

RAGS TO RICHES

A dilapidated pool turns into a backyard retreat for a busy executive and his family

By Shabnam Mogharabi Bob Masterson owns 15 beautiful acres of Oklahoma wilderness. In hopes of someday retiring there, the busy auto executive cleared the land, expanded the existing estate, added a guest house and built a pond stocked with bass.

Yet something was missing. "After he'd done all the other improvements, the existing pool, which was made of simple concrete with a wooden deck, didn't fit," says Cham Carpenter, owner of Prestige Pools & Spas Inc. in Edmond, Okla. It was also in disrepair and its equipment didn't function properly.

That's when Masterson decided to look into a new poolscape. After getting a \$100,000 quote from a landscape architect to rebuild the pool's deck, he called Carpenter. In just one meeting with the pool builder, the homeowner scrapped the landscape architect's plans and agreed to a new design.

At first, Carpenter thought he might be in over his head. Masterson seemed like a demanding client who expected corporate-style efficiency during the creative process of exterior design.

"Bob is a busy man, but he likes to have his time with his family when he comes home," Carpenter says. "So when he first told me about his backyard, we started simply. He was willing to make the commitment and turn us loose. It just ended up becoming a pretty big project."

The basic, kidney-shaped diving pool soon evolved into an awe-inspiring aquascape. The vanishing-edge project now features a large lower splash basin, in-pool bar stools, fountains, misters and a specially designed outdoor cabana and entertaining area.



PRESTIGE POOLS & SPAS INC.



The whole nine yards: With the addition of a vanishing edge, spillover spa, poolside cabana and dozens of other features, a mundane kidney-shaped pool was transformed into a muted, majestic aquascape.

How'd they do that?

When adding a vanishing edge to an existing pool structure, the No. 1 rule is to maintain structural integrity, says Cham Carpenter, owner of Prestige Pools & Spas Inc. in Edmond, Okla.

With this renovation, Carpenter and his team began by testing the structural integrity of the existing shell. During demolition, the crew sawed out a spillover edge and then checked the shell to ensure that there were no fissions in the concrete.

Next, the team excavated the area that would hold the catch basin. On the backside of the spillover wall, they drilled in rebar pins, to which they tied a steel mat. The resulting wall was almost 2 feet thick. Using concrete epoxy, Carpenter bonded the pins to the shell's structure. To create the spillover wall, approximately 20 piers measuring 16 inches wide were used.

In Oklahoma, shotcrete is preferred over gunite, so the crew then formed the retaining walls for the catch basin and shot the walls with concrete. Finally, they hauled in dirt to backfill the area around the catch basin. This was done using 6-inch grade lifts that were compacted at 1-foot intervals to ensure the integrity of the foundation.



Cham Carpenter
Owner
Prestige Pools & Spas Inc.
Edmond, Okla.

"We wanted to make sure that when we were through, there would be no cracks," Carpenter says. "We had to make sure the basin was united with the existing structure as one unit. That's important."

— S.M.

Stage one

Though the existing pool was only 5 years old, it was clearly in bad shape, according to Carpenter. It had one skimmer, crumbling brick coping and a garish green slide on a wooden deck.

"It also had a lot of circulation problems," says Carpenter, who is a member of the Master Pools Guild. "Fortunately for us, while the plumbing wasn't what it needed to be, the shell was OK. If the pool isn't structurally sound to begin with, you've got a losing battle. You may as well rip it out entirely."

Happily, Carpenter was able to keep the project's skeleton intact. During demolition, his crews removed the decking and coping, and ripped out the existing plumbing. Once the pool was reduced to its bare shell, the company began construction of the lower pool and catch basin.

The expansion proved problematic, however, due to an 11-foot elevation drop at the backside of the pool. Carpenter used several tons of fill to create a space for the lower pool and patio. "We wanted to make sure there was no settling on that steep a grade," he says. "If you cut corners on your foundation, it doesn't matter what you do from there. You have to start off strong."

The lower basin, a 3-foot-deep vessel that features bar stools and a plume fountain, doubles as a sports pool for Masterson's

two young sons. "They can play in there and go under the negative-edge waterfall. It's fun," Carpenter says.

To continue that playfulness throughout the yard, the Prestige crew retained a diving board on the deeper upper pool. They also added a mister system around the perimeter of the deck and cabana. "It's under the existing patio of the house, and we also hung nozzles on the fence around the perimeter," Carpenter says. "When you turn the mister on, it's like there's a beautiful, cooling fog around the house."

Stage two

One of the project's most beautiful additions is a cabana that frames the pool on the far side. It gives the yard more utility as a retreat and an area to entertain.

"With the construction, it was important to make it look like the structure already existed," Carpenter says. "We wanted to use brick on the exterior of the cabana walls that matched the house. The problem was that the house was about 7 or 8 years old."

Finding the bricks was arduous. He sorted through several dozen samples, and visited dozens of shops and Web sites. Eventually, Carpenter found matching bricks in a small materials store in northern Oklahoma. "The whole job took about six months from start

to finish, and finding that brick took a good amount of time," he says.

The result was well worth the wait. The large roofed structure houses a built-in grill and fireplace, an outdoor kitchen complete with a refrigerator and sink, a bar area, plenty of furniture and a half bath. Below the cabana is a large wine cellar that doubles as a storm shelter.

Relaxation elements were carried throughout the upper and lower patios, where soft-cushioned furniture abounds. Subtlety in the colors also was a key element. A light gray plaster finish echoes the new grayish-blue patterned concrete deck.

What's more, a tiled spa that can be controlled from inside the cabana adds a place for mom and dad to get away. "It was a completely different project by the end," Carpenter says. "They went from hardly ever using the pool and rarely entertaining to spending every day out there in the summer in the water or relaxing in the cabana."

For Carpenter, this ultimate backyard demonstrates the importance of the growing renovation market. "Renovations are going to be an important part of the industry in the future," he says. "You can change a customer's life with a remodel."

"To take that to the point where we ended up, where they absolutely love their backyard, it's incredible," he adds. ■