moisture for cooling themselves, thus creating their own natural misting system
- If the space is shaded with a patio roof, make sure that the building material above the cooking area is not flammable or requires a vent hood
- If a shade trellis, pergola or solid patio roof is necessary, check local building codes, setbacks, homeowners association, etc.
- Consider sun angles for the direction of slatted patio roofs
- Use built-in umbrella stands to add shade options in safe areas
- Identify wind patterns as smoke blows downwind off the grill
- Make sure that the dining areas are upwind of smoke when possible
- Consider proximity to windows, doors or balconies that are downwind of the grill
- The patio slab must be strong enough to bear the weight of the cabinetry and appliances
- The patio floor should be slip-resistant and easy to clean
- Electrical wiring with sufficient load carrying capability is critical for lighting and appliances
- Water access is usually less expensive if tied to the home's existing water and drainage system
- It is best to plumb gas lines to a cooking grill or pizza oven versus propane tanks



2. Select cabinetry and countertops that will weather and not warp.

- Options for cabinetry include weather resistant materials such as marine grade plywood, teak, UV resistant plastics, stainless steel and MDF that is designed for outdoor use

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Stone, tile or brick veneers are popular for cabinets with stainless steel doors

- Use recommended sealants as necessary to protect the cabinetry material
- Countertop material choices might be tile, stone, concrete or acrylic-based solid surface – confirm the warranty and use-and-care on surfaces for outdoor use
- Countertop edges should overhang the cabinetry by 1-1/2" to 2" and if possible, have a drip line routed just underneath the front edge to break water drips in front of cabinetry to avoid damaging more sensitive cabinet finishes



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3. Select appliances that are designed for outdoor use.

- Appliances might include grills, vent hoods, warming drawers, pizza ovens, refrigeration, wine chillers, kegerator (beer) with taps and water filtration systems to name a few



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- The appliances should be UL tested and stamped for exterior exposure
- All manufacturer specifications should be carefully followed such as for ventilation, cooking surfaces and cabinetry clearance
- Pre-manufactured outdoor kitchen units are available for compact arrangements



Outdoor Kitchens Depot

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4. Outdoor plumbing fixtures and fittings must withstand the elements.

- Look for sinks made of stainless steel, acrylic-based solid surface or ceramic
- Many bowl configurations and accessories are available for entertaining
- Chrome faucets and sink accessories are usually the most durable unless a PVD lifetime finish has been applied to satin nickel, polished brass, etc.

5. Good lighting is critical as the kitchen will be used in the evenings.

- All lighting fixtures must be approved for outdoor use
- Exterior approved ceiling fans ventilate and add comfort to the space
- Televisions and sound systems designed for outdoor use must be properly protected from the elements
- Glare is a major consideration in the placement of outdoor televisions



6. Good design

- Scale the outdoor kitchen to the backyard space
- Plan the best layout shape for the area such as galley, corridor, “L”, “U”, “G” or island
- Walking clearances and space ergonomics are based upon number of people using the outdoor kitchen

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- Identify prep, cook, serve and clean-up zones or split levels for bar service
- Incorporate separate zones for serving space for food and for beverages
- Consider how guests will efficiently pass through the serving spaces and how they will use the dining areas
- Figure out how many serve stations might be needed for a bartender or caterer leaving at least a 3 to 4 foot working space around each designated area
- Standard countertop height is 36" AFF but a couple of inches may need to be added to accommodate undercounter appliance – be sure to keep the counters lower than your client's bent elbow when standing
- Select bar stools before determining bar counter height which varies from 42" to 48" high and allow at least 24" of horizontal space for each chair
- Cantilever the bar height sitting area a minimum of 12 inches at 42" AFF and 15" at 36" AFF to allow room for bended knees
- Remember to allow for several attractive waste receptacles in appropriate areas that can be built-in or free standing



Photo courtesy of Erin

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Choosing an Outdoor Grill

The heart of the outdoor kitchen is the barbecue grill. They come in a variety of sizes, features and prices. Outdoor grills are available in two styles - built-in or on a

portable cart. Grills may incorporate griddles, woks, rotisseries, keep-warm shelf, interior lighting, warming drawers, side burners, lift-up service counters and more.

British Thermal Units (BTUs) are a measurement of the output of each burner on a gas grill. The higher the BTUs, the hotter the grill will get. Gas grills offer better control over temperatures making them the most popular for outdoor cooking. A typical indoor range produces about 5,000 to 18,000 BTUs of cooking output per burner. Outdoor gas grills can produce from about 8,000 to about 30,000 BTUs of cooking power. On the other hand, many grilling enthusiasts still prefer charcoal for its typical traditional aroma and flavor that it imparts to food.

Other aspects to consider in selecting the grill are the square inches of grilling surface, the height of the hood allowing for large foods and the ease of maintaining the exterior finish. The shape of the grill is also important. The grill box typically comes in rectangular or round shapes. Rounded kettle shapes are more conducive in allowing the heat and smoke to wrap up around the food. The rectangular shape offers much larger cooking surfaces.

A cover is a must for a grill that is going to remain outside. They are available for most grill sizes and are made of waterproof material.

This article details key factors that drive good outdoor kitchen design. In summary, the interior designer is the best professional to consider when planning and building the outdoor dream kitchen.

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