

# Getting Started With Outdoor Kitchens

by Kim and Linda Katwijk

## Capitalize on a hot trend to expand your business

Recently, my wife and I went to a Japanese steakhouse. We sat with six other guests around a large griddle where the chef put on a show as he cooked. Watching him I realized that like the grills in a hibachi restaurant, an outdoor kitchen is center stage. This drove home the importance of my role in designing and building these kitchens.

Clients count on the designer and builder to make everything perfect. They don't necessarily know what they want, and they almost certainly don't know what their options are. It's hard to overstate the importance of finding out what the clients expect in an outdoor kitchen. The more you investigate, the better: The worst thing to hear after the clients have used their expensive kitchen for a year is "I wish we had ..." followed by whatever is bugging them.

## Marketing and Selling

After getting up to speed on products and the manufacturers' installation methods, the next step is letting people know that you do outdoor kitchens. If you've been building decks for a while, you already have a list of potential kitchen clients: your past customers. They know and trust you, and one of the most economical ways to generate new business is to mail customized postcards to these folks. Put a photo of a beautiful outdoor kitchen on the postcard to catch their attention (**Figure 1, page 3**).

On the address side of the card, provide enough information to motivate people to call. I focus on getting prospective clients to visualize the food, the friends, the laughter, and the fun. Good times naturally revolve around food and beverages, and no one wants to be stuck inside cooking



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while everyone else is outside visiting. Selling an outdoor kitchen is about selling the idea of good times.

### What Does the Client Want?

Once a client is excited about an outdoor kitchen, it's time to get out your note pad and ask questions. Collect information that will enable you to best place the kitchen's components. If you aren't sure what your client is thinking, ask more questions.

In addition to finding out your prospect's desires, collect information about the site. Make a simple

line drawing with boxes representing the house, deck, and other pertinent features, such as trees or a hot tub (**Figure 2, page 3**).

Find out which way the wind blows on a typical summer day at the time of day your clients plan to use their kitchen; they won't want smoke from the barbecue blowing into the faces of their guests or into the house. Evaluate the sun's path: Will you need to include a sun shade, roof, or pergola to make the space usable (**Figure 3, page 4**)? Also think about the direction the guests will face and

what the view will be. Will the cook have his back to the guests? A good design will address all these issues.

Next help your clients choose the kitchen components that will meet their needs. Start with the grill. To determine the size of the grill, find out how many people your client is likely to entertain regularly. For a family of four, a two-burner grill, 27 inches to 30 inches wide, will work nicely. If they regularly entertain six guests, they'll need a three-burner grill, 35 inches to 37 inches wide. For parties of 15 or greater, a grill at least

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48 inches wide is a must. Not just any grill will do, either. If it's going to be built into the cabinets, you need to use grills rated for zero-clearance installation.

Another question to ask is whether your client prefers to fuel the grill with natural gas, propane, or charcoal. Natural gas and propane are convenient and clean. Either can be tied to the home's existing gas supply. If you go that route, don't forget the cost of having a plumber or the gas company do this work.

After the grill, everything else is optional, and boy, are there options. For outdoor use, various manufacturers offer refrigerators, side burners, sinks, paper-towel holders, chill plates, warming drawers, pizza ovens, and more. Let your client's desires (and budget) determine which components to include.

One of the last questions you need to ask is who the dominant cook will be. The answer will help you plan the best height for all working surfaces. Let's say you're meeting with a husband and wife. He's 6 feet 4 inches tall, she's 5 feet 3 inches tall — a comfortable counter height will be completely different for each.

Have the main cook stand flat-footed with arms hanging at his or her sides. Next, have him or her raise a forearm so it is bent at the elbow and parallel to the floor. Then he or she should bend the raised wrist so the fingers point down. The distance between the client's fingertips and the floor is the ideal counter height.

### From Notes to Design

Armed with an understanding of your client's needs and desires, you're ready to draw up the design. As with indoor kitchens, there are three common layouts for an outdoor kitchen: the U-shape, the L-shape, and the straight line (Figure 4, page 5). The



Figure 1. Your existing customer base is the best place to start looking for outdoor-kitchen jobs. The author sends out custom postcards to inform former clients of this part of his business.

