

Louis Kahn and the Architectural Barbecue

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The world-renowned architect Louis Kahn was one of many modern American architects who, from the 1930s to the early 1950s, included barbecues in their houses. Their barbecues were not designed for the smiling, young, 'semi-middle-class' suburban families eating hamburgers and hot dogs in their backyards, with whom we are familiar from popular imagery of the 1950s, when the barbecue became an important signifier of the arrival of male domesticity in the United States. Instead, the architects' clients were executives and professionals. The design history of the barbecue as an architectural feature allows us to reconsider the origins of outdoor cooking in America and propose an earlier, top-down explanation of how barbecuing became popular in the post-war period. Architectural barbecues generally followed conventional formats, but Kahn's could be strikingly different, picturesque compositions and imposing additions to his buildings. The Weiss house (1947–1950) composition is a spacious 'outdoor room', a flagstone terrace with barbecue, seating, and serving area, which *Architectural Forum* described as a 'deliberately brutal stone fireplace, a landmark, almost, from a moonscape.' His barbecue for the Genel house (1948–1951), set into the corner of two stone walls, has a huge soapstone hood and chimney, referring to the stonework of the house and extending its silhouette. For Kahn, barbecues were not simply necessary evils that now had to be included as expressions of a modern house and a modern lifestyle. They were a challenge to his imagination and his ingenuity, and he approached them with great seriousness as he tried to make barbecues integral elements of his design.

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Although the architect Louis Kahn never donned barbecue mitts and an apron,¹ he made it practical for his clients to do so, allowing them to enjoy outdoor cooking and entertaining by including built-in barbecues in a number of the houses he designed. He was not the only prominent modern American architect to do this; Bruce Goff, John Lautner, Cliff May, Richard Neutra, and many others, especially on the West Coast, included these features in the design of their houses, particularly from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. But Kahn went beyond the conventional formats for barbecues that were being followed by his contemporaries; he took a fresh approach, creating expressive compositions that were closely integrated with the materials and aesthetics of his houses.

Louis Kahn (1901–1974) has been much celebrated for his monumental buildings, most notably, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California (1959–1965), the capital of Bangladesh in Dacca (1962–1983), and three museums, the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut (1951–1953), the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (1966–1972), and the Yale Center for British Art, also in New Haven (1969–1974). Innovative plans, meticulous concern for detail and materials, and brilliance in the handling of light have made these structures places of pilgrimage for the architectural community. Less well known, and until fairly recently less well-regarded,

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are the nine houses he built between 1940 and 1974, all in the Philadelphia suburbs.² In these projects, there is little sign of the influences of European classical architecture that imbued his monumental buildings from the 1950s and sealed his reputation; instead, he favoured an American idiom of indigenous materials and refined craftsmanship that gave his barbecue designs, like his houses, both an original and an architecturally significant form.

The barbecues that modern architects built in the 1930s and 1940s were not designed for the smiling, young, 'semi-middle class'³ families eating hamburgers and hot dogs in their backyards, with whom we are familiar with from popular imagery and who are powerful indications of the emergence of a new attitude toward the family in the 1950s. The architects' clients were executives and professionals; what the prominent cultural commentator Russell Lynes would probably have marked as Upper Middlebrow Americans, using the terminology he devised for American 'social stratification' in *The Tastemakers* in 1954.⁴ They were well enough off to commission an architect to design their houses, rather than choose from existing models in the new developments that were opening up the suburbs throughout the United States. In good weather they cooked, drank, socialized, and ate dinner on brick or stone patios off their dining rooms, with built-in barbecues, and they did so before outdoor grilling became a major American pastime. This suggests that we should reconsider our understanding of the origins of outdoor cooking in America, and propose an earlier, top-down explanation of the way barbecuing became so popular in the United States.⁵

Origin of the backyard barbecue

The backyard barbecue became an important signifier of the arrival during the 1950s of male domesticity in the United States, and a stereotype of its age. 'Celebrated in popular texts such as *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best*,' the historian Bill Osgerby observed in his gender study *Playboys in Paradise*, 'the domesticated male was [. . .] enshrined in new, family-oriented pastimes and practices. Most obvious was the rise of the weekend barbecue as a national institution. Presided over by Dad, the barbecue was an arena where men could act out their role as beneficent family figure-head, exhibiting a domestic proficiency that was safely reconciled with their sense of masculine self—because the barbecue took place in the "great outdoors", whereas the kitchen remained clearly designated as a space for Mom.'⁶

