

Mimi Masri designed the exterior for the 2016 Red Cross Designers' Show House. Notice how the box within a box lighting echoes the architecture and the blue and white color scheme ties the loggia into the pool.

Photography by Carmel and Robert Brantley



A dip into Great Design

By Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub

Whether you want to create an inviting atmosphere for entertaining outdoors or just add a pool, pergola or outdoor kitchen, the choices you make can transform your backyard into the perfect setting for relaxing at home.



Connecting inside and out

Everyone got to choose the space they wanted to design for the 2016 Palm Beach Red Cross Designers' Show House, and that left Mimi Masri – one of the chairs of the event – the outdoor space nobody else wanted. The 40th year for the show house was staged in a converted firehouse in the Old Northwood neighborhood of West Palm Beach.

That's the price of leadership but she saw it as a challenge, not a penalty.

The summer kitchen and pool space wasn't very attractive but she enhanced it by enclosing the loggia, putting wood ceramic tile on the garage wall backing the kitchen and adding four carved ribbed wood panels to separate the kitchen from the pool area.

"Outdoor kitchens can be beautiful but you don't want to look at them, especially when you are giving a party," she says.

Masri finished the look with blue and white curtains, accessories and 1-inch wide plantation shutters finished in a cobalt blue powder-coated paint to match the pool tile.

"The exits to the pool deck were very tall and very small," she says. "It felt like a silo." Her remedy? Four large square-within-a-square lighting fixtures by World Imports that mimic the architecture, reduce the height of the space visually and tie everything together.

What's her best advice?

"Be bold. The space tells us what we need and we do it."

Clockwise, Masri upgraded the outdoor kitchen by backing it with wood ceramic tile. Carved wood panels separate it from the pool deck and add architectural interest. The loggia furnishings provide separate sections for dining and conversation. The long, narrow loggia became more intimate with plantation shutters painted cobalt blue; and she added a built-in concrete sofa to save space.

Photography by Carmel and Robert Brantley



Making some shade

Watermark Construction has a reputation for designing beautiful pools with all the latest features, such as waterfalls, spas, water jets, bubblers and beach entries.

Besides custom pool design, they are also on top of the latest trends in outdoor entertaining.

“What’s new and trending is people are definitely looking to expand their outdoor living spaces,” says owner Bryan McCallum. “We started a couple of years ago with pergolas, fire pits and outdoor kitchens. Now when someone does a remodel these features are expected.”

Every pergola and outdoor kitchen is custom designed for the space. The structure can be attached to the house or built on the pool deck.

Clients request a variety of options, some as simple as a grill with a propane tank, he says. Others ask for a BBQ island with granite countertops, top-of-the-line grills, refrigerators and sinks. Many are asking for higher-end appliances that are built to last longer in our Florida weather.

Open pergolas should withstand hurricanes as long as they have the proper footers to hold them down, he says. The open structure prevents lift by the wind much like proper pruning of trees prevents them from coming out of the ground. For those who desire more shade and protection from the rain, Watermark also offers awning structures that open and close.

“People are spending more time at home and entertaining more at home,” he says. “They want these features to expand their entertaining space.”

Top left, the pergola with outdoor kitchen is finished in Brazilian walnut with a waterfall side of travertine. The pergola on the right is a classic design with Corinthian columns designed for an accent, not shade. The pergola pictured on the bottom is attached to the house with simple Roman Tuscan columns and an outdoor kitchen protected by a roof.



Water, water everywhere

The contemporary trend of clean lines has moved from inside to outside in the latest pool designs.

Greg McIntosh of GSM Builders has seen the changes in the five years he has been in the business of constructing new pools and remodeling older pools.

“The clients want pools that are more streamlined with geometric straight lines rather than free form,” he says.

Infinity pools, with an edge that appears to make the water flow onto the landscape or surrounding water, are popular along with spas that overflow 360 degrees, bubblers, shallow-water sun shelves and fire bowls. He says the popularity of LEDs have allowed pool designers to create a light show of four or five changing colors. Clients are also asking for travertine pool decks, but the stone is porous and requires a sealer.

His previous experience was in landscaping, which puts him in a good position to suggest the right plants to use poolside so they won't drop leaves or pods into the water. He suggests using Zoyzia grass, which has good tolerance to shade, salt and traffic. Sylvester palms and bromeliads are other good choices.

The design at left has an infinity edge that looks like it flows into the water and a separation between the hot tub and the pool. Greg McIntosh says more clients are looking for streamlined pools, like the straight-line design above.

Sources

Bryan McCallum: Watermark Construction, 4460 N. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale, 954-776-3338, watermarkconstructionfl.com.

Greg McIntosh: GSM Builders, 2701 E. Oakland Park Blvd., Suite A, Fort Lauderdale, 954-605-4451, gsmbuilders.com.

Mimi Masri: 1902 S. Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, 561-671-1958, mmdesignsllc.com.