

# HOME

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FIRE STYLE

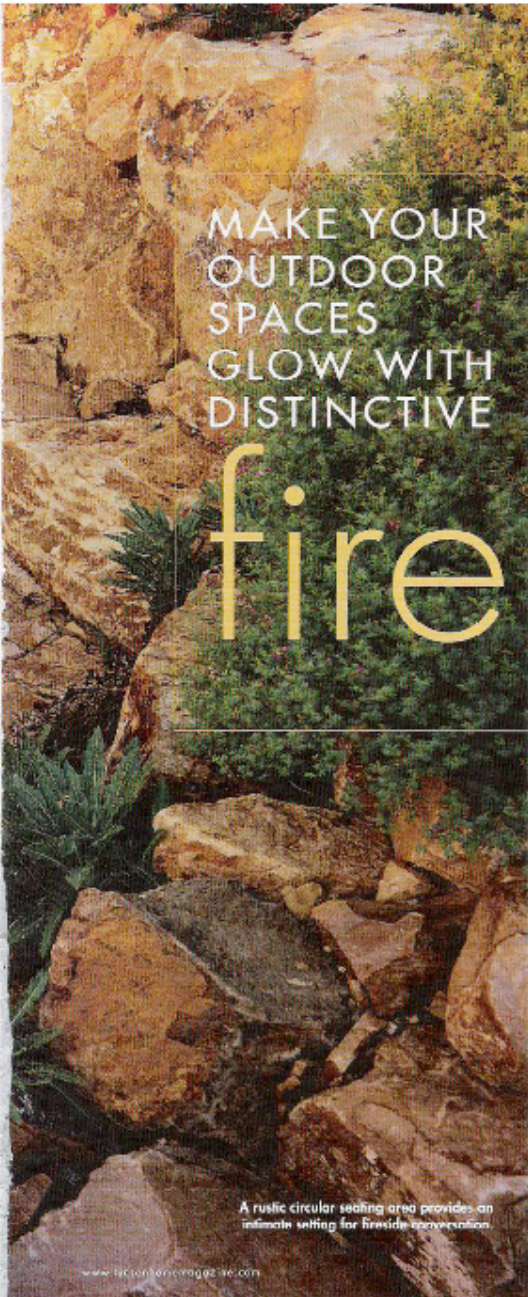
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WINTER 2005-06 \$2.95



25274-50254





MAKE YOUR  
OUTDOOR  
SPACES  
GLOW WITH  
DISTINCTIVE

# fire style

A rustic circular seating area provides an intimate setting for fireside conversation.

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BY SCOTT CALHOUN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERENCE MOORE

Two years ago, I took my family to Alamos, Mexico, in the southern part of Sonora, for the holidays. Invited to a family party by friends, we celebrated the new year outdoors in the courtyard of an old Colonial villa near the town square. We ate tacos among the mango and avocado trees, listened to roaming musicians, and warmed ourselves by the multiple fire pits arranged around the patio. We all look back fondly on that night, but what stayed with us most were the fires. Even in southern Sonora, the nighttime winter temperatures can get chilly. A warm hearth welcomes visitors. We smelled the smoke in our hair and clothes for the remainder of the trip, and each whiff brought smiles to our faces. Ever since that party, the glory of outdoor fireplaces, fire pits, and ovens has been seared into my garden-design sensibilities. ▶

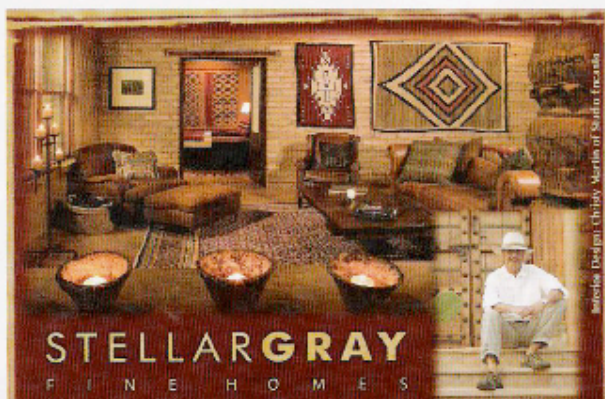


feature takes advantage of the convenience of natural gas, it retains the ambiance of a primitive rock shelter. The intimacy of the circular enclosure has created, quite literally, a conversation pit. According to the Colvilles, the experience of being out in the fire pit with the shadows flickering off the rocks causes people to reveal secrets they would normally keep to themselves. Unique elements, such as using a rock knob to open the gas valve to fuel the hidden ring of fire, add to the natural style of the sit-

ting area. When combining fire and rock, Billings prefers to use gas for its even heat and because it will not damage his carefully placed rockwork.

