

outdoor GRILLING



At right: Christy and Scott Grigsby, owners of Everything Barbeque in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, are pleased with how much their store has grown since it opened in 2006.

Below: Since opening the business, the Grigsbys have added a 1,200-square-foot display area that provides visual inspiration for customers who want to build outdoor kitchens.

growing stronger

While many small retail businesses, during the past three years, have struggled to stay alive in the grip of a recession, Everything Barbeque in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, has not only survived; it has thrived. This outdoor-cooking store has prospered while many specialty retailers have closed their doors (or posted anemic sales) because its owners love what they do.

Patio & Hearth Products Report first showcased this store in 2007, when it was not even a year old. This was before the financial fallout of 2008, and retail sales in the United States were still reasonably strong. Although the retail picture has changed dramatically since that time, Everything Barbeque has grown substantially.

Despite a weak retail sector, Scott Grigsby and his wife, Christy, were able to turn their entrepreneurial dream into a reality through hard work and a love of sharing their passion with customers. Scott traded his career in health-care clinical operations for a job that would incorporate his zeal for outdoor entertaining.

"This is what I thought about and looked forward to, each and every weekend," Scott explains. "When you know you love something and have a deep desire to share that passion with others, you can succeed."

An unexpected opportunity that surfaced a year after the Grigsbys launched Everything Barbeque also helped them grow the business much sooner than they had anticipated. At that time, a business in the

An outdoor-cooking guru turns passion into profit.

by CAROL DAUS photography by JEFF BEHYMER



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strip mall next door to them vacated its space unexpectedly, freeing up additional showroom space for their store.

Expansion was an important goal in their 5-year business plan, but they hadn't expected to accomplish this after just one year of doing business. "We seized this opportunity and retooled our plan because we knew this was something we couldn't turn down," Christy explains.

The end result was the incorporation of a 1,200-square-foot display area that has transformed the business into a full-service retail operation for customers seeking to create stylish and functional outdoor kitchens. To demonstrate different options, the outdoor-kitchen gallery features several outdoor-kitchen styles in stacked stone, brick, and stucco.

The expanded showroom also contains a pergola and an outdoor fireplace. "These displays have taken the outdoor-kitchen part of our business to a whole new level because customers have an easier time visualizing what they can accomplish in their own backyards," Christy says.

THE RIGHT PRODUCT MIX

One of the keys to Everything Barbecue's success is its diverse product mix, which Scott has broadened since he started the business four years ago. Some of his

big-selling brands include Weber, Big Green Egg, Lynx, Alfresco, Twin Eagles, Luxor, Hasty-Bake, Cookshack, and Horizon Smokers.

"We like to offer a variety of price points, without sacrificing quality on the low end or creating too small a niche on the high end," he explains. "We look for manufacturers and distributors that really work with us and like to have a relationship beyond just taking an order and shipping the product."

To ensure that these relationships succeed, Scott and his employees maintain strong communication with manufacturers. "These relationships can really make a significant difference in keeping our costs down and keeping product coming in when it is needed most," he says.

According to Scott, today's outdoor-kitchen customers pay a lot of attention to the fit and finish of products, opting for those that exude a high sense of quality and craftsmanship. "Features as simple as lighted control knobs and spring-assist lids will sway certain clients to a specific brand, even if a lower-cost product has more basic qualities that are similar," he says.

The availability of outdoor-kitchen equipment can also influence a customer's decision to make a purchase. In today's world, many customers are impatient if they have to wait for products to be delivered. They want their outdoor kitchens up and run-



ning as soon as possible.

Although contemporary-styled grills are growing in popularity in many regions of the United States, in Oklahoma City, customers are still attracted to more traditional designs. "We have learned how to create a wow factor in the store without using something that looks flashy—but ultimately, won't sell," Scott says.

To stay abreast of new products, Scott constantly communicates with distributors and manufacturers, as

Is Fuego the Apple of the Barbecue Industry?

by CHERYL DANGEL CULLEN

Grills from Fuego North America look unlike any others. These grills are ultramodern, and they are a departure from virtually any other grills on the market today, in terms of their design and features. In fact, if you referred to the grills as coming from the Apple® of the barbecue industry, you wouldn't be far off the mark.

