



THE PIT AND THE POOL

**A vacation home evolves with
the family** *By Carol Diggs*

Sometimes the solution to your problem means redefining your goals. That's what happened when James Hazel decided he had to deal with his lawn's erosion issues.

Twenty years ago, James and Sally Hazel were looking for a weekend place to get their young family away from the pressures of Washington and his job as a D.C. lobbyist. One weekend they came to see a farm along the South River outside Stanardsville—nearly 300 acres of rolling hills, forests, and pastures, lovely views of the Blue Ridge, an almost-new house on a hill, with a fire pit overlooking the perfect swimming hole—“and that was it,” says Hazel. They built a basketball half-court off the gravel drive for their two sons, settled in, and began making family memories.

Fast forward to 2017. The Hazels had retired to Charlottesville, but still used the South River house frequently for long weekends, summer vacations, and family gatherings as their sons married and began their own careers. Over the years, Hazel had become



But even a perfect solution isn't without its challenges. The new deck had to be carefully terraced into the slope to ensure that the drop between the patio and the pool (and between the pool and the ground) wasn't so high it presented a danger for small children. And while keeping those kids safe around the water was the prime concern, a pool enclosure would really clutter up the deck's open feel and the beautiful views, so the heated salt-water pool has a retractable cover that's kept closed whenever it's not in use. The pool machinery had to be accessible, so it's off to the side near the driveway, but a little downslope and screened by shrubbery to keep it out of sight.

Boeschstein's design also successfully handles the challenge of integrating the new feature with the existing patio and into the surrounding landscape. Silver travertine, chosen for the pool decking because it retains less heat, was also laid over the concrete patio to help unify the two areas. Both retaining walls are faced with a Willow Creek stone veneer. The grasses and flowering plants in the bed atop the patio's retaining wall echo those on the lawn, just as the shrubs below the pool deck help merge the entire feature into the woods at the base of the slope.

The upgraded fire pit, although it's far enough down the western slope that it's not visible from the patio/pool area, is still tied into the overall design. The same stone choices used in the pool feature appear here: sandstone pavers leading into

Down the hill from the pool area, the upgraded fire pit draws on some of the same design choices as the pool below, with sandstone pavers, a stone bench, and a small travertine patio with chairs overlooking the South River.

PHOTOS: VIRGINIA HAMRICK



concerned about erosion on the house's steep west lawn, especially around the aging fire pit. He contacted local landscape architect Anna Boeschstein of Grounded LLC because he had seen her work on another country property in this magazine.

As Hazel and Boeschstein talked, other issues began to emerge. The Hazel family and guests spent all their time on the house's narrow concrete patio, because there wasn't much level lawn space to gather on; they couldn't rework the west lawn because that's where the septic field was; they'd often talked about a pool; soon there would be grandkids visiting...

And so the real solution emerged: Create a terraced pool on the gentler south slope. That way, the Hazels would have both a recreation space for their growing family and more room for entertaining. Upgrading and relandscaping the old fire pit as part of the pool project would help stabilize the western slope and create another place to gather.

the pit, a semicircular stone bench backed into the slope and faced with Willow Creek stone, and a small travertine patio with Adirondack chairs overlooking the swimming hole and the trout-stocked South River.

Both projects were completed in time for the family's annual Fourth of July barbecue in 2018, and saw frequent use until the pandemic hit in 2020. Last year, Hazel says, he and his wife celebrated a smaller-than-usual Christmas, just the two of them, around the fire pit.

In a fortunate new development, Hazel was recently offered the chance to purchase a parcel of farmland directly across the South River from his house, so he could upgrade and conserve that bank of the river and buffer his property from development. He and Boeschstein are already at work on the landscape design for the reclaimed riverbank—after all, it's part of the view from his fire pit.