BEST NEW REMODEL IDEAS

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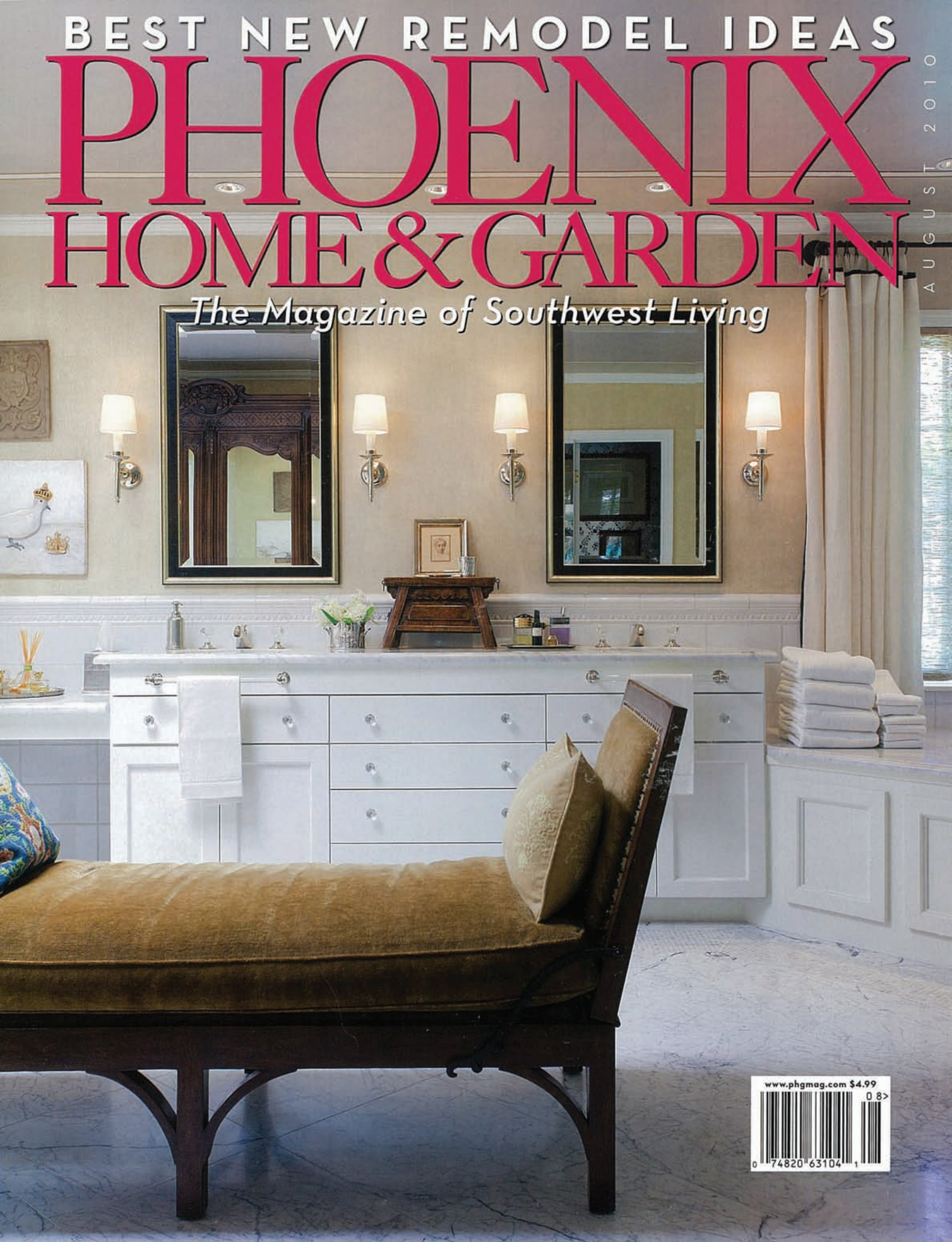

