

Outdoor inspiration

Updating your living space doesn't have to break the bank — Southview Design offers tips and estimated costs to trick out your backyard

BY MOLLY GUTHREY

What does it cost to give your backyard a makeover?

That depends — but inspiration is free.

We checked in with the experts at Southview Design, a landscape design-build company, and asked them to break down three of their recent projects. You might find an element or two you'd like to recreate in your own yard.

Project: A backyard pool — and so much more.

Goals: A couple with demanding careers wanted to make their backyard a vacation destination for themselves as well as friends and family.

Elements: An in-ground pool and spa, pool house cabana, outdoor kitchen, putting green with artificial turf, patio with a gas fire table, wood-burning firepit, tiered retaining walls.

Designer's notebook: While this backyard is stocked with fun, designer Matt Burton says it can inspire at any price point: "When people see beautiful pictures of a project in a magazine, they might think, 'I want that, but I could never afford that,'" Burton says. "But most landscape companies and designers can work with any budget. Whether it's \$5,000 or \$150,000, it's all about creating a space to suit the

clients' needs."

No matter our backyard budget, we all pretty much want the same thing: "After you're done working a long day, you just want a place to put your feet up and enjoy some downtime with a glass of wine," Burton says. "Creating the space to do that is what we're here to do."

Pool: "I do probably three to five pools a year," Burton explains. He says pools are more common now than in years past, despite our tricky climate: "People's time is precious," he says. "They seem to be investing in the spaces they already live in, rather than buying a second home or cabin." A pool costs less than a cabin: "A basic pool is between \$30,000 and \$70,000," Burton says. Additional costs can include preparing the site, safety features such as covers and accessories like diving boards. Concrete pools cost more than vinyl or fiberglass; many Minnesota homeowners choose the vinyl option.

Spas: Spas — also known as hot tubs — can either be in-ground or aboveground, with in-ground options like the one used here costing more than aboveground. Burton says prices for models he'd recommend start around \$6,000.

OUTDOOR INSPIRATION, 3K>



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Patio: This project features a concrete paver patio (Belgard's Provence Slabs). What could yours cost? "A paver patio," Burton says, "will go for about \$15 to \$45 a square foot."

Firepit: "The average Minnesotan loves a good wood-burning firepit," Burton says. But a gas firepit can be nice, too: "You can turn it on and off and it throws off great heat but less than a wood burner." And yes, you can still roast marshmallows. Mobile firepits can be purchased for less than \$100 for wood-burning; custom, in-ground ones for wood or gas can cost thousands, depending on the material used.

Fire table: It's fire, it's furniture, it's both. A fire table is also similar to a gas grill. "If you are willing to change a tank in a grill, it's not a problem to change a fire tank," Burton says. Other benefits: "You can get multiple uses out of it and it can be moved around." A fire table can cost between \$200 and \$600, Burton says, or up to \$5,000 for a custom one that's built-in and finished in stone.

Sound system: "Al fresco sound" isn't as costly as you might think, Burton says: "You could have a reasonable system by Sonos Systems for between \$900 and \$3,000."

Outdoor landscape lighting: "Lighting is really the cherry on top," Burton says. "It sets it off. I think the key to lighting is you don't want to see the light fixture itself, you just want to see the ambiance of the lights." Also in the case of lighting: "Less is more, you have to be strategic" Burton says. "You don't want it to look like you're waiting for a 747 to land."

His advice is to begin with the basics: "You can start with the transformer and fixtures up front," Burton says. "You can always add on more later, but it's important to have the right transformer." What might it cost? "A standard lighting system with good fixtures and wires would run \$4,000 on the low end and up to \$15,000."

Putting green: While these clients added a small putting green to their backyard, next to the pool, it's not a common feature in Minnesota backyards: "We might install one every other year," Burton says. There are a couple of local companies that offer putting greens for the residential market, Burton explains, including Tour Greens. The DIYer can also purchase artificial turf rolls online.

Outdoor kitchen: This outdoor kitchen was

designed in concert with the pool house cabana, with a "caddy window" connecting it to the house's kitchenette. The good news is that an outdoor kitchen costs a lot less than our indoor versions. A big grill, a prep surface, a pizza oven — it just depends on what you want, and what kind of finishes, but expect prices to start around \$5,000.



Pool house cabana: Before you start making plans for a pool house cabana or similar backyard structure, be sure to check in with your local municipality regarding rules, laws and guidelines, says Dan Murphy of Kuhl Design + Build, the company that designed and built the pool house and collaborated with Southview Design for this backyard. "It's a cabin, with less driving," Murphy said. This pool house is designed for day trips, not sleepovers, but it includes a small kitchen, a full bathroom with a changing area, a fireplace and a loft. Prices vary, but you can find inspiration by searching for "portable pool house cabana" online. Local companies also offer ideas for everything from she sheds to portable studios to backyard bars to pool houses — browse the online photo galleries at tuffshed.com or the Shed Shop at theshedshopusa.com. Prices will likely start in the low thousands.

