

# backyard challenge

ADVERTISEMENT

THE CLIENTS

- A forty something couple and their two children:
- 8 year old son and a 14 yr old daughter.
- "Active" family – enjoy being outside, active sports (soccer, volleyball, swimming)
- Entertain 15-20 on a regular basis, sometimes have 30-40 (2x a year)
- Like to grill and entertain outside
- Like room for some theme gardening: roses, herbs
- Want a pool but want to be able to use the patio when the pool is closed in spring and fall

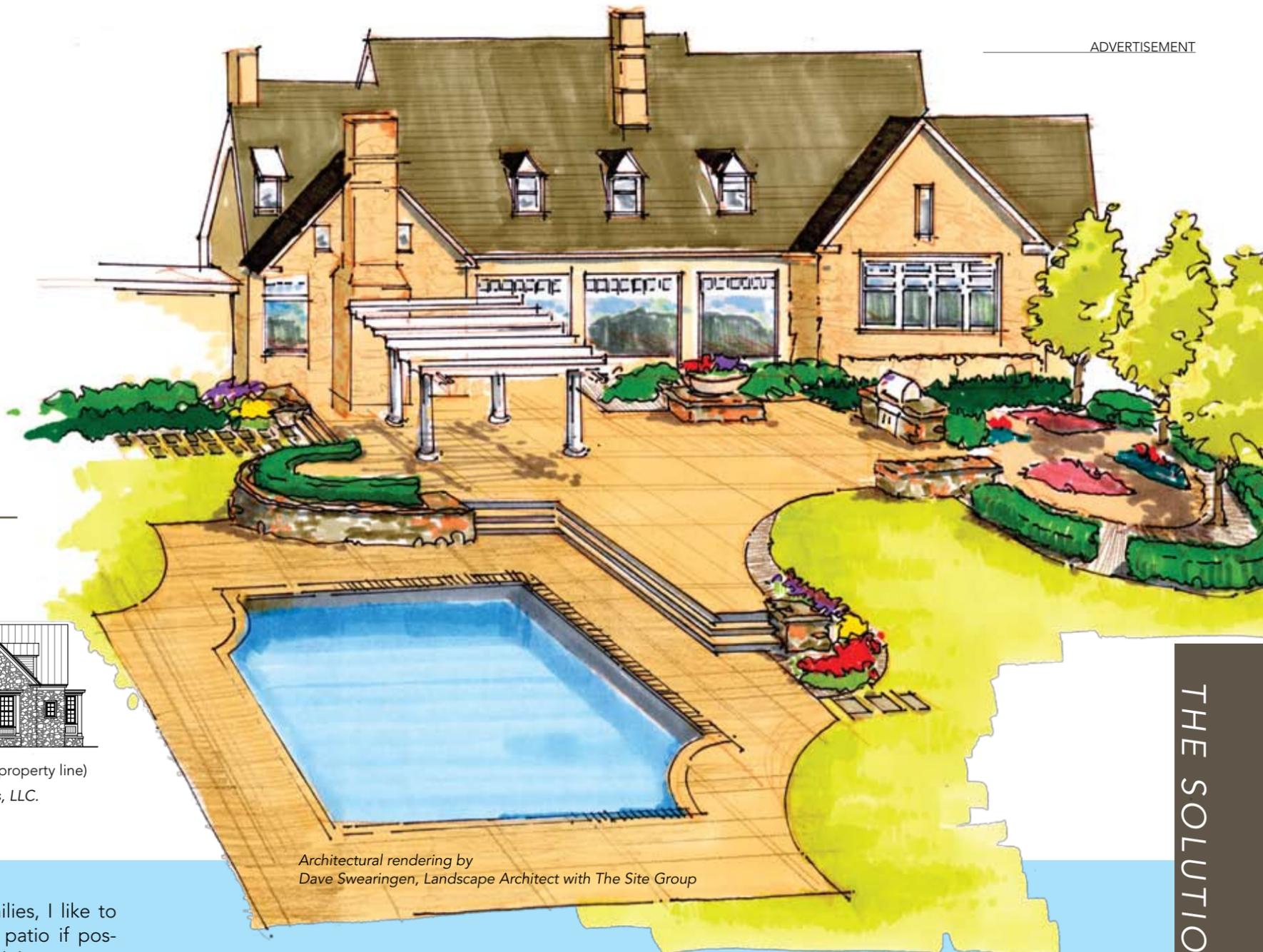
THE SITE

- Site is basically flat from left to right (falls 18" from left to right across back of house, but falls 5' from the house to the back right property corner (approx 150')
- Good views directly in back of the house, but bad views to the left for at least 50% of the side property line.
- No outstanding drainage issues
- Back of the house faces southwest



(standing at the back of the house facing the back property line)

Elevation view by Shawn Duncan Associates, LLC.



Architectural rendering by Dave Swearingen, Landscape Architect with The Site Group

Like so many of the well designed houses we work around, the beauty of the back of this home is the large panels of glass in the center section. I imagine standing inside of those windows with a cup of coffee in my hand looking out across the backyard to the beautiful woods and creek that lie behind the property. The relaxation of a natural view helps us unwind or gear up for "normal life." The design of the outdoor spaces has to revolve around views – open views to the back and the pool area, softened views to the left, and sub-vistas within the outdoor spaces. So much of our nice patio season is in the spring and fall when the pool is closed, so access to the pool and patio had to flow together in the summer but not revolve around the pool. Solution: use the natural fall of the lot to the back-right corner to drop the pool and pool deck down a couple of steps where it is easily accessible, in view of the house, and out of the main patio for spring and fall entertaining.

When I design patios for active families, I like to bring the grass area right up to the patio if possible to merge the active and entertaining spaces. Bringing the grass up to the edge of the patio makes the yard part of the extended space of the patio.

Since the patio faces southwest, a source of shade would be appreciated. The shade structure has to keep the views open and serve both the patio and the pool areas. Most people want sun when they are by the pool, but there are always a couple of people that want at least a filtered shade. I am recommending a pergola to provide this filtered shade. The pergola helps define a "space within a space" that would be used for more intimate entertaining.

The whole patio could accommodate a larger group. Yet another level of intimacy is created in the herb/rose garden to the left of the patio. The taller trees would give a sense of enclosure to the space while blocking out the bad view to the left of the backyard. I could envision a trickling fountain and

a couple of chairs in this garden, creating soft background noise and a space for quiet conversation. The structured architecture of the rose/herb garden makes a nice counter point to the informality of the plants themselves.

Repetition of materials such as the stone from the house into the landscape creates unity between the house and the landscape. The walls and columns help break up the large flat panels of patio and lawn and further subdivide the spaces of the patio. The same stone could be used to build a grill counter and outdoor bar space for eating and serving meals. An oversized column with a flat planter filled with annuals creates a focal point outside the grand windows that open across the main living space of the house.

The marriage of the natural elements of the site and well defined spaces for activity and entertaining creates a successfully designed space. Every backyard is different, each family is unique, and therefore each design should be also. Whether hosting a rowdy swim party for preteens or an elegant evening of low level lighting and soft music under the pergola, this backyard serves as a stage for an active outdoor lifestyle.



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