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Party on the Patio

BY STEPHANIE STEWART • PHOTOS BY THE FACTORY PHOTOGRAPHY

Stratton Exteriors creates an outdoor kitchen built for entertaining

As summer turns to autumn and the deep heat of August starts to moderate, you have to admit, we all long for a true outdoor living space. Sure, there's nothing like a great porch, but if you're devoted to entertaining, and want the opportunity to have folks over to watch the big game outside or have a cookout, you're probably yearning for a serious outdoor cooking spot as well as a place to lounge. Contemporary reality suggests you may not have the budget now you had two or three years ago to build that kind of space, but that doesn't mean you can't pull it off. On the contrary, according to Shane Stratton of Stratton Exteriors, a little smart planning and forethought can produce something extraordinary, even if you're working on a budget. And you've got to love that.



Recently, Stratton's company completed work on an outdoor kitchen for residents living near Percy Priest Lake. The couple wanted to build an outdoor kitchen as the first piece in a complete backyard remodel—next year, they're looking to put in a firepit, surrounded by stone pavers, and a pool. The instructions they gave Stratton were exacting—they wanted the new space, which would be reached easily through the back door into the yard, to blend smoothly with the existing house, including the roofline. They also gave him a very specific budget to work with.

Stratton says they went about things the right way, purchasing many outdoor components themselves—including the cabinetry, grill, trash receptacle and other amenities, in order to keep the cost down. Across the board, they also chose durable materials to guarantee they'd last, and not need frequent changing or maintenance to keep looking great. The appliances, for example, are stainless steel, which won't easily rust or corrode.

Making use of creativity and design smarts, Stratton added to this effect, making building choices that also ensure sturdiness. "The granite we chose for example, a new Terra Brazil variety, which is just beautiful with all the veining, is also durable—it'll last forever," he says. "The laminate won't fade, and the roofline makes certain it's all well sheltered from the elements. It's all built to last and look great."

Stratton got his first challenge making sure the kitchen would blend with the roofline, and fit naturally into the design and structure of the house, as though it had always been there. He managed this by giving the kitchen a high, vaulted ceiling, which in turn blends well with the original roof. When you're standing in the kitchen space, the high ceiling both creates the illusion of truly abundant space and provides ample opportunity to create great lighting effects—and a place to put a sizeable ceiling fan to keep air



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circulating on typical Tennessee summer days.

Added to the smoothness of the shift from home roof to porch roof, Stratton and his clients made a terrific selection of manufactured stone to cover the counter structure, in order to connect the two structures visually. The texture and color of the stone melds well with the home's brick, and ties together—through its mottled colors and patina—the brick and the roughly, yet fashionably, stained concrete floor.

“The stained concrete does a lot of things,” says Stratton. “Aside from being durable, it hides dirt and keeps everything looking good. There's lots of depth to the floor—they wanted a slate-like look for it, and the concrete does that admirably.”

Thanks to custom construction, the homeowners were able to guarantee everything matched their tastes—and their

needs. For example, the ample functional lighting is set on a dimmer switch, allowing the charming accent lights to be turned up while the kitchen is being used for prep, then back down to maintain a mood while guests are enjoying the meal and the space. “We've also designed everything with clean-up in mind,” says Stratton. “It's easy to tidy up and keep the place looking good.”

Whether you regularly host parties every weekend or your calmer life involves family summer get-togethers, there's nothing like having the option of moving your gatherings outdoors in the crisp early fall weather (or spring, or summer or even winter, when it comes down to it). A well-designed outdoor kitchen makes it possible to entertain in comfort and leisure, bringing the outdoors in.

For more information on Stratton Exteriors, visit strattonexteriors.com or call (615) 337-9192.