



Summertime Oasis



BY JENNIFER VOLLMERT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY SWEENEY

A private retreat in the middle of town is the type of oasis Rachel Gwin wanted to create in her outdoor living space. Gwin's backyard was already mature and beautiful. "The Japanese magnolias won our hearts," she recalls of her move six years ago. So when it was time to reconstruct the backyard to incorporate her outdoor retreat, cutting down the Japanese magnolias was not an option. Gwin explains, "We had to figure out a way to keep the beauty and the integrity of the yard and build into it, not remove any of it."

Gwin turned to Paul Lively of the Lively Landscape Co., LLC. "[I loved] how elegant, but natural his projects appeared," Gwin explains. "Paul and I spent two and a half hours walking through the new living space trying to decide how to minimize any drastic changes to the existing garden, enlarge our entertainment space and create our outdoor private retreat," she says.

Lively learned more about the outdoor space and what Gwin wanted. He notes, "[I learned that Gwin] loved the older Saucer magnolias, entertains for parties of up to 60 people, and truly enjoys living outside, but the sun was unbearable between the existing magnolias and the house."

Part of Lively's design focus was to recognize the potential for inclusion of multiple spaces and better traffic flow. The existing patio area was oddly-shaped, small and uncovered, which made it difficult to use for entertaining. In addition, the patio and swimming pool layout was choppy.

Lively explains that the design was more about the hardscape and how that fits into an existing garden. "The existing multiple trunked Saucer magnolias offered so much in scale, casualness, and some shade," he says. "There were a few plants that we incorporated such as Japanese pieris and Autumn fern, but we ended up relocating a lot of the client's existing plants into the design."

Lively incorporated multiple spaces into the new backyard: a pool, an outdoor kitchen, a dining area, covered outdoor den and fireplace. He explains, "This design is an outdoor room within a series of outdoor rooms, in that each area holds its own space, but all relate and flow well."

For instance, he adds, "The fireplace area is for after-dinner relaxing. The open stone patio is for outdoor dining. The outdoor kitchen—complete with gas grill, Big Green Egg smoker, sink and refrigerator—will satisfy taste buds of friends and family as they sit comfortably on bar stools at the stone counter. The stone seat walls also help relate each space and serve as overflow seating."

The backyard's unifier is without a doubt the stonework, created by Clay Stanley of Natchez Stone Company, LLC.

"The stonework is the best I have seen in Nashville," shares Gwin.

Natchez Stone worked with every detail: the pergola/arbor, fireplace, seats/walls, patio, walkways, water feature, outdoor kitchen, hidden trash area, cedar fencing and cedar storage shed. A last-minute decision was made to add the flagstone coping and autumn slate to the pool area, which Lively and Stanley both feel ties the two areas together and further unites all of the outdoor living spaces.

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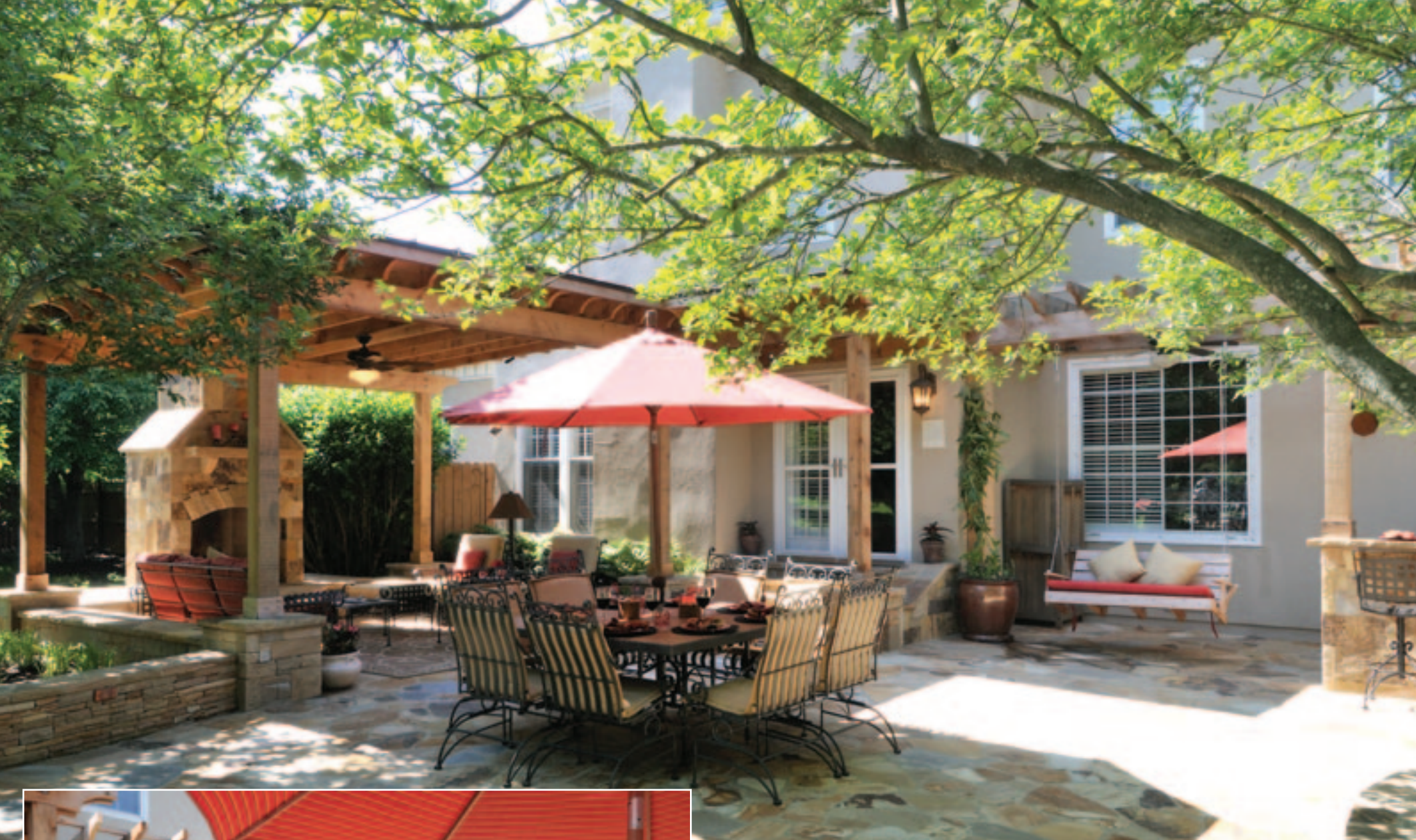
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With her backyard oasis complete, the homeowner has realized the numerous opportunities for entertaining large groups in a well-planned backyard.

Stanley calls the look a refined rustic. "By using square-cut stones for the fireplace and kitchen area along with horizontal and vertical lines for the seat walls and stairs, you achieve a formal atmosphere [toned down by] the rough-cut cedar for the pergola/arbor and the irregular flag-stone for the patio area."

"We all worked together to achieve a goal of providing a relaxed, natural atmosphere that blended well with the mature landscaping and colors of the existing residence, while providing all the modern comforts of today's latest technology," Stanley says.

Better traffic flow for guests, the convenience of an outdoor kitchen, covered seating areas and a gorgeous fireplace now blend perfectly alongside Gwin's prized Japanese magnolias, pool and garden areas. With her backyard oasis complete, she has realized the numerous opportunities for entertaining large groups in a well-planned backyard. Gwin shares, "Our vision for the new living space turned out perfectly." *

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