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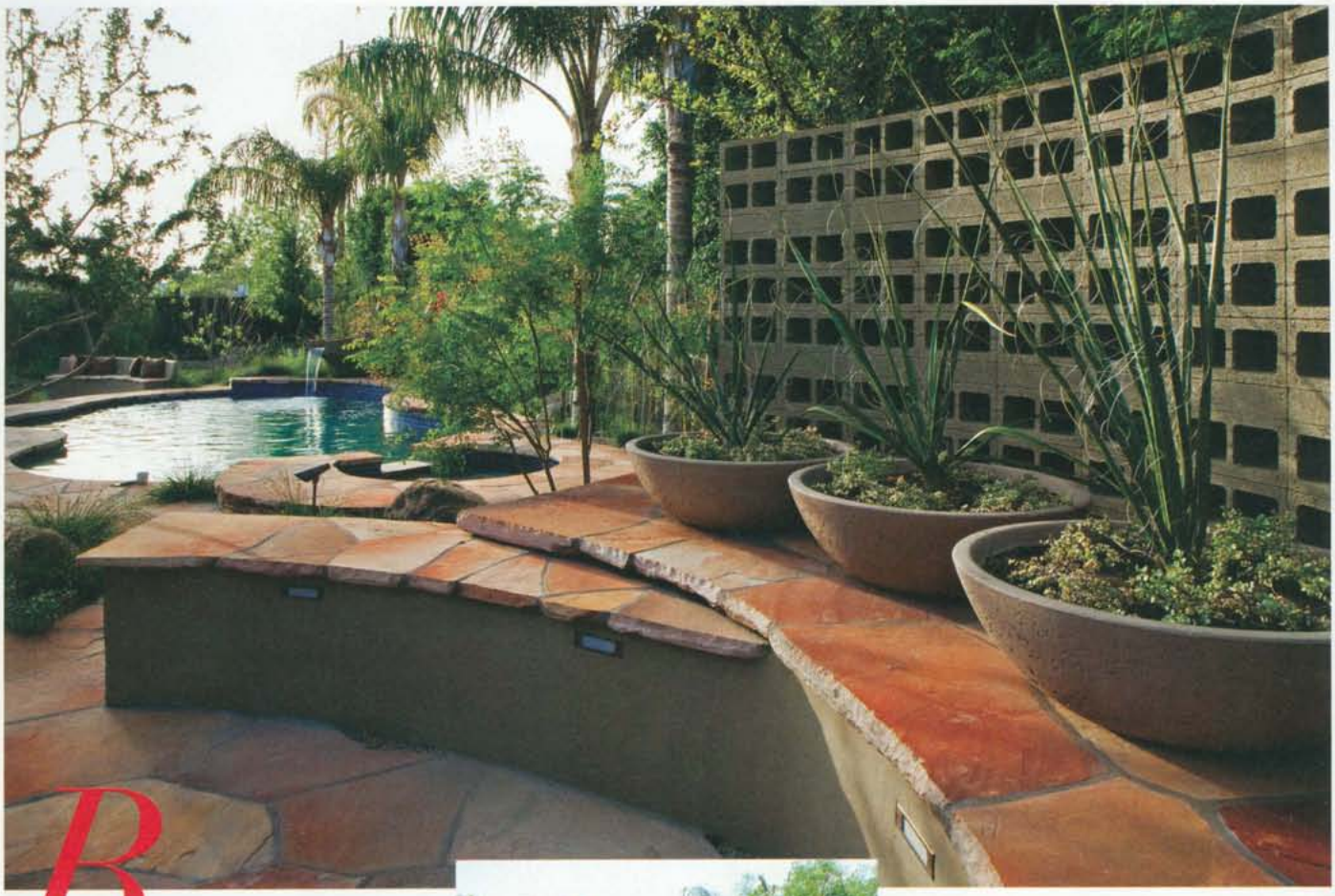
BEFORE

NEW ATTITUDE

A REVAMPED BACKYARD TURNS A FAMILY INSIDE OUT

TEXT BY ROBERTA LANDMAN ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD MAACK

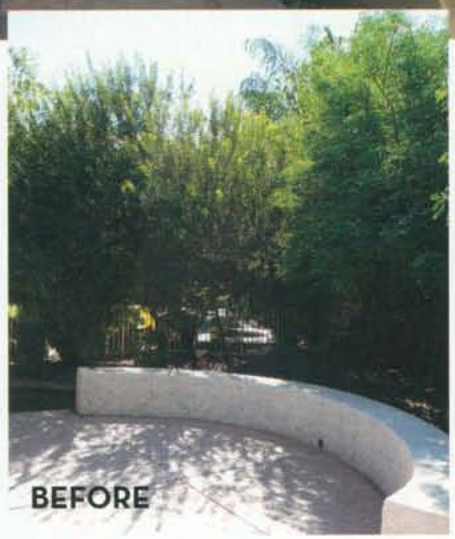
A new flagstone deck on an existing pool and spa transformed this once plain-looking Tempe backyard. Landscape designer Troy Bankord also used the stone as a unifying element in other areas of the yard, creating a series of outdoor "rooms" that facilitate entertaining and relaxation.



