

# Take it Outside

Outdoor fires give cozy warmth whenever and wherever you want it

BY VANESSA SALVIA

**A**ROUND HERE, SITTING BY A FIRE PROVIDES welcome warmth during a season of cold winds and rain. In the summertime, a fire provides cozy ambience and a fun way to grill up hot dogs and s'mores. A fireplace or firepit lets you enjoy the outdoors all year long, and a little planning can help you get the most from your space, whatever your budget.



A firepit is a hole or a raised hole where the burning material is placed. It can be any shape and is typically easier to incorporate into your yard and less expensive because it is a smaller structure. A firebowl is most likely pre-fabricated of concrete or metal. These can be placed wherever you want them and can be somewhat portable. A fireplace is a larger structure and can be situated to block unsightly views or block wind. Outdoor fireplaces are typically more expensive and are subject to some permits and inspections.

First, decide whether you want to burn wood or gas. Burning wood outdoors is subject to burn restrictions during some months of the year and during periods of stagnant air advisories. Gas can be burned year-round. And then there's always the possibility of a hybrid that can burn both gas and wood.

Eugene builder Dan Cooper, of DC Fine Homes, primarily builds new houses, and he says 95 percent of buyers want some sort of outdoor living area with a fire feature. "In new homes 10 years ago, outdoor areas were an afterthought, or just were in higher-end homes," he says, "and now pretty much all homes have them."

Most of Cooper's clients are custom-designing their homes, so installing an outdoor room becomes part of the construction. "They have all of the tradesmen already on-site, so they might as well piece it together," he says. "The pre-fab pits are best for people that are retrofitting an older home, whereas with new construction we have carte blanche for what we can do."

Eugene's Rainbow Valley Design and Construction has always built outdoor spaces, but now they have a division focused just on this area. Stonemason Jon Clark thinks about the fire's proximity to the house, a door, or a window. "You don't want smoke from a chimney wafting into an upstairs bedroom or the neighbor's house," Clark says.

A building pro will ask how you want to use the space: Intimate gatherings or large garden parties? Outdoor cooking or simply ambiance? "We're designing to accommodate the function," Cooper says. "You can strategically place the fireplace so that maybe this mass of stone blocks a view they don't want to be looking at but also doesn't block a view that they want," he says. Alec Dakers, Rainbow Valley's lead designer, says that in his experience many of the lots in town have neighbors looking down into them. "You don't want to be in front of your neighbors sitting at your fire, so the fire is only one component of an outdoor space," he says.

Often, gas fires are designed in a modern, clean style. Eugene builder Jordan Iverson builds custom homes, but he is also a



COURTESY OF RAINBOW VALLEY



Rainbow Valley Design & Construction designed this modern and elegant outdoor spa and patio, including a custom hot tub and curtains and bamboo for privacy.



Custom outdoor fireplace by Fifth Season Landscape

COURTESY OF CHAUNCEY FREEMAN

dealer for Remarque bioethanol fireplaces that can be found at MODERN. “Bioethanol is a totally clean-burning fuel that comes from corn,” Iverson says. “These fires burn with no smoke so you can move them wherever you need them. They don’t need to be connected to lines.”

Remarque fire features come in sizes from small tabletop models to large models that can be used both indoor and outdoor, in prices ranging from \$250 to \$1,800. “They really are portable,” Iverson says. “The small ones you can use outdoors on your patio and then hang up on a wall like a picture. They come in different styles, but the ones that I carry are chosen to be even more on the contemporary side.”

Iverson says the most common question he fields about these fire features is whether they really put out heat. “They really heat up,” he says. “They will heat up 200 to 300 square feet, so a patio or nice size room depending on the model. And you get that true flame. They’re not natural gas so they don’t have to be vented. You could have an open flame sitting on your table top.”

For their Perry-Pomranky project, Rainbow Valley installed a private spa-like retreat fit for year-round outdoor living, cooking, relaxing, and entertaining. Mature bamboo was planted around the custom hot tub for privacy, with outdoor curtains used to screen off sections of space. A wood pergola with a polycarbonate roof lets light in but keeps rain out. This project won two awards in 2012.

Isaac Yuan, one of Cooper’s clients, has an outdoor space with a gorgeous view overlooking the Lorane Valley. The house was built in 2011 and the gas-burning fire feature

was installed at the same time. “We use it quite a bit during the spring, summer, and fall,” Yuan says, “especially when it gets cool at night. We use it more than we expected.”

Jon Clark, the stonemason, views a fire feature as an almost mythical addition to home life. “The connection we have with fire is still really primitive, and anyone who sits around an open fire is almost always comfortable and at ease,” he says. For Dakers, sitting around a fire brings back memories of camping and childhood. Whatever memories fire evokes for you, an outdoor space with a fire is a most welcome addition to any home. ■

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