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**Let's go outside**

Exterior spaces are becoming more exciting, with all sorts of new products and ideas for al fresco living. Eliza Miller from Arcadia Home Interiors takes a look at what's on offer

**WITH THE CLOCKS HAVING CHANGED** a couple of months ago and the evenings getting ever lighter, we dare to start thinking about the joys of eating al fresco. Food is such a pleasure and in much the same way that the kitchen in your home is the centre point for family time, socialising and entertaining, the same can be said for eating outside – however big or small your garden, terrace or balcony might be. A really good barbecue can be a great focal piece in any outdoor living space and if you are anything like me, there is still something mouth-watering about a barbecued hotdog or burger and bap – that cave man thrill of cooking on fire! Watching husbands, dads and boyfriends getting competitive with a pair of tongs, bedecked in aprons, is always amusing, but as we know only too well, the English weather is not famed for balmy evenings. However, this need not dampen our al fresco intentions as fire pits, chimineas, braziers and outdoor log burners can transform the duller of evenings.

My favourite ventless fireplace is made by Swedish company Vauni; this wonderful, spherical design is fired with liquid bioethanol which burns without producing any smoke, soot or ash – and I can think of nothing more fun or stylish than having one of these pods in my garden – perfect! The Scandinavians are well known for their cosy lifestyle ethic and there are many Nordic words that translate to a similar lifestyle theme – your home as your sanctuary, everyday togetherness creating a feeling of

contentment and so on. And while perhaps associated with keeping snug as a bug in the winter, Scandi-living can also be enjoyed in all seasons – afternoons in the sun, playing in the park or the garden, having barbecues and eating outside (roast pork and cold beer) with family and friends.

There are an increasing amount of outdoor ovens on the market now, a variation on a theme if you like, but one that has recently grabbed my attention is, unsurprisingly, designed in the Netherlands. It can be left outdoors all year round and is made from sustainable materials; the cone-shaped fire bowl features a wide, flat rim that doubles as a cooking surface but not only that, even if you decide not to cook on it, it makes a stylish fire pit, whether you are flipping steaks around the edge of it or not!

Think of your garden as an extra room in your house and you can do a number of things to make this a space that you can then use all year round. If your budget allows, you could create a garden room (after all, who wouldn't relish a glorified garden shed, somewhere to escape to – much like retreating to a den to escape the wrath of Mum when you were a child!). A general rule of thumb is that you won't need planning permission for an outbuilding with a maximum eaves height of 2.5m, but do double-check this with your local council and bear in mind you may need building consent. I have long dreamt of owning a shepherd's hut, the ultimate romantic hidey hole, but I know without checking that there are not enough pennies in the piggy bank for that just at the moment. Still, I can keep dreaming...

Other things to think about are water features – the gentle sound of water can be extremely relaxing and we have come a long way in terms of design from chubby cherubs holding spouting flagons (or worse!). And finally lighting – why not consider solar-powered lights, whether purely practical to light a pathway or simply for decoration to illuminate a particular feature or flowerbed? Post-mounted lights either side of a doorway create a welcoming entrance to your home, and even simple citronella tea lights in jam jars hanging from the branches of a tree will give a magical effect – like protective fireflies keeping the insects at bay. &



For more ideas and examples, see: [www.arcadiahomeinteriors.co.uk](http://www.arcadiahomeinteriors.co.uk)

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