Before getting down to the nitty gritty of deciding which plant goes where in a backyard re-do, landscape designer Troy Bankord has something else on his mind.

"I try to figure out the clients' lifestyle and what it takes to get them out and use the space," he explains. In the makeover of this once-"tired" Tempe yard, the Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest succeeded in his goal—and exceptionally well, apparently.

Notes the homeowner, a mother of two daughters ages 11 and 13, "We are out there all the time." If she sets a table inside, she relates, "The kids demand, '"No, let's eat outside."'



BEFORE

What is it that is pulling them outdoors? Aside from a new barbecue and patio, well-chosen plantings and an existing pool area modernized with a sculptural water feature, there is a recessed fire-pit that is a conversation piece in itself—and a magnet for kids and adults alike, the homeowner declares.

"The girls love it," she says of the fire element. "It has been used for birthday parties with 15 teenage girls roasting marshmallows for s'mores." For her own entertaining, the spot is a natural gathering place for adults to relax and enjoy a glass of wine.

Before the backyard's conversion, "It looked like a standard family backyard, with a pool fence cutting it in half," the homeowner recalls. "And there was a lot of grass that we were not using." The semicircular fire pit and its expansive seating area took the place of much of that grass.

Bankord describes the revamped yard as "a huge cul de sac lot that wraps its arms around you." Of the newly defined and refurbished areas he set in place, the landscape designer notes, "I wanted individual 'rooms' that flow together." He organized that flow by incorporating similar plants in each space.

For example, at the fire pit area, a wispy clump of Berkeley Sedge appears as if it "blew in from seed and is growing wild," explains Bankord. "There is also one in a wok pot, and this plant is used a lot around the garden to tie things together."

He thinned out the backyard's overgrown plants and trees, kept several existing ones, and added new varieties with a sense of purpose. "The butterflies love lantana, and the hummingbirds love hesperaloe," Bankord states. A few existing red Baja fairy duster plants were augmented to attract both birds and butterflies.

Providing a sensory experience for people, too, was important. "We added Italian cypress. The homeowner loves their fragrance and their air of romance," Bankord says. Arabian jasmine is planted around citrus trees, all of which create lovely aromas when in bloom, he reports.

"It is much more than I imagined it would be," the happy homeowner says of her revitalized backyard. "Literally, when people come over, we head right outside. It is used constantly."

This page: Filled with colorful plants, including firestick and kalanchoe, a stone wok pot sits at the water's edge. A large poured- and sandblasted concrete water feature was added during the re-do. Water cascades into the pool through a wide scupper. **Opposite:** Troy Bankord replaced an ordinary-looking curved banco on the dining patio with a bi-level, flagstone-topped seating area with built-in lighting backed by a decorative concrete-block wall. The three wok pots contain giant hesperaloe and variegated elephant's food plants.

Opposite top: At various times, artichokes, squash and other vegetables grow alongside a colorful array of pansies, sunflowers and lavender in the raised garden bed. It is located outside a kitchen window on the east side of the house, where citrus trees lend shade and fragrance. Flagstone pavers lead to the inviting spot, and a new flagstone cap unites the walled garden with the rest of the yard. **Opposite bottom:** The sunken fire pit has become the highlight of the made-over yard, the lady of the house reports. Bancos seat 10 to 12 people, and more can gather at the popular spot if chairs are drawn up. "It has a campfire feel," Troy Bankord says of the gas-fired pit. "You can feel the heat all the way to your feet." **Above:** Before the backyard renovation, "The patio was small and not inviting," adds Bankord. To enlarge it, he removed the existing pink flagstone and added a broad and continuous sweep of darker flagstone. Its deeper hue has an organic feel and also makes plants "pop," he notes. **Right:** Swiss chard and Spanish lavender coexist prettily in this garden vignette.

See Sources.