



Inside *Out*

Indoor living breaks through—walls, that is—with alfresco dining rooms, fireplaces, even poolside TV. *By Scott Sowers*



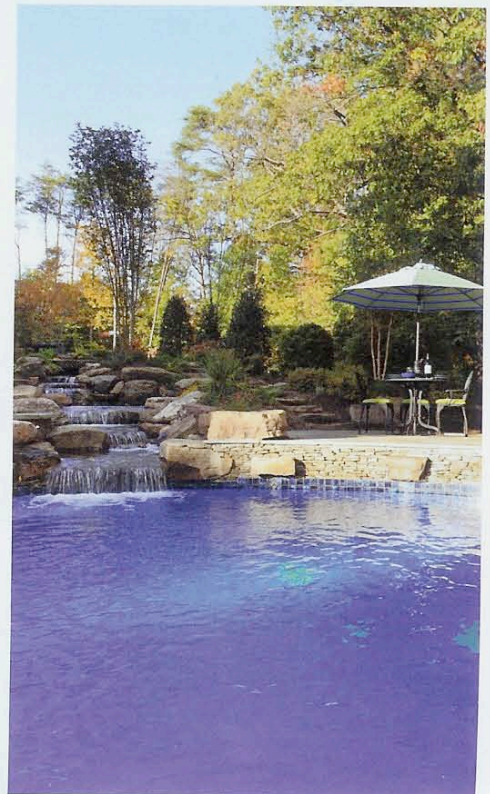
A custom NVblu pool offers spray heads, a tanning ledge, an electronic cover, and Pebble Tec finish. RIGHT: Drew Crowder of NVblu, a member of the Society of Watershape Designers, created this freeform pool with a waterfall and a custom scallop stairwell entry. Patios for both were done by Staiz Stone & Structure.

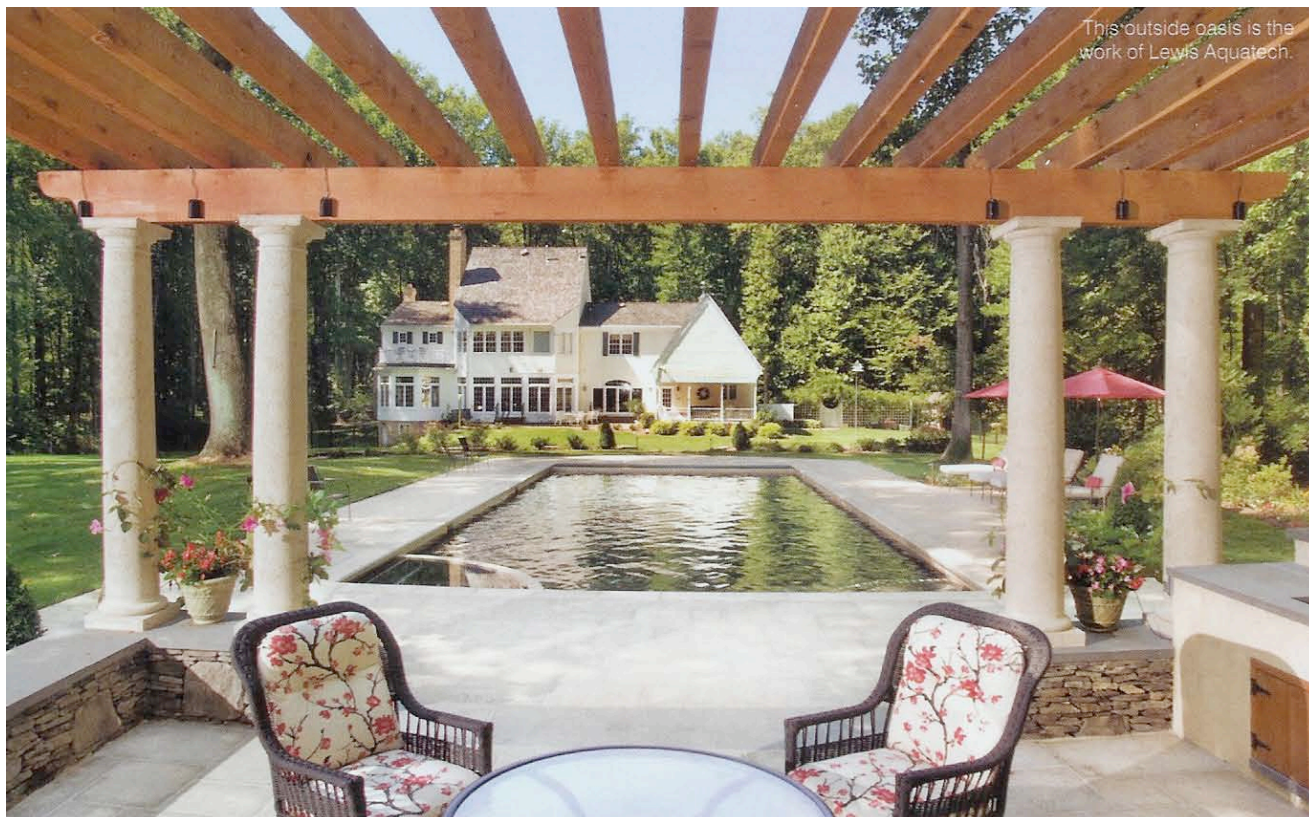
IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD, outside is where it's at. Outdoor kitchens, outdoor fireplaces blazing away in outdoor living rooms—pretty soon you won't need a house at all. So whether you're shopping for a new pad or getting the old place fixed up for an open house, pay attention to what's happening on the exterior.

