

Water & STONE



A city house finally gets a pool, and more

BY ERIKA HOWSARE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK

It had been a long time coming. Chris and Greg Menke have owned their house in Charlottesville since 1982, and they've made many changes and updates to it along the way. But there was at least one big project they hadn't gotten around to. "A pool was always part of the plan," says Greg.

Though their children were grown, in winter 2013, they decided it was time at last to make the pool a reality. Their property certainly seemed primed for it: Though it's very close to Barracks Road Shopping Center, it comprises more than two acres of ground that slopes down from the rear of the house, a 1939 brick colonial.

The Menkes had always enjoyed their privacy and leafy views. When they hired landscape architect Jill Trischman-Marks, one of her goals was to preserve the house's visual relationship with the trees. "I didn't want to stop the eye at the pool," she says.

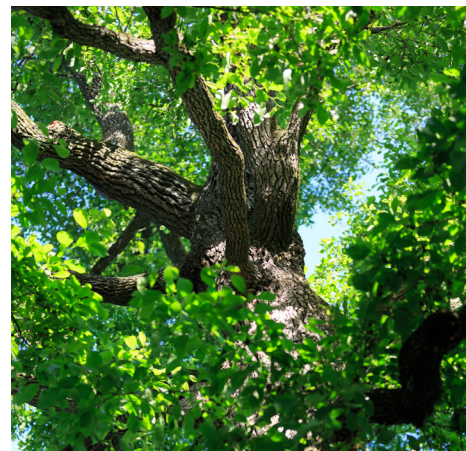
In siting the pool, she was dealing with a terraced yard and trying to preserve a prized black gum tree near the existing rear deck. Excavating too near the roots would have harmed the tree, so the pool needed to move downhill. That fit Trischman-Marks' general approach. "Pools are closed six months of the year," she says. "They should be close to the house, but not so close that you have to look at it."

The solution was to install stone retaining walls above the pool, then layered plantings above the wall. When mature, these rhododendrons and hydrangeas will mask the pool from the house's rear windows. "And when you're in the pool, the rhododendrons will hide the perennials" above them, says Trischman-Marks, "so it reads as two separate gardens."

The couple also decided to build a pool cabana (designed by architect Andy Thomas), so that structure—which includes a bathroom, seating area and kitchenette—is integrated into Trischman-Marks' design for the pool surround.

What turned out to be the centerpiece of the entire project are the stone retaining walls and

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When siting the pool, landscape architect Jill Trischman-Marks wanted to preserve the gum tree near the back deck. "We've always loved it; it's so gnarly," says homeowner Chris Menke. The solution was to install stone retaining walls above the pool, then layered plantings above the wall.

steps. Originally, the plan was for the wall to be constructed of concrete block. “Greg said the walls should be more special,” says Trischman-Marks. “I said ‘Oh, have I got the mason for you.’”

This was Greg LaMastra, who hand-cut and dry-stacked the walls as his final project before retirement. “This was his last hurrah,” said Trischman-Marks. The walls are masterpieces of precision. Impressive curved steps climbing up from the pool deck are made of massive blocks of stone, cut and leveled just so.

“Those rock walls will be there for 300 years,” said Greg Menke. He and Chris decided to have LaMastra also replace the staircase to the house’s back door; these steps curve in the opposite direction from the set below them and are finished with simple metal rails that Trischman-Marks designed “not to compete with the steps,” she says.

Plantings are chosen for deer resistance and for integration with the woody surroundings. Crape myrtles frame the view beyond the pool, and Otto Luyken laurels line its far edge. Chris had always wanted to add magnolia trees to the property, so two gem magnolias now flank the steps to the house.

The pool deck is roomy enough for easy entertaining. “It was designed with a lot of space, so we could put a couple dozen people here,” says Greg. “You don’t even feel it.” Lots of guests have already come and gone, and the couple’s adult children—who used to ride sleds down this slope—now host high school reunion parties around the pool.

A fire pit opposite the cabana makes the transition from the new installation to the ornamental garden that was here when the Menkes first bought the property. Having such a lengthy relationship with their home makes the Menkes take the long view of a project like this. Says Greg, one of his overriding goals was this: “Let’s do something that looks like it’s been here forever.”

THE BREAKDOWN

13,630 square feet

Primary materials or finishes:

Chiseled West Virginia stone (walls, steps, fire pit); textured colored concrete paving with hand-scoring (pool surround); powder-coated aluminum (fence and railings)

Plant selections: Crape myrtles, Otto Luyken laurel, scintillation rhododendrons, hydrangeas, chastetree, rose of Sharon, stewartia

Other notable, custom, or innovative features: Stone walls by Greg LaMastra



The homeowners hired architect Andy Thomas to design a cabana—with a bathroom, seating area and kitchenette—which Trischman integrated into the pool area. Both the cabana floor and the pool deck are made of colored concrete, which ties the indoor and outdoor spaces together.