

LANDSCAPE + POOL HOUSE CONSTRUCTION: E.J. Jaxtiner Builder, Inc.
ARCHITECT: Patrick Ahearn Architect LLC
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Bernice Wahler Landscapes
PLANT MATERIALS: Cape Coastal Nursery



A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

The addition of a pool house spawns the creation of an outdoor living area set in a native landscape.

One would be hard pressed to recognize Dr. Susan O’Bell’s Federal-style home in West Barnstable as a reproduction built in the mid 1980s. “The house looks like it has been there for 200 years,” she muses. “It’s like a Nantucket sea captain’s house with that widow’s walk.” Such was the intent, as the house is located in a historic district—a fact that shaped not only its character but also that of the landscape around it.

By Kiley Jacques | Photography by Kyle J. Caldwell

Seizing the opportunity

It was during the construction of a new pool and pool house that O'Bell and her husband, an attorney in Boston, decided to revamp the outdoor space at the rear of their property. Faced with an unkempt landscape defined by myriad slopes, simple stone walls and a small brick patio, the call was made to clear the slate and start fresh. "There was the house, the driveway, black pines and scrubby trees and underbrush, and not much else," recalls O'Bell, adding that the space was not all that user-friendly. Ultimately, the project evolved to include a major re-grade of the topography and the addition of new garden beds, terraces and retaining walls.

Patrick Ahearn Architect's Mike Tartamella, the lead architect for the pool house project, suggested O'Bell hire a landscape

designer to address the aftermath of heavy equipment and to explore opportunities for improvement. "It made sense to level the grade and add gardens to create a much larger, functional outdoor living area that would accommodate the children," explains O'Bell, noting the addition of a generous "play lawn."

"This idea of outdoor living really changed the dynamic of the whole backyard and house," says project manager Jonathan Jaxtmer of Hyannis-based E.J. Jaxtmer Builder, Inc., the builder responsible for both the pool house construction and the landscape installation. Jaxtmer notes, too, that they also built the main house in 1985. "It was sort of fun to come back and do a little bit of remodeling to account for the new pool and patio—in terms of the layout and flow." He points to the addition of a Dutch door in the mudroom, as well as a set of French doors in a secondary living room, for direct access to the pool deck.



The pool house boasts a walk-out basement with storage, first-floor sitting area with a fireplace, wet bar, changing room, laundry facilities and a sleeping loft.

Landing a design

As busy professionals with three young children and high-pressure careers, O’Bell and her husband were looking for a lot of guidance regarding the landscape. “We suffer from decision fatigue, so we like to find designers who will just tell us what to do,” jokes O’Bell. Enter landscape designer Bernice Wahler, whose work centers on the ornamental use of native plants. “Choosing plants from the native palette guarantees success,” she says, adding that for this project she used large en masse plantings for dramatic swathes of color and texture.

The young couple relied heavily on Wahler to cull from their conversations and take it from there. “We described what we were hoping for, which was a mixture between classic Cape—hydrangeas, privet and white picket fences, all of which made its way into the landscape—and a bit of elegance, but without creating a bunch of formal gardens that we would have to spend our weekends maintaining,” explains O’Bell. They also wanted a landscape that would afford year-round interest.

