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Mid-City utopia: Ruby Slipper Cafe's Jennifer and Erich Weishaupt backyard becomes a high-end home entertainment complex

Sue Strachan **SEP 20, 2017 - 5:29 PM**

Utopia is a lofty word, but that's the term designer and architect Marc Robert uses to describe the newly remodeled backyard he designed for Jennifer and Erich Weishaupt's Mid-City home.

And for a family who loves to be outside, calling the space utopia seems just about right.

Entering the Weishaupt's backyard is like stepping into a private villa at a luxury resort. There's, of course, the pool, a sleek rectangular focal point of the space. But there's also a bocce ball court, "tanning ledges," a covered grill space, an indoor/outdoor kitchen and several entertainment areas. (Watch the Saints game without ever leaving the pool, if you'd like.)

As the owners of eight Ruby Slipper restaurants and the parents of three children, the Weishaupts are the epitome of busy. So, when they aren't working, the couple wanted to relax, spend time with their kids -- Aidan, 11; Zachary, 7; and Emery, 5 -- and invite friends and family over to their home.

When they bought their raised Eastlake Victorian home in August 2012, it was move-in ready, except for a little interior painting. The backyard with its small pool and the first floor's unfinished apartment, though, were ready for a re-imaging.

It was a wall - a folding glass wall - that spurred the couple to launch the remodel.

"I was at a friend's house, and I saw it, a NanaWall, and knew that was what I wanted," Jennifer said. "We literally built this around the wall."

Robert, an architect with the New Orleans firm Design Office, was called in to help the Weishaupts interpret their vision, as well as conjure up a few things they hadn't considered. Robert also served as construction manager of the project.

With the NanaWall as a main design element for both the new entertainment area and TV room, the couple made a list of what else they wanted: a kitchen, a hot tub. "Erich wanted the kegerator; I wanted a wine refrigerator and a tanning ledge in the pool," Jennifer said.

Robert then came back with a design that included those ideas, but added clever structural elements -- creating spaces of "varying levels of temperature and touch," he said -- and integrated the space with the main house. The cabinets from Mattix Cabinets Works, for example, are painted the same color -- Sherwin-Williams Cloudburst -- as the house's front and back doors.

While there are multiple access points to the backyard, the most eye-catching feature is the entrance that the family uses the most. Instead of a typical staircase leading from the home's second-floor kitchen to the yard, Roberts designed a walkway made of steel that covers part of the pool.

The walkway accomplished a number of things: it provided an easy way to get to the backyard as well as a covered area for the grill and shade

for part of the pool and hot tub. "We can sit in the hot tub if it rains," Erich said.

At the far end of the walkway, there's a sitting area where the couple likes to enjoy their morning coffee. "The walkway takes advantage of the full space of the backyard," Jennifer said.

The walkway also provides an entrance to the oversized slide, which the children love.

The new pool, designed by Robert and built by Pleasure Pools, is the centerpiece of the yard. Framed by a series of tanning ledges built around the edges, there's plenty of space for family members and guests to lie by the pool or chat with people in the new entertainment areas, which include the indoor/outdoor kitchen, a small den, a side yard (covered in AstroTurf) and a bocce and corn hole court, which was converted from a driveway.

The garage, which also faces the pool, was divided in half: one side remains a storage space, while the new TV room, featuring a glass NanaWall, will get much use during football season. Erich, who hails from Alabama, is a huge Auburn (and Saints) fan.

The Weishaupts, whose home is not far from the New Orleans Fair Grounds, are looking forward to entertaining, especially during Jazz Fest. The renovation, which started in Jan. 3, was scheduled to be ready for this year's fest, but wasn't quite done in time.

But between now and 2018 Jazz Fest, the Weishaupts and their children are just enjoying their own utopia.

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