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Plein Air Cooking

Barnes Vanze creates a complementary outdoor kitchen and dining space for a home in Potomac, Maryland. **BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD PHOTOS BY ERIC ROTH**

Californians have long known the pleasures of outdoor living, but now the American population at large is hip to the joy as well. A popular part of the outdoor living trend is the outdoor kitchen, says the Arlington, Virginia-based Hearth, Patio, & Barbecue Association, a non-profit trade association representing and promoting the interests of the hearth and barbecue products industries.

Outdoor kitchens, of course, can mean many things, from full-blown showpieces that are every bit as elaborate as the room inside the home to simple, elegant affairs that are small but func-

tional. A case in point is this diminutive space by Washington, D.C., firm Barnes Vanze Architects. "This one is relatively straightforward," says Anthony Barnes. "To call it a kitchen might be a stretch, but that is the intention."

The space is part of a new Northern European country-style home that features such architectural elements as wrought-iron detailing, Venetian plaster, and stone patios. Barnes Vanze's job was to make the kitchen a functional, seamless accessory of the main house. The beauty of the location, Barnes explains, is that it's neighboring the main house but also near

the pool. "You can use the space when you're poolside, but its location adjacent to the main kitchen is nice as well. Everything is close."

Located near a small covered area off the main house, the kitchen consists of a grill, granite serving countertop, prep counter, and outdoor refrigerator, which is an important feature, says Barnes. "It means the cold ingredients"—such as kebabs or marinating meats—"are not attracting flies or pets or getting warm

Barnes Vanze Architects designs a small outdoor kitchen for a client who loves to entertain.





The grill is situated away from the dining area so guests can enjoy the aroma without the smoke.

Creating the Kitchen

If you've spent an evening cooking and dining in an outdoor kitchen, you know how enjoyable the experience can be. But designing a suitable space is much more complicated than you might think.

"People should first consider how they will use an outdoor kitchen the most," architect Anthony Barnes says. "Some people cook on a grill frequently, so having it near the house is very convenient. In other cases, the space is a destination and a reason to go by the pool or stage a summer meal. Each one has design constraints."

Outdoor storage is nice, but Barnes says truly waterproof cabinets are almost impossible to build. Stainless cabinets do a good job and are probably 90-percent waterproof and weather-proof, he says. Avoid wood, except for weather-tough species such as teak. "I don't recommend outdoor storage for cooking and eating utensils," he says. "Pollen and dust get on these things, so they should be kept inside."

Barnes says homeowners should always ask for outlets near the countertops, avoid range hoods, and resist the urge to use regular interior appliances. Outdoor-rated products are specially engineered to handle the elements, while regular appliances are not. While you're at it, reconsider the built-in grill. It's a handsome look, Barnes explains, but it's inflexible. "It will get rusty, and you'll have to replace it with almost the same model. Depending on the design of the kitchen, it might be a better idea to get a freestanding unit."

Lastly, always consider illumination. "Lighting is a critical thing," says Barnes, "because you've got to be able to see when you cook at night."

by the sun, so you can actually stage your cooking before your guests arrive."

The architects clad the base of the prep area in a multicolored stone that's also used on the main house. "The stone base [of the main house] goes up 36" off the ground," Barnes explains. "We used the same stone in the kitchen because it's hardy and solid-looking." A Tennessee orchard stone, on the other hand, provides a durable flooring surface and continues the warm materials palette that is used throughout the house and the kitchen.

The kitchen is close enough to the main house that the architects used similar materials to tie the two together, but Barnes says sometimes an architect might take the opposite strategy. "You could change the materials to make a destination out of [the kitchen], a little bit like the way a gazebo can be visual focus in a garden," he says.



The architects tied the main house and the outdoor kitchen together by using the same colored stone on the house foundation as well as around the grill and refrigerator.

Because the kitchen is so simple and so close to the house, Barnes omitted general purpose illumination. Instead, he gave the homeowners a mini light if they want to cook at night. "In this case, we used a small light on a gooseneck," Barnes says. "The black line to the left of the grill is an articulated gooseneck, which has a little light on it that can be turned to the grill. The idea is that you can't see it when it's not in use, but you're able to turn it on for task lighting without holding a flashlight in your

mouth, which is no fun."

Similar to the national trend, outdoor kitchens are popular in the Washington, D.C., area, and Barnes Vanze has been getting more requests for them. Even if a full-blown kitchen isn't possible, the firm advocates that clients consider a grill as part of their project.

"I happen to be a great fan of grills," Barnes says. "The grill is a healthy alternative to cooking in a pan and is part of a healthier lifestyle that has been a

trend for a long time. It's generally an extremely good way to cook. There are no extra fats, you don't need to bread things, and you're not cooking anything in oil or frying it."

Healthy living notwithstanding, this outdoor kitchen in Potomac, Maryland, may be small on square footage, but Barnes Vanze managed to infuse big style and big functionality in its miniature-sized space. **NOH**