In the late-nineteenth century Manhattan, described in Edith Wharton’s Age of Innocence, social standing was measured by the elaborate ceremony of the formal dinner. In suburban America, homeowners redefined their individual dreams and newly endowed entourage of relax casual dining, home theaters, and high-end appliances to foster a sense of family togetherness and personal space. The kitchen remains the symbolic center of both house and family.

Today’s domestic rituals find the kitchen not merely visible but moved into central focus. In 2003, the New York elite, described by a content Oceanside, California homeowner: ‘We built this house [in 2001] when it was new and the backyard was a blank slate. With three-quarters of an acre, there was plenty of space to create a yard that had the feel of a nice resort with room to entertain outdoors but that still flowed together. [My husband] and I knew we wanted to cook and eat outdoors, so we built an outdoor kitchen with a barbecue, side burners, a rotisserie, a sink and a refrigerator. The kitchen also has a serving counter that can seat 15 on bar stools, though the yard can hold many more…. From the bar area one can see both the pool and the outdoor living room, a cozy space with furniture that cost more than some of the furniture inside of the house, and a plasma television, where the kids watch movies at night.’

The propensity of these ‘live-eat-play’ spaces to continue their sprawl outside is represented by Builder’s Choice trend number four, the ‘Great Outdoors.’ This general category defines a broad array of features and ‘inspired outdoor architecture’ intended to facilitate ‘great indoor/outdoor relationships.’ The concept is best described by a content Oceanside, California homeowner: ‘We bought this house [in 2001] when it was new and the backyard was a blank slate. With three-quarters of an acre, there was plenty of space to create a yard that had the feel of a nice resort with room to entertain outdoors but that still flowed together. [My husband] and I knew we wanted to cook and eat outdoors, so we built an outdoor kitchen with a barbecue, side burners, a rotisserie, a sink and a refrigerator. The kitchen also has a serving counter that can seat 15 on bar stools, though the yard can hold many more…. From the bar area one can see both the pool and the outdoor living room, a cozy space with furniture that cost more than some of the furniture inside of the house, and a plasma television, where the kids watch movies at night.’

The kitchen can’t be contained anymore, so it blends into that large live-eat-play space often called a great room, which connects through glass doors to the outside space, now being treated as an integral part of the design. The idea is to allow family togetherness and personal space at the same time, meaning never having to reach a consensus about what to do together. The outdoor kitchen, ranked eighth, mark a similar repurposing of residential space. These plumbed spaces are adapting new duties, such as homework, television viewing, and laundry folding. ‘Wetrooms,’ ranked fifth, is a similar repurposing of residential space. These plumbed spaces are adapting new duties, such as homework, television viewing, and laundry folding. ‘Wetrooms,’ ranked third, is a similar repurposing of residential space. These plumbed spaces are adapting new duties, such as homework, television viewing, and laundry folding. ‘Wetrooms,’ ranked third, is a similar repurposing of residential space. These plumbed spaces are adapting new duties, such as homework, television viewing, and laundry folding. ‘Wetrooms,’ ranked third, is a similar repurposing of residential space. These plumbed spaces are adapting new duties, such as homework, television viewing, and laundry folding. ‘Wetrooms,’ ranked third, is a similar repurposing of residential space.
Backyard Kitchen

What started as a simple built-in grill turned into a full-featured backyard kitchen for Gayle and Ken Riley of Studio, California. It took first place for outdoor projects in the Better Homes and Gardens® Home Improvement Contest. Rather than hosting their home for outdoor dinners on warm summer evenings, Gayle and Ken escape to their backyard kitchen one night, as their children Karina and Scott can join in on the fun. "This functions as a separate kitchen, so we don’t need to be in and out of the house all the time," Gayle says.

A sink, three outlets for blender and small appliances, and cabinets for dishes, spices, and snacks occupy the work-core side of the U-shape kitchen. The tile countertop is complemented outside, where it serves as a bar-height seating area.

This kitchen is the heart of the home for the Riley family (above right), even if it’s outside right. A sliding window between the interior kitchen and its outdoor counterpart serves as a convenient pass-through (above left).

Opposite
Figure 2: The Backyard Kitchen, "First Place for Outdoor Projects. Better Homes and Gardens Home Improvement Contest, August 2002." Originally published in Better Homes and Gardens (August 2002). 92. Permission of Meredith Corporation.

