

THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR KITCHEN

A WOOD-BURNING GRILL, INFRARED SEARING STATION AND ROTISSERIE—THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS TO HELP YOU GRILL, SMOKE AND FRY LIKE A PRO.

BY CHERYL AND BILL JAMISON

When Americans started cooking in their backyards with a passion in the 1950s, the only gear they needed was a spindly, three-legged charcoal grill that cost little more than their teenager's weekly supply of bubble gum. Lucky families also enjoyed a park-style picnic table, a dad eager to cook but totally uninformed on the craft, and an endless hoard of hamburger meat, hot dogs and spongy white-bread buns.

Fast-forwarding to 2007, a good spatula costs as much as that old grill, moms join dads in the cooking, and chicken breasts, salmon and even eggplant steaks edge red meat off the grate and plate. But the biggest change of all is that the lucky family's picnic table has evolved into a full outdoor room featuring a spiffy dining space, a multi-functional kitchen, a lounging and conversation area, and maybe a swimming pool, fireplace or pit, state-of-the-art audio system, wine bar, beer fridge and, sometime soon, probably a slide-out waterbed for overnight guests.

In most cases, the core of a contemporary outdoor room remains a grill, even for people who don't use their indoor kitchens for much more than food storage and reheating. According to recent surveys, three-quarters of Americans prefer to do all cooking outside, even at such traditional occasions as Thanksgiving and the December religious holidays.

To cater to this demand, a variety of companies now build prefabricated or custom grill "islands," with options for every imaginable accessory. Even major indoor appliance makers, including KitchenAid, Maytag and Viking, have moved into the field.

You can search for the isle of your dreams on the Internet, or to find out what's readily available in your area, visit local patio and grill retailers. For extra frills such as exotic landscaping, water features, open-air heating and atmospheric lighting, check out home and garden magazines or consult with an experienced architect. You'll quickly discover that patio design is as hot as Texas hold 'em (and much easier to master).

As authors of a half-dozen outdoor cookbooks, our area of expertise is the cooking equipment, the practical side of the planning that brings a patio alive with flavor. Having tried virtually every kind of gear and gadget on the market, we've developed some strong opinions on what works well and what doesn't. Among the multitude of options, only a few truly make a difference in your cooking capabilities and success.

The starting point, obviously, is the grill itself. After many carefully controlled experiments, we've come to the conclusion that charcoal and gas grills produce the same results when they generate the same levels of heat in open, uncov-



THE NEW OUTDOOR KITCHEN

Cooking Up a Kitchen for the Way You Live and Play | Cookbook Review



The authors' Santa Fe kitchen is seen in photos by Eric Roth in *The New Outdoor Kitchen* (Taunton Press, 2007) by Deborah Krasner. Right, a Los Angeles dream kitchen by Alfresco Open Air Culinary Systems.



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