



Photo courtesy of Creative Rock Formations. Pools by Charlotte Pools & Spas.

backyard bliss

With these tips, you'll never want to leave home again



by Jesseca Whalen

// You know what this backyard needs? A living room." This is a quote from a friend as we were discussing the latest trends in home design. We laughed about it, but the truth is there – more and more people are carving out their own little piece of heaven, complete with kitchens, fireplaces and pools, right in their backyards.

"People are gravitating to being outdoors more," says Sheryl Isenhour of IBD Outdoor Rooms, a company that designs and manufactures products like outdoor kitchen islands and fire pits. "Especially in North Carolina, where you

can be outside 11 months of the year with a little bit of climate control."

Check out these ideas to create an outdoor paradise you can enjoy year round, no suitcase required.

ADD SOME SIZZLE

Fun and functional, outdoor kitchens are an awesome place to entertain, and with the advent of patio heaters and outdoor fans, you can comfortably eat outside in almost any weather.

"Almost everyone I work with wants some type of outdoor kitchen. It's just a great entertainment space," says J'Nell

Bryson of J'Nell Bryson Landscape Architecture. "Built-in grill areas with sinks and green eggs are really popular." Also known as a ceramic kamado grill, green eggs are charcoal smokers that cook everything from meat to vegetables in minutes. Bryson is a chef — she went to culinary school in San Francisco — so her ideal patio would feature an outdoor pizza oven, full kitchen, refrigerator, dishwasher and a big dining table.

"We're starting to notice that people are putting more expensive kitchens outdoors than inside the house," Isenhour laughs. "The economy is in an upswing,

and this is an economy-driven business."

Another reason for the outdoor kitchen trend? A post-recession mindset that's inspiring people to think twice before spending money at bars and restaurants.

"People are nesting more," Isenhour says. "Homes are now a place to get together instead of going out. A great thing, too, is that outdoor kitchens or rooms are no longer just the rich man's product. A year's worth of money that you'd spend going out to eat you can use to build a beautiful outdoor area. And you can do it in stages if your



Photos courtesy of J'Neil Bryson Landscape Architecture

budget doesn't allow you to drop it all at once. For me, a backyard is an ongoing project."

HEAT THINGS UP

A continuing backyard trend is the addition of fire pits and fireplaces. After all, who doesn't want to watch flames flicker as evening deepens and smoke trails dance toward the stars?

"Outdoor living is exploding in this market," says Brian Lewis of Sunmar Construction, who designs intricate craftsman-style fire pits and outdoor fireplaces along with pools and waterfalls.

"Your biggest investment is your home. Creating a relaxing lifestyle is key. You really can have your staycation."

And one of the best places to relax is in front of a crackling fire. "Fire pits are more popular than fireplaces in outdoor spaces," Bryson says. "It's a great conversation area. Plus, everyone can gather around it and get warm."

"We've sold fire pits left and right this year," Isenhour agrees. "We even sent one to Hawaii a few weeks ago."

Part of Isenhour's ideal outdoor room, in addition to a wood-fired oven, grill island and green egg, is a fireplace

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or fire pit “for some ambiance,” she says.

STAY COOL

Let’s be honest, summer is toasty in the South. That’s why pools and water features are a must-have in many backyards. Not only is it great for the homeowners to enjoy, but if you’re into investment properties, turnover becomes that much easier.

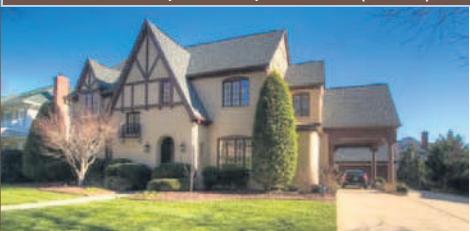
“If you put in an amazing backyard, it’s going to sell the house,” says Christian Spires of Creative Rock Formations, who designs and builds nature-inspired features for pools, including grottos, waterfalls and caves. “There’s tremendous value in that. Even a simple water feature can give the space that ‘wow’ factor.”

Creative Rock Formations is a precast company, which means they imprint rock so they can be environmentally friendly. “When companies use real rock they have to mine it, which destroys the



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mountains,” Spires explains. “They don’t realize how much damage they’re actually doing. We backpack to find the rocks to mold and duplicate them over and over. This gives us a ton of flexibility with what we do – we can stain, waterproof and warranty our cliffs and boulders where others can’t. Our five-year warranty is the best in the business.”

Spires recently transformed a backyard for a high-profile client near Davidson. “The existing pool was

extremely boring, so we put in another one on the upper level and connected the two pools with a 25-foot tube slide. We also added rocks, a fire pit, grottos, caves and pathways.”

Sunmar Construction also prefers to “think outside the box” when it comes to water feature design. “We always want to do something different, whether it’s waterfalls going into the pool or unique tile flooring,” Lewis says.

“No matter what,” he adds, “You should feel proud of where you live.” **HID**

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