

El Dorado County

HOME IMPROVEMENT



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Cooking *al fresco*

■ Sherri Bergmann



Homeowners have a healthy appetite for outdoor kitchens

Outdoor kitchens have really evolved since our early ancestors cooked over a campfire. What has not changed is the reason we want to cook in the great outdoors. It's a part of a man's (and woman's) innate desire to barbecue. Nothing beats great weather and hearing frogs croak, birds sing and crickets chirp while the smell of a good barbecued steak or hamburger wafts through the air, pausing conversations as family and friends take a deep breath and get ready to fill their plates.

Baseball may be considered America's great pastime, but few will disagree that cooking outdoors is a grand slam.

Outdoor kitchen options are endless — customize to your taste and budget. You can have just a grill or design a custom unit with a refrigerator or kegerator, bar sink, dual-burner stove, cocktail station, storage unit plus an overhead awning with a ceiling fan or a built-in umbrella to shade the cook on hot summer days. Want more? Add your own pizza oven.

Not sure how to start planning the outdoor kitchen of your dreams?

"When considering an outdoor living space, budget is No. 1," advised Geoff Thomas, who owns GPT Construction Masonry & Design with his wife Paula. "Layout and location are second. Third, how many friends and family do you plan on entertaining? Lastly, choose the equipment you will need to cook your preferred style barbecue or the size of your pizza oven."

"The first thing people need to know about an outdoor kitchen



Courtesy photos

Real kitchens have curves. Custom countertops created by GPT Construction Masonry & Design can feature smooth curves if the homeowner desires.

is that when it is built correctly and out of masonry materials, it can become an asset and can create additional value to your home," Geoff added.

"When thinking about spending money in your backyard, keep in mind that not everyone wants to swim in a swimming pool but everyone wants to cook and entertain their friends. We want to build our customers' investments that they can recoup or have their children's children enjoy."

Paula pointed out that as an investment, having an outdoor kitchen can help sell a home a lot faster and shared a testimony from Darren, a repeat customer, who wrote in his Yelp.com review, "We sold our home two years later and the

backyard kitchen became one of the biggest selling points of the house. Our Realtor told us we had 'the nicest backyard in Whitney Ranch.' This made the value of the house much higher and very easy to sell."

Custom countertops

As opposed to pre-made and cut countertops, each outdoor kitchen countertop done by GPT Construction Masonry & Design is unique.

Geoff elaborated, "We don't use pre-molded counters. Our countertops are 'poured in place' on the kitchen monolithically, meaning the concrete has rebar running through the kitchen as well as the countertop — locking it into a cage of rebar. You can dance on these countertops."

"They age well and look better year after year as they take on the characteristics of poured-in-place concrete countertops," he continued. "And, most importantly, they do not date and last a lifetime. The UV rays from the sun are the only thing that breaks down the sealer on the concrete countertops; every three to five years they need to be resealed depending on what your visual preference is. We personally like the old look and custom patina of the aged tops; it gives them a softer look and character. If there was peeling of the sealer that would be deemed repairable."

"Regarding colors, the acid stain come in earth tones and it is the customer's vision of how dark or light they would like the

colors as well as what pattern they would like. After 15 years of business we have a plethora of pictures to choose from. From subtle to really busy, it's up to each customer's individual taste."

Hassle-free maintenance

In spite of the harsh elements of nature, masonry requires very little maintenance and care.

"Our concrete countertops need only a simple Windex and a rag, or if you've waited too long and the dust and pollen have built up, then break out the rag and Dawn soap and give it a wash just like your car," Geoff said. "Then squeegee the tops just like a windshield and you're good to go, ready to barbecue."

From imagination to reality

The hardest part of starting an outdoor kitchen may be wondering how it will look and fit in your backyard.

"If you are having difficulty envisioning your outdoor environment, we have a design package available that gives you a PDF to-scale plan of your new area with a 3D rendering," Geoff said. "We work closely and engage in multiple contacts to tweak and refine your project so that it meets your needs and your budget. The 3D rendering



Courtesy photo

This outdoor kitchen project included extending the patio with travertine and creating a tight unit with a barbecue, fireplace and wood-fired pizza oven.

is beautiful in showing you what it is like to stand in your yard looking at your project so you can get a feel of being in your backyard project. Multiple angles are provided so everything is perfect. Once the design and rendering are completed, you have the added bonus knowing that if you end up signing with us the cost of the design goes toward your project."

Geoff and Paula said they take pride in

providing their customers with the convenience of a one-stop shop for barbecue and pizza oven equipment, outdoor furniture and all outdoor kitchen needs. They added they are especially proud of building masonry that withstands the test of time so future generations can enjoy the function and beauty of the outdoor kitchens they've created.

gptconstruction.com ■ (916) 204-1223