



THE OUTDOOR KITCHEN AND *beyond*

Why limit your client's plan to just an outdoor barbeque when today's materials allow you to offer so much more

BY RAY RODENBURGH

Are you leaving opportunities on the table? Many contractors are seeing opportunities for increased business and profits in constructing outdoor landscape features and structures that only a few years ago were not even considered an opportunity. The landscape industry is constantly growing new opportunities and some of us are missing them.

Looking back 30 years, it was rare that a landscape contractor would even construct or install a driveway. When the paving stone was introduced to North

America, it opened up a whole new area of business for landscapers. Soon they were installing driveways and, with the help of pressure treated lumber, constructing steps and elaborate front entrances.

Several years later, concrete segmental retaining walls became a staple of the landscape business, allowing contractors to construct large walls, steps and planters.

Not long after that, gazebos and arbors were added to their repertoire.

Today, there is yet another addition to this growing list of services and skills which you can capitalize on. The "outdoor kitchen" is a trend that is getting hotter and hotter. Built-in grills, bar fridges, sinks and marble countertops can

be economically constructed using a variety of modular concrete blocks manufactured for that purpose. Some systems are much easier to use than others.

If the idea of installing a grill seems daunting, it's time you took a closer look. Almost all of the popular grill manufacturers have installation specs on their Web sites. Your task is almost like constructing a large planter with an opening on one side and the top allowing the grill to be easily set into the structure. (Always use a qualified technician for final gas or propane hook-ups and observe local construction and safety codes.)

One thing you should always consider when designing and building these struc-



If you use your imagination you will be able to offer your clients "outdoor living" designs and projects that will delight them.

These are easily incorporated at the same time and will add tremendous value to the outdoor kitchen. Always include these into your initial plan. They can be easily taken out of the plan if your customer chooses to do so.

This outdoor kitchen helps people extend their season outdoors. Even when the air gets cool in the fall, many people are still outdoors enjoying a beautiful fall evening and entertaining friends and family. This is especially true now with the

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tures, is the foundation. Soil conditions, drainage and the size of structure will dictate how the foundation should be built. Floating slabs on a granular base may be okay for some locations, but in others a frost-free foundation may be warranted. Remember also that new housing developments tend to have areas of loose soil around the house. In these cases, a foundation that goes down to a solid soil is important. The last thing you want is to have a customer calling you back to raise their sinking barbeque.

The outdoor kitchen does not stop at the barbeque. If you're building a built-in grill, then installing a cooking top, a bar fridge and a sink is a natural progression.

ever-increasing number of outdoor fireplaces being built using the same landscape products that were used to construct the kitchen area. Work that into your plan, too. Outdoor fireplaces are very popular in today's backyard. Always check local build-

ing codes and ordinances prior to designing or constructing a fireplace or fire pit.

Seating is another great opportunity not to be overlooked. Whenever you are designing an outdoor room of any kind, consider "seat-walls" as part of the plan.

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6 product selection factors

1. Texture. No sharp edges.
2. Colors available. Do they match the pavers you intend to use for the patio?
3. Dimensional compatibility. You need this to facilitate quick and efficient construction.
4. Consistency of unit size.
5. Design choices.
6. Can the product be combined with other textured wall units or pavers to provide a one-of-a-kind creation?

— RR

By incorporating a seat-wall into the plan, you can easily add 15 to 20 seats at less than the cost of expensive patio chairs. The seat-walls also add a couple of other important things to the mix. Seat-walls, with some design creativity can become an attractive feature or focal point to the patio. They also add a sense of privacy or coziness to the room.

All these opportunities are not only available in the backyard, but in the front yard too. Mailboxes with engraved names and numbers bring a stately appearance to any home. They can be designed elaborately with accent pavers, gates, ledges and lampposts or simply and modestly. Either way they will add curb appeal to any home. Built-in mailboxes also have the advantage of being vandal resistant.

With advancements being made in modular concrete wall systems and concrete adhesives, projects that were traditionally left up to stone masons and bricklayers, are now opportunities for the landscape professional.

What opportunities can you see? Perhaps a tool shed constructed all or in part with a modular wall system? A garage? Or even maybe even a swimming pool. Rise and design to the challenge. This summer leave no business opportunities on the table. **LM**

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