**Building your Backyard Paradise is easier and faster than you think.**

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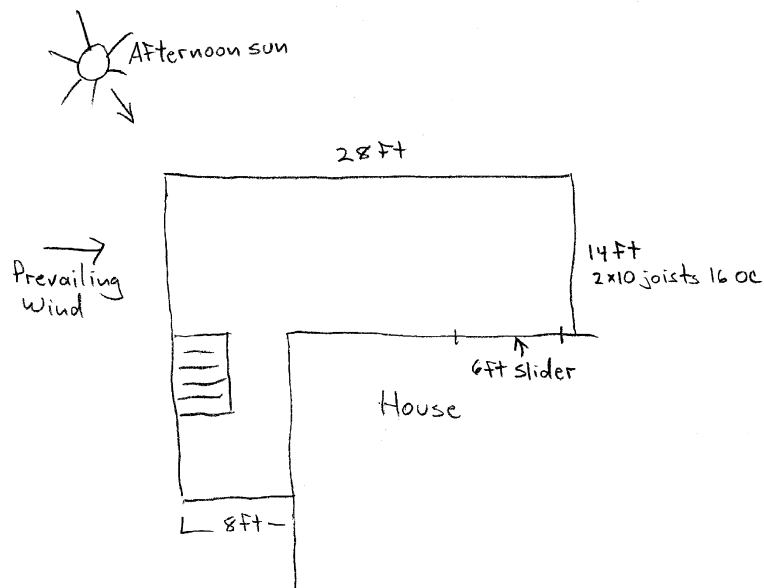


Figure 2. A simple sketch of the site is invaluable when you're designing the kitchen. You'll need dimensions, the location of the sun when the kitchen is likely to be in use, the direction of prevailing winds, and information about the structure.

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U-shape tends to provide the shortest distance between the main appliances; the L-shape gives the next shortest distance between elements; and the straight line makes for the longest walk.

Kitchens on decks are generally located in one of three spots. As long as the deck is large enough to accommodate it, a central island is usually the most desirable as it allows people to move freely all the way around it. The second option – placing the kitchen along the outer edges of the deck – works well on smaller decks. The third option is to install the kitchen against the house. I don't recommend this, because smoke and grease from the grill will stain the side of the house and the eaves.

Try to place the key appliances – usually a grill, a sink, and a refrigerator – close together, oriented as three points of a triangle. Allow enough room for one or two people to be cooking while several others are sitting and someone else is walking by. Identify the normal traffic patterns from the house to the yard and don't



IDAHO BACKYARD LIVING



ROBERT SIMONSON

Figure 3. It's common for outdoor kitchens to see use in the late afternoon, when the sun is at a low angle. Building in a sun-screen is often a good idea (above). In rainy climates, a full roof is good plan (left).

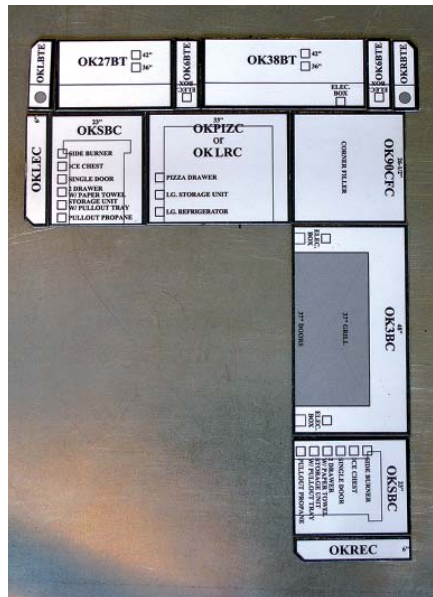
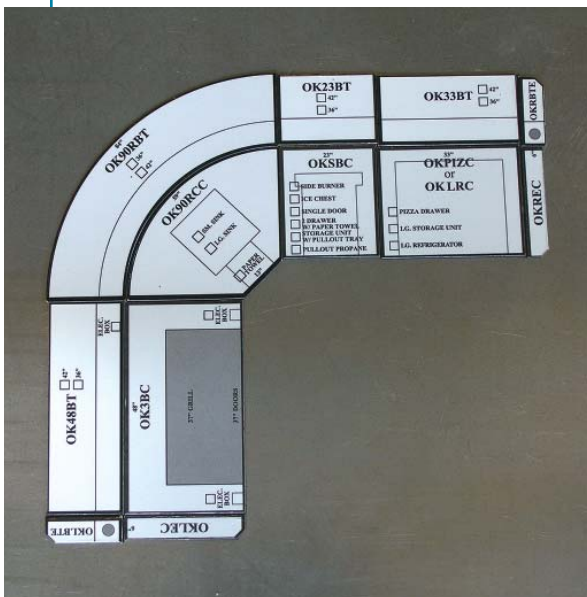


Figure 4. To help plan a layout, Calise Outdoor Kitchens offers quarter-inch-scale drawings of its cabinets and kitchen components mounted on magnetic film. These can be arranged in different ways on a steel plate until the perfect configuration emerges.