The common link is Robert Brunner, Fuego's cofounder and chief designer. Brunner headed the design team at Apple in the 1990s, where he developed the original Macintosh PowerBook. Today, he not only heads design for Fuego (as a partner in the company), but also is the CEO of Ammunition Group (San Francisco, California), the famed design company.

Alex Siow, CEO of Fuego North America, San Francisco, says, "The intention behind creating our products is beyond just designing another pretty object. The thinking is to create a unique experience for users, applying both design and functional solutions. Since most outdoor entertainment and

social events involve grilling, people naturally gather around the chef when the grill has an open island design configuration."

With that in mind, the Fuego 01 and 02 grills were designed with telescoping hoods that tuck away when not in use, creating a social hub that people can gather around at parties. In addition, the grills have a patented drawer system that lets users interchange gas, infrared, and charcoal cooking methods by simply swapping drawer and fuel options.

The compact version of the grill,



the Fuego 02, is also available as an electric grill—an option that is perfect for people who want to grill in places where the use of gas/propane is prohibited. Powered by standard 120-volt current, the grill puts a high-quality electric heating element in direct contact with cast-iron grill grates to transfer continuous searing temperatures. "Due to the high heat retention and conductivity of cast iron, our electric grills outperform most electric grills you usually find on the market

today," Siow says.

He also reports that the 01 and 02 grills have won eight industry awards. They include the International Forum Design Award, the Gold International Design Excellence Award (IDEA), and the 2008 Vesta Awards for Best Gas Barbecue and Best in Show for Outdoor Room Products.

The Fuego Modular is promoted as the ultimate outdoor kitchen—designed for hosting the ultimate outdoor party—and it received the International Design Competition Spark Award and the Chicago Athenaeum Good Design Award in 2010. "Once delivered, the simple modular-and-frame system can be fully installed and ready to entertain guests within an afternoon," Siow notes.

The kitchen comes complete with customizable modular options that include grill modules (with a patented interchangeable-drawer system), a cooking module with dual burners, a food-warming module, and a storage module, as well as a complete washing unit with a refrigeration option. To complete the kitchen, Fuego offers a 9-foot slate bar countertop and a 4-foot food-preparation counter with a sink.

"Customers also have the option of picking and choosing individual modules, integrating these highly functional cooking systems into their outdoor designs and architecture," Siow says.

THE ELEMENT

This year, the company launched the Element by Fuego line, which has received favorable responses from the industry and consumers alike. "We have already received four industry awards, including the Good Design Award, the Spark Award, and the Vesta Award for Best Gas Barbecue of 2010, as well as the soon-to-be-announced IDEA Gold Award from the Industrial Designers Society of America," Siow says.

"Fuego started with a family of very high-

end and exclusive products, built with design, innovation, and unmatched quality in mind. In the past four years of designing and building these very high-end grills and kitchens, we wanted to spin off a new segment of products offering innovation, quality, and the Fuego experience at a price range more affordable to the public," Siow explains.

Making news is the Fuego Element grill, which is advertised as the hottest thing to hit barbecuing since the burger. The Element grill is Fuego's mass-market brand; it offers cooking features, power, and a compact design in one unique and modern grill.

The Element grill is engineered with a powerful and efficient dual-ring burner system combined with a 21-inch cast-iron surface; the round grill is nothing like its more bulky counterparts on the market. "The grill's compact footprint, with discreet gas-compartment storage and locking wheels, makes it the ideal grill for ultramobility and the ultimate party performer," Siow says.

MAINTAINING ITS EDGE

Who is buying Fuego? It's the same upscale, forward-thinking consumer who buys Apple products. "Fuego grills are targeted toward consumers who appreciate great design, technology, architecture, and innovation," Siow explains. "They also enjoy outdoor entertaining and socializing with friends. They look for products that complement (and can enhance) their landscape designs, rather than filling up their precious outdoor space with awkward-looking appliances."

