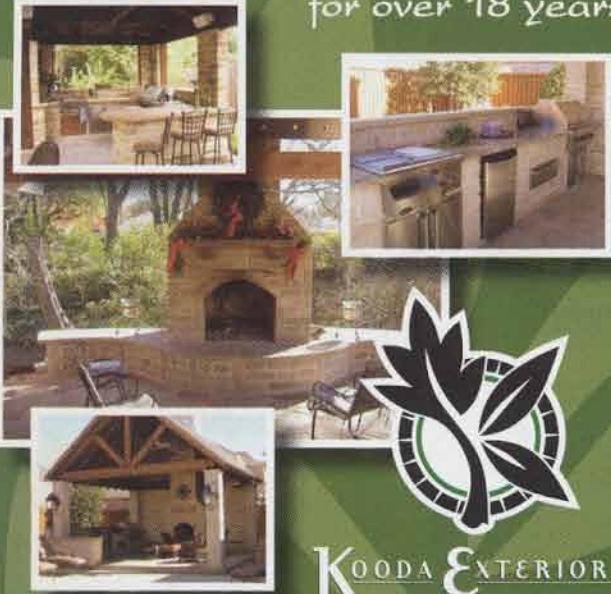


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## outdoor rooms the hottest trend in home design

CATHY COKER MARTIN

As a little girl growing up in East Texas, long blonde hair flowing down to my waist, I would sit in front of the warm comfort of our fireplace to dry my hair before going to bed. While home for winter break from the University of Texas in Austin, I can remember lounging for hours on the stone hearth of our fireplace that I had missed so much while away at college. There is a magical, mesmerizing, hypnotic and safe feeling fireplaces give us that is shared worldwide. From cottages to castles, one can find a myriad of fireplace styles to choose from to fit any décor and lifestyle.

Fireplaces have long been a principal feature in American homes. Builders find it difficult to even sell a home without a fireplace feature. Fireplaces are a center of family gatherings and provide an instant sense of romance and relaxation. It is a well known fact that home is all about comfort.

Currently, the hottest design buzz phrase is "outdoor rooms." These expanded patios often incorporate an outdoor fireplace. Whether small and portable or built-in, they have become the "must have" outdoor feature for homes, not to mention, hotels, restaurants and resorts. Even some of the up and coming, high-

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rise residential developments are putting fireplaces on their balconies for their residents.

These "outdoor rooms" not only create a warm inviting place for family and friends to gather, but also add value to a home. Statistics show that outdoor living spaces can add as much as 30% to the property value of a home. With Dallas' mostly year round mild climate, it is the perfect place to add an outdoor room and/or fireplace. I have a large chimenea on my patio that has been the focal point for many wonderful gatherings, for both family and friends. Surrounded by my garden of seasonal and annual flowers and foliage, with a perfect view of the evening sunsets, it truly is my own personal oasis, as I like to call it. Adding to this enchanting ambiance, I have added a tiered stone fountain in the corner of my patio. The combination of a warm, cozy fire, my flowers and the gentle falling water from the fountain, is enough to send anyone into the most tranquil state imaginable. Over the years, this has been the perfect place to laugh, ponder, relax and best of all, watch my two sons grow and play with their friends in our yard adjacent to the patio.

There are so many creative ways to enhance your outdoor room by adding comfy furnishings, a swing, outdoor speakers for background music, even a television can be a fun idea, if you have a covered area for it. I have a television under my covered porch area that gets quite a bit of use, especially during football season. On a rainy day, you can find me sitting on my swing, under the covered porch.

If you are thinking of adding an outdoor room to your home, you will not be disappointed at what a wonderful inviting atmosphere it will add to your outdoor living environment as well as being a wonderful place to entertain and relax. ☺



Photos courtesy of Stone Legends

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