

More Than Just a Backyard

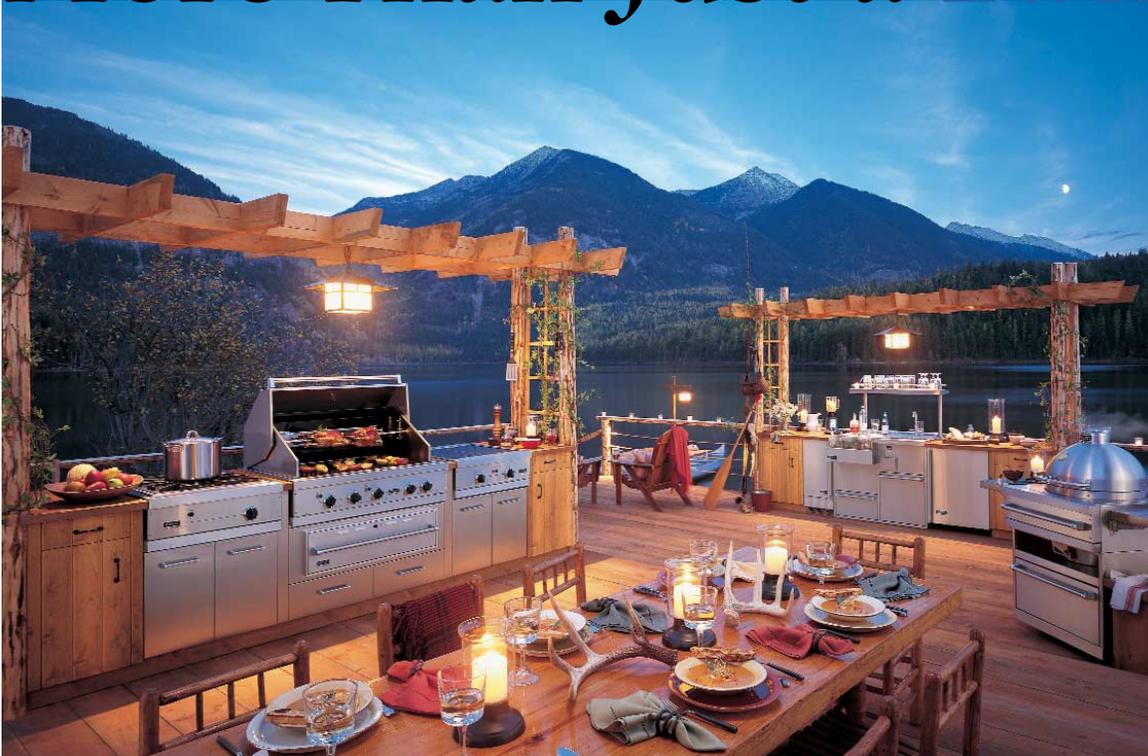


Image courtesy of Viking Range Corporation

THERE'S NO NEED TO LIMIT THE COOKING, COMMUNITY AND COMFORT OF YOUR KITCHEN TO INSIDE YOUR HOME. VENTURE OUTDOORS AND CREATE A KITCHEN, SIMPLE OR ELABORATE, THAT IS SURE TO BECOME AN ENTERTAINING OASIS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

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CTW FEATURES

Too many cooks may spoil the broth, but there's no harm in giving the family chef a second kitchen. Especially if that additional cooking space takes up residence in the great outdoors. "You can do virtually anything outside now that you can inside," says Dick Atkins of Designer Outdoor Kitchens in Lenexa, Kan. And with the prevalence of heating lamps, your outdoor kitchen activities aren't limited to select seasons - you can enjoy your outdoor

kitchen year round.

He has worked on high-end outdoor kitchens with everything from warming drawers and refrigerators to wine coolers, TVs and full-size bars. Many of these spaces are planned with the same care as an interior remodeling project, and they can provide soothing spots for entertaining a crowd or just kicking back with family after a long day at work.

The choices are as endless as your budget, but a basic outdoor kitchen includes three key zones: cooking, prepping and eating. "It might be as simple as a picnic table and hibachi," says Deborah Krasner, author of

"The New Outdoor Kitchen: Cooking Up a Kitchen for the Way You Live and Play" (Taunton, 2007).