According to the experts, the outer surroundings should reflect the home's architecture. "We specialize in extending the house into the landscape so it looks compatible," says landscape architect Jay Graham, principal of Graham Landscape Architecture, based in Annapolis, Maryland. If the home is contemporary, you should be looking at clean, simple lines inside and out; for a traditional dwelling it's OK to consider old-school patios, pools, and porticos.

Getting the basics correct is key, but what separates the ho-hum from the "oh my"? Again, think about bringing the comforts of indoor living outside. Don Gwiz, vice president of Lewis Aquatech in Chantilly, Virginia, cites several recent hot additions, such as outdoor pizza kitchens, insect-repellent systems, and snow-melt systems underneath terraces.

Making the grounds four-season friendly should be part of the plan, but summer is when you can really cash in with exterior planning. For





that, you're going to need a pool. "Putting in pools used to be like working from templates; they were basically cookie-cutter style," says Drew Crowder, managing partner of Chantilly-based NVblu. "Nowadays a pool guy has to be versed in art and architecture. It's all about color theory and hydraulic design. It's like advanced physics."

The science boils down to such features as infinity edges, high-efficiency pool heaters designed to save energy, and artfully executed tile. Want to cantilever a lap pool over a second-story owner's suite? No problem. Want to check your pool's water temperature on your BlackBerry while you're vacationing? Can do. A gorgeous pool can also connect to an adjoining après-swim space where one can unwind after a rousing game of pool volleyball or some serious lap work. Picture a big-screen plasma TV (suitable for outdoor use) above the mantel of your outdoor fireplace.

Pool guys have seen their line of work change dramatically over the years. "We've built tents over a piece of land so we can dig during the winter, so we could produce something amazing," Crowder recalls. "The different shapes of pools have become endless," Gwiz says, "and the floor plan of outdoor spaces has become more architecturally correct."

While planning the look of outdoor spaces, don't overlook the greenery. "It seems we've talked to a lot of clients lately about 'hardscapes' and they'll say, 'That's all great, but we want plants,'" says Eric Groft, principal with Oehme van Sweden of Washington, DC. Native plants are hot right now, as is the idea of using strategic plantings to help the indoor and outdoor spaces blend seamlessly.

Certain constraints, however, come into play. "You have to consider the architecture of the garden," says Graham. "Otherwise it can end up looking wild and crazy." Adds Groft: "Natural is not easy. We're always trying to establish what we call the genius of the place." His firm's strokes of "genius" have included 20-foot waterfalls, inconspicuous fire rings, soothing lily ponds, bubbling fountains, dining decks off the dining room, and secluded private terraces adjacent to the owner's suite.

Living outdoors continues to be part of the American dream, evidenced by wrap-around porches, patios, and pools. But like interior design, these standbys are evolving while influencing property value and resale appeal.

"It's all about bringing the elements of living inside out by grounding the house with its outdoor spaces," Groft says. ★

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Graham Landscape Architecture
designed this pergola wall to act as
a counterpoint to the stone house.

