

## REAL ESTATE



LoParco Associates

**Left:** Steve LoParco, president of LoParco Associates, designed this fire pit as an outdoor seating area. His company has noticed an increase in requests for fire pits. **Right:** This home at 74 Upper Cross Road in mid-country features multiple outdoor verandas perfect for outdoor dining and entertainment. The home is listed for \$9.95 million.



David Ogilvy &amp; Associates

### LUXURY LIVING

# Creating outdoor spaces for active living, entertaining

By Meg Barone

Backyards have always been a place for recreation and casual dining at a picnic table by the charcoal or propane tank-fueled grill. Today's backyards are not just for barbecuing and badminton — they have become extensions of our indoor living spaces, and in some cases, homeowners are asking contractors to create luxurious outdoor dining areas with built-in kitchens.

It won't be long before autumn will give way to the typical New England winter that will bury the state in a blanket of snow. Until then, residents will do whatever they can to stay outside.

"The concept of outdoor living has never been more popular as today's families strive for a healthy and active lifestyle, but the definition of outdoor living is changing. ... It is a movement toward more

family time and being more active," according to the Master Pools Guild website, which annually releases its top ten trends in pools and backyards.

At No. 6 on this year's list is the trend toward seamless indoor and outdoor spaces, which Guild officials said has become one of their most popular design trends. Homeowners appreciate the ability to extend their living and entertaining spaces beyond the confines of four walls. In addition to expanded outdoor kitchens and dining areas, homeowners are adding outdoor living and media rooms including televisions.

The outdoor cooking areas have gotten more sophisticated, according to Steve LoParco, president of LoParco Associates, a HOBI award-winning Greenwich firm specializing in custom home construction and renovation. LoParco agrees that people are more "out-

doorsy" and health-conscious and their living spaces reflect that. He definitely sees a growing interest in creating more outdoor living areas.

"It's an extension of your home—you're adding square footage to your home," he said.

"Without a doubt, people are spending more time outdoors," said Paul Broadbent of Broadbent Construction, home builders and contractors for residential construction, home additions and home renovations in Greenwich. Broadbent has seen an increase in requests for free-standing outdoor fireplaces and fire pits.

Even in Greenwich neighborhoods where the houses are more modest and closer together, residents want to spend more time in their backyards and are approaching contractors to build decks and privacy screening, he said. Last summer, Broadbent said one of his projects involved constructing a

pergola with a latticework privacy feature on the sides. On one deck, he created a sunken area for the installation of a hot tub to keep from impinging on the surrounding view but also to make it easier to enter and exit the spa.

Broadbent said people are getting away from the traditional woods like mahogany for their decking and gravitating toward composite materials, like Trex and Azek. Composite deck materials come in a wide array of colors, he said.

"Years ago it was brown or gray; now there's nine different shades of brown and a wide variation in the grays," he said.

Upscale builders are also using ipe wood, an extremely durable and expensive wood, which is ideal for decks and outdoor furniture.

LoParco said his projects have not included full outdoor kitchens but there is a call for more built-in

outdoor grills with sophisticated equipment and greater counter space. He has also noticed more interest in gas-fueled fireplaces and fire pits that feature under-ground hook-up to the house's gas line.

To create that seamless inside-out space LoParco said more homeowners are opting for Nana-Walls, folding frameless glass wall systems instead of French doors and sliding doors.

Mar Jennings, an Emmy-nominated television personality, life-style expert, designer and best-selling author from Fairfield County, calls it "an open door policy." But it's not enough to live outdoors, said Jennings, author of two books including "Life on Mars: Creating Casual Luxury." People want to spend time outdoors with indoor comfort. They are using indoor design principles to create livable outdoor spaces, he said.