THINK VERTICAL

For a different project, Southview Design offered some unique solutions that may inspire your own outdoor living.

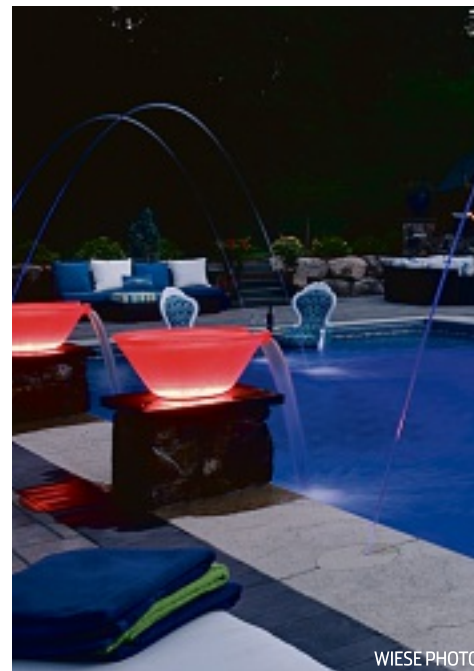
Challenge: A half-circle patio in the couple's backyard, original to the house and made of

concrete pavers, was deteriorating. The small patio also had no shade coverage and did not match the larger scale of the house.

Goals: The homeowners wanted a more usable patio space that could comfortably accommodate 8 to 12 people.

Elements: A new, larger patio with space for sitting, entertaining and dining; a wood-burning fireplace; a pergola built into a stone base; seating walls.

When setting the budget: If you need help prioritizing your backyard budget, designer Alyson Landmark offers this advice: "I encourage people to spend more money on the vertical elements — like a fireplace — rather than a patio, since the vertical elements are much more visible." In this case, the eye is drawn up to the pergola and the fireplace, not down to the patio — which is concrete — but with a twist. Do you notice how the concrete is accented with a flagstone walkway? It was a small upgrade that made a big statement due to its central location.



An outdoor living room: Step onto the family's new rectangular patio and look to your left: You will see a large dining table and chairs as well as a seating wall for serving or sitting. Or, look to the right: This is where you can settle into the comfy couch or chairs, enjoying the crackle from the blaze in the wood-burning fireplace and the shade from the pergola above. It really does feel like an extension of the house — and it's a good investment: "An outdoor living room really does add a lot of value," Landmark says.

Pergola: On this patio, the pergola is built into a stone base and a seating wall; the stone is repeated in the custom stone fireplace,

which is flanked on either side by built-in firewood storage. How much might a pergola cost for your backyard? A 12-foot by 12-foot wood pergola kit, including frost footings and installation, costs around \$8,000, Landmark says, with other materials such as fiberglass, costing more.

Shopping: Landmark often recommends people start their outdoor furniture shopping at Pottery Barn or Restoration Hardware. HOM Furniture or other local furniture stores also have outdoor lines.

MINNESOTA MEETS MIAMI

Finally, here's one more project to spark ideas.

Challenge: "They didn't use their yard because it sloped and had a lot of trees," Josh Koller of Southview Design explains.

Goals: The couple, who moved from Miami to Minnesota for their careers, thought a pool would make their new place feel more like home.

Elements: In addition to a pool and a spa, the backyard now has patio space and an outdoor fireplace.

Pool accessories: Pools, like people, can be accessorized. Lighted waterfall bowls make a dramatic statement and might cost between \$3,000 to \$7,000, Koller estimates. Pool jets with LED lights might start at \$2,500, he says. Sundecks — a shallow in-pool platform for sitting or wading — could start around \$6,000.

The in-pool armchairs for the sundeck were a Florida find, but Minnesotans can find pool chairs at local stores like Poolside, Koller says. Online, fun pool chairs can range from less than \$100 up to \$700 for a Ledge Lounger chaise. Or you can consider pool sectionals for more than \$3,000.

Outdoor fireplaces: If you don't want to invest in a custom, masonry outdoor fireplace, an investment costing well into the thousands, there are less expensive options, such as fireplace kits available at local home and garden stores; or Sunjoy's Bel Aire wood-burning outdoor fireplace, which can be purchased online for about \$1,400 and assembled easily at home.

Designer's advice: It's OK to start making plans without a price list in hand: "Get the design done first and go from there," Koller says. "Maybe, as a homeowner, decide to do everything all at once, maybe in phases, maybe you take things out or maybe you will find out you can add to the design."

Molly Guthrey is a frequent contributor to Spaces, where this article originally appeared.