In his article 'The Birth of the Patio Daddy-O: Outdoor Grilling in Postwar America', the historian Tim Miller attributes the fad for grilling in the 1950s to a general increase in outdoor activities, smaller houses, which pushed family life outside from within, and the new 'togetherness', with the father now becoming an important player in the family drama. This does not apply to the situation as it had developed in the 1930s and 1940s, when suburban houses were larger and the barbecue was for adult entertainment. Miller overlooks this step in tracing the evolution of outdoor cooking from the masculine province of the campfire to the domesticated male of the backyard; while he acknowledges the 'early popularity of barbecuing in the West in the 1930s' he omits any discussion of the dynamics of the intervening period, with its more sophisticated and more self-assured men who took on a hobbyist's approach to barbecuing.⁷

It makes sense that, if home barbecuing emerged in the 1930s and 1940s rather than the 1950s, the craze should have originated with higher end households. First, you needed land, or at least a small backyard, which would not become accessible to a

great many young Americans until after the Second World War. Then you needed a barbecue, and most likely you would have had to have one built (or have built it yourself). Articles on barbecuing in a wide range of popular magazines—*American Home*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Parents*, *Sunset* and *Popular Mechanics* among them—and in the introductory matter in outdoor cookbooks offered two alternatives for the handyman: construct a portable metal barbecue or build one of brick or stone. A few portable stainless-steel grills were on the market in the 1930s and 1940s, and one, a collapsible barbecue wagon designed by Harry Weese and Benjamin Baldwin, was even sufficiently sophisticated to be found among the prize-winning ‘furniture for outdoor living’ shown in the Organic Design in Home Furnishings exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1941.⁸ However, portable grills were far from being as ubiquitous as they are now.⁹ Sears, Roebuck & Company, the leading American retailer of the post-war era, did not start selling portable charcoal grills until 1951,¹⁰ while Weber, today known as the grill giant, did not bring its first barbecue to market until 1952.¹¹ Nevertheless, the fact that a large corporation such as Sears decided to enter the market at that time suggests that there already was a considerable interest in barbecuing.

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, books and magazines laid out plans for building permanent barbecues in gardens and on patios—barbecues built against an existing house or terrace wall or freestanding brick, cinder block, or stone structures, in a surprising variety of sizes and complexities. There could be very simple examples, low squares of brick with one or two grills; tall cyclopean versions with grill and chimney; and even more elaborate brick or stone models with several grills or range units, serving counters, or wings with seating and storage for wood and equipment. Although promoted as grist for the home handyman, many of the plans that were published were far too complicated for any but the most experienced do-it-yourselfer. These were aspirational articles, the subject of outdoor fireplaces and patio equipment of all sorts reappearing annually in the popular magazines as larger and larger audiences began to see the value of outdoor cookery.

By the time Helen Evans Brown, the guru of West Coast cookery, wrote her *Patio Cook Book* in 1951, barbecuing had burgeoned, so much so that the focus of many of the magazine articles had switched from building barbecues to using them, supplying recipes and hints for grilling instead of plans.¹² Evans could also document an explosion of expensive barbecue equipment that had become available to these upscale, early adopters. Unnerved by ‘some of the paraphernalia that is lately making its appearances on the patio—hydraulic lifts for the grates, automatic starters and stokers for the fire, electric timers that turn the spit on or off,’ she added presciently, ‘Perhaps it is that I see the writing on the patio wall—a fear that these luxuries may lead to other things. An electric dishwasher, perhaps, complete with rustic exterior; or an electronically heated “barbecue” that transforms frozen “charcoal-broiled” steaks to something hot in less time than it takes to down the olive in the last martini.’¹³

The recipes that appear in barbecue cookbooks from the period confirm that the early audience for barbecuing was very worldly. James Beard, who published his *Cook It Outdoors* in 1941, presents many complicated dishes, along with fancy cocktails, side dishes, and desserts with origins in a multitude of diverse cuisines that would not have resonated with an unsophisticated audience. Similarly, Brown’s *Patio Cook Book*, stylishly bound in cloth that resembles gaily striped awning fabric, offers recipes and ingredients that went way beyond what would become standard barbecue fare. By 1956 the *New York Herald Tribune* food writer Clementine Paddleford would sum up the situation: ‘Everywhere the Barbecue. No longer a new thing. Once a fad, now a “solid” in the way of entertaining. I doubt if ever again fried meats will be in the running.’¹⁴