Fuego isn't resting on its laurels and its recent awards. Look for more to come. Siow says, "We have big ideas, and we love to create and innovate. Design is in our DNA, and creating unique and innovative products feeds our passion. Currently, we are very focused on bringing new and innovative products to the outdoor-entertaining category; you will see many more new and unique products from us in 2011." ■

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well as with organizations such as the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association. He and his staff also listen closely to customers, research websites, and watch cooking channels to see which products outdoor-cooking chefs are promoting.

Scott advises retailers to keep an open mind when evaluating products. "If we carry an industry-leader product, yet our local competition carries a knockoff, we make sure our sales staff is made aware of this and is educated on why what we offer is the better choice," Scott says. "Knowing features doesn't necessarily make sales happen, but being over-the-top knowledgeable about the similarities and differences of product options builds confidence, in our customers' minds, that our product was selected for specific reasons of its superior quality."

A BUSINESS WITHIN A BUSINESS

Despite the weak economy, in the Oklahoma City area, the number of businesses opening that claim to be specialists in outdoor-kitchen construction has been increasing. These new ventures have not had an impact on Everything Barbeque because local consumers view the Grigsbys' business as a turnkey operation that provides a full range of products and services for outdoor cooking.

"Many companies that say they build outdoor kitchens end up handing over these jobs to construction companies," Christy notes. "There are a lot of landscapers, pool companies, and builders who advertise that they do outdoor kitchens, but you have to obtain the equipment elsewhere. We have a brick-and-mortar business that people can walk into to take a look at the total package."

It's easy to understand why customer satisfaction runs high at Everything Barbeque. Customers browse in the store, receive information from knowledgeable

salespeople, select equipment from a wide array of products, and work closely with experienced outdoor-kitchen designers.

When construction begins, the same faces that the customer has been working with since day one show up in the backyard for the groundbreaking, and a construction team that specializes in outdoor structures makes the plan a reality. Since the project is based on a cohesive plan, there's complete accountability and strong communication. This one-stop approach to outdoor-kitchen design and construction is one of the major strengths of this family-run business.

Christy stresses that the most effective tool in helping to grow the business has been treating each customer the way that she and Scott would like to be treated. "When we offer a great experience for our clients, they become our best promoters. A happy customer is the best marketing avenue out there," she says.

Recognizing that superior customer service alone won't sustain a business, the Grigsbys have used advertising and public relations to get the word out about their expanded showroom. Everything Barbeque has advertised in Oklahoma City's major newspaper, as well as in several slick, high-end magazines that target specific, affluent local markets.

Christy (who has an advertising background) has also supplied articles on topics such as safety tips for grilling and outdoor-kitchen-construction considerations to a publisher who produces magazines for country clubs. "The great thing about these public-relations vehicles is that they don't cost us anything," she says.

Everything Barbeque also coordinates special events and cooking demonstrations with its vendors. In April 2010, the store hosted its fourth annual Big Green Egg® Oklahoma EGGfest, which was held behind the store; it

featured 90 volunteer EGGhead chefs, from across the country, who came to share their passion for the Big Green Egg. Over 1,000 customers showed up for classes and tastings, as well as the fun and fellowship that surround this unique product.

In May 2010, the Grigsbys hosted their fourth annual Fired-up Vendor Cook-off, where representatives of Weber, Lynx, Big Green Egg, Hasty-Bake, Lynx, Alfresco, and Twin Eagles demonstrated grilling techniques on their equipment.

MANAGING GROWTH

When Everything Barbeque was launched, Scott, Christy, and one other individual were the only three employees. Now, in addition to Scott and Christy, there's a full-time manager, two full-time employees, and one part-time employee.

Finding the right employees for the business has not been easy, since they have to be more than just salespeople. In other words, they need to be jacks-of-all-trades. "They have to be willing to remove products from a truck, unbox them, and build them—and then be savvy enough to understand their features, so they can sell them on the floor," Christy says.

Everything Barbeque has attracted considerable attention in the industry and has even been approached about franchising opportunities. Although the Grigsbys have included expansion in their strategic plan, they still want to perfect their current store before adding new locations.

Looking ahead, Scott and Christy are excited about the possibilities for their family-run business. "I believe our industry is only in its infancy because there are so many homeowners who desire outdoor kitchens, but haven't followed through on their plans yet," Christy says. "The future looks very bright for us." ■

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