"You can really have an outdoor kitchen at any budget." Just don't expect to get the same amenities with \$2,000 as \$50,000, and keep in mind that everything is contagious. "You go to someone's house and taste the pizza from an outdoor pizza oven, and you go home and want one," she says.

So why make such a big investment when you already have a kitchen indoors? In essence, an outdoor kitchen expands your home's square footage and gives you an enter-

taining space that's likely to be the envy of the neighbors. There are also more cooking options outside, which range

from smoking to grilling. And when you sell your home, this project may offer the same kind of return on investment as upgrading your interior kitchen, says Pete Georgiadis, owner of Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, Kalamazoo, Mich.

If you're thinking about taking the plunge, start by considering how you're likely to use the space. Will a few people gather there? Or lots of guests? Will it be completely independent from the indoor kitchen or more of a satellite area? Are you a gourmet cook? Or do you have simpler needs? "I like to do brats and beer and onions, and my wife loves it when I do it outside because it doesn't smell up the house," Georgiadis says.

All outdoor kitchens start with a grill, but from there many homeowners choose to add storage, prep space, under-the-counter refrigeration and a sink. As you select materials, it's key to keep in mind how they'll stand up outside. "Durability and maintenance matter most," Georgiadis says. Look at how a counter or cabinet will stand up to salt air or freezing temperatures. Stainless steel is a durable option - especially when an



Image courtesy of Viking Range Corporation

Think outside the box: An outdoor kitchen isn't simply another place to cook. It's a chance to extend your home's design and flair just as much as it's a new venue for entertaining.

item also has stainless hardware – but wood needs to be covered and can require a lot of upkeep.

It's also crucial to think about layout. Will the placement of the grill cause smoke to blow into guests' faces? A ventilation hood can alleviate the problem, but it can also carry a sizable price tag.

Two cheaper options: Install a stainless-steel oscillating fan to blow away the smoke or strategically change the grill locale. The latter is also important for interacting with guests. "You want your chef – whoever that is – to not be isolated from the rest of the people," says Tom Ewell, vice president of Outdoor Kitchens by Design, Jacksonville Beach, Fla. "You at least need a stand-up bar where someone can stand and talk to him or her."

Frequent entertainers may

want to splurge on even more elaborate add-ons. An ice maker helps keep large crowds happy while a warming drawer allows you to serve everyone at the same time – regardless of whether they want their steaks rare or well-done. Good hosts also know the importance of atmosphere. Well planned lighting and landscaping can liven up a space or take stress down a notch. Other impressive extras include ceiling fans, keg taps and sound systems.

"I've had a lot of clients tell me it's like the field of dreams," Ewell says. "If you build it, they will come."

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Grill-Buying Checklist

Every outdoor kitchen starts with a grill, but how do you choose the right one? Try these simple guidelines for avoiding buyer's remorse:

Basics: Do you want charcoal or gas? Some homeowners opt for two grills or choose a hybrid model that allows charcoal, gas and wood in one grill.

Durability: Put your hands on any grill you're considering to make sure the parts don't feel flimsy. "Does the hood wobble when you open and close it?" says Tom Ewell, vice president of Outdoor Kitchens by Design, Jacksonville Beach, Fla.

Power: Everyone touts BTUs (British thermal units), but Pete Georgiadis, owner of Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, Kalamazoo, Mich., says the number that really matters is BTUs per square inch of grilling space. Take the time to do the math.

Bells and Whistles: "What features do you like and does it do all that?" Georgiadis says. "Do you want to smoke? Or have a searing burner?" Think about how you cook and whether a particular grill meets your needs.

Cleaning: How much time will it take to clean and maintain the grill? Grates coated in porcelain, for example, are easier to clean than stainless counterparts, says Taylor Calhoun, a product manager with Viking Range Corporation in Greenwood, Miss.

Material: Stainless steel is a popular and durable option for the outdoors, but you need to pay attention to the details. Is the hardware stainless? How high is the quality of the stainless steel?

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