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# HOME Improvement

DALLAS

*from  
Patios to  
Piazzas*

the fine art of outdoor living

*also*  
clocks  
fire pits  
home spas



Photo courtesy of Oasis Fire

## fire pits

the evolution of outdoor chic

CATHY COKER MARTIN

The first thought that comes to my mind when you mention a "fire pit" is camping out under the stars. I can remember campouts with my fellow girl scouts and the thrill of hunting and scavenging for rocks to encircle the pit we had dug. Once the pit was prepared, we would begin gathering kindling and wood for the fire. The real challenge for us, as novice fire builders, was to actually get the fire to stay lit. We went through boxes and boxes of matches before we had a decent flame going. We roasted hot dogs, cooked campfire stew and frequently burned our marshmallows, but the cozy fire pit was the center of our gathering and fun. What fond memories were created there for all to remember.

Today, there is no need to build your own fire pit out of nature. There are dozens and dozens of portable, semi-permanent and permanent fire pit options on the market. Fire pits are one of

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**Cathy Coker Martin** is a Stone Legends Certified Architectural Design Specialist and is licensed in the state of Texas as an Interior Designer. She has her B.A. in Interior Design from the University of Texas at Austin, and over 20 years design experience in Dallas. She

designs for clients from across the U.S. and is strategically involved in product development and public relations for Stone Legends. Contact Cathy at [cmartin@stonelegends.com](mailto:cmartin@stonelegends.com) or 214-398-1199.

the latest, must-have staples, for urban and suburban outdoor living “Chic’ers.” If you are shopping for the perfect fire pit for your home, there are a few guidelines you should consider before purchasing. The container or “pit” should be relatively small. Three feet in diameter is a good size for most pits. The pit should be made of stone or metal, have proper ventilation and be able to be placed a safe distance from your home, fence or other combustible material. One other consideration is the perfect location.

Fire pits or “comfort fires” as I like to call them, have come a long way in recent years and are now available in a variety of styles and sizes. The cost for a stone or brick pit varies depending on design, but a portable metal dish on a stand can be found at stores such as Smith & Hawken and other local garden centers for as little as \$100. There are various small, portable fire pits from rustic metal designs to sleek stainless steel contemporary designs. These are perfect for smaller patios or to take along on your next camping trip. By adding a grill, your fire pit becomes a cooking surface. Some come with metal spark screens that help to contain the embers and the flames as well. I have even seen models that come with their own poker tool.

Another somewhat portable fire pit is a chiminea. Chimineas can be found in adobe clay or metal. They are upright as opposed to low and horizontal pits. One consideration, if you are purchasing a metal chiminea is to note that the metal body gets extremely hot, so beware not to touch it once a fire has been started and keep children and pets, as with any fire, safely away.

While the portable fire pits are still very popular, the trend is moving toward a more permanent, built-in look, one level up from portable. For a built-in pit, consider whether you want gas logs, a gas jet, gel alcohol or wood and/or charcoal burning style. Many are built into patios with either pavers or concrete around the perimeter. Fieldstone adds a nice rustic touch to a pit. If room allows, it is always nice to have a ledge deep enough to sit on while roasting your marshmallows or just warming your back. In addition, built-in firepits begin at about \$500 depending on the set-up, size and finish selected.

Sitting around a fire is a relaxing and simple way to enjoy an evening with friends and good conversation, not to mention a lovely way for families to spend time together. More and more homeowners are investing in making their backyard an escape from the chaos of everyday life. The bottom line is to be safe and follow the same safety precautions that you would follow for any open fire. Check your city codes to be sure recreational fires are permitted where you live. One thing I recently discovered, an interesting tidbit with regard to fire pits, if an open fire is being used for cooking, regardless of the style, it is permitted in most cities. Best of all, once your backyard fire pit is installed, built or set-up you will have entered the realm of the prestigious “outdoor chic” crowd. How about that for a title! 🍷