



# AL FRESCO

TODAY'S **OUTDOOR KITCHENS** ARE FOR MORE THAN JUST GRILLING BURGERS.

BY ROBERT HAYNES-PETERSON

**G**rowing up, an “outdoor kitchen” (if such a term even existed) generally meant a portable barbecue sitting atop an aqua-colored slab of cement. Basketweave plastic lounge chairs might be protected by a corrugated tin awning, and Dad spent more time swearing at non-functioning equipment than actually grilling. Today, a host of high-tech innovations, weatherproof custom appliances, and a desire to maximize the social space of even the largest houses have redefined the concept of cooking and dining al fresco.

“We actually require our homeowners to include a summer kitchen in

their construction,” says Page Pierce, vice president of Walt Disney World Resort’s new Golden Oak luxury housing development. The community, which opened last September with eight homes, will eventually host as many as 800 homes, along with a top-tier restaurant and demonstration kitchen, community center and other amenities. Homeowners have VIP access to the neighboring Disney theme parks, along with available perks like door-to-park car service, concierge services for the greater Orlando region and access to special and private events.

TOP: BURDGE & ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS; BOTTOM LEFT: BURDGE & ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS; BOTTOM RIGHT: BURDGE & ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS



“Outdoor kitchens are about being social, not about formality,” says architect Doug Burdge, who designed the spaces above and left.

“One of our thoughts in planning Golden Oak was to not create a development that was just boxes,” says Pierce. “Because this is Florida, it’s important to celebrate the indoor/outdoor living we’re able to enjoy.” At a minimum, most houses have a covered area with a great barbecue, outdoor sink, refrigerator and outdoor seating. But they can get much more elaborate. “Some have remote control retractable screens to keep the bugs out while allowing flow from the indoor kitchen, past the summer kitchen, all the way to the swim-up bar.”

Flow, and the efficient use of indoor/outdoor space seem to be key ingredients in designing a successful outdoor kitchen. “When we pay taxes and insurance on a house, we’ve paid for the environment around that house,” says Julian Exclusia of Florida Builder Appliances, an upscale division of Sears Holding Corporation. “We’re not just sitting in a cubby hole.” Exclusia works with athletes, entertainers and others to design and equip custom homes, and he’s critical of some architects who “hide” a house’s kitchen in the corner. “If you’re entertaining, you’re looking at the expanse, or you should be, whether it’s the Colorado Rockies or the Caribbean.”

Christopher Grubb, president of Arch Interiors in Beverly Hills, notes that “we’re trying to create a cohesive look and bring these spaces together.” His full-service design firm has created several L.A.-area outdoor spaces, featuring popular elements like warming drawers, beer taps and an outdoor pizza oven, adding utility and distinction. Doug Burdge, a Malibu architect, designed an oceanfront property with not one, but three outdoor spaces: a grill area, a semi-enclosed chef’s kitchen and a rooftop social space.

“Outdoor kitchens are now a part of almost every design we do.”

Many significant outdoor improvements, however, tend to happen after completion of the house itself. This seems, in a large part, due to the economy. “In Southern California right now, 99% of all the home contracts are improvements on existing properties, not new construction,” says Grubb. Meanwhile in Florida, Exclusia notes that banks are reluctant to finance what they see as an elective (and expensive—elaborate kitchens can run \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more) element. Thus, even high-end custom homeowners are completing the house first, then financing the outdoor activity spaces. However, Grubb notes that a professional, well-designed outdoor kitchen and social area could add hundreds of thousands of dollars or more in resale value to a luxury property.

**T**here are other reasons to design a space more elaborate than the average lonely Weber grill on an island of concrete. Owners who rent their homes for charity events or other gatherings effectively double or triple the number of available hosting venues (or, alternatively, keep guests and visitors outside, away from living areas and damage-prone furnishings).

Simple physics may also be at play in the rising popularity of the outdoor kitchen. “We’ve kind of peaked on our maximum house size,” says Jeff Dross, corporate director of industry trends for Kichler Lighting. “So a lot of architects are building in courtyards, adding large glass walls, and creating indoor/outdoor flow. You’re essentially adding more rooms, and your yard becomes a really nice, usable space.”



Today’s outdoor kitchens are designed to ensure that entertainment, design and service flow smoothly from inside to outside.

