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POOLSIDE VIEW From right: Loungers by Brown Jordan encourage lingering in the new landscape, while hand-carved marble tables add indoor luxe to the outdoor space; the in-ground pool was the starting point, and inspiration, for Mariani's backyard renovation.

LABOR OF LOVE

When two perfectionists join forces, the finished product is paradise.

By Katie Schroeder | Photography by Tony Soluri

To say Frank Mariani has completed the outdoor space of his Lake Forest home would be a slight misstatement. Although the owner of Mariani Landscape (marianilandscape.com)—one of the country's top residential and commercial landscape design firms—recently redesigned the entertaining area on his 10-acre oasis, he admits it's never finished. **CONTINUED...**



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-FRANK PONTERIO



...CONTINUED "If I think about 26 years ago when the pool went in, I thought the backyard was a great space," Mariani says of the property he bought in 1986. "Every morning, I work out on my elliptical, and instead of watching news shows, I spend more time looking out the window at this outdoor space, thinking about what my next landscape design addition is going to be."

He teamed up with award-winning interior designer Frank Ponterio (frankponterio.com), who also happens to be a friend and neighbor, to update the space and make it four-season sustainable. "Even though I'm a professional," says Mariani, "bringing in a professional like Frank just takes it that next step up." Topping the wish list was an outdoor gourmet kitchen where guests could congregate while Mariani cooks, as well as the addition of a poolside fireplace with plush chairs, comfortable seating around the pergola-covered dining table and multiple lounge areas for guests. Ponterio applied his interior design talent to the task, and the resulting outdoor 'rooms' blend seamlessly with their functionality and visual flow.

"Part of what I really enjoy about what we did here is that nothing screams louder than anything else; it's all in balance," says Ponterio. "[Mariani] has a family dinner every Sunday, and when he entertains, it could be 10 to 100 people, so having a large space for everyone as well as small, intimate spaces within that is really great."

Mariani tips his hat to Ponterio for zoning in on a classic design and subdued palette to accompany the natural colors of his garden's English-countryside aesthetic. "When I was younger, I didn't want to see one leaf on the ground, but now, I kind of love it when CONTINUED...

MOVABLE FEAST

From above: Lounge chairs by Michael Taylor in Holly Hunt outdoor fabric anchor the seating area. The custom stone-topped table is by Murray's Iron Works. The garden stool provides an extra surface, or extra seating, when Mariani has one of his frequent dinner parties; Frank Ponterio and Frank Mariani.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CATHERINE VATTIOLAP



SEASONS CHANGE
From above: A cozy space for two; a seating area and outdoor fireplace were additions to the space that, with a few blankets, can now be used year-round.

...CONTINUED a few leaves fall on the patio, and it looks more natural," he says. "It's softer, so it doesn't have to be precise; it just has to be sound in design. I think we've accomplished that, and I think Frank complemented that with his choice of furniture and fabrics."

The estate also includes vegetable and herb gardens, an orchard with pear and apple trees, beehives, and enough potted plants and florals to attract its own population of hummingbirds and butterflies.

It probably won't surprise Ponterio to know Mariani plans to install a natural, eco-friendly pond to cultivate water-loving flowers, soften the pergola with fabric and build a 20-foot-high platform atop one of the oak trees overlooking the property.

"The two of us are so similar that we're just going to keep going," says Mariani. "He's just slightly opinionated, like I am, but we challenge each other, and I think we're both better off because of it." ■