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LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Whitten Landscaping

An aging pool area prompted a total outdoor overhaul, which included a new patio, fire pit, fieldstone wall and numerous plantings for the Cassidys' now enviable yard.



Paradise Poolside

A makeover by Whitten Landscaping has inspired these homeowners to spend more time outdoors, enjoying their small piece of paradise.



Hank and Gail Cassidy

can't get home fast enough these days. It took Whitten Landscaping less than two months to transform their .15-acre backyard into a resort-like oasis, and the couple couldn't be happier.

Originally the homeowners wanted to update just the pool and a deck, but they ended up hiring Whitten for a comprehensive makeover that included new pool coping, an expansive bluestone patio, a circular gas fireplace, an outdoor shower and a fieldstone wall against their recently built deck for a finished look. The improvements wrap around to the front of the home as well, in the form of new brick front steps and walkway, a fieldstone wall and new plantings. The sum total is a picture-perfect setting that's as user-friendly as it is inviting.

By Lenore Cullen Barnes
Photos by Amber Jane Barricman

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Hank had hired Whitten for a previous landscaping project at his business and was pleased with their work, so when it came time to redo his own yard, the choice was easy. It all began with the pool, which, at 13 years old, was ready for a new liner. The Cassidys also wanted to update the four-foot concrete apron surrounding the pool.

Improved grading

The first step was to address the lawn sloping toward the pool.

"We knew we needed to regrade the lawn," says Craig Whitten, owner of the South Yarmouth-based company. "Water was puddling in the landscape." To correct this, Whitten's team laser-leveled the backyard, and put in a new sod lawn and irrigation system. Then the backyard was ready for the patio. "Putting stonework in is a great way of changing the grade," explains Whitten.



Skillful Stonework

A beautiful flat-faced fieldstone wall (the mason cut many of the stones by hand) with bluestone caps with rock-face edging extends from the back of the house at a perpendicular angle, stretching around a second side of the deck. Inset lighting in the wall, plus two electric lampposts on opposite ends of the patio, add drama to the ambience when dusk falls.

The 48-inch, round fire pit is also clad in flat-faced fieldstone with bluestone caps. These caps are particularly desirable to use, says Whitten, because they conduct heat, providing a warm surface for chilly feet. In the center of the fire pit are bronze-toned and clear glass pieces that reflect the firelight and shimmer in their respective colors.

Below: Random-patterned bluestone serves as the new pool surround and patio area while also helping to smooth out grade changes.



Top and left: Hand-cut, flat-faced fieldstone wall separates the deck from the pool patio; accent down-lighting inserted into the wall provides extra drama after dusk.

It's also visually appealing. The expanded patio features bluestone of varying sizes set in a random pattern, flowing directly from the new deck to the pool.

"It really extended our living space from indoors to out," says Gail. "It's all so convenient and functional – it's an easy walk from the kitchen to deck to patio. It's cleaner too; there's less traction on the grass, so there's no mud and no mess. It keeps the grass out of the pool."





Whitten's crew installed an outdoor shower made of Azek onto the deck. Below: The gas fire pit, with a custom 48-inch round, bluestone cap, is made of flat-faced fieldstone that matches the deck wall.



"We use [the new fire pit] so much more than the wood fire," Gail says. "Wood was nice but always kind of problematic. This is so easy; we can light it or turn it off with just the flick of a switch. And it extends the season. We were out here last Thanksgiving."

Green Spaces

Together, Whitten and the Cassids achieved an aesthetically pleasing balance of green space and stone.

"We went as far as we could with the lawn on either end of the pool," Gail explains. "I wanted to keep some green. I didn't want full hardscaping. I like my very manageable grass area now."



After the landscape makeover, there are now plenty of outdoor spaces for entertaining.

"The whole lot is only .29 of an acre and the backyard is probably half of that," Hank says. "We maxed out what we could from a relatively small space. A few 14-foot Leland Cypress trees planted along a side-yard fence provides additional privacy.

At the front of the home, Whitten installed new steps and a revised walkway, both in red-black brick laid in a straight pattern, to form a better approach to the front door. A cemented flat-faced fieldstone wall accents new plantings, including cotoneaster, Japanese hollies, PJM rhododendrons, blaus pink azaleas and emerald green arborvitae.

"We chose the emerald green arborvitae because they're tight," Whitten says. "They won't expand and grow wide like other types of arborvitae, which makes them great for foundation plantings."

A multiple-stemmed birch, instead of a single-stem, was also selected for its fuller and more visually appealing look. Against black mulch, the colors of the various blooms pop.

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The new front pathway is comprised of red-black brick laid in a straight pattern for a traditional look.

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Whether the homeowners are grilling dinner with their three children, entertaining friends around the pool or just relaxing on the patio with a good book, they now relish outdoor time more than ever.

Gail says about the transformation: "We couldn't be more pleased with how it all turned out." 🏡



Above: Cotoneaster is a great wall plant, according to Whitten, because of its vibrant berries and tendency to sprawl over walls. Right: A multi-stem birch offers a fuller appearance than a single stem.

