



# Poolside Living

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME FOR FUN AND GAMES—  
ESPECIALLY IN THIS ACTIVE FAMILY'S WATER-THEMED BACKYARD.

BY JASON MILLER PHOTOGRAPHER ED GOHLICH FIELD EDITOR ANDREA CAUGHEY

■ Submerged tile-clad pedestals support concrete slabs above the swimming pool surface, opposite, making them appear buoyant. A stream of water spills from a square stainless-steel pipe and into the pool.

■ Maureen Duff, *this photo*, sets the teak-and-stainless-steel table for a meal. The backyard's separate furniture groupings suit a variety of activities.



■ A whirlpool accented with glass tiles, *this photo*, is popular with the Duffs' triplets. Sun worshippers can choose teak or mesh lounge chairs; both styles sit on stainless-steel frames. ■ The Duff home, *opposite*, references Spanish and Mediterranean architecture, a common style in Southern California.





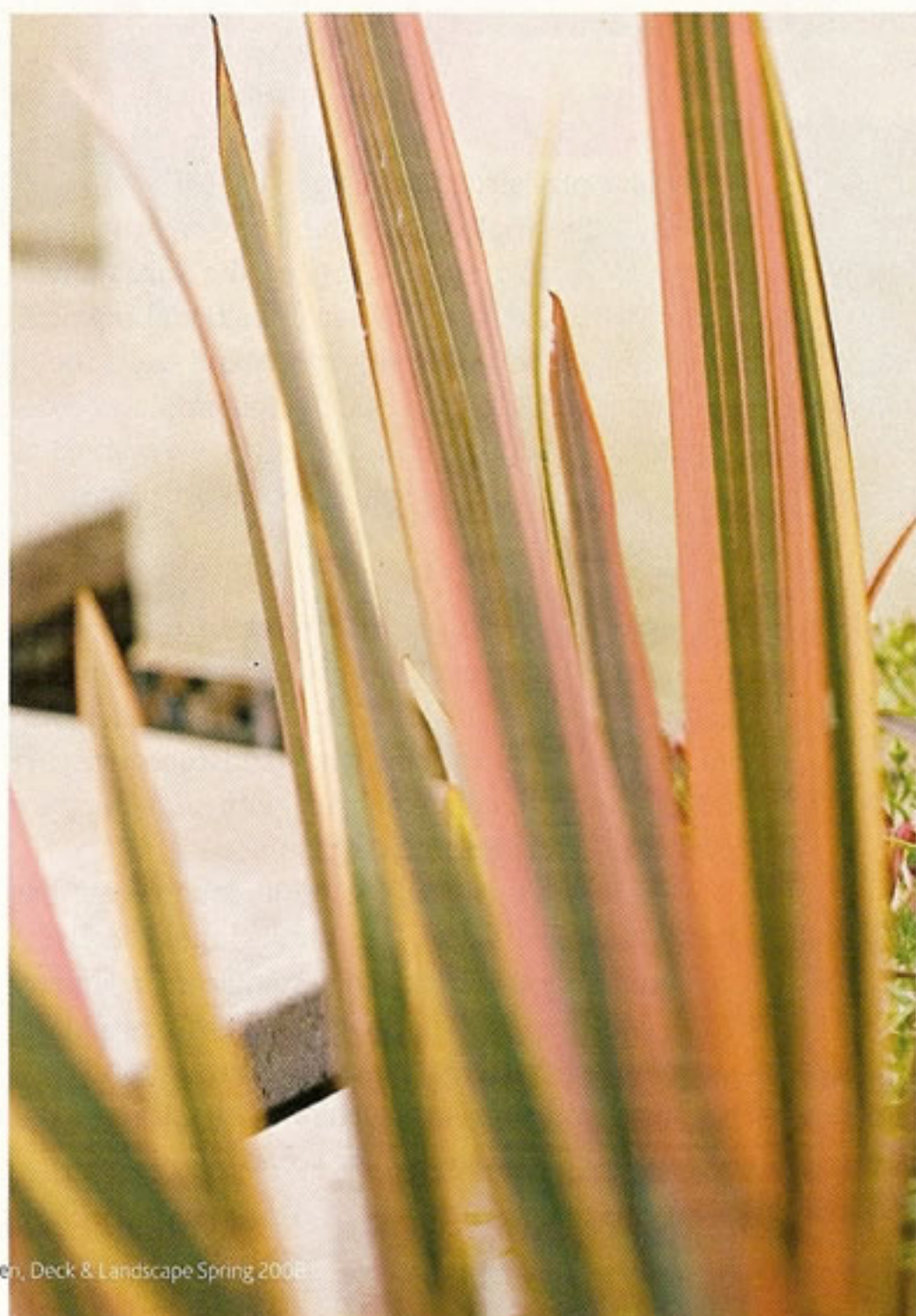
**S**teve and Maureen Duff were perfectly happy with their Carlsbad, California, backyard—at first. With 2-year-old triplets, their days and evenings were spent doing what many parents do: watching their kids frolic on a play structure in a grassy lawn.