Above
Figure 3: Troy Adams’ outdoor kitchen as featured in Bon Appétit. Photo by Julius Shulman and Juergen Nagai originally published in Bon Appétit (April 2008). 148. Permission of Julius Shulman Photography.
television. The man pronounced the result “perfect for hosting outdoor dinner parties.” Those new to the dream can find instruction in the network-sponsored HGTV KitchenDesign guide to these ‘fully functional cooking areas perfect for entertaining your friends and family.’ Regardless of their scope, these spaces now allow homeowners to perform the entire ritual of the social dinner from initial greeting to cooking, serving and entertaining.

The outdoor kitchen is poised to become a stock feature of upscale and luxury housing. In 2006, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), a Washington, D.C.-based trade association whose 235,000+ members design, finance and construct an estimated 80% of all new American housing units, issued projections for the ‘Home of the Future.’ NAHB data indicate by 2015, typical upscale single-family homes will have two stories and over 4,000 square feet, as well as outdoor ‘rooms’ outfitted with sinks, refrigerators, grills and cooking islands, all joined by fireplaces, televisions or audio equipment or both, and pools or home spas. In contrast, projections for the average home identify a two-story structure with 2,330 square feet, a one-story foyer, a ‘parlor/recreationlibrary’ and a single porch attached to the property front. Both classifications will have three-car garages, and kitchens and bathrooms will continue to be among the most important factors affecting consumer buying choices. Kitchens in average homes will feature upgraded materials and appliances but appear solely indoors.14

An exemplar of the type appeared in a New York Times (June 2007) real estate piece entitled, ‘What You Get for $30 Million.’ The article and accompanying photographs describe a lavish Aspen. The property came with a separate one-bedroom apartment with its own…

For $1.5 million, 3,000.000 dollars, and $1.50, 28.000 dollars in annual taxes thereafter, the future buyer would also receive an outdoor kitchen anchored by what appears to be a Weber Summit, introduced in 1995 as the first luxury gas grill (by way of comparison, the current top-end Summit S-670 has a 769 square-inch cooking area and 60,000 BTU-per-hour input).15 The kitchen, like the house proper, rustic furniture and handmade home accessories included in the sale price, serves to fulfill rampant expectations generated by the exclusive Colorado mountain resort. To cook or to merely partake of items prepared in this particular kitchen, with its uninterrupted views of Rocky Mountain wilderness and fully realized Western-themed fantasy, is to experience the pure heart of the outdoor kitchen concept.

Balanced between early versions of the type and the luxe ideals it might well be the mature form of the outdoor kitchen. Featured in Bon Appetit (April 2008) is veteran interior designer Troy Adams’ own kitchen, created to ‘capture an indoor-outdoor experience.’16 The kitchen is a marvel. At 10-by-30 feet it is small for the type, and photographs make clear that it is a kitchen that becomes a room of its own. In sum, the final result is a triumph of the concept; one secured by photographs by no less a triumph of the concept; one secured by photographs by no less 1914.

For Adams, ‘each leg of the triangle should be at least four feet and no longer than nine.’ He doubles the formula – increased size is apparently a critical aspect of the outdoor kitchen – to create two distinct triangular pathways, anchored by a central chopping block. In a reflection of the organizing metaphors of the type, the designer allows the overly large dimensions require ‘hiking through the front yard. It has views of the Rocky Mountain wilderness and fully realized Western-themed fantasy, is to experience the pure heart of the outdoor kitchen concept.

The ‘smooth working’ of social and built apparatuses of food is ‘as indispensable to the biological performance as the placing of food into the individual’s mouth, mastication, salivation, swallowing, and digestion.’ In contrast, shelter magazine Domino celebrates flowing, decentralized home layouts for allowing the possibility, in the encouraging terms of a subheading, of ‘Eating wherever, whenever.’ As itself one of these decentralized forms, the outdoor kitchen has a direct correspondence with the apparently deregulated eating that defines current American dietary habits, habits that justify converting backyard family playgrounds into extended dining rooms.