Although gas is eclipsing wood for many outdoor purposes, some cooks swear by wood. Eddie Muñoz of Sol Design prefers cooking on wood, although he admits most of his clients choose gas. "At my own house, I have a giant wood fire pit," says Muñoz, "with a grill that rotates on top of it. I can cook for a large crowd with no prob-

ALTHOUGH GAS IS ECLIPSING WOOD FOR MANY OUTDOOR PURPOSES, SOME COOKS SWEAR BY WOOD.



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**SOME  
OUTDOOR  
FIREPLACES  
EVEN OFFER  
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lem." For those serious about cooking with fire, Mugnaini Imports' Italian brick ovens are the perfect patio focal point. Mugnaini ovens are both decorative and functional and can be purchased either pre-assembled or in kits. They are built to cook rustic breads, pizza, and wood-roasted chicken to perfection. If the Tuscan lifestyle is what you're after, an Italian wood-fired oven adds authenticity to your design. As the most hard-core barbecue chefs will attest, cooking with wood adds flavor that cannot be matched by gas. For the best of both worlds, Jan Marshall of Arcadia Landscape says you can add wood flavor to gas fires through the use of a "wood box": a small box placed next to the gas elements of your grill and filled with wood shavings or kindling. The wood box imparts a smoky flavor to whatever you cook.

According to Marshall, the surge in outdoor fire features is a direct result of the expansion of outdoor living areas. Many of Marshall's clients are California transplants already accustomed to fine outdoor living accoutrements. When budgeting for outdoor living spaces that include fireplaces, fire pits, or kitchens, Marshall advises homeowners to set aside 15-20% of their construction budget for landscaping, rather than the traditional 10-15% recommended in other parts of the country. "Because we can spend so much time outdoors here, we need to add elements that make the space more comfortable. Outdoor fireplaces, fire pits, and heaters make December



Magnami Imports' Italian brick fireplaces offer both function and style.

and January outdoor entertaining a reality," she explains.

Muniz prefers pairing ramadas with outdoor fireplaces. "Even when the temperatures are in the 30s, having a warm outdoor fire is like having a sweater on." One of Muniz's current projects will use canvas curtains to enclose a ramada area and keep the warmth of the outdoor fireplace contained. Muniz agrees that outdoor fire elements are a hot item for both new and remodeled yards. "Almost every single one of my clients is having some sort of outdoor fireplace installed."

Love of grilled food, nostalgia for camping trips—these make the prospect of constructing a backyard fire pit or outdoor oven as delicious as a roasted marshmallow. Nights spent gathered around a fire with family and friends make great memories, which when you get down to it, is probably the real reason people build outdoor rooms to begin with. Good fires, good friends, and good food—all are primitive and contemporary needs of the human animal. ❏

Garden writer Scott Calhoun owns and operates *ZonaGardens*, a local landscape design and garden-walking firm, and is the author of *Yard Full of Sun*. Since his youth, he has enjoyed a good fire.

#### RESOURCES

Arcadia Landscape, 791-0889 • Earth Energy's Hearth and Patio, 888-8867 • Heatlator, 800-927-6841; www.heatlator.com • Joe Billings, The Landscaping Artist, 861-0646 • Magnami Imports Inc., 888-887-7206 • Sol Design, 882-9369

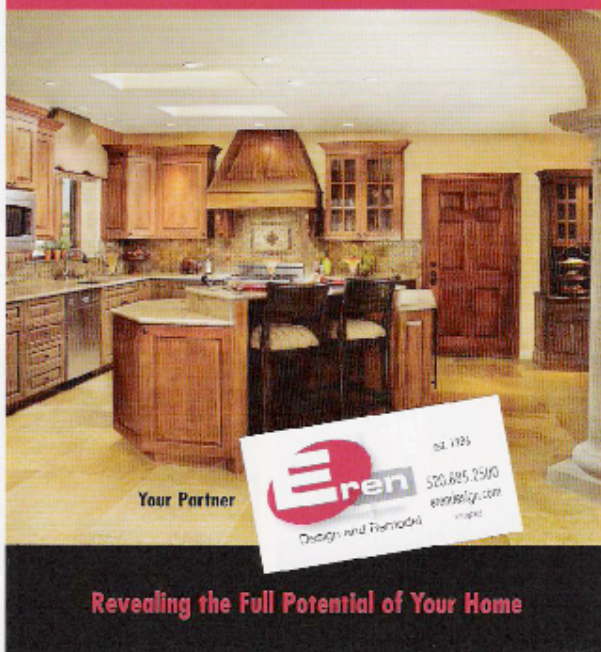
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