



# From Unruly Field to Family Playground

Southview Design tames wild open space, transforming it into a luxurious backyard resort.

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In the late 1990s, Tom and Julie Tefft built their family's home in Dellwood on an especially large lot with memories of Minnesota farm life still lingering around them. They filled the rooms with furniture and the walls with family portraits. But the raw yard remained untended and undeveloped. There is something to be said for living with nature, kicking balls around open fields, but this is Minnesota. We like to spend as much time as possible outdoors after a long, dark winter. We want to soak up the short-lived sun.

So, in 2004, the Teffts agreed it was time to "add on" to their living space -- this time for outdoor living. Because of their fantastic experience with Imperial Builders, they asked for a referral to a landscape firm. Imperial suggested Southview Design Landscape Contractors. Tim Johnson was hired as the designer, and ideas began to flow.

The Teffts had a wish list. At the top was solving a rather serious drainage problem that had been a nuisance for five years. Second, third and fourth on the list? Let's have a pool, a basketball court,

**Opposite Page Top:** Wisconsin Chilton flagstone, set in a 4" concrete slab, forms the terrace.

**Opposite Page Bottom:** Looking away from the home, the deck has an extended view of the landscape.

**Above:** An attractive creek bed was created to deal with drainage problems. It includes ornamental grasses and bridges for crossing.



**Above: The pool area feels like a resort, set away from the home. The pool house provides the necessities of an afternoon in the sun – a bathroom, a refrigerator, a grill, and an outdoor shower.**

and plenty of room for kids of all ages. Solving the drainage problem and installing a swimming pool seemed mutually exclusive – at first. The south facing ground directly behind the home seemed the natural spot for a pool. But this location would only increase drainage problems; water would run right into it. Because the drainage from one neighbor drained into the Tefft’s backyard and the other neighbor’s yard was graded too high, the water was essentially trapped. Additionally, the back yard was mostly weeds and native grasses

and the sod had a tendency to die off each year due to standing water. These problems seemed like the metaphorical “lemon.” But Johnson was determined to make lemonade.

He played with the layout and asked himself, “What if the pool was sited away from the home over a man-made creek bed made of stone and lined with ornamental grasses? What if there were small bridges over it with a path and stairs leading to the pool area, set on higher ground? What if we added a pool house so that, since the pool



is away from the main house, the family would have a changing room, a bathroom, and a service kitchen?" The whole thing began to sound like a resort in the back yard and the Teffts decided this could be even better than they imagined.

The design process took several months and included the task of defining the various areas for activities – dining, a fire pit, sport court, the pool house and, of course, the pool.

"I like to think of the areas as rooms, like in a home. You might have a room that is carpeted,

then a room with wood floors. I approach the materials outside in the same way," Johnson explains.

Drawing from a natural palette of materials, he began with an unusually beautiful Chilton flagstone from Wisconsin to create the dining area adjacent to the home. It is set on a 4" concrete slab, which allows for easier use of furniture, providing a flatter surface. This material is repeated around the fire pit and is used as pathways. A rough-cut limestone is used for stairs and as the foundation

**Above Top: Johnson uses a variety of materials to define specific areas. Here, he uses Chilton fieldstone to encircle the fire pit. Stamped concrete surrounds the pool.**

**Above Bottom: Sports are an important part of this family's life. Johnson designed an open field for soccer and a basketball court next to the pool area.**



**Above Top:** The Wisconsin Chilton fieldstone is also used to create charming paths that lead to the creek bed. Rough-cut limestone is used as the base for the wooden bridges.

**Above Bottom:** The low-maintenance plant material is supported by an automatic drip watering system. The daylilies are perennials that add color but require little attention.

for the small wooden bridges. Fieldstone boulders were selected for retaining walls. For the pool, Johnson chose stamped, colored concrete because it looks like pavers, but still keeps dirt and debris out of the pool. It is also used to edge the pool, giving a more finished look than the standard plastic liner.

Once the pool house was sited, Imperial Homes became involved in the design and construction of the small, but important, building. Johnson is especially pleased with their contribution to the



project. It is so deftly designed that Julie and the children can “trek” to the pool in the morning, with a small supply of food and not return until the sun has set. The pool house provides a changing room, a small kitchen with refrigerator, sink and grill; a bathroom; and storage for tucking away cushions in the winter months. An outdoor shower rinses away the salts from the water used in the mineral pool.

Surrounding the pool area, Johnson selected evergreens, ornamental grasses, deciduous shrubs



and perennials watered with a drip irrigation system. The plant material includes Burning Bush, a Hindu Pan Pine, Tannenbaum Spruce, stately Birch and summery Hydrangea. Behind this cultivated ground is a broad expanse of prairie, which everyone agreed should remain natural. A basketball court and open field for soccer is adjacent to the pool, which provides a cool rinse after a rigorous game.

Although the original vision was quite different than the end result, the project couldn't have

turned out more perfectly. Julie says, "I love how the pool is off by itself. You can make a day of it. I don't even bring my phone."

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[southviewdesign.com](http://southviewdesign.com)  
 Landscape Designer: Tim Johnson

**Pool:** Poolside  
[poolside.biz](http://poolside.biz)

**Pool House:**  
 Imperial Homes, Inc.  
[imperialhomesinc.com](http://imperialhomesinc.com)

**Concrete Work:**  
 Southside Concrete  
[southsideconcrete.com](http://southsideconcrete.com)

**Fence:**  
 Keller Residential  
[kellerres.com](http://kellerres.com)

**Above: Fieldstone boulders create a retaining wall, limestone steps lead from the driveway into the family's playground.**