

CHARLOTTE URBAN

HOME

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Rustic Chic

Luxe Living in the Country

SNAP, CRACKLE, POP:
Outdoor Fireplaces

Jim Schmid Photography

A WARM WINTER SANCTUARY



Custom Land Design

There's something about a crackling fire that brings people together and makes everyone feel warmer – body and soul. Today you don't have to limit fireside chats to your living room. It's easier than ever to relax with family and friends around a beautiful fireplace that sits under the stars in your own backyard.

As more homeowners discover the benefits of outdoor fireplaces, these quiet retreats are becoming more popular in our market. We talked with some of Charlotte's prominent landscape architects to learn their best ideas for creating cozy outdoor fireplace retreats that complement your indoor living space and your home's architecture.

Enhance Your Backyard Living Space

Tom Coogan, owner of Coogan's Landscape Design, has been creating beautiful outdoor living areas for homeowners in the Charlotte area for close to three decades. He believes outdoor fireplaces are growing in popularity as more people discover that these retreat areas are more than a luxury, they increase living area and re-sale value.

"Homeowners have created beautiful backyards, and they want to enjoy them well into the winter months," says Coogan. "They realize that an outdoor fireplace can make this possible."

Cindy Marze with Hearth & Patio, a leading provider of outdoor furniture and grill and hearth products, says the demand for outdoor fireplaces is growing because homeowners are maximizing the enjoyment in their homes.

"People are spending more time at home now and they want to utilize any space they can," says Marze. "An outdoor fireplace allows you to extend your living area to entertain friends and business clients or spend an evening roasting hot dogs or marshmallows with your children."

Build Around Your lifestyle

According to Coogan, the key to building a successful outdoor fireplace retreat is deciding how you want to live in the space. You may want a small, low maintenance fireplace to fit in a small area with gas logs. Or you might want a very large fireplace and patio area with the space to accommodate lots of friends and a variety of activities. "Our designers make it easy and love working with people to create an outdoor area that serves their needs," he says.

John Biggers, owner of Biggers Lawn and Landscape, has been creating upscale outdoor living including pool installation and maintenance for homeowners since 1985. He says it's important to carry the atmosphere of the home's interior through to the outside.

"We use brick, stone, travertine, granite countertops – anything that's inside, we incorporate into the outside living area to extend the environment and create a gathering space that family and friends can enjoy."

Wood burning or gas?

As Marze points out, "A fireplace with a fire in it, regardless if it's wood or gas, creates a cozy feeling." So you can't go wrong either way. But you will need to decide which is right for you and the way you entertain – wood burning or gas logs.

"Wood burning fireplaces allow you to roast hot dogs and marshmallows for s'mores and give you that wonderful smell of wood burning," says Marze. "Although it is convenient, gas does not allow that. Hearth & Patio does more gas burning fireplaces because our customers like the idea of being able to turn a knob to turn on a fire instead of building a fire out of wood."

Many of the customers at Coogan's Landscape Design request gas

starters for their wood burning fireplaces, or they want complete gas log systems. “People really want the instant beauty and warmth without the cleanup,” Coogan says.

Gas log lights are a standard feature of the outdoor fireplaces Biggers installs through his landscape company. “We always install gas log lights to get the wood burning. Once it starts, you simply turn off the gas and enjoy the crackling beauty of a wood burning fire,” he says.

Beyond the sights and sounds, Biggers says it’s important that outdoor fireplaces also provide warmth. “We use a construction method based on the colonial homes of New England. Our angled throat design pushes heat out to help the fireplace generate more warmth,” he explains.

Plan your location and your budget

In addition to deciding what kind of retreat you’ll have, you must select the best location for your home and determine your budget. Our landscape experts tell us there are many things to consider, building codes among them.

“If you’ve decided to have a wood burning fireplace, there are more codes to consider,” says Marze.

“Make sure you’re allowed to build an outdoor fireplace on your property,” says Coogan, explaining that building codes can vary from area to area. “Homeowners associations and subdivision regulations would be a good place to start.”

Consider the placement and proximity to your home and its surroundings. Think about the size and scope of your project and whether you want to use the space for large gatherings or personal retreats with lots of privacy. Of course, your budget may decide a lot of these things for you.

“Every custom outdoor fireplace is different,” says Coogan. “You can spend as little as \$6,000 for a very small basic structure on up to \$35,000, depending on the details, size, and the materials wanted.”



Biggers says homeowners should plan to spend at least \$25,000 to \$30,000 for their outdoor fireplace retreat, particularly if they are planning to include a built-in grill. "With all the special features available today to complete your outdoor retreat, it can add up," he says.

Add The Finishing Touches

Outdoor refrigerators, food warming bins, ice makers, running water, audio systems, and flat screen TVs. The list of amenities that can help make your outdoor fireplace area the perfect escape from daily pressures is extensive.

Seating walls and outdoor furniture must also be considered. Plan your seating arrangements to create a nice conversation area.

"You will want an area in front of the fireplace for a comfortable sitting group," says Marze. "Some people want a sofa and a couple of chairs, while others like the idea of four comfortable chairs and a table."

Final tips for success include making sure you hire a licensed contractor and check their references. "They will have to run gas lines and you will have to have a permit, so your contractor must perform well. Make sure you're working with someone you can trust," says Biggers. "The cheapest price is not always the best. Get references and examine the work they've done for other customers to make a wise decision and create the perfect outdoor fireplace retreat." ❖

For more information and additional resources for your outdoor living space, including a list of general contractors, hardscape contractors, landscape contractors and outdoor living showrooms, please visit urbanhomemagazine.com and our blog.



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Who says style stops inside your home? The Meredith chandelier is 31" high by 26" and is U.L. listed for a damp location. The wall sconce measures 6" wide by 18" high. It is U.L. listed for a wet location. **Kichler.com. Lighting and Bulbs Unlimited. 704-845-8844 or 704-602-0150.**



Brown Jordan offers bright, dynamic and quick-drying fabrics that will make your patio pop. Available in several sizes and shapes, these all-weather outdoor pillows are UV protected to resist fading and are soft, yet durable to resist mildew. **brownjordan.com. The Hearth and Patio. 704-332-4139 or 704-909-2420.**

Outdoor Fireplace Success

- Decide how many people you want to accommodate and how you will use the space.
- Use materials that bring elements of your interior design outdoors.
- Decide between wood burning and gas logs, or combine both with a gas starter.
- Make sure your fireplace will offer warmth as well as beauty.
- Determine the location for your fireplace, considering proximity to your home.
- Budget for your outdoor retreat, allowing from \$6,000 for basics to \$35,000 for luxuries.
- Add amenities that fit your lifestyle, from built-in grills and icemakers to flat screen TVs.
- Consider seating arrangements, with a built-in seating wall or comfy furniture.
- Consult with licensed contractors, reviewing their previous work closely to choose a builder that's right for you.