But as the triplets—two sons and a daughter—began to grow, the Duffs noticed the yard's shortcomings. "As they aged, it wasn't functional anymore. We found ourselves spending less and less time in the backyard," Steve says. "So we contemplated redesigning it to better suit our lifestyle; we wanted to entertain more, have neighborhood block parties."

#### **ACTIVITY CENTRAL**

Thus began an ambitious project to transform a plain patch of green into a hub of entertainment and activity. Maureen teamed with pool designer Skip Phillips of Questar Pools and landscape designer Linda Chisari to create a space with something for everyone—including the neighbors.

Their canvas of roughly 3,500 square feet has become a destination for family and friends. A contemporary swimming pool, completed in January 2006, anchors the space. A pool deck of poured concrete—with some slabs appearing to float—accommodates several clusters of casual furniture. Red umbrellas punctuate the scene.



Near the dining area, a fire bowl serves as a focal point and conversation piece. The bowl is a lava bubble—a volcanic stone with a pocket formed when the lava was hot—which the Duffs had plumbed for natural gas. An automatic igniter fires it up; the flames dance among chunks of tempered glass that fill the bowl.

#### **FUN FOR ALL AGES**

The overall effect of the Duffs' new patio oasis is informal elegance, an open-arms environment where visitors of all ages are welcome—and secure. "It's a space for kids and adults," Maureen says. "Our friends with little kids can go to the shallow end of the pool and the kids are safe there."

As for the family's adult friends, the feedback has been enthusiastic. "People who are used to generic backyard pools are very impressed," Steve says. "We're really happy about it, too; we've expanded our livable space significantly."

The triplets, now almost 11 years old, are equally pleased with the new play space. "We do a lot more entertaining now, it seems," Maureen says with a laugh. "We must have had 50 kids over here for the Fourth of July." □

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■ To create a bubbling fountain, *this photo*, the Duffs drilled a hole in the bottom of a Balinese water jug, inserted a pump and piping, and filled the jug with river rock.

■ Poolside furnishings, *opposite top*, are contemporary teak.

"We wanted clean lines," Maureen says.

■ A New Zealand flax, *opposite bottom*, displays spikey form and striped leaves.



## Fire in the Bowl

Gas-fueled fire pits and fire bowls, *above*, descendants of the popular chimineas, deliver the warmth and atmosphere of a wood fire without the messy cleanup or requisite storage space for firewood. Not surprisingly, they've become a common fixture on backyard patios.

"You can go outside, hit a switch, and have an instant fire," says Jim Jarvis, president of Fort Worth-based *dancingfire.com*. "After drinks and conversation, you hit the switch again to turn it off, and go back inside without smelling like smoke," Jarvis says. "It's a great way to have the ambience of a wood-burning fire with very little maintenance."

Gas fire pits are typically fueled with propane or natural gas, each of which has pros and cons. Natural gas lines must be installed by a master plumber and checked by a local building inspector to ensure they meet municipal codes; costs for inspection and installation vary from city to city, so ask your plumber for an estimate. The gas lines are virtually permanent, so choose the site carefully. On the plus side, there's no maintenance after setup.

Propane-fueled pits are portable, so you can move them as often as you rearrange your patio furniture. You can camouflage a propane tank in myriad ways, but you must refill it periodically. This shouldn't be a deal breaker, though, says Jarvis, who owns a propane-fueled fire pit. "I have three tanks, and two are always full," he says. "When the third one is empty, I just rotate in one of the full ones and take the empty one to be filled."