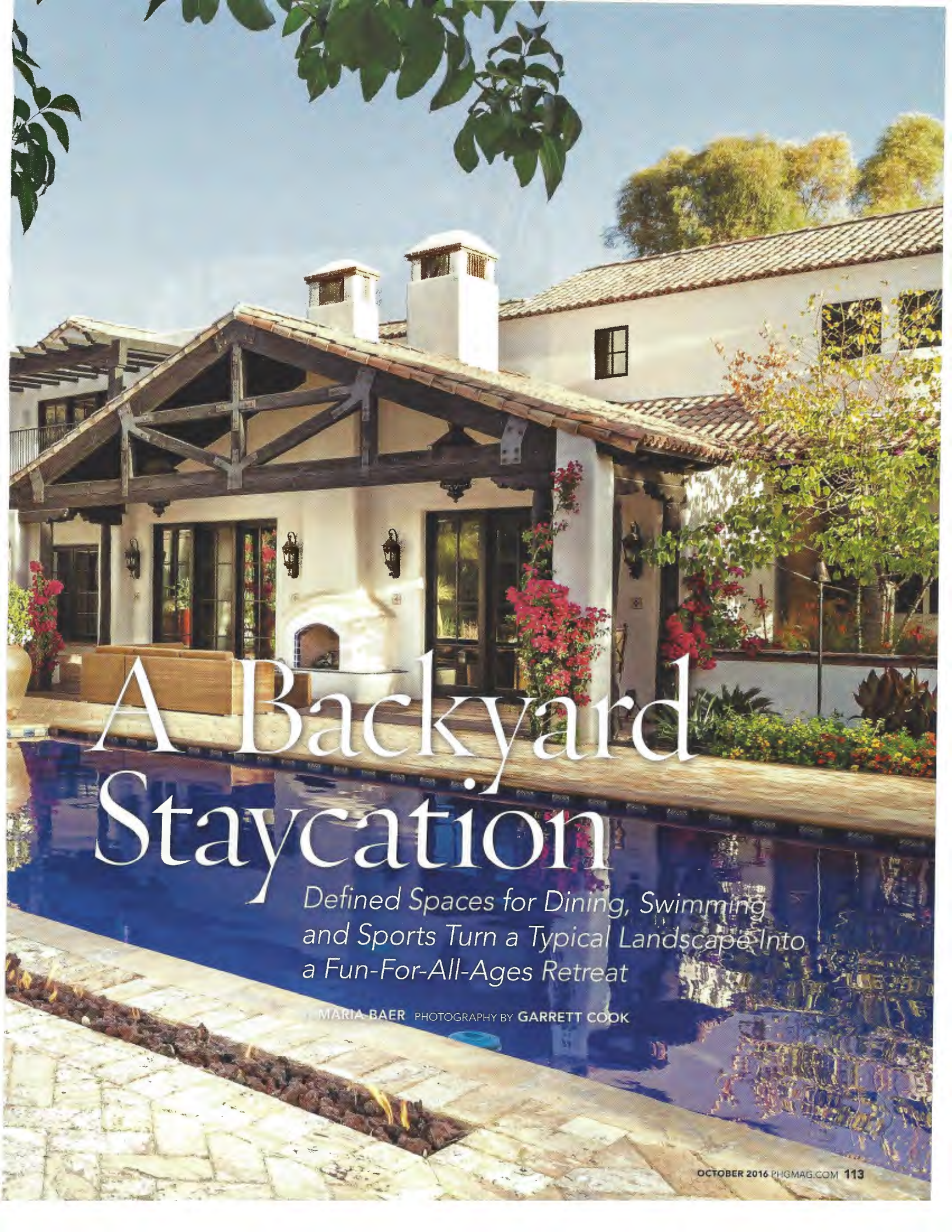




The expansive backyard was designed to accentuate the home's Spanish Mediterranean style, which is embodied in the tile roof, dark woodwork and chunky columns. Palm trees, flowering bougainvillea and an array of potted plants contrast colorfully with the clean, white stucco, while the handcrafted blue and white tiles add Spanish charm to the pool and spa.





# A Backyard Staycation

*Defined Spaces for Dining, Swimming  
and Sports Turn a Typical Landscape Into  
a Fun-For-All-Ages Retreat*

*MARIA BAER* PHOTOGRAPHY BY *GARRETT COOK*



**T**O VISIT THIS RESORTLIKE BACKYARD IN the middle of a hidden Paradise Valley neighborhood is to take a tour that never ends. Around each corner is another enclave, another place to put your feet up, play a game or fire up another grill. “We ended up creating a space that’s more of a party house than anything,” says landscape architect Chad Robert. “The homeowners have almost everything you can imagine.” He’s not exaggerating.

The project was a tall order, as the family has what could be considered the ultimate entertaining challenge: two teenage boys. But thanks to the help of the *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner, they seem to have created a space their kids never want to leave.

Their house, which was built in the late '80s, is a sprawling Spanish Mediterranean abode complete with white stucco and contrasting deep brown wooden elements, sweeping arches and massive columns. Inspired by its style, Robert took the theme and ran with it, filling the backyard with brilliantly colored tile, textured flooring, multileveled destinations, more columns and scrolling ironwork.

