

Wooden it be nice to have an outdoor fire?

DEB TAPP

WHILE outdoor rooms are becoming commonplace in New Zealand homes, so too are outdoor fires.

Aspen Landscapes owner Stuart Baines says outdoor fireplaces are more often than not the focal point in most exterior rooms his firm creates.

"The classic outdoor fire looks like this - a standard woodbox, with a floating hearth, slightly off the ground, with two wood storage areas on either side, a chunky flue and a tall chimney, all sitting on porcelain tiles or nicely-honed concrete pavers."

As Stuart says, Kiwis in particular love the outdoors and gravitate to outdoor fires for the simple reason that they are drawn to the smell, sight, sound and feel of a real fire.

"We all love the smell of a fire, the sound of wood crackling... it's cosy and it encourages conversation," he says.

"I've got my own one at home, we enjoy the fact you can throw wood on it, and sit around and talk."

"You don't have devices around, you have music playing, it's really that ability to communicate, it's like being around a campfire."

Those simple pleasures mean more Kiwis are installing outdoor fireplaces on their properties, most commonly in outdoor rooms that come off interior living spaces.

"If you've got an outdoor fireplace you can see from the house, on winter days or crappy summer days you may not use it, but you can use uplighting so it looks inviting and is a year-round feature."

Before even contemplating an



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outdoor fire, Stuart says homeowners need to take a few things into consideration first.

"For it to look good, serve its purpose and add value to a property, it needs to be thought through and done properly."

Placement is vital. All outdoor fireplaces must be positioned on a fireproof surface, such as gravel or concrete, well away from trees and power lines, while also ensuring any sparks and ember won't reach garden structures or flammable materials.

Check council requirements, particularly if you are building an outdoor fireplace on a boundary or close to yours or a neighbour's house.

"Always check out regulations and building codes in relation to outdoor fires and tick all those boxes," says Stuart.

"At the end of the day, commonsense prevails."

When positioning an outdoor

fire think about prevailing wind direction and whether you want to install walls or screens to keep the heat in and the cold out, or use existing trees within the property to do the job.

"With clever planning you may also be able to use your outdoor fireplace to screen unsightly views, or the neighbours," says Stuart.

Also consider where it can be positioned to keep seating and the surrounding area toasty, where you would store fuel, such as gas tanks or wood, and the materials that would tie in with your existing home.

"We are constantly custom making outdoor fireplaces to fit in a space, using materials that have some similarities to the house so it all ties in nicely."

While Aspen's outdoor fireplaces are bespoke, they usually consist of a steel firebox or refractory bricks inside.

"Refractory bricks are more

expensive, but they do hold the heat well and are great for cooking."

From there the choice of other materials are endless.

"There are so many different styles, you can put firewood underneath, you can have storage in a floating hearth, or storage either side to balance it up, you can opt for stones, concrete blocks, a clean plastered look, or even schist stone, there are so many applications.

"You can have a mantelpiece - we've used sleepers a lot for that to give an outdoor fire that earthy, rustic feel."

Some people opt to use outdoor fireplaces for the dual purpose of heating and cooking.

"You can have them so you can slide in a grate and use the embers to cook, or you can have what is like a mini-pizza oven at the top of the firebox."

"Some people are even going without the traditional barbecue and are just using their outdoor fire as a means to cook, they are very versatile."

Stuart speaks of one successful project for a family in Wadestown. The fireplace itself is very bespoke and custom-made, designed with help from the client.

"The steel fire box we buy in and we create the rest around it - features like lighting can also be added for effect paving/patio, planting and screens," explains Stuart.

"This particular client's outdoor fire featured two wood storage cupboards, and a floating hearth and mantle were part of the style options we can produce, along with the height of the chimney, its shape and size..."

The completed project has



Stuart Baines' team at work installing part of an outdoor fire. The central firebox can be complemented by firewood storage, a floating hearth and given a variety of other finishing touches.

delighted its owners, says Stuart.

