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OUTDOOR LIVING

## Pool retreat meets entertaining needs great and small

By **DANNY C. FLANDERS**  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
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When Joe Overton wants to have a couple of friends over, he has the perfect outdoor spot for sipping cocktails, be it summer or winter: a covered patio with cozy fireplace and kitchen island within arm's reach.

Yet when he's feeling more adventuresome and wants to throw a bash for 100, guests are never cramped at the Decatur-area setting, with its swimming pool, hot tub, decking and seating areas.

"What I love about it is, while it's a large space, it also has all these intimate spots within it," says Overton, a dermatologist who practices in Covington.

That's the way Atlanta landscape architect Tom Flowers designed Overton's outdoor space after getting to know his client's needs and lifestyle. Overton wanted a multifunctional design — a trend that's sweeping the country and fueling an "outdoor living" industry with so many tenacles it's difficult to attach a dollar figure.

"Ever since 9/11, people have really been turning inward, concentrating on their homes, and outdoor spaces have become commonplace in new homes as well as renovations," says Flowers of Sanctum Design Group. "We've definitely gone from a front-porch society to a backyard one."

In Overton's case, make that *side* yard. The location made the project atypical; he wanted to capitalize on views from several side rooms in his house instead of locating the pool in the backyard, where space was more limited. The setting begins with a side-entrance terrace that descends to the pool, with the gazebo-like outdoor room forming a focal point at the back.

The site, in turn, created the need for privacy, so Flowers landscaped the setting with tall conifers for screening.

The design emphasizes a circular motif, reflecting the curvilinear patterns found in nature, such as ponds and tree trunks, he says. The informal, organic-form swimming pool is edged with circular decks and flanked by a round hot tub and grotto. Materials mimic those in the house, including brick and cedar, further blending indoors and outdoors.

Inside the cedar gazebo, Flowers pulled out all the bells and whistles — a remote-controlled gas fireplace, a grill station with rotisserie, sink and refrigerator, and a waterproof LCD TV. Yet those amenities didn't drive the cost of the \$120,000 project, he says, so much as the design of the oversize pool with lap lane.

Which leads to Overton's advice for anyone planning an outdoor living space: "Have some flexibility in your budget. Things always cost more than you think they're going to cost."

Conversely, he points out, a professional designer can save you from costly mistakes. Plus, he says, such outdoor areas should be thought of as an addition to the home. "Besides, with Atlanta's climate so nice," he says, "you can enjoy a space like this practically year-round."

### A PRO'S ADVICE

Planning an outdoor space? Here's what landscape architect Tom Flowers of Sanctum Design Group advises:

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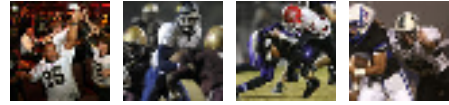
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- First, analyze your lifestyle and determine your needs. How will you use the space — simply for personal relaxation? Grand-scale entertaining? Will you be cooking? How often will you use the space? What time of day?
- Identify the site's limitations. Consider its terrain, exposure, access, utilities, trees (which can be expensive to remove for a pool, for example).
- Determine a "real-world" budget, whether the design is installed all at once or over time.
- Consider the various cost factors. Typically, hardscaping (stonework, structures, fences, walls) drives the cost, followed by a swimming pool, outdoor fireplace, major structural plants (such as shade trees and privacy screens) and amenities. Those features can vary, however (e.g., a portable grill vs. a gas fireplace). "You also can do all sorts of things to create a small space for just a few thousand dollars," Flowers says, such as a simple arbor over a bricked surface with a garden bench.
- Decide whether you can and want to do any of the project yourself. New prefab concrete pavers, which look more sophisticated than in the past, are fairly easy to lay, and pre-built arbors, which provide a canopy and sense of enclosure, are not difficult to install.

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