What seems to have tempted these homeowners in the 1930s and 1940s to try outdoor barbecuing were their experiences in restaurant dining. What they wanted most of all was to bring home the sizzling steaks and grilled (not fried) meats they were enjoying when they ate out, especially in the steakhouses that by then were gaining great popularity. But the emphasis was on steaks. 'Why not go picnicking in your own back yard?' *Popular Science* asked in 1941, when presenting plans for several barbecues. 'Outdoor suppers are a delightful variation from more prosaic modes of entertaining, and one that guests and hosts alike enjoy. Charcoal-broiled steak, served around the glowing embers of an open fireplace, has a flavour few can resist, especially when appetites have been whetted by the fresh air and the piquant aroma of food cooking over live coals.'¹⁵ A few years later, just after the war ended, *Architectural Record* published a note about an outdoor barbecue 'anticipating the day when steaks again will be plentiful'.¹⁶

The influence of steakhouses cannot be overlooked. These masculine restaurants had opened up over the previous decades in a number of cities in the United States. In their *Great Restaurants of America*, published in 1960, Ted Patrick and Silas Spitzer reported that the Christ Cella steakhouse in New York, which had been founded in the 1920s and served a sirloin shell 'charred a crusty black from close contact with flames of blast-furnace intensity', had become 'so famous that soon a dozen imitations sprung up along East 45th Street, and Steak Row was born.'¹⁷ James Beard, who favoured a much more urbane cuisine, noted this phenomenon disparagingly: 'Probably the most popular item of food in America is steak,' he wrote, 'and I, for one, cannot for the life of me understand why. I admit that a tender steak, perfectly cooked, is very good. But why all the fuss and the downright worship of the sirloin and the tenderloin and the porterhouse, I'm damned if I can understand.'¹⁸ Even at the most elegant restaurants this infatuation with steak held true, as René Black, chef at the Waldorf, reported: 'After the war, the Waldorf kitchens got nine orders of steak for one order of anything else.'¹⁹

My personal experience supports this. My father, who frequently travelled on business, would return from his trips with animated tales of the meals he had eaten in deluxe restaurants. It was those savoury two inch thick (sometimes three inch thick) charcoal-broiled steaks that he wanted to replicate on the stone barbecue he had built in our suburban backyard in the late 1940s. Although our barbecue was also fitted out with a spit, we never used it, and except perhaps when we had a large gathering of young as well as old, nothing but thick steaks was ever cooked on our grill.

My father was chief of the barbecue, even though, like most other men of his era, he never ventured to cook anything indoors. Because men at this time were referencing chefs, masters of their trade, who prepared their meals at serious restaurants, rather than seeing themselves as merely alternative cooks at home, these barbecue hobbyists do not seem to have been concerned with redefining their roles in the family or have been overwhelmed by the masculine insecurity that Tim Miller suggests could be an issue with men undertaking to barbecue later on in the 1950s. Both Miller and Chris Dummit, who described the same phenomenon in his article 'Finding a Place for Father: Selling the Barbecue in Postwar Canada', emphasized the extreme masculine rhetoric that was introduced to convince the suburban male that barbecuing was all right.²⁰

It was not just the father who must have felt threatened, however. By the later 1950s, when male barbecuing had achieved its iconic status and the role of the mother as household cook and prime nurturer could have been in danger, the typical barbecue menu changed, as the food historian Harvey Levenstein has noted: 'Only the most easily prepared foods would be served, mainly hot dogs and hamburgers, accompanied by

a range of purchased foods such as canned beans, cole slaw, potato salad, macaroni salad, ketchup, and relishes—nothing that could threaten the female monopoly over *real* cooking. To assuage any fears that Dad might really be serious about moving into the kitchen, he was encouraged to wear large aprons with macho slogans, which were the opposite of her frilly ones, and wield oversize utensils, which were clearly inappropriate for the kitchen'.²¹ This again distinguishes the early barbecue experience from the later one: whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, patio dining was stationary—steaks eaten at a table set with cutlery and china—by the 1950s, barbecuing, along with many other aspects of domesticity, 'took on a new mobility', as Karal Ann Marling has noted.²² It became casual, with hamburgers and hot dogs eaten on rolls on one's lap using the new plastic dishware or paper plates and disposable (wooden or paper) cutlery.