"They've told us that this is one of the best ways to get this one together to talk, engage, listen to music, socialise and generally relax."

It's not hard to see why outdoor fireplaces have become the main feature of outdoor spaces.

"Outdoor fires really are not just a point of interest, but they are a gathering point."

"They're a 'nice-to-have' commodity, a lovely way to spend those long summer evenings outside together around a fire where everyone is warm and chatty."

Put some boom in the room

The typical party speaker is better heard and not seen.

But that's not the case with Ultimate Ears' new Hyperboom, which goes on sale on Monday.

The hype for the Hyperboom promises "massive sound and extreme bass to any party".

But décor-conscious homeowners also will find the 360deg speaker a boon for their living space, as it eschews hard plastic and flashy lights for a refined, understated design: a solid and sleek diamond-like form with soft, curved edges and a speckled fabric to help optimise sound and durability.

Ultimate Ears and its UE Boom range dominate the mobile Bluetooth speaker market in New Zealand, with one in about every three households.

The Hyperboom expands on the UE Boom's capability by filling even large rooms with sound, with triple the loudness and more than six times the bass of Megaboom 3.

That's because it has two 4.5-inch woofers, two 1-inch tweeters, and two 3.5-inch passive radiators (each is the size of one Boom 3 speaker).

There's also an adaptive equaliser that analyses the environment and automatically adjusts audio to fill any space, a rechargeable 24-hour battery, and a USB charge-out port for topping up your smartphone jukebox.

The Hyperboom's IPX4 rating means it can withstand drink spills or pool splashes.

And with four input sources - two Bluetooth, 3.5mm auxiliary, optical audio - you can switch among multiple devices with the press of a button.

One-Touch Music Control lets you



The Hyperboom has triple the loudness and more than six times the bass of UE's Megaboom 3.

play, pause and skip tracks directly on the speaker and launch playlists from Apple Music, Spotify for Android, Amazon Music and Deezer

Premium. Hyperboom is supported on the Boom app from the Apple App and Google Play stores.

Warning on the risks of buying 'as is, where is'

HOUSES THAT are marketed 'as is, where is' can be tempting for cash-strapped first-home buyers and do-it-yourselfers but there can be pitfalls.

"While 'as is, where is' properties in New Zealand have generally suffered damage through natural events, they can also be listed 'as is, where is' because of owner neglect, an estate sale, or a mortgagee sale," Real Estate Authority (REA) chief executive Kevin Lampen-Smith says.

There also could be weathertightness issues, insurance problems and unconsented alterations.

So it's critical that buyers are extra-diligent and find out if the property can be insured before making an offer.

They also should seek independent legal advice and clarification from an insurance provider before signing a sale and purchase agreement, as banks will want proof of property insurance before settlement.

There are different insurance scenarios for 'as is, where is' properties damaged in a natural disaster.

In some cases, the damage is so severe insurers write off the property because the cost of repair is uneconomical.

Instead, the homeowners receive a cash settlement to help pay for demolition and the building of another house.

The REA says prospective buyers of these properties should commission a geotechnical report to see if rebuilding on the land is possible.

"It's a good idea to keep in mind that it may be difficult to insure a replacement house on the same piece of land, if there has been no insurance for a length of time.

"Talking to insurance companies or an independent insurance broker will give you an idea of your options."

Where repairs have been approved but not undertaken, make sure you fully understand



When considering a property 'as is, where is' do your homework. Don't be blind to the potential risks.

the cost of repair by obtaining a qualified building inspection and/or engineering report.

If the property wasn't insured when disaster struck, the cost of repair will fall on the owner, which may be reflected in the sale price.

The REA recommends asking the real estate agent for any proof of repair, to ascertain what work may have been carried out, and to explore with an independent insurance broker the best insurance options.

"Your first port of call may be contacting your current insurance company. Having an existing relationship with an insurer means that you have already been assessed as a good risk."