The multiple household iterations of the American kitchen are not without irony. Trends outlined by Builder’s Choice arrive as the home kitchen as a whole is falling into disuse or being repurposed for various other family and communal activities. For example, by 2001 only 40.5% of American households were still cooking an average ‘once a day’ and by 2004 29% of all meals were consumed in restaurants. Data vary but currently up to 75% of all non-restaurant meals and snacks, including that consumed in home, are in the form of pre-cooked, ready-to-eat and other forms of convenience food and food products. Clearly, the outdoor kitchen is not a response to contemporary cooking needs. Nor do outdoor kitchens, wetrooms and ‘family kitchens’ appear to satisfy certain broad expectations placed upon standardized designed domestic space, or the functions contained within it, since the early-twentieth century. Not the least of these is the linked communal act of cooking and eating en famille that anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski placed against the satisfaction of mere animal appetite. He writes, ‘Some physical apparatus for eating is used, table manners observed, and the social conditions of the act carefully defined. It would be possible, indeed, to show that in every human society and as regards any individual in society the act of eating happens within a definite institution… it is always a fixed place, with an organization for the supply of food or its preparation, and for the opportunities of consuming it; [emphasis added].’

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Here it is instructive to examine the truism that the built environment reflects and structures human behavior in both the public and private spheres. To depart from longstanding spatial divisions within a house is to alter or abandon the activities of private life previously secured by dedicated rooms, and vice versa. Senior design historian Penny Sparke attributes change in interior design to a dialectic of taste and efficiency, with the latter having the potential to homogenize taste and eliminate individuality and
difference. In other words, change is driven by subjective desire, and falters when codified into a socially regulated form. This contradiction mars Watson Phillips' glorification of the modern kitchen in the form of idealized Victorian décor, and especially references the thrilling view of the stars through the chimney-piece and the ‘mysterious ‘safe’ under the hill where kitchen consumption was affected by the emerging era of consumer goods, economic growth and surplus. Historian Daniel Roche explains that people were told to adjust their diet to their circumstances. The typical diet of eighteenth-century rural France was mostly crude bread; water, wine, cheese, vegetables, and perhaps a little meat, and was similar to that of working-class Paris; this would remain roughly the case well into the nineteenth century. Wealthy and bourgeois Parisians, however, pursued a diet less aristocratic than gourmand, supplementing an existing wide range of items such as eggs, butters, cheese, sugar, coffee, wine, spirits, cider and beer with fresh vegetables and herbs, quality domestic meat and dairy products marked with their site of origin, imported spices, chocolate, tea and other ‘sophisticated, costly, and exotic ingredients.’

Kitchens acquired new functions and accessories as well. Food consumption was affected by the emerging era of consumer goods, economic growth and surplus. Historian Daniel Roche explains that people were told to adjust their diet to their circumstances. The typical diet of eighteenth-century rural France was mostly crude bread; water, wine, cheese, vegetables, and perhaps a little meat, and was similar to that of working-class Paris; this would remain roughly the case well into the nineteenth century. Wealthy and bourgeois Parisians, however, pursued a diet less aristocratic than gourmand, supplementing an existing wide range of items such as eggs, butters, cheese, sugar, coffee, wine, spirits, cider and beer with fresh vegetables and herbs, quality domestic meat and dairy products marked with their site of origin, imported spices, chocolate, tea and other ‘sophisticated, costly, and exotic ingredients.’

Kitchens changed in direct response to heightened attention accorded to food and its preparation. In 1715, 20% of a household inventory consisted of kitchen utensils in the form of iron frying pans, grills, tripods and cooking hooks, copper cauldrons and casserole, and tin dishware. By 1780, the hearth had given way to the stove, the grill eclipsed by lighter stoneware and casseroles, and tin dishware. The kitchen thus constituted a collective fixed point that gave stability and meaning to new varieties of foodstuffs and cooking, as well as to the surrounding constellation of customs, durations, and newly essential accessories. That the most literal act of consumption took place within the private residence mitigated lingering religious and social inhibitions against material excess. As Voltaire explained, ‘One can live with luxury in his house without ostentation, that is to say without adorning oneself in public with a revolting opulence.’