The architect and the barbecue

While backyard grilling is usually discussed as if it were a new phenomenon of the 1950s, it clearly got rolling earlier. The history of architecture and interior design helps us to relocate the introduction of the barbecue to comfortable middle-class homes during the interwar years. In this period, Modern architects played an important role in helping their clients to rethink domestic space that was dedicated to cooking and entertaining.

'Modern' is the operative word. The barbecue was enmeshed within the emphasis on outdoor living and the introduction of the patio into the design of modern American houses at this time. 'In Southern California, the outdoor fireplace has come to be an accessory that is second in importance only to the garage, especially in those locales where modern new homes are being built,' the author of 'How to Construct an Outdoor Fireplace for Picnicking in Your Own Garden' wrote in 1936 as he introduced his *Popular Science* readership to this new fad.²³

Both outdoor fireplaces and barbecues found their place on the patio, and we must be careful to distinguish one from the other. Outdoor fireplaces usually shared the chimney of an indoor fireplace, back-to-back or side-by-side with it. Like fire pits, which were also being built, they were meant for warmth or for atmosphere, and were low to the ground; while they could also have been used for cooking, no equipment was built in for this purpose. Rudolph Schindler built outdoor fireplaces on the two patios of his Kings Road house in West Hollywood (1921–1922), John Lautner designed one for the indoor-outdoor dining area of his Bell house in Los Angeles (1940), Richard Neutra designed a hearth for the upstairs deck (the 'gloriette') of his Desert House in Palm Springs (1946–1947), and Louis Kahn brought one east for the dining terrace of his first domestic commission, the Jesse and Ruth Oser house near Philadelphia (1940–1942).²⁴ The eagerness with which outdoor fireplaces were included in even the most sumptuous of houses demonstrates the importance then being given to these outdoor spaces as second living rooms.

The outdoor barbecue was an innovation of the upscale California ranch house. In his modern California ranch houses, Cliff May introduced many new possibilities for Western outdoor living focused on patios, with fire pits, fireplaces, and barbecues, for ambience, warmth, and cooking. His Desert Ranch House included a barbecue built into one end of a covered corridor that was open to the patio. Looking inward, following a Spanish tradition that was still strong in California, and with generous amount of plate glass and a central patio, it melded indoors with outdoors, and extended life to the open air.²⁵

One cannot overestimate the influence of May's ranches, which were heavily promoted by such high-end magazines as *Sunset* and *House Beautiful*. In 1948, Elizabeth Gordon, editor of *House Beautiful*, devoted an entire issue to a Cliff May design, which she dubbed the 'Pace-Setter House'. The magazine supported the construction of a model home that was built in Los Angeles and exhibited to the public. To emphasize that the ranch house had national and mass potential, the issue positively answered its question, 'Could you build the Pace-Setter House in a cold climate?', and included a reduced ranch-house plan that would fit on a sixty by one hundred foot lot.²⁶ By 1954, Russell Lynes could state that the ranch house had 'become the standard new suburban dwelling in the suburbs of New York as of Boston, of Chicago as of Cincinnati or Seattle or, of course, Los Angeles. [. . .] Stylistically they are sired by the same California notion of the good life. They are all one-story cottages with gently sloping roofs and out-sized picture windows. [. . .] somehow the romantic appeal of the West is built into all of them. The suburban ranches are often a quarter of an acre or less, and the view from the picture window is of another picture window. The pervasive Western spirit of the open range and the barbecue, of sunshine and leisure is nonetheless nationwide.'²⁷

