

CASE STUDY

Creating an Outdoor Kitchen IN A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR ESTATE



Living spaces outside the home are nothing new, especially in areas like South Florida where many homes have a lanai or patio. But for many years, the outdoor living space has become much more than an area with a lounge chair and a side table. It has become an extension of the home, a designed, built-in area for leisure, for entertaining guests, for social events and for cooking.

So it's no surprise that the outdoor kitchen has become an integral part of that area. Just as an interior kitchen is an organic gathering space, the built-in outdoor kitchen has come to serve the same function outside the house.

Though the outdoor kitchen was recently an emerging trend, it is now a well-established expectation in high-end homes.

"In our multi-million-dollar projects, it's a given," says Ryan Hughes, president and creative director of Ryan Hughes Design/Build. His company focuses on outdoor living spaces, encompassing "everything outside the walls of the home from the hardscape to landscape, right down to the outdoor furniture and accessories" and includes custom-designed pools, signature landscaping, and fire and water features.

"People come to us to design a functional space," he says. "Just like the kitchen is the heart of a home for a family and social gathering...our philosophy is that the outside needs to have that same function, that same key element. I'd like to think we're one of the trend setters by showing that the outdoor kitchen should be a built-in element and its own destination."

A Design Approach to the Outdoor Kitchen

In projects undertaken by Ryan Hughes Design/Build, a grill from the local big box hardware store (some assembly required) and a cooler would hardly suffice. Economically, his clients tend to represent the top one percent of the population, and the homes are palatial by anyone's standards. How does a designer approach the design of the outdoor kitchen where expectations are so high?



"We have a formula we use for our outdoor spaces...functionality, feel and architecture, in that order," says Hughes. "First, everything has to be functional...the kitchen, the pool, the way people migrate through the space and utilize the seating areas. Functionality is key. Next is the feel, the colors, the textures. Then the architecture...space planning, portion, balance."

The outdoor kitchen, he says, should be a self-sufficient destination where everything that's needed is at hand, eliminating the need for back and forth movement, in and out of the house. It should be more than just a grilling station.

Choosing a Luxury Grill and Other Components

Given his approach, what would Hughes choose when specifying a grill and all the other components of an exclusive, luxury outdoor kitchen in order to satisfy a client?

His answer is on display in a multi-million-dollar waterfront estate in St. Petersburg, Florida. However, his answer is the same on all his large-scale projects.



“We suggest Fire Magic grills to 100 percent of our clients,” he says. “Fire Magic fits with our brand because it contributes to our feel. There’s a sleekness to the hood, the size of the handles, the quality of the stainless...all that contributes to the overall feel of luxury.”

In the same way that Hughes stresses functionality and feel in his design, he looks for the same in a grill and its accessories. Functionally, Fire Magic grills produce more BTUs and have a larger cooking space than any other grill. Features such as Diamond Sear cooking grids, internal halogen lighting, a high-efficiency, recessed infrared backburner with a rotisserie, a cast stainless steel burner, and other innovative features make the grill a favorite of designers and chefs.

In terms of the design aesthetic, Fire Magic also shines. “We’re also selling the feel,” Hughes says. “The curb appeal — the blue lights (on the control knobs), the stainless on the Echelon (the premium Fire Magic line) and the Magic View window (allows a cooking view without losing heat or smoke).”

“Longevity is important, because Fire Magic stands behind their parts,” he says. “Everything is 100 percent stainless, even the burner. They use 304 stainless steel, so everything is just super high-end. Durability, quality, curb appeal, and of course, it cooks like a mean machine. That’s why we’ve landed on it as our flagship product.”

“Fire Magic has done a really good job of designing something that’s universal. It just fits. The styling is very sleek and modern, but not too modern. It can transcend styles. It can fit in a traditional project and it can fit in an ultra-modern project.”

While grill selection is a focal point in an outdoor kitchen, for the space to be complete, a wide range of accessories are necessary, including additional burners, refrigerators, storage cabinets and drawers, sinks and faucets, bar accessories, ventilation hoods, trash compartments, and a whole assortment of other components. From a design point of view, it’s important that all of them have a unified design and are built with the same standards of quality.

“We sell the outdoor kitchen as a destination that needs to be self-sufficient, so the accessories are very important,” says Hughes. “Storage is very important...the beverage butler, double drawers, triple drawers, refrigerator and ice maker. I think the trash compartment is also huge, because everyone is going to generate trash. It does such a good job of securing trash in a self-contained vault. No critters are getting into it.”

Hughes says one of his Fire Magic favorites is the ice maker, which generates more than 60 lbs. of ice a day. “No one’s refrigerator/freezer ice maker in their house does that. Even when someone says they’ll get their ice inside, I tell them to consider a party with 20 people. Their ice maker inside just won’t keep up.”

Hughes recommends Fire Magic to all his customers, and nearly all of them follow his recommendation, usually due to his experience with the brand both professionally and personally. “When I tell my clients, this is what I have in my home and this is how I use it, they trust our company. That’s why 95 percent of them use Fire Magic.”