The kitchen as a fixture of the twentieth century home is equally well-documented in works ranging from Maud C. Cooke’s Breakfast, Dinner, and Supper, or, What to Eat and How to Prepare It, a late-nineteenth century manual of etiquette and hygienic food-handling to the theoretical explorations of Ellen Lupton’s The Kitchen, the Bathroom, and the Aesthetics of Waste (1992). In broad strokes, the rational household movement of the early 1900s displaced the de-shéred emphasis on taste, morality and decoration, and professionalized the predominantly feminine control of production and consumption. Kitchens assumed a simplified spatial organization. During the 1910s and into the Interwar period, Christine Frederick and Lillian Gilbreth promoted ‘household engineering’ and factory modes of efficiency as means of achieving enhanced productivity. Frederick’s ‘New Housekeeping’ essays of 1912 and Household Engineering and Social Management in the Home (1919) called for in Sparkes’ summary, small, laboratory-like kitchens organized in such a way that walking between working surfaces, the cooker, the sink, the food storage, the utensil storage and the serving table, could be minimized, and with all elements positioned according to the order of actions in the task involved.

The shift from the Victorian exercise of taste to scientific management is recorded in Richardson’s Wright’s Inside the House of Good Taste (1915, 1918). Watson K. Phillips’ chapter ‘The Modern Kitchen and its Planning’ opens with an account of his grandmother’s kitchen, a large, convenient room made continuous with the dining room by removal of a partition. The essay opens with nostalgia recounting its already-outmoded cistern, wood box, red-painted cookie tins, and the ‘serviceable white oil-cloth’ covered table where he partook of the still-unrivalled pleasure of homemade buckwheat cakes with honey. Phillips vacillates between boyhood sense-memory and keen enthusiasm for the precise and controlled space of the modern kitchen; ‘turning from the old to the new reveals many changes,’ he writes. The larger book explains that the kitchen alone escapes the general imperative that a house reflect its inhabitants’ personalities. The ‘living-room must be made for entertaining as well as for everyday life; while bedrooms are where women especially could be most freely expressive.’ The dining-room was the site of distinction and tradition, the dedicated environment for the high spot of the waking hours.’ As the book explains, ‘A good dinner works the daily miracle of a man’s existence.’ Within this scheme, Watson describes a modern kitchen in conformance with guidelines for efficient and sanitary food preparation and perhaps, the invisibility of domestic labor. The sink is to be porcelain and no less than 20 inches by 30 inches, adjusted from the standard height of thirty inches to a subjectively ‘comfortable level’ to optimize its operation. Walls and ceilings are finished with smooth white paint or ‘washable paper that can be renewed at slight expense,’ and shelved cabinets ensure ‘every necessary thing is at hand: A clock shelf, preferably built in, is an ‘inescapable and useful’ adjunct to this well-regulated room. A rigorous aspeticism prompted both a ‘double-acting door’ and a pantry between kitchen and dining room that served to keep the sight, sound and smell of cooking food from those awaiting their meals. The illusion of the ‘daily miracle’ was accomplished without fuss, and focus was kept on the social and familial rituals enacted within the homeowners’ dining room.

Admiration for the scientific kitchen began to flag as early as 1929. ‘The day of the white laboratory-like kitchen is past,’ announced an Iowa State College Extension Service booklet on home management. In its stead came aesthetic and code standards disseminated in exhibitions such as the ‘Day after Tomorrow’s Kitchen’ (1944) that ushered in automated convenience perpetuated by the post-World War II housing boom. Inexpensive and rapidly made post-war suburban housing abandoned traditional layouts and introduced multipurpose hybrid rooms designed, in part, to keep construction costs low. The kitchen moved from the back of the house to become a ‘U-shaped work space equipped with appliances and gadgets,’ separated by a low counter from a living room that similarly assumed additional roles as study, dining room, parlor, and playroom. The kitchen remained efficient but was now startlingly visible and imbued with a new flexibility of purpose. As such, it fit the progressive consumptionism of the postwar 1950s, an era of new and broadly based affluence. As in the earlier example of France, the altered kitchens of single-family
suburban homes fit correspondingly ‘massive changes in American living patterns’ and accommodated new domestic technologies, disposable patterns and packaged foods.64

THE DREAMS OF 21ST CENTURY SUBURBIA

However varied its forms, luxury encoded as dream is at the very heart of American attitudes toward home ownership; indeed, dreams serve as the structuring metaphor for much of the twentieth-century consumer desire. Every man has within him at least one house and one garden which, were he able to create them, would doubtless bring him Nirvana,” Richardson Wright explains in the foreword to Inside the House of Good Taste. ‘It’s his dream house and his dream garden, the sort of garden that he will make when he gets enough money…. whatever the size or wherever the place, it will be his, alone.65 It’s a Nirvana realized by the post-war “kitchen of tomorrow,” the “dream kitchen,” the “pace-setting kitchen,” or the “miracle kitchen.”'

