

River Revival

THE PERFECT FOCAL POINT FOR A BACKYARD TRANSFORMATION

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The open patio surrounding the pool overlooks a steeply sloped hillside with graceful curved walkways and natural granite steps leading to a charming screened cottage. Once hidden and inaccessible, the backyard has been transformed into a welcoming riverside retreat.





When Tim and Anne Halvorsen retired, they knew they wanted to live in a vibrant community away from Boston traffic. They wanted to see the water from their home and have access to a deepwater dock and the ocean. After searching for a year, they found what they were looking for on the banks of the Cocheco River in Dover, New Hampshire.

Three years ago, the couple purchased their riverfront home. A mature stand of arborvitae shielded the backyard pool from the neighbors and the concrete patio was narrow and several steps below the back entrance to the house. The chain link fence surrounding the pool was overgrown with shrubs, which hid the view. Just beyond the fence, the backyard sloped down sixty vertical feet before reaching the banks of the river.

But the property had potential. "This was one of the few homes on the market that had a deepwater dock," said Tim. "So we set about trying to turn the place into something that looked like it was on the river."

Their goal was to open up the view beyond the fence and create a large, welcoming space for entertaining. They planned to add a porch next to the house to provide an outdoor eating area overlooking the property, a larger patio and vibrant flower gardens surrounding the pool and a stone walkway leading down the hill to a small, screened cottage where they could enjoy the view of the river.

To make their conception a reality, Tim and Anne hired Matt and Jenn Gunn of Fat Cod Plantscape in Stratham, New Hampshire. "They seemed to have a really cool vision that was in sync with where we were heading," said Anne.

As the concrete patio, chain link fence and overgrown shrubs surrounding the pool were removed, it became clear that the Cocheco River would be the focal point of the landscape design. The large porch designed by Matt and built by his brother Cameron, provided a perfect setting for the existing hot tub to overlook the pool, gardens and river. "The hot tub used to be right outside the door," said Tim. "Now we have a great view and a much better hot tub experience."

The next step was to determine the size and shape of the patio. "We wanted more space," said Tim, "but not so much that it would actually interrupt the view of the river." The curved design, repeated in the walkway below, allowed them to nearly double the size of the patio.

The patio and walkway blend into the hillside in simple harmony. "We used the arborvitae hedge as a starting point to determine the radius of an imaginary circle," said Matt. "That measurement was used to create the curved line of the patio. The walkway follows that same line, tying the entire design together."

While the hardscape elements are designed to blend into the landscape, the flowers command attention. "We knew from working on the site that the area was really hot and sunny," said Jenn. "Also, both Tim and Anne really like



Facing Page: A new porch with a commanding view of the river provides a smooth transition from the inside of the home to the poolside patio. Surrounded by vibrant flower gardens, the patio is a welcoming space for friends and family to gather. | Above: With the transformation complete, Tim and Anne Halvorsen are able to take advantage of their deepwater dock and enjoy the comforts of their riverfront home. | Below: "Before" photos show the narrow concrete patio surrounding the pool. The backyard and river were completely hidden from view by overgrown shrubs along a chain link fence.





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The backyard slopes more than sixty vertical feet down to the banks of the Cochecho River. About halfway down the hill stands a small screened cottage, perfect for taking in the view and enjoying the breeze. With an exposed spruce wood ceiling, cedar flooring and cedar shingle siding, the small cottage is well suited to the surrounding woods and invites its visitors to curl up with a good book and a glass of wine.





Above: The granite walkway surrounded by Japanese maples and junipers is designed to blend into the natural landscape. It contrasts nicely with the vibrant colors of the flower gardens that surround the pool and sets a more reflective tone for the rest of the property. Pictured below are the bright pink flowers of *Phlox* 'Candy Floss' and white and yellow *Leucanthemum* 'Sunny Side Up'.



bright, vibrant colors and wanted as much color as possible for the time they are at the house. They also wanted a lower maintenance garden. So we choose perennials with a June to August bloom, vibrant colors and a long bloom time."

After reviewing photos of gardens with Tim and Anne, Jenn selected the plants. The pool is surrounded by bright pink flowers, which include *Armeria* 'Bloodstone', *Phlox* 'Candy Floss', *Hibiscus* 'Fantasia' and *Monarda* 'Petite Delight'. Splashes of blue are provided by *Veronica* 'Royal Candles' and *Echinops ritro*. Yellow *Coreopsis* 'Jethro Tull' and 'Zagreb' are interspersed with white *Platycodon* 'Fairly Snow' and the aptly named *Leucanthemum* 'Sunny Side Up'. A row of *Panicum* 'Heavy Metal', a native marsh grass common near brackish waters, was planted to soften the edge near the arborvitae.

Nearby is a native granite fountain. "The fountain was, in the overall scheme of the project, somewhat discretionary," said Anne. "And Tim insisted that we keep it. He was right. The water sound is just so nice out there and it's illuminated at night, so it reflects in the pool. It really is very pretty."

Leaving the pool area, the gardens take on the feel of woods. The granite-veneered retaining wall provides a backdrop for Japanese maples and junipers. "Junipers are often relegated to a second-class plant because you see so many of them in parking lots," explained Matt. "But they are wicked durable. They'll take the heat and dry of that hill really well and once they grow and spread, there will be no need to maintain them, because there won't be any weed competition."

A short way down the hill stands a screened cottage designed and built by Daytes Garvin of Siren Design Works. Tim and Anne first worked with Daytes when they renovated their kitchen. "He's a real artist," said Anne. "We worked together to create the screen house, but really it was Daytes's design. He listened to what we wanted and turned it into something really cool."

The cottage features an exposed spruce wood ceiling, cedar flooring and cedar shingle siding. With electricity, wireless Internet access and a wine refrigerator, it is the perfect place to relax. One wall of the cottage is completely open, providing an unencumbered view of the river. Daytes believes that structures should revolve around their surroundings. "In this case," he said, "you've got the river, a steep slope and a house behind it, so orientation is critical to obtain the views and make sure you have access to the building without obstructing access to the river."

Tim and Anne now enjoy their riverside retreat with friends and family. "We're in love with everything," said Tim. "It just came out great!" ■

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