

Outdoor Spaces Redefined

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Back yard pergolas stretch skyward seemingly supported by a beach pebble stone wall. Photos provided



The barbecue was intentionally placed below the line of sight as guests enter this yard from the kitchen. The pool surface (foreground) is smooth as glass.

Originally the yard contained a very large pool which was difficult to fence off (the new owners had young children). Waters' team removed the old pool, and prepped the site for a new scene and new setting. Then it rained. The project suffered six weeks of rain delay, which Waters said proved their toughest challenge. When the rain stopped, the company installed a "spool"—a small pool, something Waters said better suits the limited number of "summer days" in Lafayette. "It's bigger than a spa and smaller than a pool," he explained. The spool contains swim jets, so it functions as a therapy pool. It also provides a current for swimming "upstream" during swim lessons for the owners' children. Because it was built as a zero edge water feature, it also functions as an art piece.

Achieving a perfectly level spool surface is a complex, intricate process, Waters said, one that has been used since the Egyptians used water to level the pyramid construction. He must have gotten this pool just right – in still photos it appears less a water feature than a black slate walkway. Waters called the entire backyard a "visual experience," with pergolas arching over the spool, and basalt columns grouped within a stone bed, each column representing a family member.

Hand-set black Mexican beach pebble decorates the downhill spool wall and lends an acoustic dimension to the space, as it softly disperses sounds. Waters

said the owners told him they did "almost zero" in-home entertaining before the transformation. Now, however, the kitchen's sliding doors retract, seamlessly connecting the interior with the outdoors. Their yard has now become the central gathering point of their social group.

Anne Cole's Lamorinda back yard also boasts a pool, but in comparison and by her own definition, it is huge. That probably suits the primary school children, her children's classmates who gather for year-end pool parties at the site, just fine. Its former owner was an energy company executive who managed a pool design that is truly unique, and believe it or not, best appreciated from a Google Earth perspective.

Cole, a former Arizona resident, first moved to the East Bay in 1999, but didn't even know where Lamorinda was. Now she can't imagine raising her children anywhere else. "I don't put my kids in camp for the summer," she said, "I send them outside."

Cole purchased the home in late 2010, and kept the yard the way it was. "I think it was built in about 2003," she recalled. In addition to a commanding view looking out across the pool (her favorite), the yard features a fountain and fragrant roses, plus a vineyard growing cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, and malbec grapes.

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Roses in full bloom greet the guests coming through the entry gate of this Garden Tour home.

Photo Cathy Dausman