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Backyard Paradise

A TYPICAL SUBURBAN BACKYARD BECOMES A COUPLE'S DREAM VACATION SPOT WITH THE CREATION OF A COURTYARD AND OUTDOOR LIVING AREAS.

WRITTEN BY CHERYL DANGEL CULLEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANET MESIC-MACKIE
PRODUCED BY HILARY ROSE

Many people dream of owning a vacation home, but for Carolyn Marsel and her husband, the time and expense of traveling seemed an unnecessary hindrance. They wanted a quiet spot to unwind, but they didn't want to venture far from their suburban Chicago home. So the couple decided to create the perfect getaway where it would be most accessible—in their backyard.

Carolyn, who works as a ceramic artist from her home studio, had always dreamed of having an enclosed courtyard with outdoor living space. With their daughter finishing high school, Carolyn and her husband decided the time was right to bring that vision to life. They started by enlarging their master bedroom into a suite, which transformed the layout of the home from a lopsided horseshoe into a symmetrical U shape. Next, they consulted with landscape architect Chris Pronek, who suggested building an outdoor wood-burning fireplace at the back of the grassy yard. Stone walls extend from either side of the enormous fireplace toward the house, anchoring the space and closing the U-shape layout.

Carolyn Marsel and her husband love fireplaces, so when they started designing their vacation home in the backyard, a wood-burning fireplace was a priority. A casual sitting area and dramatic arbor made from large cedar planks encourage guests to gather around the fire. The hot tub is a popular spot for Carolyn's husband, who uses it twice a day.

FUNCTIONAL FORMATIONS

At first, Carolyn Marsel didn't know what to do with the expansive space above her new outdoor fireplace. She couldn't hang a painting over it, so she decided to use the gray flagstone surround as a canvas to display her ceramic artwork. She chose rough-hewn stones and asked the stone workers to position them randomly in the wall.

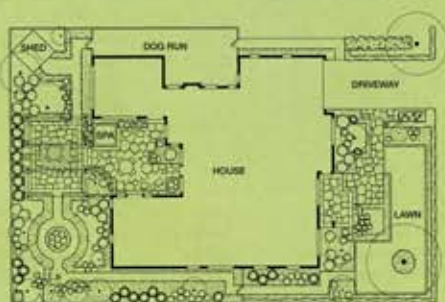
These large, odd-shape stones stand out from the flagstone, creating unique shelves within the enormous wall that Carolyn uses to showcase her collection of candleholders and flowerpots. "I think that I have a very functional way of decorating," she says. "And the space above the fireplace was so large that it almost would have seemed wasted if I didn't find a way to utilize it."

LEFT: An inviting fireside dining area is the perfect spot for entertaining. "We don't hear traffic back here, just the breeze through the trees," Carolyn says. "It's very serene and natural."
ABOVE LEFT: Rough-hewn stones protrude from the fireplace to serve as little shelves for pots and vases, the contents of which Carolyn changes regularly. In spring, she displays tulips and daffodils from her cutting garden; in autumn, it's hydrangeas and mums. "It's like a traveling exhibit," she says. "The simple flowers and pots make a beautiful statement in a simple way."
ABOVE RIGHT: An arbor made from large cedar beams enhances the cozy sitting area in front of the fireplace.

With the yard cozily wrapped in walls and stone, Pronck pulled up the grass for two spacious patios. The lower patio, with a dining area and a hot tub, sets the stage for welcoming guests; the upper patio contains an additional dining area in front of the fireplace and an outdoor grill.

Although the new outdoor living space is just a few feet from the house, it looks like it could be thousands of miles away. "Sitting in the courtyard, no one would ever guess we're in the middle of a subdivision. It looks like we're on acres and acres of land—not your typical 90x140-foot, one-third-of-an-acre lot," Carolyn says. "Whenever I'm back there, I feel like I'm on vacation. It's like I'm cutting flowers in my Italian rooftop garden, or a cold night in the hot tub is like soaking on a back deck in Aspen. Staying at home is easier than traveling, and we've created a vacation home that we can go to every time we step out of our back door."

RESOURCES ON PAGE 120
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THE CHANGE

An exterior overhaul turns an average backyard into a secluded courtyard retreat.

WHAT IT TOOK

- Building a flagstone fireplace at the back of the yard with walls on either side to close off the home's U-shape layout and create a private courtyard.
- Constructing an arbor from large cedar planks for an indoor/outdoor effect.
- Removing the lawn to make way for two tiered patios with room for cooking, entertaining, and lounging.
- Installing a hot tub on the lower tier for a true vacation feel.
- Filling the area with plants that attract butterflies and provide color and texture. Wind chimes, bird feeders, and birdhouses enhance the relaxed atmosphere.

THIS PHOTO: Carolyn's studio, the family room, and the master suite surround the courtyard; each room permits access through French doors. **OPPOSITE:** An outdoor grill, one of Carolyn's favorite features, is built into the fireplace structure.

Backyard Paradise



A TYPICAL SUBURBAN BACKYARD BECOMES A COLLETT'S DREAM VACATION SPOT WITH THE CREATION OF A COURTYARD AND OUTDOOR LIVING AREAS.

ENTRÉE BY TRACY, 34856, COLLIER
780000 49617 14877 4760-44-210
PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY HARRIS

Many people dream of owning a vacation home, but for Carolyn and her husband, the dream of escaping to a peaceful retreat was always a reality. They wanted a quiet getaway, but they didn't want to leave their family behind. Carolyn wanted the perfect getaway where it would be easy to escape to their backyard.

Carolyn, who works in a stressful office from her home, had always dreamed of having an outdoor retreat with a view of the lake. With their young children, Carolyn and her husband decided the time was right to bring that dream to life. They started by choosing a location for their new retreat, which included the layout of the house and a pool. They also wanted to have a hot tub, a grill, and a pergola. Carolyn and her husband worked with a landscape designer to create a plan for their backyard. They chose a stone patio, a hot tub, a grill, and a pergola. They also wanted to have a fireplace, a table, and chairs. Carolyn and her husband worked with a landscape designer to create a plan for their backyard. They chose a stone patio, a hot tub, a grill, and a pergola. They also wanted to have a fireplace, a table, and chairs.

Photo: Jim Harris/118

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Landscape designer: Chris Pronek, Milieu Design, Inc., 48 E. Hintz Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090; 847/465-1160.

Jointed arbor, flag stone flooring, fireplace masonry—through Milieu Design, Inc., Wheeling, Illinois; 847/465-1160. **Hot tub**—Hydroquip, Corona, California; 951/273-7575; www.hydroquip.com. **Grill** Summit Gold—Weber-Stephen Products Co.; 800/446-1071; www.weber.com. **Lighting**—Kichler Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio; www.kichler.com. **Tables, chairs, fabric for cushions, umbrella**—Williams' Ski Haus, Highland Park, Illinois; 847/831-4300. **Tablecloth**—Pottery Barn; 800/922-5507; www.potterybarn.com (product line varies).