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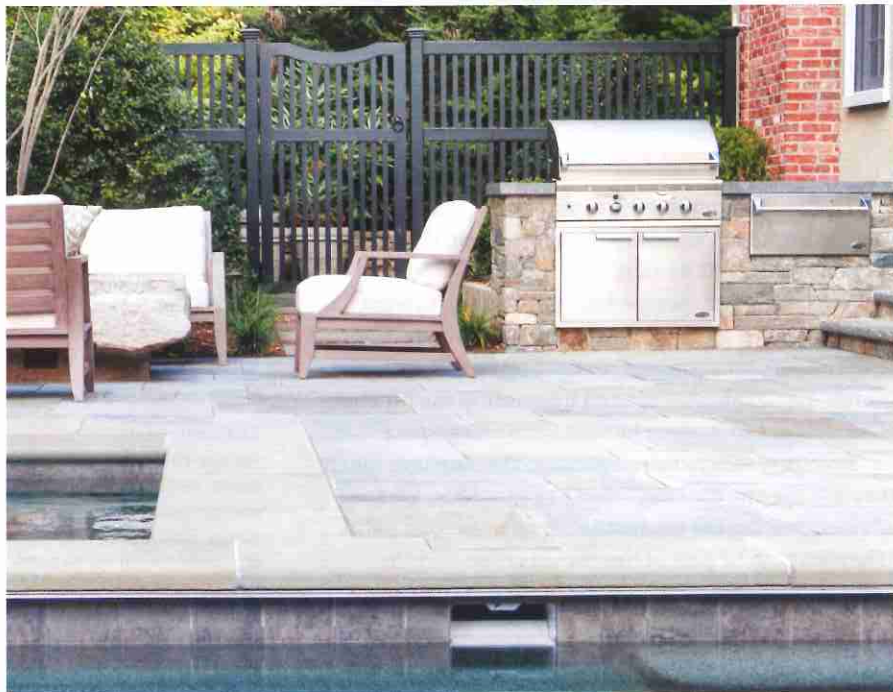
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sibility of fully entertaining outdoors really expands what you can get out of that limited amount of time we have.”

Whether you have a townhome with a modest courtyard or an estate with a sprawling backyard, an outdoor kitchen can make your summer simpler, more relaxing, and more rewarding. Ready to get cooking? We talked to area designers and put together a recipe for the perfect outdoor kitchen.

THE SPACE

Limited on space? No problem.

The most important element is a grill with some counter space to either side—one area for uncooked food and one for the finished product—says Peter White, principal at ZEN Associates of Woburn. In fact, you can achieve a minimalist outdoor kitchen as long as you have room for a unit 6 1/2 feet long, Shulman says. In this modest space, you can fit a grill, refrigerator, storage drawers, and countertop, he says.

If you have more square footage to work with, thinking about location is key, designers advise. Think about locating your outdoor kitchen near your indoor version to make it easier to shuttle supplies back and forth and to take advantage of the existing facilities.

“Oftentimes those functions can be complementary,” says Matthew Cunningham, of Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design in Stoneham. “You can eliminate redundancies.”

ALFRESCO COOKING

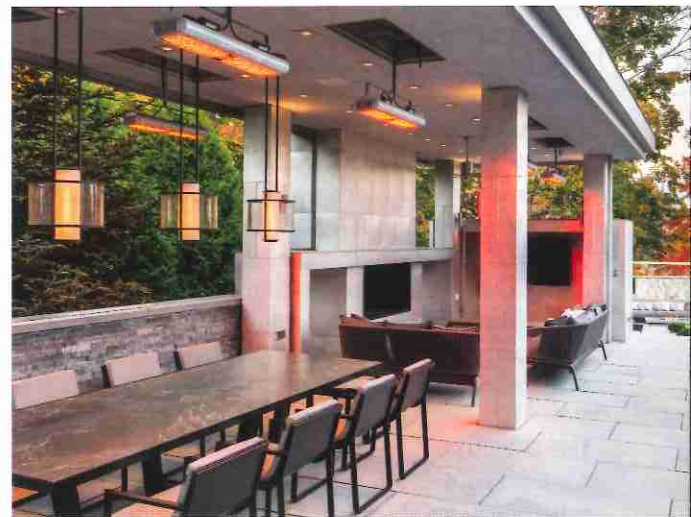
LOCAL DESIGNERS WEIGH IN ON PUTTING TOGETHER THE PERFECT OUTDOOR KITCHEN TO ENJOY DURING NEW ENGLAND SUMMERS.

By Sarah Shemkus

SUMMER IN NEW ENGLAND IS A PRECIOUS AND fleeting thing. The warm weather and long, sunny days last just a few short months, at most.

To make the most out of these short-lived joys, more and more homeowners are bringing the inside out by creating outdoor kitchens where they can cook, eat, and chat while soaking in every second of the season.