There are numerous seating arrangements, including an intimate table for two next to a spa-like three-headed fountain and a concrete Mexican-tiled bench surrounding a huge, ornate fire pit, as well as a sporting zone complete with volleyball, basketball and bocce courts. But more than just







Landscape architect Chad Robert removed a center column of the back porch overhang to make room for a large, comfy seating arrangement on which friends and family can gather around the outdoor fireplace on chilly evenings. Spanish-style wrought iron lighting, brilliant blue accent tiles and colorful bougainvillea enhance the yard's old-world atmosphere.



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more of a party house than anything.

—Chad Robert, landscape architect







Dramatic Spanish-style chandeliers and heavy Tuscan stone columns add noble character to the sunken ramada. Swimmers can escape from the sun's harsh rays while enjoying a light snack or drink, or they can keep cool in the water at the fun, swim-up bar.





Heavy stone is displayed throughout the yard on columns, fountains and fire features, such as this one. A concrete banco covered in Mexican tiles surrounds the fire pit. According to the homeowners, it's a popular hangout spot for guests.

places to relax or shoot a few hoops, the backyard is also chock-full of opportunities for America's other favorite pastimes: cooking and eating.

Aside from the swaying palm trees and a towering old mesquite tree—one of the homeowners' favorite elements—the backyard's focal point is a sunken ramada at the pool's edge. The five-star-worthy setup takes a page straight out of the books of nearby Scottsdale resorts. In the center of the space is a long, bar-height wooden table with iron studs—from which diners can view the pool—and a big-screen TV. It's flanked on one side by a wall of water that cascades into the pool and an oversized charcoal grill area on the other. A few paces away is an adobe-style pizza oven. Growing happily behind the oven is a small crop of oregano. It seems the designers thought of everything, including dinner.

With a roof that is supported by thick, Roman Tuscan columns, the ramada's open design keeps the space cool in the summer, while heaters in the ceiling keep it open for business in the cool

winter months. According to the wife, she and her husband love using the ramada for family happy hours while the kids and their friends swim.

A second grilling and bar area closer to the house features a gas grill, refrigerator and smoker. For those who can't wait for the grill to heat up, they can choose something a little more fresh-picked. The backyard has as many citrus varieties as it does entertaining destinations, including tangerines, grapefruits, key limes and even kumquats. Most grow in a little grove on the edge of the yard in a place Robert designed specially for two other VIP family members: the dogs.

There's Rottweiler, Chomper, and Delilah, a Cane Corso. Both large breeds—Delilah is about the size of a Great Dane—they need a place to stretch their long legs and run. "They have to look at something pretty, too!" the wife laughs. Robert gave the canines their own resortlike area, complete with an air-conditioned adobe doghouse in front of a little pond and a long, grass-covered run.






Robert left no detail unattended, including adding intricately detailed Mexican tile on the stair risers. This bar, which is located just outside the back door, features a gas grill and refrigerator, as well as a big-screen TV for prime Super Bowl viewing. The industrial-style barstools echo those used in the nearby ramada.







A large, vibrant swimming pool is the centerpiece of a lush backyard. The pool's edge is finished with brilliant blue and white checkered tiles. The water is crystal clear and sparkling. The pool is surrounded by a light-colored stone deck. In the background, several tall palm trees stand against a clear blue sky. A white building with a terracotta roof is visible on the right. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with a mountain range in the distance.

The star of the backyard is the large, colorful pool. The homeowners' persistence for finding just the right brilliant cobalt tile for the pool paid off. The color complements the cream travertine decking, while the crystal clear water brings to mind images of the Mediterranean Sea.

The pool is the yard's showstopping feature, with its brilliant blue tile and sparkling azure waters.





**ABOVE AND RIGHT:** The yard is filled with numerous private courtyards, intimate seating areas and trickling water features that mask outside noises. "What I did was create cozier spaces," says Robert. "Different destinations with different feelings, so at different times of the year, the homeowners have a lot of different options."





Mostly, however, the happy pets can be found in the pool. “They’re in there every single night,” the wife says. “We have our routine: the kids swim, the dogs swim, and we have happy hour,” she notes with a smile.

The pool is the yard’s showstopping feature, with its brilliant blue design and sparkling azure waters. The homeowners spent the better part of a year searching for just the perfect shade of cobalt blue tile, and they had considerable difficulty finding something bright enough. But they stuck with their original vision, and the end result is a jaw-dropping homage to the vibrant blues of the Mediterranean Sea.

Like the backyard, the pool is a world within a world, with several zones for play or relaxation, including a volleyball net, a raised spa, a shallow submerged platform with a built-in umbrella and—of course—the swim-up bar, which brings together the pool partiers and the ramada dwellers.

The homeowners also host at least one big party a year in the backyard. Their favorite: Super Bowl parties. The couple are ardent hometown fans, but even if the Cardinals aren’t playing, their perfectly landscaped yard is an ideal spot for a memorable night, whether you stay for the entire game or you’re just there for the halftime show. ■



**TOP:** A variety of colorful tiles adds a touch of whimsy to a stone water fountain and patio.

**LEFT:** A large charcoal grill with an adjustable grate is built into a counter in the ramada.

**ABOVE:** A gently burbling water feature blends seamlessly with the many planters scattered through the yard.

*See Sources.*