



Alfresco, AUSSIE STYLE

COLIN BARLOW helps you cook up a feast in your garden this summer

WHAT could be better than spending evenings outdoors eating, drinking and relaxing while in the company of family and good friends?

The food and atmosphere always seems that much better when you are outside. Throughout history, our ancestors enjoyed gathering around fires to cook, share and eat their food, and today we can choose to have the convenience of anything from a basic gas barbecue to a fully equipped kitchen designed to cater for our every culinary need.

Everything including the kitchen sink

The "outdoor room" is now a regular feature in new homes, blurring the line between inside and out. Formal lounges and games rooms are disappearing, being replaced by home theatres and outdoor living areas such as pavilions, alfresco areas and courtyards.

Home owners now see the value in designing the outdoor room as they would any other room in the home to gain maximum benefit for use all year – and, of course, to take advantage of our wonderful climate.

But you don't need a new home to achieve this, just some thoughtful planning.

So let's take a look at what could go into the ultimate outdoor room. Sit back, relax and think about how you could transform or create your own alfresco area and turn it into a useful extension of the home.



above left The opulent, custom-made Big Kahuna kitchen by Ferguson Corporation includes fridge, gas barbecue, pizza oven, crustacean cooker, sink, ice bucket and timber doors.

left Mosaic can add an individual touch to your outdoor area, as used on this Mediterranean wood-fired pizza oven.

Essential elements

Outdoor kitchen elements range from basic to extravagant, depending on your lifestyle and budget.

What are the essential elements of any outdoor kitchen?

- Barbecue ■ Outdoor setting ■ Outdoor structures ■ Lighting ■ Flooring

These elements can add that extra dimension needed to create the ultimate outdoor kitchen:

- Ovens – wood-fired and gas ■ Splashback ■ Bench top ■ Fridge ■ Sink ■ Heater ■ Television



This gold medal winning garden by Roling Stone Landscapes at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show 2005 featured an extravagant outdoor kitchen.

Barbecues

The humble three or four-burner barbecue wheeled out for family gatherings has now evolved into a myriad of designs to cater for almost any style of cooking. Stainless-steel barbecues with integrated roasting hood, side burners and cabinets can be built-in or mobile.

If the barbecue is to be built-in, select the model without a stand and build around it, using materials to make it appear as if it was meant to be there. Consider adding storage, doors, a splashback and bench space.

Barbecue design considerations

- Ensure there is sufficient light for cooking – it's hard to check if your meat is done in the dark! An outdoor spotlight is ideal if you are away from the house.
- Make sure all gas bottles are enclosed by walls and doors when building built-in barbecues. Add a lock for security.
- Allow bench space either side for placing food.
- Install cupboards underneath to store your cooking utensils.
- Position the barbecue so that it will not be in a thoroughfare, near windows or too close to diners.
- Place the barbecue in an area where the cook can still participate in the gathering without feeling left out.
- Restrict access to the barbecue by barriers or walls to two or three sides so that kids and pets cannot get burnt.



Barbecues can be incorporated into any style. This mobile barbecue has a mini-orb covered cabinet complete with granite benchtop.

Seating and dining

To sit down and enjoy those balmy summer evenings in comfort, some basic planning is worthwhile. Rectangular tables will fit more people around and provide more options, as most outdoor areas are linear in shape. In-builts benches can provide permanent seating and storage. Rattan or block wools can be topped with bull mooring and finished with decorative foam cushions or timber for seating.

Seating considerations

- Always allow an extra 15cm of space around your table for the comfortable placement and movement of chairs.
- Seats should be between 430mm to 550mm high and the depth between 550mm to 600mm wide for improved comfort.
- There should be a maximum of 150mm between the edge of the table and the bench or seat to avoid overreaching when eating.
- Wood and metal tables are available in style and many contemporary designs mix the two materials.
- Protect wood surfaces with a proprietary oil to maintain its colour and lustre. Alternatively, teak furniture may be left to age naturally.
- Coordinate your outdoor furniture and add colour with plants and accessories.

Outdoor structures

The overall structure, whether a pavilion, pergola, patio or gazebo, should be designed to tie in with the architecture of the home and garden style. Look up and make use of the structure above. The underside of the roof or pavilion is often overlooked as a design element. Timber cladding, coloured sheets, mirrored sheeting, tinting and paneling can add that authentic finishing touch. A ceiling fan can keep you cool or air-conditioners can be used for enclosed rooms. Consider lighting and power requirements for cooking, heating and dining. By installing bi-fold or sliding doors you can have the flexibility of knocking the outdoor area or opening it up to allow free movement between the house and garden. Timber or powder-coated doors can be retracted into any overhead style. Café-style blinds offer a cheaper alternative to keep out the wind, rain and cold air.

Flooring

Make use of all the surfaces in your outdoor area to set the scene and decoy other practical options and aesthetic appeal. Don't go overboard and use too many similar textures together, otherwise any effect will be lost or look too busy.