To realize the American dream of homeownership, the statement is to ensure ‘All Americans have… the opportunity to uncover the ways that design in mass-produced goods conveyed their skills.’76 Manufacturers such as Corning used companies such as Herman Miller, in its 1956 report What’s your house – your home?', to entice appetites and reinforce perceptions of freshness. The larger goal was visual entertainment; as the report concludes: ‘Food is theater; the audience is seated and waiting, so bring on the chefs!’77 Industry journals note the growing popularity of food as theater: Mongolian barbecues invite diners to select fresh food items while chefs prepare the meal on large flat grills; glass kitchens…permit patrons to view their meal being prepared over open fires and in brick ovens; and sushi and teppanyaki restaurants feature Japanese chefs showing off their skills.111 A. Elizabeth Sloan reports the privileging of visual and experiential stimuli over the meal itself, a phenomenon she awards the tongue-in-cheek title ‘entertainment.’78 Writing of diners who flock to the House of Blues, Dave and Burger’s, and Elvis Presley’s Memphis, themed restaurants pioneered by the Hardrock Café (opened 1971), Sloan notes, ‘Table-side Internet access, comic books, and stock car racing themes are some of the latest permutations expanding the definition of entertainment. All of these successful business ventures tap into a particular interest in the population.’77 Restaurant designer Frederick Brutsch’s summary is more succinct: ‘Going to a restaurant is like attending ‘an accurate gauge of contemporary tastes, and responses used to literally compose the most and least desired imagery within a given nation. In general outline, America’s Most Wanted (1994) resembles a Hudson River School landscape with its soft blue sky, gently rolling hills, and placid lake with two wading deer; George Washington stands in the foreground, as does a small knot of three tourists in breezy summer clothes. The painting, SUV, and outdoor kitchen in toto arose at the same time, demonstrating the same love of domesticated wilderness, and, apparently, satisfying the same aesthetic and psychological desires. CONCLUSION

Television and print advertisements crafted the image of Explorer drivers as perpetually at home in remote, mountainous locations, surrounded by nought but blank wilderness untouched by (other) human hands. It is interesting to note the very similar conclusion of artists’ Komar and Melamid’s well-known ‘Most Wanted’ series of 1994-1997. Their premise was that national surveys could yield an accurate gauge of contemporary tastes, and responses used to literally compose the most and least desired imagery within a given nation. In general outline, America’s Most Wanted (1994) resembles a Hudson River School landscape with its soft blue sky, gently rolling hills, and placid lake with two wading deer; George Washington stands in the foreground, as does a small knot of three tourists in breezy summer clothes. The painting, SUV, and outdoor kitchen in toto arose at the same time, demonstrating the same love of domesticated wilderness, and, apparently, satisfying the same aesthetic and psychological desires.

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kitchen and parallel emergence of amorphous interconnected rooms signal both the continuation and dissolution of the modernist principals of good design. These spaces mark the upper limit of the open-plan layout that characterized post-war American homes and eliminated areas viewed as old-fashioned by prospective homeowners; however they differ in privileging symbolic functionality over utilitarian or practical needs. Then, as now, these combined living and dining or alternately, kitchen and dining spaces allowed for freshly imagined ideals of family togetherness. 40 The outdoor kitchen is appropriate for an era marked by real and virtual alienation, a fragmented room that responds to and gives pleasure to fragmented lives. It is the built environment of interactive design, the latest iteration of the ‘American Dream.’

NOTES

2. Boyer Thompson, ‘Make no mistake: Residential design is evolving rapidly, thanks to a brisk market for new-home sales,’ Builder, July 2003, 6.
3. Thomas, ‘Make no mistake: [n/a].’
4. Bill Saporta, ‘Inside The New American Home: Humble no more: the kitchen is a command center, the bathroom a spa.’
5. ‘Kitchens Without Walls,’ San Francisco Chronicle, 8.
6. Alpert, ‘A kitchen designer’s kitchen.’
12. A measure of the market was provided by the November 4, 2009 Food Network announcement that Lassagne, Play and Bake will appear in an episode of ’Iron Chef America’ to be filmed at the Oatana White House in late 2009. See ‘White House to host ‘Iron Chef’ food fight,’ San Jose Mercury News, 5 November 2009, 2(A).