Ask the real estate agent who the property is insured with, whether any claims for damage have been made with EQC and the private insurer, and if there are any claim numbers.

Make sure any EQC or private insurance claims are assigned to you, the buyer.

Where the property has been sold by mortgagee sale, it is unlikely the mortgagee will have insurance on the property before settlement.

So talk to an insurance broker about options for insuring the property before settlement.

Transferring an insurance claim to a new buyer is called 'assignment' and may allow the buyer to take over the rights to the claim (including any insurance payout).

If you discover that damage to the property is missing from the insurance claim, or if there's been a failed repair, ask your lawyer to file a request to review the original claims.

You can also ask for a review of an EQC cash settlement if the original settlement did not meet the reasonable costs of repairs.

The REA says with private insurance cover, a new owner may not be entitled to the same benefits as the previous owner because the policy is held by the individual, not the property.

Here's a what-to-watch-for checklist when considering an 'as is, where is' opportunity:

- Has a building inspection or engineer's report been carried out?
- What land zone is the property in?
- Are there any other potential natural hazards?
- Can you insure the house before settlement?
- Have you sought legal advice?
- How can you reduce the risk of further damage?

And be vigilant about chimneys, foundations and retaining walls, houses on slopes, properties with multiple types of foundations, houses with irregular design shapes or split levels, unreinforced concrete block walls, and leaking or cracking.

Latest House Values

Wellington

Suburb	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom	5 bedroom
Highbury		\$926,000	\$1,018,500	
Kaiwharawhara		\$1,125,000	\$1,392,500	
Karori	\$645,000	\$804,000	\$1,032,000	\$1,344,000
Kelburn	\$650,000	\$1,093,000	\$1,395,500	\$1,760,000
Northland	\$703,000	\$868,000	\$1,058,000	\$1,253,000
Pipitea	\$539,000	\$709,000		
Thorndon	\$675,000	\$935,500	\$1,346,500	\$2,076,000
Wadestown	\$661,000	\$947,000	\$1,210,000	\$1,504,500
Wilton	\$548,500	\$792,000	\$916,000	

View the current median values for all Wellington suburbs at QV.co.nz.

Median suburb values are based on E-Valuer, which calculates the estimated current market value for each residential property in the area using recent sales of nearby comparable properties.

QV.co.nz

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Smart property decisions start here

Team approach appeals to rugby icon

GIVEN the freedom and joy with which he played the game, it is difficult to envisage Christian Cullen, affectionately known as the 'Paekakariki Express', doing anything else but playing rugby. Since hanging up his boots 13 years ago, Cullen has been actively involved in numerous successful business ventures.

Now back home and living on the Kapiti Coast with his wife Mandy and their four children, Cullen is building on an already successful property career by stepping into a new role as a commercial sales consultant with provincial real estate company Property Brokers at their new branch in Kapiti.

A product of Horowhenua and growing up on the outskirts of Wellington, Cullen showed exceptional rugby qualities at an early age. His first coach was his father, Chris Cullen, who as well as coaching provided Christian with the best piece of advice - do your best and put your best foot forward at all times. This advice has always stood him in good stead.

Having been an active team member in many top-performing teams throughout his career, he knows the real value of being in a team united by a strong vision and passion. Hard work, honesty and self-discipline are traits he displayed as a sportsman, and are ones that he brings to every venture he takes



Christian Cullen has taken on a role selling commercial real estate, based on the Kapiti Coast.

on. "I have been involved in the property industry for many years now, and it's something that excites me," says Cullen. "Having looked around at various opportunities, I was instantly attracted

to Property Brokers' philosophies, values and their true team approach. They believe that relationships and trust count for everything. Property Brokers is built on hard work, discipline, friendships, and a powerful sense of

family. It felt like a natural fit, moving from one great team to another". Cullen will be based on the Kapiti Coast but will be selling commercial real estate throughout the country.