Wood-fired ovens

Perhaps consider a wood-fired oven if you want a versatile, low-maintenance oven that cooks food quickly. Although traditionally used to cook pizzas, this oven can cook a range of foods and can be housed under cover or outside. The ovens are hand-made and built on top of a 1.5m by 2m base platform. The oven can be rendered or tiled and is supplied as a finished unit. Check with your local council on restrictions on the use of wood fires before buying.

Gas ovens

Gas models provide an alternative to the traditional wood-fired oven. Cooking takes longer but gas produces fewer emissions. Stainless-steel models are easier to clean.

Above right A warm and cosy alfresco area complete with seating, dining area, hedge, pizza oven, rangehood, sink and patio heater designed by Martin Croxford Landscapes.

Below right Stainless-steel appliances provide an industrial look to this Martin Croxford-designed outdoor kitchen.

Making a splash

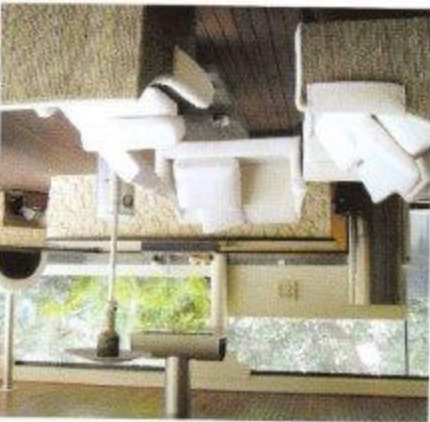
Spas/pools can add a little pizzazz to the kitchen and keep the area clean. Tiling, glass, stainless steel and granite can be used with people around and provide more options, as most outdoor areas are linear in shape. In-builts benches can provide permanent seating and storage. Rattan or block wools can be topped with bull mooring and finished with decorative foam cushions or timber for seating.

On the bench

Benchtop space is often overlooked, but proves invaluable for storage and the housing of food before and after cooking. Suitable surfaces include stainless steel, tiles, timber, laminate and granite. When not used for cooking, ornaments or statuary can be placed here.

Cool customers

Why go inside to get a drink, or have an icky tub of ice in the way when you can install a fridge in your outdoor area? From the humble bar fridge to a stainless-steel contemporary model, the convenience is worth considering. You will, of course, need a power point available.



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Hot stuff

Take the chill off those cooler evenings with an outdoor patio heater for maximum use of your outdoor room. Wall-mounted models are ideal for small areas like balconies or patios and are also safe for children and the family pet.

Propane gas tabletop heaters offer simple, low-cost solutions. The small radiating circle of heat produced will warm the air around most average-sized dining tables.

For a bigger area, consider a freestanding patio heater that can run off a gas bottle and is easy to move around.

Chimneys add a Mexican or a contemporary touch to your outdoor environment. Both traditional clay chimineas and cast-iron models are now available. Check that there is a mesh screen over the fire door for safety, or use a fireguard if children are around.

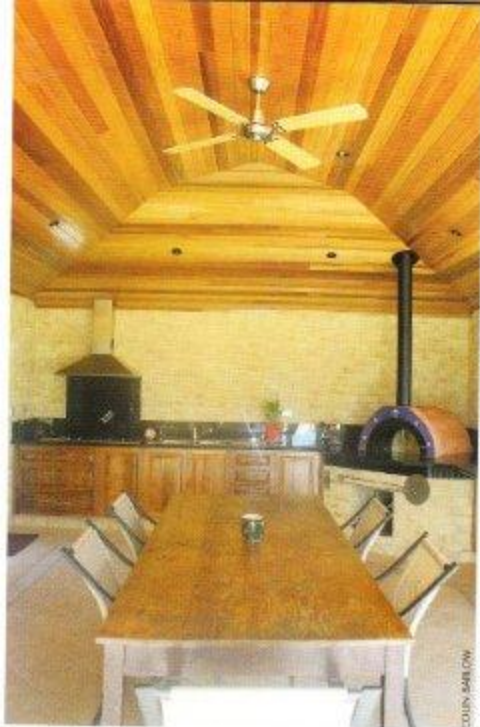
Square eyes

If you start to spend more time outdoors but don't want to miss your favourite show there is a solution. Flat-screen plasma televisions can be mounted on the wall. Avoid placing the television close to smoky and steamy areas where it may get damaged. Instead, install it on a swivel bracket so that you can view it from most areas and direct glare from the sun can be minimised.

Custom-designed

For the ultimate outdoor kitchen you can now have a custom-designed kitchen fit-out that may be built-in or mobile to cater for all your individual needs. Complete with bar fridge, ice buckets, barbecue, wok burner, pizza oven, crustacean cooker, sink, rangehood and tiled or stainless-steel splashbacks, the choice is endless.

Make the most of the outdoor lifestyle and create an outdoor kitchen. You never know who may come for dinner! ■



Elegant dining at its best. Why go anywhere else for dinner?

LOUIS JARLOW



The combined rich textures of the timber decking, chairs and limestone walls are used to great effect in this alfresco area by Martin Cabbert Landscapes.

MARTIN CABBERT LANDSCAPES