

By Geoff Thompson



COOKING UP SALES

OUTDOOR KITCHENS
FUEL GRILL GROWTH

When Ron Klinge of Clearwater, Fla., decided to replace the original-to-his-1978-home Jenn-Aire grill, little did he know what he was in for.

“My wife said, ‘Why don’t we look at a good grill, and maybe some cabinets to go around it,’” Ron says laughing. What they ended up with—an outdoor kitchen that maximized previously unused space—has completely changed their lives. It is now *the* central area of their home, whether it’s for Klinge and his wife, or their children and grandchildren over for a meal or a dip in the pool.

Their story is far from unique. Outdoor kitchens are exploding in popularity. In a recent *Casual Living* survey, 49% of respondents with outdoor living spaces had an outdoor kitchen, 61% of whom live in the South. Of those who didn’t have outdoor kitchens, nearly 25% indicated they plan to add one in the next year.

Part of what’s driving the growth is the grill. But it isn’t just the old standby charcoal grill. There are so many options for outdoor cooking today: charcoal, gas grills, ceramic/kamados, smokers. Prices range from less than \$20 into the thousands.

From that same *Casual Living* survey, 91% of those who already had an outdoor

(For our exclusive research on grill sales, including current and projected sales, turn to p. 43)

And it makes sense. As categories grow, and people see what their neighbors are doing, or see what’s possible on home improvement shows like “Kitchen Crashers,” more and more consumers want outdoor living spaces.

everyone enjoys—food,” says Matt Boettger, president of Werverver Outdoor Cabinetry. “It used to be when you went out to dinner, it was an experience. These days, with quick-service restaurants, you don’t get that. With an outdoor kitchen, we bring that experience back.”

Werverver designer Jason Moore says that when consulting with a client about design choices, he first gets an idea of their goals.

“I’ll ask a client if they plan to only cook (in their outdoor kitchen) or if they plan to cook and entertain,” Moore says. Reason being, if the plan is to cook and entertain, it affects the placement of the grill in comparison to seating. And in addition to the grill, if the plan is to entertain, there are countless accessories to add to the design.

Derald Schultz, marketing director for Primo Ceramic Grills, views outdoor kitchens as a natural progression of grilling, and thinks the

In a recent *Casual Living* survey, 49% of respondents with outdoor living spaces had an outdoor kitchen . . . Of those who didn’t have outdoor kitchens, nearly 25% indicated they plan to add one.

kitchen had a grill in it. Of those who planned to add an outdoor kitchen, 96% intend to add a grill.

In the biennial 2017 *Casual Living* Universe Study, grills are by far the No. 1 item purchased in the outdoor living category, with 2017 sales expected to be \$2.8 billion, an increase of 3.5% from 2016.

ENTICING EXPERIENCE

One company capitalizing—and perhaps even driving the outdoor kitchen trend—is Werverver Outdoor Cabinetry in Tampa, Fla.

“Grills always have been and always will be at the heart of the outdoor kitchen industry. They bring the one common denominator that

tipping point in the outdoor kitchen trend came after the 2008–2009 recession.

“After the crash, you heard the term ‘staycation,’ and part of that was people just expanding their homes into their backyards,” Schultz says. Many of Primo’s dealers are pool and spa retailers, and he sees many of them adding outdoor kitchens to pool/hot tub installations. “You don’t have to spend \$75,000 on an outdoor kitchen. You can get a great space for less than \$15,000.”

KAMADO KITCHENS

Primo makes ceramic kamado-style charcoal-burning grills, but with a couple twists. First, they are oval, rather than round, giving the grill more usable space. The oval design also offers the highest level of two-zone cooking; the ability to simultaneously cook directly over the charcoal and indirectly to control the doneness of food. Second, Primo grills are the only ceramic grills made in the U.S.A.

Primo’s latest product, the Oval G420, is an attempt to



The 2017 *Southern Living* Idea House features a Blaze power burner, an Alfresco pot filler, a Blaze vent hood, a Fire Magic built-in blender and a quilted stainless steel backsplash.

the cart-mounted model, Schultz says.

While Patrick Schiltz of Arlington Heights, Ill., doesn’t have a full-on outdoor kitchen (yet, but it’s on his radar), he does have two Kamado Joes—the large model (Big Joe) and the midsize (Classic), which he uses year-round, even in the brutal Chicago-area winters. He uses them for more than

wood works best with different flavor profiles, how to get the proper temperatures and cook times. He says the kamado technology is “boring in its simplicity, but that’s the beauty of it.”

GROWTH CATEGORY

“Everything tastes better outside,” Jennifer Robbins of Backyard Specialist in Wilmington, N.C., says. “It’s just more inviting to go outside to an outdoor kitchen rather than a grill. It breaks my heart to see these beautiful homes with beautiful outdoor spaces, and a push-around grill . . . such a waste.”

Robbins says she regularly gets calls from a potential client who was at a cookout at a friend’s home with an outdoor kitchen. The prospective customer had never seen anything like that before, and wanted one of their own.

The 2017 *Southern Living* Idea House on Bald Head Island, N.C., boasts a first for an Idea House—an outdoor kitchen.

The original design already had numerous outdoor living spaces, including a large chat group, a fire pit and a serving window to the indoor kitchen, complete with a counter and bar stool seating. But it did not have an outdoor kitchen, just a generic “grilling area.”

Builder Jeff Sanderson of Whitney Blair Custom Homes in Wilmington, N.C., decided the house needed an outdoor kitchen. Backyard Specialist did the design and installation.

The *Southern Living* designers were opposed, but he decided it was better to ask forgiveness than permission and added it anyway. In the end the *Southern Living* folks were thrilled with the results. And Sanderson liked the house so much, he moved into it himself.

Meanwhile, back in Clearwater, Klinge and his wife could not be happier with their new outdoor kitchen. “We look at each other now, and go, ‘Why didn’t we do this years ago?’” **ct**

There’s something about cooking outside with live fire and the elements. Part of the fascination is experimenting—figuring out what types of wood works best with different flavor profiles.

give grillers the best of both worlds—a gas ceramic grill. It retains the signature Primo shape, gives grillers the ability to grill, roast, smoke or bake, has the advantages of ceramic grills like moisture retention in the meats, but with the control and convenience of gas. In a nod to the growth of outdoor kitchens, the built-in model outsells

just grilling lunches and dinners—he cooks breakfast casseroles, bread, cookies, pizzas and pies.

“Grilling is a hobby; it’s a lifestyle kind of thing,” Schiltz says. “There’s something about cooking outside with live fire and the elements.” Part of the fascination with grilling is experimenting—figuring out what types of