“Summertime in New England is the best time,” says Tobin Shulman, architect and principal with Beverly-based design firm Siemasko + Verbridge. “Having the pos-



outdoor living

A poolside kitchen can also be appealing, but keep in mind that the further you are from the house, the more appliances you are likely to want, White notes.

THE LOOK

As with any element of your home, you want your outdoor kitchen to reflect your personal style. And the best outdoor kitchens also harmonize with the design of your home.

"You have to make sure it relates to the architecture of the building and the vocabulary of the building finishes," White says.

Natural stone elements have long been popular in New England, as they are a good fit for traditional New England styles, he says. Increasingly, though, homeowners are eschewing stone and embracing a more modern look for their outdoor living spaces—stainless steel cabinets and tile counters are growing in popularity, White says.

Wood, of course, is a little trickier to incorporate because of safety concerns, but there are ways to make it work, Cunningham says. He often uses ipe, a tropical hardwood that is far more fire-resistant than softer, more common woods like pine.

THE EQUIPMENT

The centerpiece of your outdoor kitchen, of course, will be the grill. So, the first essential decision is whether you want to cook primarily with charcoal or gas. Then you will need some counter space on either side, and perhaps a refrigerator. Sinks and storage drawers are also frequent choices. After you cover those bases, though, the only limit is your imagination, Shulman says.

With enough space, you can have your own wood-fired pizza oven or dedicated smoker (or both). An ice maker can save you trips inside to dig ice out of the freezer, while wine coolers and beer taps keep beverages close at hand. The quirkiest gear Shulman has ever seen a client choose, he says, was an outdoor deep fryer/boiler that could cook a lobster dinner or fry up fried dough for dessert.

Essentially, anything you might incorporate in your indoor kitchen can be adapted for use outdoors.

"All this stuff has to be designed to be used outside," Shulman says, "but the number of product offerings that are out there has expanded."

THE LAYOUT

A refined outdoor kitchen is about more than the individual elements. It is about how they all come together.



The possibility of fully entertaining outdoors will get you the most out of New England summers, says Tobin Shulman, architect and principal at Siemasko + Verbridge.

"The whole layout of the counters and the appliance space needs to be done very thoughtfully so it functions very naturally," White says.

In the same way people tend to gravitate toward the kitchen inside, outdoor kitchens can be a space for both culinary creation and connecting with family and friends. Designers recommend integrating the functional aspects of the outdoor kitchen with social space.

"No one wants to be relegated to the sidelines when they are the one cooking," says Cunningham, who advises locating the kitchen setup adjacent to a patio. "They want to be part of the conversation and the party atmosphere."

Adding some bar seating to a countertop can allow guests to sip sangria and chat with you while you work the grill, White suggests.

THE CREATURE COMFORTS

Once the basics are in place, it's time to think about the added perks. Lighting and heating are often overlooked in outdoor kitchen design, White says. An overhead canopy system, he notes, can offer shelter from rain and sun while also providing a place to mount heating and lighting elements. "They extend the useful period in that space late into the evening," he says.

You can also consider adding a little flair to your cooking by dedicating a small space for growing herbs, Cunningham says. Then you can pluck a few leaves to season your meat or veggies with the freshest possible flavors. "If there's a countertop adjacent to the grill, try a couple of thoughtful containers planted with basil and rosemary and oregano," he says. ■

Appliances are what separates a backyard patio from an outdoor kitchen. Whether you want to set mouths watering with your culinary skills or simply relax with friends over a perfectly chilled bottle of sauvignon blanc, there are options that will make your alfresco aspirations come true.

SEAR IT UP

Cook up the perfect steak by choosing a grill with searing capabilities—a section of the grill that creates intense, concentrated heat. Check out the high-end Lynx brand's ProSear line or Weber grills with a sear station, recommends Howard Freedman, partner at Beach Sales in Revere.

SMOKING HOT

For smoking meat at home, perhaps the most popular option is the quirky-looking Big Green Egg, available in seven sizes, from mini to XXL. "The recipes you can prepare are pretty incredible," says Cunningham.

DRINK UP

Keep your favorite wine at the perfect temperature with a dedicated under-counter wine cooler. With a 15-inch cooler you can keep two dozen bottles at the ready; if your needs are more modest, consider a refrigerator with a separate wine-chilling zone. Beer drinkers can opt for a built-in tap to dispense their preferred brew.

CATCH A COAL

Today's grills make it easier than ever to achieve that distinctive charcoal-fired taste, Freedman says. Weber offers models that include storage for new, fresh, and used charcoal, as well as gas-assisted ignition, eliminating the need for lighter fluid and matches.

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- **Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design**, 411 Main St., Stoneham, 617-905-2246, matthew-cunningham.com
- **Siemasko + Verbridge**, 126 Dodge St., Beverly, 978-927-3745, svdesign.com
- **ZEN Associates**, 10 Micro Dr., Woburn, 781-932-3700, zenassociates.com