

THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

Coastal

SAN DIEGO HOMES

FAMILY FUN

**BACKYARD WONDERLAND DESIGNED
FOR KIDS AND ADULTS**

FEBRUARY 2016

BACKYARD STAYCATION

EXTRAVAGANT PLAY AREAS CATER TO ADULTS AND KIDS

BY LILLIAN COX

When Kevin Prior built a 6,900-square-foot home on top of a hill in Del Sur in 2004, his kids were young and relied on their imaginations, a two-story playhouse and a tree swing to while away the time.

"When the kids outgrew the tree swing and playhouse, I wanted to build something to fit their new interests," Prior said. Another goal was to create an outdoor living area where the adults could laze around and enjoy themselves.

Prior realized he needed professional assistance to achieve his goals, suggest products and work with San Diego County and Rancho Santa Fe fire department to ensure adherence to regulations. He began researching landscape architects online and followed up with Nick Martin.



JOE DODD

"The fire bowls are spectacular. The flames shoot up four to five feet and create an ambience that is special," said Kevin Prior, who turned his backyard into a resort-style playground.

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Treated walls and beams mimic old French farmhouse.

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JOE DODD PHOTOS

“The multiple elevations allow for us to keep small parties intimate and localized while also accommodating larger get-togethers,” Prior said. “My kids are constantly in the pool, and our quality family time has moved outdoors.”

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“The reviews led me to believe that Nick was professional, passionate and collaborative,” Prior recalled. “He turned out to be all those things.

“I love to design, but I am very much an amateur. We started with a desire to do something memorable and then ideas percolated from there. Nick’s patience and experience allowed me to feel as if I was participating rather than building ‘his’ pool in my backyard.”

For Martin, designing the hardscape and landscape for the five-acre property was a dream project.

“The backyard was an empty canvas with a huge lawn and clusters of palm trees,” Martin said. “Kevin’s vision was to have a pool with a zero-perimeter vanishing edge, a pool house and 90-foot waterslide for the kids. What is



Architect Bob Belanger designed a pool house with a living and dining area that is both opulent and comfortable year-round.

distinctive about the project is that he had the financial resources and vision to incorporate a lot of ideas, some of which were extravagant, into one cohesive plan.”

Martin measured the backyard and prepared a plan for the

pool and hardscape, planting areas, rear slope and equipment location, collaborating with Prior on revisions for the master plan. An elevated platform in the southwest corner of the property was designed at the starting point for the curving tubular wa-

terslide. They broke ground for the pool in spring 2014. The pool was filled that summer and the entire project with the landscaping was completed in October 2015.

Martin also made recommendations for all the contractors, beginning with Western Outdoor Design Build for the landscaping.

Although he had a generous budget, Martin decided to preserve the existing patios and main staircases directly behind the home. Instead of buying new specimen palm trees, he saved several thousand dollars using existing ones and rearranging them in vignettes throughout the grounds. These include pigmy (*Phoenix roebelenii*), Mediterranean (*Chamaerops humilis*), Senegal date (*Phoenix reclinata*) and sago (*Cycas revoluta*) palms.

A synthetic lawn with a putting green was installed using SYNfescue 354, selected due to its realistic look, weight and abili-

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JOE DODD PHOTOS

A 90-foot tube waterslide empties into a vanishing edge pool. Landscape architect Nick Martin saved thousands of dollars using existing specimen palms and rearranging them in vignettes throughout the grounds.

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ty to dissipate heat from the sun. Premier Pools and Spas was contracted to build the pool area. Blue Moon Pools was the pebble applicator.

“The pool finish is Prism Matrix Indigo Blue manufactured by Wet Edge Technologies,” Martin said. “It has a crisp, blue look, which is dark enough to generate heat from the sun.”

The fire pit and fire bowls were purchased from Phoenix Precast Products and furniture from Skyline Design.

“Premier Fusion 7 color LED lighting system by Zodiac gives nine different color options and five different color shows,” Martin said. “The pool, spa and vanishing edge trough can all be set to different colors or shows.”

Outdoor floor tile from Spec-Ceramics was chosen for its durability, wet traction and the tea col-



“The house is Tuscan/Mediterranean but the pool and outdoor living area are very contemporary,” Martin said.

or, which dissipates heat.

Architect Bob Belanger designed a pool house with a living and dining area that is both opulent and comfortable year-round, blocking cold air that comes up the canyon at dusk. The house is also equipped with automated

doors and restaurant-style ceiling heaters.

“During winter, we spend more time inside the pool house, especially for holiday dinners and football.” Prior said. “We had a Friendsgiving in November with more than 60 people. Overall we

do less in winter, but the experiences we have are more rare in life. We are blessed to be able to host an indoor/outdoor Friendsgiving without sacrificing football or warmth.”

Prior is exuberant about his sprawling outdoor living area.

“The multiple elevations allow for us to keep small parties intimate and localized while also accommodating larger get-togethers. My kids are constantly in the pool, and our quality family time has moved outdoors.

“The fire bowls are spectacular,” he said. “The flames shoot up four to five feet and create an ambience that is special. We even turn them on when eating inside the house. The multiple elevations and colorful fabrics create great views. When coupled with the many LED lights, we definitely get a genuine staycation experience!”

Lillian Cox is an Encinitas-based writer who has been covering North County for the Union-Tribune since 2002.