

wine country

Homes and Lifestyles

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Sizzling Spaces

Al fresco kitchens
in Wine Country

Gardening for Wildlife

Create a welcoming habitat
for local critters

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sizzling spaces

BY PAM WILLIAMS

COOKING AND EATING OUTSIDE ARE AMONG THE MOST BASIC OF PLEASURES.

They should be, given that the roots of outdoor grilling go back to the dawn of civilization! In the age of modern conveniences, however, we still bring our food outside for the fun of cookouts, picnics and camping. Some of us cook outdoors at home as often as possible, leaving behind a walled-in kitchen for freedom and fresh air. And as we all know, food always tastes better outside.

Increasingly, homeowners are venturing beyond the basic barbeque grill to create entire outdoor kitchens. Known by the Italians as 'summer kitchens,' they are becoming popular in Wine Country. Perhaps this is in part because Italians have a long history in Sonoma County, but also because Californians in general are in love with Italian cuisine and culture. Vacationers who have experienced the Italian countryside want some of that lifestyle at home.

An outdoor kitchen can suit different purposes: it can be a retreat, it can expand opportunities for entertaining, or it can simply increase your living space. Options for sites also vary. Celebrity restaurateur and grilling enthusiast Bobby Flay built an outdoor kitchen on a New York City rooftop.

When attached to the house, a cooking area is convenient to the indoors and the proximity of utility lines. You can also place your outdoor kitchen away from the house – somewhere in the yard with a great view, near a pool or by some other garden feature.

One couple with a second home in Healdsburg had a desire to extend their living space into the front garden. The

al fresco kitchens up the ante on cooking out



level spot was lushly planted, but did not allow for outdoor entertaining. They asked Casey Caldwell of Healdsburg's Caldwell Trouette (who had remodeled the interior kitchen for the previous owner) to build their outdoor kitchen.

"I told them I had never done an outdoor kitchen before," says Casey, "so I just had to keep imagining the walls around us," he recalls. Landscape architect Hélène Morneau was instrumental in all the landscape drawings, layouts and overseeing the entire project. The site was completely cleared down to the soil and rebuilt with separate but flowing areas that incorporated the home's main entrance and its living room.

A Mediterranean-style garden and a seating and dining area flank the welcoming pathway from the front gate. Angling off from the wall of bench seating is a food preparation and cooking structure, and beyond, a swimming pool with patio area.

While the cooking structure is not attached, it uses the house utilities. They were easy to run underground with the yard cleared of impediments. The layout includes a sink with hot and cold plus filtered water, a refrigerator and a separate ice-maker/cooler, a two-burner stove and a DCS gas grill. The countertops are polished aggregate concrete from Bohemian Stoneworks of Occidental and the cabinet facing is made of Richlite, a green building material that is as durable as it is beautiful.

Anchoring one end of the L-shaped arrangement is a Mugnaini pizza oven, with a copper chimney top and ledger stone accents that tie in with the low ledger stone walls lining the site. Two portable outdoor heaters take the chill out of the evening air

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when diners linger at the table.

Enhancing the transition from inside to outside, the couple used some of their interior color palette for the outdoor kitchen and hardscape – tones of mahogany, copper, yellow ochre and tan.