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### Manufacturers and Materials

There are several manufacturers of outdoor kitchens, and they specialize in different types of cabinets and components. The differences include material, size, cabinet construction, and price. It's a good idea to become

familiar with several so you can provide a range of options to your clients. While there are other good suppliers out there, these three companies are the ones I'm most familiar with.

#### Calise Outdoor Kitchens

(800/652-7923, [www.outdoorkitchenconcepts.com](http://www.outdoorkitchenconcepts.com))

Calise makes modular cabinets from galvanized steel and cement board. Also available are a variety of stainless steel drawers, storage units, and appliances to fit in the modular cabinets. These can be covered with materials such as stone, tile, stucco, or weather-resistant wood.



CALISE OUTDOOR KITCHENS

#### Danver

(888/441-0537, [www.danver.com](http://www.danver.com))

Danver builds cabinets using stainless steel throughout. The cabinets have scratch-resistant interiors and stainless steel drawer fronts and door fronts. The cabinets can be installed like wood cabinets, or they can be inserted into a brick, stone or stucco enclosure.



DANVER

#### Wer/Ever Products

(888/324-3837, [www.werever.com](http://www.werever.com))

These weatherproof cabinets are composed of solid marine-grade, UV-stabilized polymer (a fancy word for plastic), and Wer/Ever claims that they won't warp, rot, or crack. A variety of colors is available. These cabinets assemble much like European-style indoor kitchen cabinets.



WER/EVER

#### Additional Cabinet, Grill, and Appliance Suppliers

Cook-N-Dine International; 305/893-1560, [www.cookndine.com](http://www.cookndine.com)

DCS by Fisher & Paykel; 888/936-7872, [www.dcsappliances.com](http://www.dcsappliances.com)

Lynx Professional Grills; 888/289-5969, [www.lynxgrills.com](http://www.lynxgrills.com)

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet; 800/868-1699, [www.kalamazoogourmet.com](http://www.kalamazoogourmet.com)

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HIGHPOINT DECK LIGHTING



BACKYARD AMERICA

**Figure 5. Outdoor kitchens call for brighter lighting than is typical for a deck, at least in the cooking areas. Overhead lighting provides general illumination (left), while moveable spot lights make sense near a grill (above). Such lighting should be controlled independently from the general deck lighting, so that a dimly lit ambiance can be restored once the steaks are cooked.**

block them.

Don't frustrate the future cook by failing to provide enough counter space for food preparation, storage, and serving. A prime example is when there is no space between a side burner and the grill. Here comes one spouse with a tray of food ready to be cooked, but the spot next to the grill

is taken up by a pot for boiling corn on the cob. Likewise, when delicious morsels are being taken off the grill, where will the serving platter go? And when the pot needs to be moved off the side burner, is there room to scoot it over? Think it all through. Your clients will love you for it.

### Lighting the Kitchen

Because decks so often get used at night, lighting an outdoor kitchen is as important as lighting an indoor one (**Figure 5**). In addition to the regular railing and step lighting, it's good to add hanging fixtures for soft down lighting on the countertop. To be able to see what's cooking, add directional spotlights to brightly light the barbecue. A switch will be needed to turn off the spots when not in use. Hanging lights will need to attach to an overhead structure. These lights are usually low voltage and run off the same transformer as the rest of the deck lighting.

Finally, make sure the deck is able to support the added weight of the kitchen (**Figure 6**). You'll need to calculate the weight the appliances and cabinets will add and check that the existing joists can handle the additional load. ❖

*Kim Katwijk is a deck builder in Olympia, Wash. Linda Katwijk co-authored this article.*



COOK-N-DINE

**Figure 6. Outdoor kitchens can add a considerable dead load to the deck. To the weight of the cabinets themselves, you need to add the weight of such items as appliances and granite countertops.**