



# the great outdoors

As outdoor kitchens become more popular it is vital for members to keep informed of requirements. Amelia Dale reports.

**A**ustralians have a long history of enjoying cooking in the great outdoors, but the past few years have seen many homeowners upgrading from the humble barbeque to a fully functioning outdoor kitchen.

Art of Kitchens owner and HIA NSW Kitchens & Bathrooms (K&B) Committee chair David Bartlett says the outdoor kitchen, which was once considered a luxury, is fast becoming a standard inclusion in new Australian homes.

‘I’ve been doing outdoor kitchens for the past 10 or 15 years. We now do about 100 outdoor kitchens a year – just about every new home that we do nowadays has one,’ he says.

‘The way that houses are designed now, with a focus on open-plan living, it’s natural to have that alfresco area at the back of the house so you can open everything up.’

Adam Douglas of Melbourne-based company Limetree Alfresco specialises in outdoor kitchens, and says he’s also seen them skyrocket in popularity in recent years, both in new homes and renovations.

‘It’s a natural part of the transition of Australians to being more house-proud,’ he explains.

‘I think it’s been driven by desire for a certain kind of lifestyle. We’ve seen it in the warmer states like Western Australia and Queensland for a while now, but [other states and territories] are catching up really quickly.’

‘In Victoria specifically we’re seeing a lot of heating going into outdoor rooms, like fire pits, open fireplaces and gas fires. They’re becoming a real staple feature in bigger outdoor areas in colder states, so people can enjoy that outdoor environment all year round.’



Photo courtesy Art of Kitchens

The term ‘outdoor kitchen’ covers a wide spectrum, including everything from an alfresco extension of an indoor kitchen to a fully self-contained outdoor food preparation and entertaining area with its own sink and tap, appliances and cupboard space.

‘We’ve seen such a wide variety of outdoor kitchens,’ Adam says. ‘Some are quite enclosed, quite covered, whereas others are somewhat exposed – this leads to a real mixture of different styles.’

The fact that outdoor kitchens are exposed to the weather in varying degrees can often be the cause of some issues during or after the build. So, it is vital to take care when selecting materials and appliances and when constructing joinery.

‘There are some real unique challenges. [For starters] you want to be constructing with materials that are going to last in an outdoor environment, which

is obviously quite a bit harsher than your indoor environment,’ Adam explains.

‘You need to consider moisture, obviously, and another big one that a lot of people don’t consider is the sun – how much sun’s going to get to it? Sun can fade or discolour some materials quite quickly if they’re not suitable for outdoors.’

**‘An alfresco barbeque rangehood [has to] deal with the heat, grease and smoke that a barbeque generates’**

When it comes to appliances the outcome of selecting the wrong product or not taking the weather into consideration can also be disastrous.

‘Glass-door alfresco bar fridges, for example – if direct sun is on those doors, even on just a 20-degree day, the fridge doesn’t work,’ Adam says. ▶

Photo courtesy Limetree Alfresco



‘They work quite well in shaded or ambient areas at temperatures up to 42 degrees... but a bit of afternoon sun will send the fridge temperature skyrocketing and ruin everything inside. We’ve actually planned outdoor kitchens where half of it gets sun, with the alfresco fridge all the way up one end to avoid getting any sun on the doors.’

Then there are barbecues and cooktops and the question of accompanying rangehoods, which can open up a whole other set of issues.

‘Not heat-shielding the barbeque is a really big pitfall that people fall into. If an outdoor kitchen goes in and the barbeque’s not heat-shielded or the cabinetry’s not protected from the heat of the barbeque somehow, it can cause a house fire,’ Adam says.

‘Plus, if the kitchen is covered with any sort of ceiling, you’re definitely going to have to factor a rangehood into the equation.

‘An alfresco barbeque rangehood is quite an expensive item – they start at around \$2,000 and go north from there – because they basically have to be a commercial rangehood to deal with the heat, grease and smoke that a barbeque generates. We’ve seen interior rangehoods put over barbecues and the filters have clogged really quickly, plastics parts in them have melted, and they’ve caught fire.’

With so much potential for problems that may leave builders, installers and cabinetmakers exposed, HIA has become aware that there is a need for a set of industry guidelines in this area. David

Bartlett says that such a resource would be invaluable to members working in businesses like his, who have often had to learn through trial and error.

‘This is something that HIA’s K&B committee is working on at the moment, some guidelines for outdoor kitchens, because there really are none,’ he says.

**‘New practices and products [will improve] the quality and the lifespan of the “great Australian outdoor kitchen”’**

Diane Sebbens, executive director for HIA Kitchens & Bathrooms, adds that bringing together all the industry experience and the ‘best known practice’ out there from experienced HIA members who are designing, constructing and specifying products for outdoor kitchens, will greatly assist in completing the first set of industry guidelines.

‘The document will remain a work-in-progress as new practices and products improve the quality and the lifespan of the “great Australian outdoor kitchen” in the years ahead,’ she says. **H**



Photo courtesy Art of Kitchens

**Creature comforts**

Many homeowners building an outdoor kitchen want their alfresco area to have all the modern conveniences of an indoor kitchen. Brad Street, head of Winning Appliances Commercial, says he has seen a broader range of outdoor appliances come onto the market in recent years to meet this demand.

‘The Australian lifestyle has always centred around the outdoors, and with such a beautiful climate, it’s no surprise alfresco entertainment areas are growing in popularity,’ he says.

‘Stainless steel built-in barbecues, sleek sound systems, beverage units and even outdoor dishwashers are being incorporated into these outdoor spaces to create alfresco entertaining areas that are second-to-none.’

David Bartlett of Art of Kitchens adds that often the challenge with appliances is ensuring clients have everything they need for a convenient cooking space without overcrowding.

‘One of the challenges is that generally outdoor kitchens are being built in small areas, and people want a lot in the design, [like] a bar fridge, a sink and a barbeque as a minimum,’ he says. ‘You have to be smart in your design.’