A number of the noted California Case Study Houses also include barbecues. The seminal Case Study House building programme, instituted in 1945 by *Arts & Architecture* magazine, was conceived as a laboratory for designing and constructing 'low-cost, experimental modern prototypes'²⁸ for single-family production housing at a time when the American housing crisis was extreme. While it was very successful in showcasing modern building ideas, the programme did not produce significant low-cost models. Some of the houses were designed for real-life situations, others for imaginary families, and many of the clients for the houses that were built were considerably more affluent than had been anticipated. Several, in fact, were the architects themselves, including Charles Eames and Rodney Walker. In the early plans for the first Case Study House, which Julius Ralph Davidson designed in 1945 for a mythical American two-professional, servant-less household, a combination brick incinerator and barbecue is located on the patio (a not illogical, nor for that matter, unusual, fusion).²⁹ The two houses that Richard Neutra designed for fictional relatives, Omega (1945) and Alpha (1946), both had barbecues. In the imaginary discussion Neutra has with his clients, Mrs Omega asks about the patio, 'Can we have a flagstone barbecue and pavement around it? [. . .] I like the grand outside tapped for most of our living purposes. [. . .] We could even have a barbecue buffet supper after a drink out there'. In his own voice, Neutra describes the patio as a 'social court for the quiet and relaxed being together, primarily of adults [. . .] endowed with the mentioned outdoor hearth and cooking devices.'³⁰ Here the hearth and cooking devices are for adult entertaining—the children are not invited—and again we see a role for the barbecue that is quite different from the family-centred one that became a cliché later on.

The barbecues that Rodney Walker, Ralph Soriano, and Craig Ellwood designed for their Case Study houses each had a very different configuration, but none was conceived as a significant architectural statement. Walker's house (1946–1947), the largest to be built under the programme, located a large barbecue set-up on the roof; it included 'a brick fireplace with opening three feet wide and four and a half feet high [and] sink and cabinets for barbecue equipment.'³¹ Soriano's barbecue (1950) is table high, set in a white brick chimney on the patio outside the dining room and side-by-side with the fireplace that faces the living room inside. The barbecue is simply a rectangular void in an anonymous brick wall; nothing calls attention to it and it seems

as if it were just one more programmatic requirement that arrived there by default.³² Finally, the patio of Ellwood's Bel Air house (1952–1953) 'was well defined for relaxed, outdoor living and entertaining, including among its features, a large stone chimney complete with fireplace and electric barbecue spit' rising against the outside of the living room wall also side-by-side with its interior fireplace.³³ This was the last of the Case Study Houses to have a barbecue, although the programme continued until 1966, when *Arts & Architecture* magazine folded. By the early 1950s, when Sears, Weber, and many others had begun to market portable grills, the need to be up-to-date with architecturally integrated fireplaces began to wane.

Louis Kahn and the architectural barbecue

Most of the barbecues that modern architects designed for their houses during the 1940s and 1950s followed the conventional formats shown in home magazines—outfitted hearths introduced into masonry chimneys, units built against patio walls, or simple freestanding models. Louis Kahn took a strikingly different path for the design of his barbecues. Two of them were picturesque compositions and imposing additions to his own buildings, one for the house he designed for Morton and Lenore Weiss at the top of a slope near Norristown, Pennsylvania, between 1947 and 1950; and the other for the house in the near Philadelphia suburb of Wynnewood built for Samuel and Ruth Genel, which was in the works at the same time, between 1948 and 1951.

If Kahn had wanted to have his barbecues share the exterior walls of interior fireplaces, as so many built-in barbecues did, it would have been impossible because both houses had fireplaces that were freestanding, not placed on their outer walls. Instead, for the Weiss house, Kahn designed a spacious 'outdoor room', an astonishingly massive installation at the end of a twenty-nine foot long flagstone terrace, with barbecue, seating, and serving area [1]. *Architectural Forum* described it in 1950 as a 'deliberately



