

IN THE RIGHT LIGHT

Behind a historic home,
a landscape for night and day

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIA HAMRICK



Before hiring The Grow Co., sitting by the pool to take in afternoon views meant baking in the sun. “There were no trees to soften the blow,” said homeowner Matt Lucas. “Putting a tree in the right spot took an incredible amount of thought.” An October glory red maple tree, sited just so, shades the outdoor dining table near one corner of the pool, without compromising the vistas.

A house that’s been standing since before the Civil War can demand a lot of attention from its owner. Such was the case with Matt and Tricia Lucas’ home, a Free Union gem that, despite its ample size, had just one bathroom when the couple bought it about a decade ago. In fact, the home was in such rough shape that, remembered Matt, “The appraiser put a negative value on the house.”

It took several years to restore the house to the point where it could shelter the Lucases and their four children. And once they moved in, they needed to live in it a while before they could really address the landscape design. There are nearly 40 acres of open and wooded land stretching from the homesite toward the mountains, and the area near the house includes several vintage outbuildings.

“It was pretty charming, but it wasn’t functional charm,” said Matt. “It was unusable.” Rethinking the outdoor living space was a tricky puzzle, with different advice flowing in from everyone he approached. “I found it to be a hard problem to solve,” he said.

The family did install a pool and surrounded it with a patio that Lucas called “a placeholder”—they knew that it wasn’t exactly what they’d ultimately want. “I was willing to live with it,” he said, “and we circled back a couple years later and said let’s get it right.”

Patience was a good strategy, as it allowed the Lucases to figure out over time what exactly their needs were. The pool sits in a courtyard formed by the house’s back porch and a nearby smokehouse (now repurposed as Tricia’s office). From here, there are excellent views but also unforgiving exposure to the afternoon sun.

“You want to sit by the pool and enjoy it in the middle of the day, but there were no trees to soften the blow of the sun,” said Matt. “Putting a tree in the right spot took an incredible amount of thought.”

Enter Cabell Cox and The Grow Co., who laid out a plan for the patio and pool surround that would offer some sun protection. “You’ve got this gorgeous view here and that’s the last thing you want to block,” Cox said. An October glory red maple tree, sited just so, shades the outdoor dining table near one corner of the pool, without compromising the vistas.

On the opposite side of the pool, where chaise lounges line up, partial rather than total shade was the ticket. Cox suggested a pair of river birches, which have “a softer leaf” and are beautiful to boot, with peeling white bark.

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There are deliberate details everywhere: West Virginia sandstone offers a counterpoint in texture to the house's right angles; an iron gate from the 1800s lends a tie to the home's history; river birch and weeping cherries provide shade and personality to the landscape. Altogether, the Lucases have planted about 70 trees on their property.

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They grow from square beds punched through a stunning pool deck composed of irregular West Virginia sandstone. It offers a counterpoint in texture and shape to the house's many right angles, and seems to invite barefoot walking. Where the pool area had previously been defined by a row of nandina, Cox designed a low stone wall. "That creates division of spaces," he explained—separating the pool crisply from the driveway and front lawn.

Two weeping cherry trees on either side of the smokehouse bloom pink in spring. Altogether, the Lucases have planted about 70 trees on their

property. Cox recommended pin oaks, red maples and saucer magnolia to help shade the west side of the house. Someday, Matt would like to add a grove of ginkgoes in the field, to make a "big burst of yellow" in autumn.

Meanwhile, the family has had a full year to enjoy the new pool area, and they've made the most of it. "The pool, all winter, was a hockey rink" for the kids, now ages 11 to 20, Matt said. Various seating areas lend themselves to relaxing at different times of day—from morning coffee on the front porch to afternoon thunderstorms viewed from the patio table. "It's a fun place," said Matt.—*Erika Howsare*

THE BREAKDOWN

Approximately 2,750 square feet

Primary materials: Flat-laid hardscape of West Virginia sandstone; Tennessee brick; natural stone wall

Lighting: Low voltage, accent uplights

Plant selections: Red maple "October Glory," Sweetbay magnolia, spirea, abelia, weeping cherry, river birch

Custom features: Iron gate from the 1800s