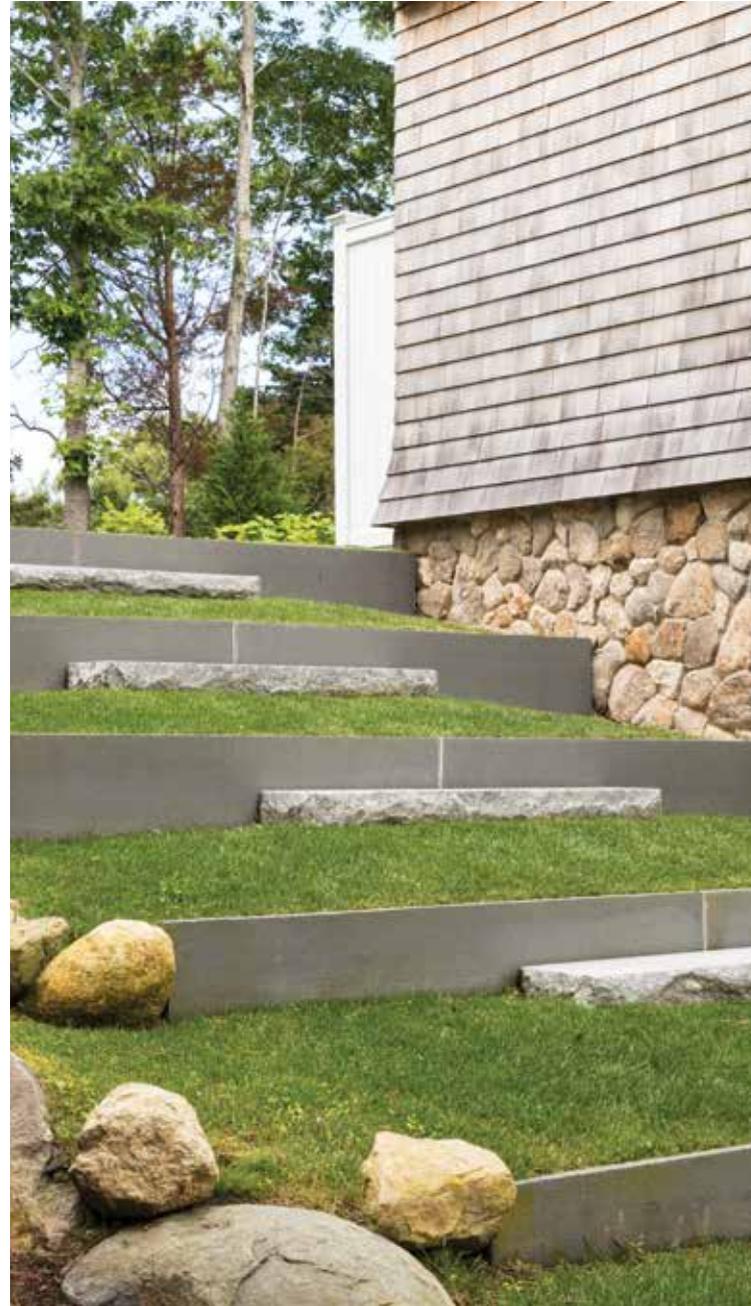


Selecting the right materials

Sourcing material from Cape Coastal Nursery, Wahler chose white pine, Leyland cypress, oak leaf hydrangea, clethra and a few different species of viburnum to re-create privacy screening that had been lost during the re-grade. “The neighbor in the back right is really elevated,” notes Jaxtiner. “They could look right into the family’s pool area. So, with the help of that bank, we planted larger trees and shrubs, and you can barely see that neighbor’s house now.” For plant materials, says Wahler, “I used a mix of slow- and fast-growing plants. The [latter] are very showy and fill in nice and full while the slow growers are getting their feet—those have more longevity.”

Finding level areas on which to site terraces, stairs and retaining walls required innovation. To address the near-vertical drop between the back and front lawn, for example, Wahler designed steps from carved granite slabs and bluestone planks set on edge and cut straight into the hillside. The color play between the bluestone and the gray, weathered shingles helps tie the modern element to the traditional setting. “The steps fit with our design sensibility, which is transitional—a mixture of modern and traditional,” notes O’Bell.

Left: A pair of blue doors off the mudroom, and a set of French doors in a secondary living room provide access to the pool deck. Above: White pine, Leyland cypress, oak leaf hydrangea, clethra and viburnum were planted to re-create the privacy screening that was lost during the landscape re-grade.



Pool house perks

Left, top and bottom: The project included the addition of new garden beds, terraces and retaining walls. Right: Steps made of carved granite slabs and bluestone planks were installed on edge and cut straight into the hillside to address the near vertical drop between the back and front lawns.

Of the pool house itself, O’Bell says: “Mike brought to the project a particular aesthetic . . . very classic Colonial work. We are drawn to that, but after thinking about how the pool house would be used, we evolved our ideas.” The structure features a full walk-out basement with storage; first-floor sitting room with a fireplace, wet bar and custom cabinetry, plus a changing room and laundry facilities; and a sleeping loft accessed via a ship’s ladder.

The way in which the new pool house and reformed site meld with the original house is something O’Bell fully appreciates. “We didn’t want to do anything with the pool house or the gardens that would detract from the old look of the house.” Mission accomplished. 📌

in the details



The pool patio is made of bluestone, sourced through Stonewood Products.



Delaware Valley White azaleas installed by Jaxtiner Landscaping, LLC.



Cedar white-painted picket fence and arbor installed by Fallon Fence Inc. of Hyannis.