



Cooking, Conversation, and Contrast

Convivial spaces and impact pieces
infuse flair and practicality into this
fun-loving New Jersey backyard.

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A

larger-than-life toy duck sculpture perched beside a sparkling pool pretty much says it all: This is the place for fun.

“That sculpture is the quintessential example of who they are,” Philadelphia designer Michele Plachter says of her clients—a young, active family with two kids and two dogs. “They love to have a good time and wanted a welcoming yet sophisticated backyard where their guests would feel at ease.”

Plachter was more than game to take on the outdoor space. “As an interior designer, I like to have fun too,” she says. “So when I find a client who allows me to be creative, it’s a great match.” Plus, she’d already worked with the family from the ground up on their new transitional-style Colonial in Haddenfield, New Jersey.

Working from the inside out, she carried the home’s modern yet timeless black-and-white palette, the husband’s penchant for tech, and the interior’s focus on great entertaining spaces right out the back door.

First up was what the family calls the lanai, a term that connotes enjoying the good life in nature. It originates from a Hawaiian word for roofed, open-side structures. And while this structure is in an East Coast setting—not in the Land of Endless Summers—ceiling heating elements and a large fireplace make it possible to sit outside to watch movies or a football game year-round. A grill, wine cooler, and super comfortable seating add to the draw.

Beyond the lanai, the pool’s highly angular design makes a modern splash. With the exception of two gently curved in-pool lounge chairs, Plachter embraced the geometric impact, adding rectilinear lounge chairs and a boxy daybed. Graphic black-and-white fabrics impress in the laid-back scene.

“I like a hit of the unexpected,” Plachter explains. “It’s easy to find subtle patterns or solids, but we wanted to take this area to the next level to make it feel unique. The polka dots are a little more whimsical than what’s expected, which is what I love to do.”

That knack for the unanticipated even carries to one of the most basic enjoyment factors:

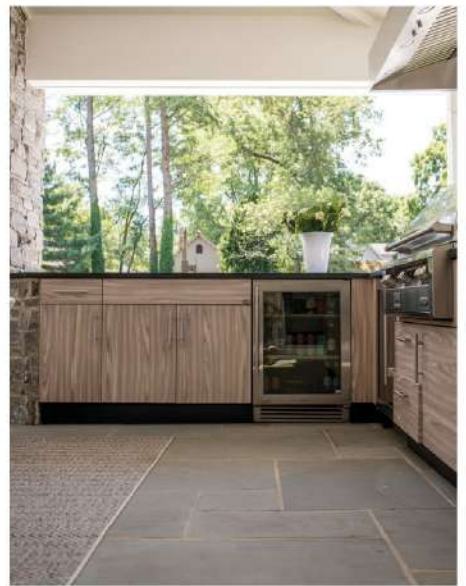


Above With style and comfort top priorities, designer Michele Plachter was thrilled to find these sculptural chairs that she special-ordered with outdoor fabric. “They may be the most comfortable outdoor chairs,” she says. “When I sat in them, I was like ‘Done and done.’”

Right Space-saving mahogany stools fold in neatly beneath the black leathered granite countertop when not in use.

Previous pages Pavers laid in a herringbone pattern distinguish the fire table area as its own outdoor room in the backyard of this Haddenfield, New Jersey, home. A dark-color fence visually recedes into the background.





Far right, top to bottom
Stainless-steel cabinets contribute a convincing wood aesthetic to the much-used outdoor kitchen. Black doors, each topped with a sconce, punch up the classic palette. A patterned cement-tile floor and shiplap walls give an island feel to the powder room with an exterior door.

eating outside. Pullout attached mahogany barstools solved a space problem at the L-shape dining bar. And the fire table, unlike regular firepits, provides a surface for trays of food. Then there are the hosts. She enjoys cooking in the outdoor kitchen; he's a tech guy who likes all the bells and whistles—and the idea that people can serve themselves by pushing buttons and tweaking levers of appliances, such as his Bier Meister beer dispenser that pours drinks on demand.

“It’s definitely the party backyard,” Plachter says, adding that it’s also very fashion-forward but super functional and welcoming. “I think people sometimes hesitate and play it safe when designing spaces in their own home,” she adds. “But what’s the fun in that?”



This photo The sleek pool furniture is juxtaposed by less-serious polka dots, geometrics, stripes, and a fanciful duck sculpture.





IN AND OUT

When creating a home's exterior spaces, designer Michele Plachter considers the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. For seamless style indoors and out, she shares these tips: **Invest in both.** People are sometimes surprised that outdoor furniture can be more expensive than indoor furniture. That's because it needs to resist the elements. "Part of my job is helping clients understand outdoor

spaces are a valuable investment and should be considered an extension of their home," Plachter says. **Include references.** Make connections so indoor and outdoor spaces feel cohesive but not "matchy-matchy." In this project, the black vanity in the powder room with an exterior door nods to the interior kitchen cabinets. **Add designer details.** Outdoor furnishings have come a long way from their

scratchy, homely days. Details and accessories previously reserved for interiors now show up in many outdoor items, including durable silky fabrics and fringed pillows, for a touch of glam. **Make comfort king.** "I want spaces to be beautiful, but they also need to be comfortable so people will want to spend more time outside. There's nothing worse than sitting on a cold hard chair," Plachter says.

Define rooms. Just as for interiors, give every outdoor space a functional purpose and a visual element that speaks to the other spaces. For instance, using different flooring materials or the same material laid in different pattern configurations helps distinguish and separate outdoor rooms. **Frame the view.** Pay attention to how the backyard looks through a home's windows to ensure continuity.

Above The versatile café-like dining area includes two tables that can be easily combined. **Opposite** The fiberglass duck sculpture proves a good conversation starter.



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