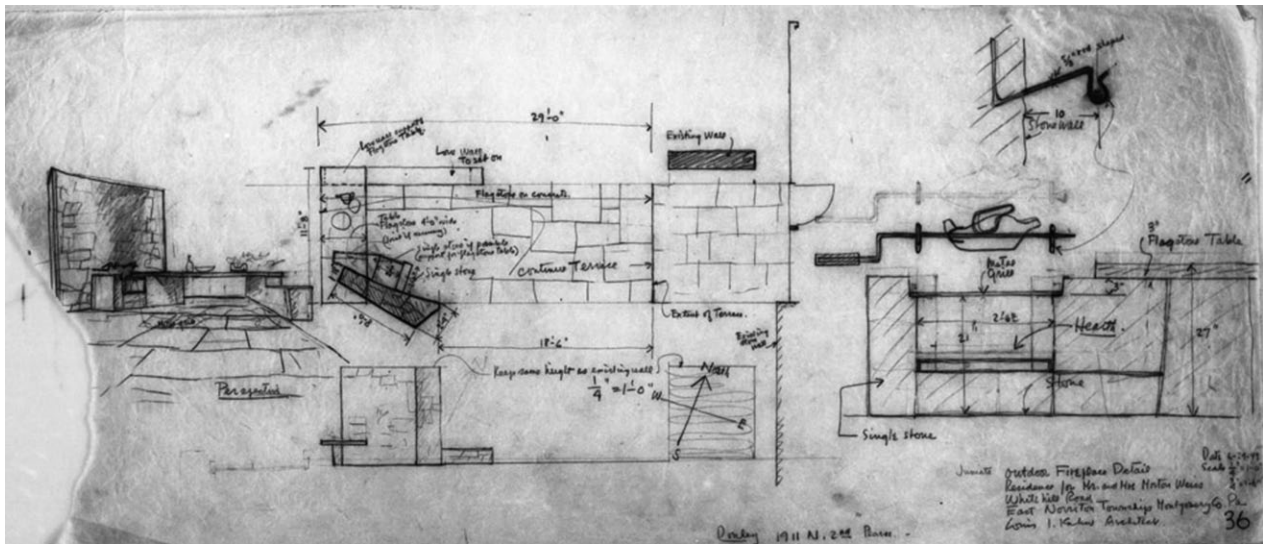
Fig 1. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Morton and Lenore Weiss House, East Norriton Township, Pennsylvania, 1947–1950. Outdoor room. Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Photo: John Ebstel, 1950. Reproduced with permission from the University of Pennsylvania

brutal stone fireplace, a landmark, almost, from a moonscape; beside it is a seat formed from a single rock more than 8 ft. long. Like all the other stones, this one came from the exposed, and therefore weatherbeaten surface of the quarry' [2].³⁴ The large stone was found at a nearby quarry in Valley Forge, when the architect was selecting material for the house, and although Kahn did not have specific plans for it at the time, he had it brought to the site and it became the significant seating element of the moonscape that he later created. The angled, trapezoidal, wall of the barbecue echoes the large, irregular, multicoloured stones of the freestanding screen wall near the doorway, the house, the chimney, and its central indoor fireplace as it closes off the vista and shelters the grill at its base. In choosing locally quarried stone and constructing the random rubble wall, Kahn was following the traditions of the Pennsylvania countryside that could be seen in the distance. Unlike the International Style architects of his time, whose houses could have been sited anywhere, Kahn was attentive to history and intent on grounding his houses in their locale, and the barbecue extended that aesthetic into the landscape.

An early drawing for the barbecue in the Louis I. Kahn Collection at the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania depicts this outdoor space, much as it was built but before the last-minute decision was made to include the long stone slab as a bench [3]. He had previously envisioned building a low seating wall that joined the support of a long flagstone countertop, which intersects the stone wall and sits next to the barbecue. On the left side of the drawing is a perspective view of the area with barbecue fixings ready on the counter; in the centre, a plan; and on the right, an elevation of the barbecue. The fireplace itself is simple, with a single grill and a hand-operated spit on which a large fowl is impaled.



Fig 2. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Morton and Lenore Weiss House, East Norriton Township, Pennsylvania, 1947–1950. Barbecue. Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Photo: John Ebstel, 1950. Reproduced with permission from the University of Pennsylvania



Kahn did not include a chimney in this barbecue design, and the residue of smoke from cooking can be seen on the back wall in photographs of the era. This would not have been a concern had Kahn chosen to follow his earlier ideas for the barbecue, which are seen in a number of drawings in the Kahn Collection. Instead of sitting the barbecue at the base of a massive wall, he imagined a low installation with over-scaled, moulded-metal hoods over the fireplace, one distinctly organic in form, a second, severely angular [4, 5]. Large metal hoods can be seen over freestanding fireplaces within houses of the 1950s,³⁵ but none seem to have been used outdoors at that time.

