



Way to Grow in Orinda

What's Cooking in Your Back Yard?

Bringing the Inside - Out.

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Orindans love the outdoors, and why wouldn't we? The relatively new concept of "Outdoor Living" is a rapidly growing lifestyle phenomenon in our area. Many homeowners view their yards as an extension of their homes, and create separate spaces and rooms for specific purposes. Yet outdoor living has evolved beyond the picnic tables, folding chairs, and hibachis of our parents' backyards. This new landscaping trend is about bringing

putting greens to theaters, along with workout rooms, meditation gardens, and even a smoking lounge.

Because our weather often includes a big chill in the evening, fireplaces and fire pits are popular for adding warmth and ambiance. Elegant outdoor lighting fixtures that look as if they're intended for indoor use (chandeliers, candelabras, table lamps) extend the evening and add to the feeling of comfort. People are even bringing



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Bring your kitchen outdoors to enjoy that special outdoor ambiance.

comforts outside.

Today's consumers have a vast and growing selection of products to make outdoor living one of the most pleasurable aspects of owning a home. Backyard kitchens sometimes become more elaborate than the inside one, with large, built-in barbecues (many including rotisseries and side burners) wine coolers, refrigerators, pizza ovens, and food and cocktail prep areas.

Aside from the two most popular additions — kitchens and living rooms — outdoor enthusiasts are adding all sorts of creative rooms and spaces to their yards. We have designed and installed outdoor play spaces, from bocce ball courts to

indoor entertainment systems outside with weather-proof televisions and stereo systems. Artwork, rugs, and furnishings specially made for outside can add a roomy feeling to a patio or deck. Today there is almost nothing you can have inside your home that you can't enjoy outside, too.

The most important step in building a good-looking, functional outdoor kitchen is design. You must consider the same factors that you would for a new indoor kitchen. First, you must consider what you want. Then what your budget and space can afford. Then you must look for the appropriate location based on convenience, site surroundings, and climate conditions. These factors will also impact the selection

of products and materials used in building your open-air cooking and dining space. Knowledge of the safety and durability of these products and materials when used outdoors is key in saving you replacement costs.

For convenience and efficiency, often the best place for your outdoor kitchen is just outside your indoor one. Here you'll have quick and easy access to food, equipment, and tableware. By choosing a location with an emphasis on efficiency, you'll use and enjoy your open-air kitchen more often.

Sometimes a view, a focal point (such as a pool or water feature), or the lay of the land will dictate the placement of your outdoor kitchen farther from your house. For example, you may need to have your space covered with shade, or trees may need to be added or removed. If you're fortunate enough to have a great view of the setting sun, your dining space should be positioned to benefit from that view.

The terrain of your yard is also a factor in deciding the layout of your outdoor space. If you have a hillside, like so many of us in Orinda do, it may require installing a retaining wall. Your built-in barbecue, bench, or fireplace can double as a retaining wall when backed into that hillside. It's also important to consider the degree of privacy you want — your landscaping will create and define the "walls" of your space.

Among the other location considerations for your outside rooms is their impact on the views from inside your home. And if your outdoor kitchen is far from your house, a smooth flow of traffic will be important.

As the trend of outdoor living grows, the market is keeping up with the demand by offering more products designed to live outside. There are more appliances available these days than just a couple of years ago that are UL-rated for outdoor use.

The best outside floor and counter surface options are the natural ones, such as granite or stone. Products made by nature will better withstand the wear and tear of outdoor exposure. These are generally best chosen in lighter colors so as not to absorb too much of the sun's heat. Concrete and stainless are also good choices, and certain tiles can be more durable than stone, particularly when used for flooring.

Factors such as heat, sound and light are often overlooked when planning outdoor spaces, yet these elements are essential. Think about how the system will be powered. There are two basic options: If your backyard kitchen is close to your house, it can be powered through a common

or nearby wall. A more remote location will require installing a separate electrical and/or gas line.

Because cool Orinda evenings often send us indoors for warmth, most homeowners are adding a heat source to their exterior rooms. There are many options to choose from in this regard. We have installed propane and natural gas heaters, mounted in eaves and arbors, as well as free-standing models. Fireplaces and fire-pits, although not as efficient as a gas heater in warming up a large space, are a more popular choice.

Sound systems will greatly enhance the social aspect of your outdoor space and can be wired to the in-house stereo system, or wired to act independently. Finally, good lighting is critical to the success of your backyard kitchen and entertainment spaces. Just as with the indoor kitchen, there must be ample amounts of both ambient and task lighting. Often, the ambient (mood) lighting is remembered, but the task lighting



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The Wheaton family will certainly enjoy summer evenings with their new outdoor kitchen and fireplace.

is not. It can be difficult to perfect your cooking if the cook can't see the food. Good task lighting can easily be achieved by placing small, directional spot lights in overhead eaves, structures, or even in trees. We avoid the barbecue lights with flexible

stems because they don't look good, they don't hold themselves up well, and they rust easily. There are newer, more effective mounting lights available that can be permanently attached onto your barbecue counter.