

Dining Al Fresco



Homeowners who want to maximize their property and take full advantage of the Florida climate with its 365 days of temperate weather are turning to outdoor kitchens as an engaging option. The boom in outdoor entertaining setups can be attributed to the current affordability due to low interest rates and financing options. This, coupled with the nesting trend the country has experienced, has had a dramatic effect on the desirability to gather at home in small groups rather than travel or buy a second residence.


Some opt for separate cocktail bars replete with chillers, icemakers, water purifiers and built-in blenders. Others spend more time and dollars on the decking, landscaping, furnishing and audio for the entire yard. In the end, it seems the most desirable item is the outdoor built-in grill.

As of late, the biggest trend that Bob Estes, Greg Schletter and Sue Whitney of The Outdoor Kitchen Store have seen is to take on bigger and better components. Buyers are adding items to their outdoor islands such as side burners, wok burners, deep fryers and smokers to the grill unit itself, as well as all the modern appliances that you would find in a regular kitchen. The choices available for outdoor kitchens and living areas are as diverse in price and size as they are in style and substance. So no matter what kind of lifestyle or home you have, there is something for everyone.

Observation decks

Glenn Pearson, who recently built an 11,000-square-foot home in Apollo Beach, had his outdoor living space designed and constructed by Alliston Enterprises to maximize his entertaining possibilities and take full advantage of his glorious, unobstructed waterfront view of downtown St. Petersburg. Having the flexibility to create the decks, pool and outdoor kitchen space without restrictions from existing

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Outdoor kitchens are what's cooking in today's lifestyles

By Debra E. Williams

Photos by Johan Roetz/ Vision Photography



Overleaf: Rubin and Keith Kupatkin, with a family of five children, tended toward the higher end of appliances and accoutrements when creating their outdoor kitchen.

This page: Glenn Pearson wanted to take advantage of his glorious, unobstructed waterfront view when building his new home with outdoor kitchen.

Left: A granite-topped island is the centerpiece for the outdoor kitchen and entertainment center created for Glenn.



designs gave Glenn and his architect free rein to satisfy every desire and whim.

To that end, the outdoor space is set with three levels of decking made out of natural coral tile and framed with Spanish-style cement balustrades. The first level is accessible from the indoor kitchen and is set with outdoor seating for dining or simply relaxing and enjoying the view.

A set of short stairs leads gently down to the next level where a 15-foot, granite-topped island is the centerpiece for the kitchen and entertainment center. The unit is comprehensive with a stainless steel grill cooktop and rotisserie, a sink and a 48-inch refrigerator. Storage cabinets below house cooking utensils and bar items. On the opposite side of the grilling space a set of four barstools lines the raised countertop. Design and detail are everywhere in this showstopper, as is evident with the marble wall sculpture rendering of the famous Greek image of a small boy holding a large fish, which is encrusted on the main wall of this 700-square-foot deck.

Another set of shallow stairs leads down to the pool and spa encased within a 70-foot deck. Low voltage lighting and audio speakers are an added bonus to this ideal setting for cocktails for 50 or a quiet sunset cookout for two. No matter the occasion, the impact is pure repose.

"Imagine your highest level of stress during the day. When I come out here it is amazing how it immediately goes away. That is what this house does for me," reflects Glenn.

Appealing surroundings

Teresa and Rick Becker had a similar desire to bring the indoors out to their existing pool and lanai area when they decided to invest in a permanent grilling, entertaining and kitchen unit. Due to his hectic schedule, Rick wanted to hire someone who could execute the project from start to finish. The Outdoor Kitchen Store suited his needs perfectly with the setup of the design, labor and equipment from start to finish, the main goal being the utilization of space to the utmost capacity. The end product is based on an 8-foot island with a 36-inch cooktop and ventilation hood. The countertop and backsplash are designed with decorative ceramic and accent tiles that complement the gleaming stainless steel drawers, cabinet doors and 24-inch refrigerator. To finish off the outdoor entertaining experience, the Beckers went a step further and wired the lanai with audio/visual equipment.

"We are grilling out three to four times a week, and the maintenance is very easy to handle. The equipment is solid and long lasting. This has definitely increased the value and appeal of our home," says Rick.

A tranquil oasis

Robin Kapatkin dreamily describes her outdoor kitchen and living area as, "almost like an oasis." After she and her husband, Keith, bravely decided to go all out and complete the project they began almost seven years ago with a renovation to an existing concrete

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pool deck, there was no turning back. They agreed to the extensive renovation plans from The Outdoor Kitchen Store in hopes of creating a space that would provide them quality time with their five children, while adding substantial value to their home.

The Kapatkins tended toward the higher end of the appliances and accoutrements, as they are a family of seven and need to deal with the practical necessities of mealtime in addition to their social entertaining. To accomplish this they designed an outdoor brick 11x11½-foot gas grill island complete with a rotisserie and a wok component. Stainless steel warming and storage drawers and a 48-inch refrigerator smartly surround and support the grilling unit. The countertop affords space for four barstools and just beyond the grilling station is a marvelous pillared outside wood-burning fireplace that carries through with the brick and tile design from the main island. Around the pool deck they have four large chaises and two marble tables. To add extra room and comfort without being exposed to the summer sun, they reconfigured their 575-square-foot lanai by adding French doors and sliders, then installed a Corian-countertopped kitchen area with a wine cooler, dishwasher, sink and refrigerator.

Robin believes the smartest thing they did was keep the grill island outside and focus on the importance of having the large space well lit. She and her husband agree that while the project was extensive, it has brought immense relaxation and enjoyment to the entire family.

It is this sentiment that seems to be a common denominator in the outdoor kitchen customer. Indeed the kitchens have become so popular that waiting lists for installation have grown from weeks to months. Once the work begins it is a fairly swift process taking anywhere from two to four weeks depending upon the nuances of the individual design.

"Our clients range from 20 to 80 years old. We put in units for newlyweds, retirees, empty nesters, you name it. We really do not have a gender or age specific customer base," explains Greg Schletter. Bob Estes adds, "We all got into this business after careers in other fields, and it has been so satisfying to see the satisfaction and happiness in the homes of our customers and to see the qualities of their lives improve because of our product." 🍷

Theresa and Rick Becker wanted to bring the indoors out to their existing pool and lanai area, so they invested in a permanent grilling, entertainment and kitchen unit.