



**FROM TOP:** A combination of textures and materials, from stone and oxidized steel to smooth pavers and lush vegetation, makes for a rich and naturally elegant poolscape. Lighting at every step is as beautiful as it is functional, bathing the terraces in a soft glow and highlighting design features. A raised terrace with a fire pit is a fine setting for evening entertaining.

## The Family That Plays Together

A Brookline, Massachusetts, backyard becomes an outdoor living space with a little something for everyone.



It was an interesting conundrum: classic, stately New England brick home; homeowners with contemporary tastes; and a blank canvas of a yard to marry the two styles seamlessly. The owners, who are originally from Brazil, had a robust and exacting outdoor vision to reimagine the standard developer's landscape that came with their new home near Boston. "They wanted outdoor spaces that could be lived in and used by the family, but would also function as entertaining spaces," says Peter White, owner and principal landscape architect at ZEN Associates. "They wanted a space that was comfortable enough for the immediate family, but also could accommodate larger events—everything from preschool parties to very snappily dressed galas. We were tasked with coming up with a design and palette of materials that acknowledged the house."

Essentially, the space needed to be everything to everybody.

| TEXT BY JULIE DUGDALE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAT REA |



home's exterior and provides unexpected warmth in a setting with an otherwise contemporary feel. The pool-area wall, for example, is sectioned into corten steel and traditional stone. The steel oxidizes to a deep rust color, which contrasts nicely with its stone counterpart. The arbor above the kitchen, designed by Andrew Sidford Architects and fabricated by Custom Iron Craft, is also made of steel, creating a sense of unity between the outdoor spaces. "We brought in materials that aren't typically used in this way," White says, "with organic colors that really blend well with the house."

Accents like the orange hues of the bar stools and umbrellas and the red pillows on the lounge play off the brick and the warmth of the oxidized steel. One detail

that ties it all together: "We very cautiously used white trim and white painted wood on the dining canopy," White says, "because white is a strong detail on the house."

Despite the expansive feature-laden yard, it was important to the family to have a sense of intimacy.

**FROM TOP:** Carefully selected elements, like a stone wall with a traditional look and the white dining canopy, play off the house and create a sense of unity. An understated water feature behind the chaises provides relaxing ambient sound. The full outdoor kitchen and bar are situated centrally for an ideal view of the pool. **FACING PAGE:** Lush, layered planting behind the white canopy gives the space a classic New England feel, even with the yard's contemporary design and accents like the sleek dining table and chairs.

White and his team outlined five separate outdoor areas in a modern landscape that works with the traditional home aesthetic and meets the functional needs of a busy family with two—soon to be three—small children. "There are covered spaces if it's raining or too sunny; water for the daytime; a fire terrace for chilly nights; lighting that's not only pretty to look at, but also practical; and enough open space to set up for additional activities, like a tented party," White says. "There's very little downtime here."

Besides the pool and spacious fire pit, the yard features a full outdoor kitchen and bar, a canopied dining area, and a play area on the lawn. The innovative use of mixed materials—granite, steel, stone walls, beige pavers—harmonizes with the



The solution: lush vegetation layered in front of a fence around the pool-cape perimeter. The ZEN team planted flowering hydrangea, hemlock, holly, and evergreen, “without blocking the neighbors, overcrowding the space, or casting big shadows,” White says. “They wanted it to be private without being reclusive.”

What truly sets this poolscape apart, though, are the thoughtful details that ensure the backyard isn’t simply for show; it’s a place the family and their guests can thoroughly and comfortably use at all times. The lighting is artfully installed to light every step in the evening and to illuminate the steel walls for a rich,



warming effect. A just-right sound system creates an ideal low-decibel atmosphere. And adding to the ambience is the pleasant effect of the water feature at the end of the pool. “It’s modern, done in a way that’s not a classic statue or bubbler,” White says. “It’s a focal point when you’re at the far end near the fire pit—kind of an invitation to move around the property.”

For guests who want to take advantage of all the yard has to offer, but aren’t up for a full swim, the pool is designed to be all-inclusive: wide, side-to-side steps serve as a graceful graduated entry—like wading into the water at the beach or lake—perfect for non-swimmers who want to cool off while being social. The space even has a vegetable and cutting garden that brings alfresco dining full-circle. Says White: “It’s all the things you’d expect to see in a landscape you really do live in.” ■■■

**RESOURCES:** For more information about this project, see page 186.