For the Genel house, Kahn also designed a freestanding barbecue structure that repeats the form of the stonework used on the house and extends its footprint into the landscape. It rests at the base of a set of stone stairs, one level below the dining-room terrace on the hilly site. Vincent Scully, in his early monograph of Kahn's work, saw echoes of the 'archaic world' depicted in Kahn's travel sketches in these 'walls and passages'

Fig 3. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Morton and Lenore Weiss House, East Norriton Township, Pennsylvania, 1947–1950. Drawing for the barbecue. Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Reproduced with permission from the University of Pennsylvania

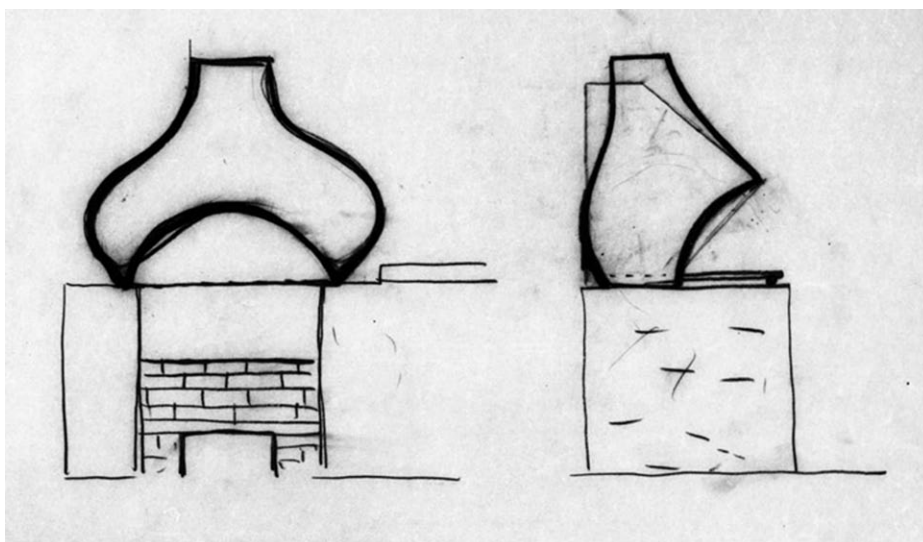


Fig 4. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Morton and Lenore Weiss House, East Norriton Township, Pennsylvania, 1947–1950. Drawing for a barbecue. Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Reproduced with permission from the University of Pennsylvania

Fig 5. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Morton and Lenore Weiss House, East Norriton Township, Pennsylvania, 1947–1950. Drawing for a barbecue. Louis I. Kahn Collection, The University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Reproduced with permission from the University of Pennsylvania

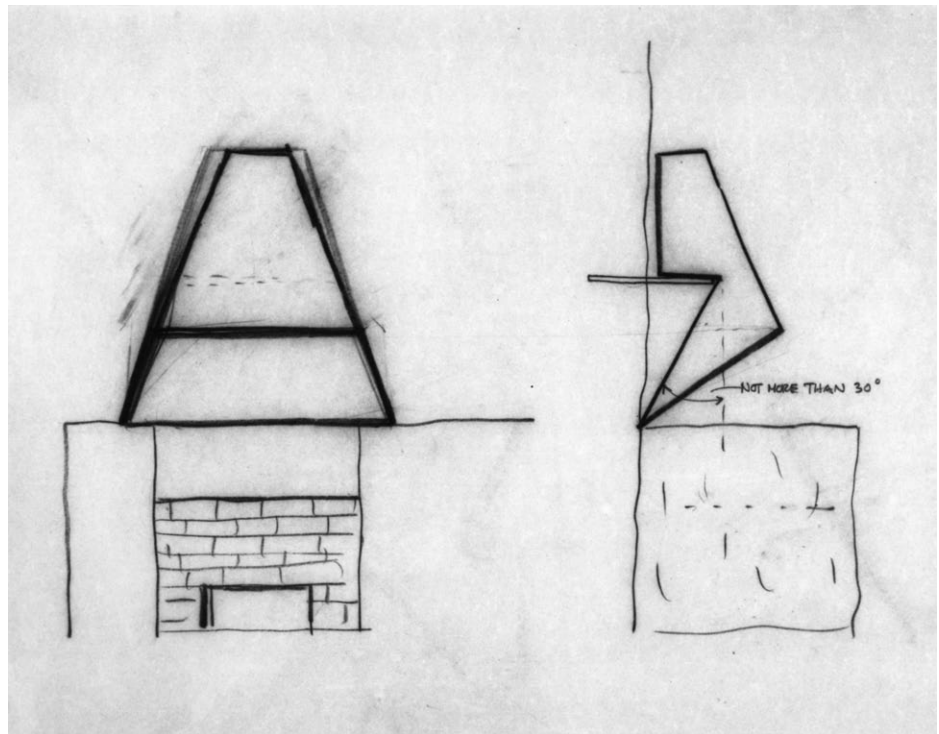


Fig 6. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Samuel and Ruth Genel House, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, 1948–1951. Barbecue with terrace above. Photo: William J. Whitaker. Reproduced with permission from William Whitaker



