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Moving Life Outside

Today's outdoor space becomes an essential part of daily living and healthfulness

OFFERING A RESPITE FROM SCREENS and technology, the popularity of alfresco dining and cooking has steadily grown over the last decade. However, this year the outdoor kitchen took an unexpected leap in demand as many consumers are homebound and looking for variety and ways to safely socialize.

“The greatest advantage of outdoor kitchen design is the fact that it exists outside,” said Sarah Lograsso, director of marketing for Kindred Outdoors & Surrounds. “For those who are fortunate enough to have green spaces of their own, the outdoors represents a ready retreat from the pressures of the day or even the pressures of any given moment.”

BEHIND THE JUMP IN DEMAND

The pandemic is credited for inspiring this popularity. Manufacturers like Memphis Wood Fire Grills have reported recorded sales this summer; their research showed that 81 percent of consumers who traditionally cook at home twice per week said they would cook outdoors more going forward.

“Along with the increase in the number of people working and spending more time at home, people are investing in their indoor and outdoor spaces, upgrading to higher-quality appliances and cooking much more in their own backyards,” said Sharla Wagy, general manager of Memphis Wood Fire Grills.

Consumers are looking for their outdoor spaces to be a reprieve from the home's interior and its new association with work and school. With multiple family members living together for longer hours than usual, it is essential to everyone's well-being to have a place to escape. It's even more beneficial if that place accommodates a fun new hobby or activity.

ABOVE LEFT The **KALAMAZOO** Hybrid Fire Grill is a high-performance gas grill that can also cook with charcoal and wood. The grill handles a range of cooking techniques from low-and-slow barbecue to intense searing at temperatures in excess of 1,000 degrees. The K1000 version of the Hybrid Fire Grill, shown here, starts at \$23,295. kalamazoogourmet.com

ABOVE RIGHT The True Clear Ice Machine from **TRUE RESIDENTIAL** produces up to 70 pounds per day with storage of 28 pounds of ice. The Clear Ice Machine uses less energy and water than other residential ice machines, and all models have a drain pump and water filter built in. MSRP is \$3,999 in stainless steel (shown). true-residential.com

RIGHT The 42-in. Lyra Fire Bowl from **KINDRED OUTDOORS & SURROUNDS** has a modern linear design with a sloped fire feature that boasts a 65,000 BTU burner and all brass fittings. Sharp, 90-degree inset walls add to its monolithic concrete design, and it comes standard with black lava rock, carry straps and match-lit components to comply with CSA standards for natural gas or liquid propane. It is shown in aged teak with a honed finish, and the MSRP for the 42-in. model is \$2,999. MyKindredLiving.com

By ERINN LOUCKS

“We've witnessed a massive increase in the number of meals people are cooking at home, and as we cook more, we look for a bit more variety,” said Russ Faulk, chief designer and head of product at Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet. “People are learning new cooking skills, like traditional barbecue and pizza making.”

There is also a need for safe places to gather. According to Lograsso, many people have begun to open their own outdoor spaces to trusted family, friends and neighbors. These socially distanced gatherings supplement for lost opportunities for dining out, going to the movies or cheering on a favorite sports team.

“Many outdoor spaces are adopting the practices we've previously been used to enjoying away from home,” added Lograsso.

BRINGING ENTERTAINMENT OUTSIDE

With these demands in mind, clients want versatile, fun and highly functional outdoor spaces. Bringing the comforts of the indoors outside is important to them; people want to expand their entertainment in their backyards and create experience-based spaces. This includes televisions, firepits, wine cabinets, full cooking stations and more.



“We see a large trend toward creating full entertainment suites outdoors,” said Andrew Shead, marketing manager, True Residential. “Consumers want all the necessary accoutrements of the indoors available outdoors, and they don’t want to sacrifice convenience, functionality, performance or style when doing so.”

According to Kyle You, THOR Kitchen managing director, men in particular are pushing for these types of spaces, complete with bar stations, wine refrigerators and especially a variety of different appliances, like pizza ovens and smokers.

“Instead of the traditional barbecue and patio set, we’re finding that men want to take their meals to the next level,” said You.

Implementing technology throughout the space is extremely helpful – but not essential – for the successful outdoor entertaining experience these clients are looking for. Just like indoors, kitchen technology should make cooking more enjoyable. Updated appliances should allow for reliable, consistent cooking; light fixtures and temperature control elements should be simple to manipulate; and fire features should also ignite and extinguish easily. Consumers today are already used to the streamlined functionality of smart home technology inside and expect that convenience to be carried outdoors.

“Outdoor living has morphed beyond product functionality – that’s a given now,” said India Hynes, CEO of Vinotemp. “So today technology allows us to design and live outdoors without worrying about tech and instead focusing on comfort and needs.”

CREATING A UNIFIED SPACE

While the outdoor kitchen might be growing more independent from the indoor kitchen, homeowners still want to see cohesiveness between the two spaces. Fortunately, manufacturers have made it possible to echo a home’s interior in an outdoor space with indoor/outdoor units and finishes that can be used in both areas. Many outdoor appliances are offered in the highest-quality stainless steel and engineered with year-round use in mind.

“With all the gorgeous finishes, hardware options and stylistically designed units, there is no reason consumers cannot carry the design style of their interiors into the outdoors,” said Shead. “There are no longer limited choices.”

