

GET CREATIVE!

When planning an outdoor kitchen, design innovation is as important as functionality

Words: Amanda Elboz



Australia's enviable climate ensures most homeowners across the country can use their gardens all year round. Our ability to enjoy our outdoor living experiences is constantly being enhanced with new design ideas and technology. For the cold weather there are heated swimming pools and outdoor heaters or fire pits; for

the warm weather there are outdoor showers to wash off the sand after a day at the beach and cooling outdoor fans. And then there is the outdoor kitchen, giving us even more opportunities to make the most of our outdoor spaces, summer or winter.

An outdoor essential

What started out as a fashionable trend in the luxury home and landscape renovation scene now appears to be a regular feature in landscape projects, and that is the inclusion of an outdoor kitchen. Today, outdoor kitchens are being incorporated into new home designs rather than being tackled as an afterthought.

But if you have an established home and garden, there are still ample opportunities for introducing an outdoor kitchen. Over the years I have noticed an increase in requests from clients for their outdoor entertaining area to include a kitchen and serving area. What used to be a designated area for the barbecue, maybe a sink and bench, has turned into a full-scale planned and designed kitchen with items such as fridges, state-of-the-art gas

burner barbecues, stainless-steel sinks and taps, cabinetry housing glasses and crockery, pizza ovens and, well, the list goes on.

Designer material choices

The other big difference in this area has been the materials used to construct these kitchens. Now, often materials you would find in the home kitchen are used. CaesarStone benchtops are popular, along with stainless-steel benches as they are serviceable in the outdoor elements. A more recent trend is the rise in the popularity of concrete benchtops. The benefits of polished concrete benchtops are that they are custom made so can fit the site; there is a choice of colours and finishes, depending on how much aggregate the client would like to be seen in the finished product; and they make a very cost-effective option.

As the outdoor kitchen is designed by the landscape designer custom to the site, the cabinetry choices, handles and splashbacks are often chosen to complement or replicate the interior kitchen. Colour preferences change over time but currently warm brown and grey tones are popular choices for cabinet doors. This is also a very practical approach for the serviceability of such neutral, natural colours in an outdoor environment. Brown, taupe and grey also blend really well with hard landscaping choices such as pavers, tiles and decking.

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Consider the location

Choosing a location to site an outdoor kitchen is taken into consideration when designing the main entertaining area of a landscape. For practical reasons, it makes sense that the kitchen be an integral component of any entertaining area. This is for ease of serving and so the cook can continue to chat to guests.

Today, people desire all the mod cons and convenience that an inside kitchen provides when entertaining out of doors; therefore, if you're not going to have a fully equipped outdoor kitchen, it's important it be close to the house so you have easy access to everything you need. Just as homeowners now desire open-plan kitchens indoors so that they feel a part of the action when entertaining friends and family, the same principle applies for the outdoor kitchen.

Take it under cover

Ideally, an outdoor kitchen is designed within an undercover area. This allows the kitchen to be used year round and in all weather conditions. The roofing also ensures the products are kept in better condition for a longer period of time - gone are the days where a black plastic barbecue cover is needed to protect the focal point of the entertaining area.

How the roofing option is designed also contributes an interesting design element to the overall landscape design. The roof may exist where the kitchen is sited under an already-built covered deck or pergola, or the roofing may be completely new and how it is designed will have a major impact on how well the outdoor kitchen integrates with the look of the home.

The practical issues

It's important to take into consideration access to amenities when designing an outdoor kitchen. Water and electricity are necessary — and these needs might be quite extensive if the kitchen includes wine chillers and under-bench fridges, benchtop appliances, ceiling fans and the like, so it is prudent to ensure they will be accessible from the designed site. And good lighting — task and ambient — will be needed, too.

Built-in bench seating can work fabulously within an outdoor kitchen design. It's also a great way to achieve casual seating, possibly

a place to keep cushions and the like if the bench seat is built as a storage box with a hinged, lift-up lid. But, most importantly, it's a design feature in itself and can balance other design elements that form key components of the outdoor cooking and dining space.

Unleash your creativity

For a designer, being asked to include an outdoor kitchen in a landscape plan brings with it lots of opportunities, both in the way a garden can be used and the aesthetic qualities an interesting kitchen can create. I see the continued interest in the outdoor kitchen as a really exciting opportunity for homeowners and designers to get really creative, developing innovative and interesting new ways to use outdoor spaces and

DESIGN TRENDS

- Stainless-steel barbecues built into benchtops.
- Wood-fired pizza ovens and teppanyaki grills.
- Custom-built cabinets in natural, neutral colours.
- Sinks with hot and cold running water.
- Benchtops in polished concrete or CaesarStone.
- Under-bench wine chillers and fridges.
- Replicating an indoor kitchen's look and feel.

enjoy the home entertaining experience. At this point, the options are endless and only limited by our imagination, and maybe the budget. ■

Amanda Elboz is a Sydney-based landscape designer and director of Space Landscape Designs.



1. An outdoor kitchen may be housed in a standalone structure. Photo courtesy Scott Brown Landscape Design.

2. A new trend on the horizon? Combined outdoor kitchen and dining unit, from Atlantis Outdoor Kitchens, USA.

3. If you don't have a sink or fridge, keep things close to the house so you can access the indoor kitchen.