[6].³⁶ The fireplace, of brick, is set into the corner of two stone walls of unequal length and has a huge asymmetrical soapstone hood and chimney, which refers to the triangular shape of the marble fireplace within the house.



Fig 7. Louis Kahn (1901–1974), Norman and Doris Fisher House, Hatboro, Pennsylvania, 1960–1967. Barbecue. Photo: William J. Whitaker. Reproduced with permission from William Whitaker

After the early 1950s, when portable barbecues were being widely sold, Kahn completed only one other barbecue, and that reluctantly. Against Kahn's recommendation, Dr Fisher insisted it be built into the chimney of his house in Hatboro, Pennsylvania (1960–1967) [7], which on the basement level is under an overhang and in a rather inaccessible location, far away from and out of view of the outdoor dining area. The barbecue is simply a rectangular opening let into the curved side of the semi-circular stone chimney (the living room fireplace on the floor above opens on the diameter), but the irregularity of the multicoloured stones, emphasized by the deeply raked mortar, and the curve of the wall give it an unexpected liveliness. An earlier plan [8] shows that Kahn had tried to animate it further with a single stone at its base jutting out from the curved wall. This barbecue was almost never used, and the Fishers eventually added a freestanding grill adjacent to their patio.

When Louis Kahn confronted a new architectural element, in this case, the outdoor barbecue, he considered it afresh. Unlike most other architects of his time, who accepted standard configurations for these features, Kahn made them his own. For him they were not simply necessary evils, elements that now had to be included in post-war American building as an expression of the modern house and the modern lifestyle. They were challenges to his imagination and his ingenuity, and he approached them with great seriousness as he tried to make them integral elements of his design. He considered them successful examples of his creativity, and in assessing his own work in an interview in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* in 1950, he even claimed that 'the only new feature in the Weiss house is the outdoor living space.'³⁷

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Notes

- 1 Kahn always lived in the city, where he did not have any land, and in any case, it would not have been in his temperament to be interested in barbecuing; author's conversation with Kahn's daughter Sue Ann, 23 October 2010.
- 2 See G. H. Marcus & W. Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn*, Yale University Press, New Haven, forthcoming.
- 3 Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen used this term to characterize the residents of Levittown and other similar suburban developments in *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, Basic Books, New York, 2000, p. 167.
- 4 R. Lynes, 'Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow', in *The Tastemakers*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1954, pp. 310–33. This chapter originally appeared in *Harper's* in 1949.
- 5 'Barbecue' was the term used almost exclusively for this activity during the 1930s and 1940s.
- 6 B. Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure—Style in Modern America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 68.
- 7 T. Miller, 'The Birth of the Patio Daddy-O: Outdoor Grilling in Postwar America', *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010, pp. 5–11.
- 8 E. F. Noyes, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941, p. 36.
- 9 James Beard in *Cook It Outdoors*, M. Barrows, New York, 1941, p. 15, mentions the availability of 'one or two portable models on wheels'.
- 10 W. H. Young with N. K. Young, *The 1950s*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2004, p. 98.
- 11 Weber-Stephen Products Co. History <<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/WeberStephen-Products-Co-Company-History.html>> accessed 18 September 2012.
- 12 A review of articles indexed as 'Barbecues' and as 'Fireplaces, Outdoors' in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* from the 1930s to the 1950s reveals this.
- 13 H. E. Brown, *Patio Cook Book*, Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles, 1951, n.p.
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- 26 'Pace-Setter House', *House Beautiful* vol. 90, February 1948, pp. 61–113; see also, D. P. Gregory, *Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House*, Rizzoli, New York, 2008, pp. 73–83.
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- 29 *Ibid.*, plan on p. 27. *Popular Science*, for example, featured an outdoor fireplace and incinerator in its May 1932 issue (p. 101).
- 30 Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–2.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
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- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
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