Powder coat technology provides for a range of design options, while preserving the durability and low-maintenance benefits of stainless steel. These finishes are available in dozens of colors – deep greens and blues are the most popular for outdoors – as well as wood-grain and industrial finishes and can also be applied to interior spaces for full cohesiveness.



ABOVE The Solaris Outdoor Collection from **CAESAR-STONE** provides the convenience of stain-resistant, easy-to-clean surfaces with the durability to withstand all the elements. The collection currently includes three surface options – Middy (shown here), Palm Shade and Clearskies – all of which are UV protected and require no sealants or waxes for maintenance. The price is \$75-\$125 per square foot installed. www.caesarstoneus.com

RIGHT The Beale Street Built-In from **MEMPHIS WOOD FIRE GRILLS** is a pellet grill for those wanting to have the ability to smoke, sear, roast and convection bake in one unit. The built-in comes standard with indirect cooking capabilities and the option to sear over an open flame with the Direct Flame Insert. Other features include durable stainless-steel construction, a front-loading pellet hopper and an integrated Wi-Fi controller & Memphis mobile app. MSRP is \$1,799. memphisgrills.com



“As homeowners seek more comprehensive outdoor kitchens, we’ve seen a corresponding demand for storage and cabinetry to ensure that outdoor spaces can operate independently,” said Mitch Slater, president of Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens and Danver, which manufactures Trex Outdoor Kitchens.

THE CHALLENGES OF WEATHER

Designers will need to take advantage of these offerings in more regions than just traditional, temperate-weather areas. The 2020 Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchen’s “State of the Industry Report” showed a rising interest in outdoor kitchens across all regions and climates, even those with harsher weather.

Depending on the elements the outdoor kitchen will endure, designers now have options whatever the case. Adding shelter and heating and cooling can extend the outdoor season in many regions. Misting fans and umbrellas can help with hot weather, while fire pits and fireplaces – the



Engineered to perform in temperatures as high as 100 degrees, **VINOTEMP**’s 15-in. Outdoor Dual-Zone Wine & Beverage Cooler stores and cools wine and other beverages in two customizable climate zones. It also features a Dynamic Cooling Mode to rapidly cool items, interior lighting options and a temperature alarm that sounds if the door is left open and/or the storage temperature is out of range. MSRP is \$1,349. www.vinotemp.com



MoBar from **DOMETIC** is a mobile beverage center for the outdoor living space and is available in three sizes, MoBar 50, MoBar 300 (shown here) and MoBar 550. Easy to move with heavy-duty wheels and an ergonomic handle, each MoBar is produced with commercially graded 304 stainless steel and offers soft-closing hinges. MSRP starts at \$2,969 for the MoBar 300. www.dometic.com



LEFT BROWN JORDAN OUTDOOR KITCHENS has launched Elements, its latest collaboration with international architect and designer Daniel Germani. Available in a wide range of colors, the contemporary, free-standing collection offers a variety of stainless-steel modules and embraces a pared-back, European-inspired aesthetic built to withstand any climate. Price is available upon request. brownjordanoutdoorkitchens.com

most popular outdoor living upgrade overall, according to the Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchen's report – are still enjoyable in the winter months.

While outdoor kitchens today are durable enough to withstand the most extreme temperatures, placement is important to consider in a design. If a specialty appliance will be placed under an overhead structure, work with the manufacturer to ensure there are no fire hazards. A grill or a smoker should also be downwind of seating areas for everyone's comfort. The countertop material should not get uncomfortably hot in direct sunlight and should not glare brightly, and lighting – both in-ground and overhead, if there is an overhead structure – should ensure safety even when it's dark out.

BELOW LEFT RUVATI's Merino Collection of marine-grade sinks is made of premium T-316 stainless steel for heavy-duty use and is resistant to corrosion and rusting even in saltwater environments. The collection includes sinks in three sizes, including 15 by 15 inches, 15 by 20 inches and 21 by 20 inches with a 9-in. bowl depth, and comes with a cutting board and stainless-steel colander, bottom rinse grid and basket strainer drain assembly. MSRP starts at \$349. www.ruvati.com

RIGHT THOR KITCHEN's recently redesigned Pro-Style Modular Outdoor Kitchen Suite features a sleek, masculine design aesthetic with new enhancements, including recessed handles and larger surface areas. The six-piece outdoor kitchen suite includes: a 31-in., four-burner, built-in propane gas island grill with Infrared rotisserie burner; bar center; refrigerator cabinet module; grilling prep station; corner cabinet module; and wood-burning pizza oven module. MSRP for the outdoor kitchen suite with a 24-in. indoor/outdoor wine cooler is \$5,713, and the suite with indoor/outdoor refrigerator drawers is \$5,913. thorkitchen.com

WHERE THE OUTDOOR SPACE IS GOING

Right now, and in the near future, homeowners will consider quality outdoor spaces a high priority in their remodels. Even after restrictions have completely eased, it is likely that homeowners will continue the healthy habits they picked up this year, including cooking more at home and being outside.

These outdoor spaces will become increasingly design focused; finishes and colors normally reserved for the inside will be moved outside. Furniture, materials and aesthetics will echo the interiors more closely for a comfortable and cohesive feel, and technology will continue to streamline the cooking and entertaining experience inside and out.

“As we continue to explore new opportunities in outdoor living, it's only natural to expect that our spaces will continue to become more expressive and diverse to mirror our own rich identities,” said Lograsso. “Similarly, outdoor living spaces are inherently inclusive and come alive only when we come together. That is why it is important for us to continue to innovate.” ●

