

AN OMAHA WORLD-HERALD PUBLICATION

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Fun Ideas
for Kids'
Spaces

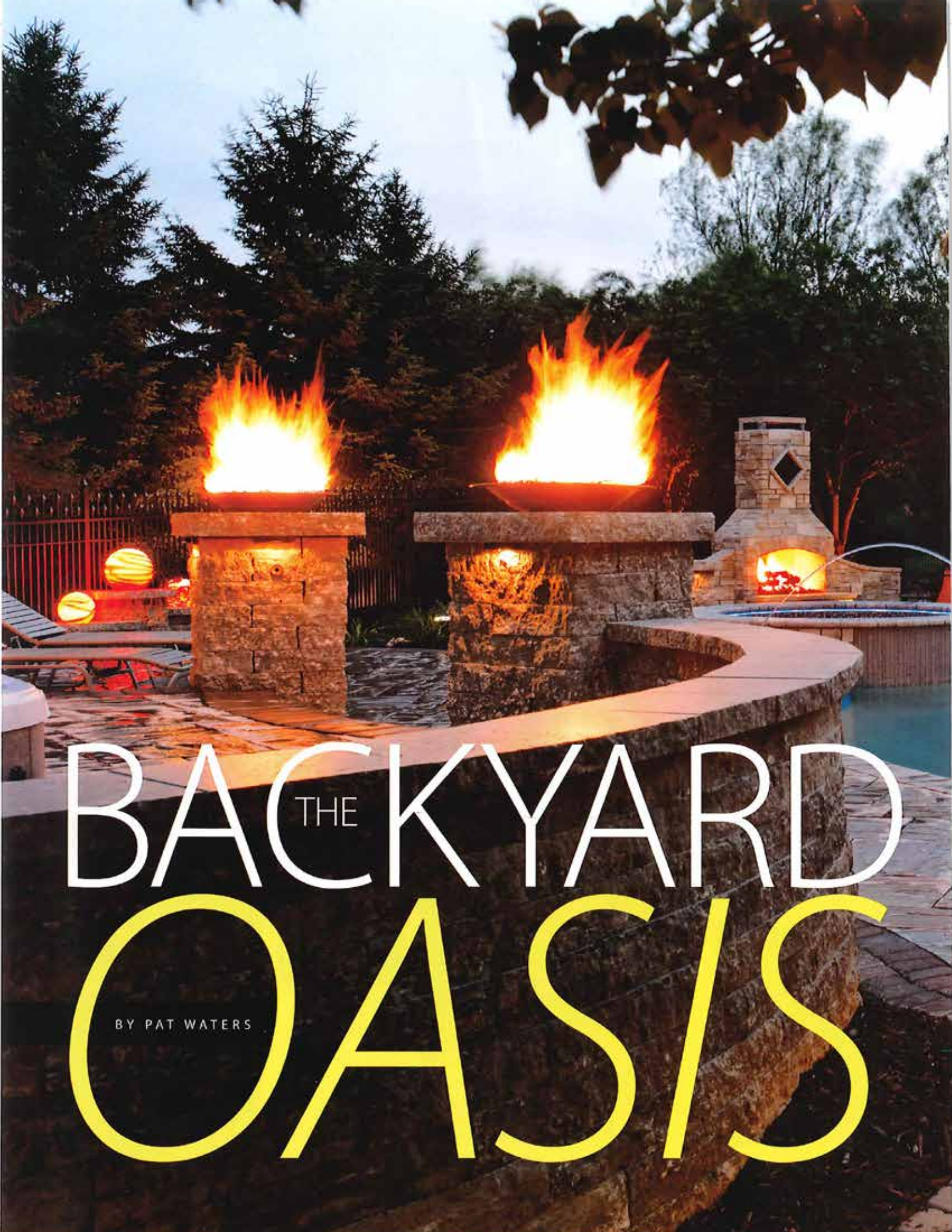
INSPIRED HOME OMAHA Summer Oasis

Six steps to creating the ultimate backyard experience



MIXOLOGIST
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**HOW TO PAINT
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BACK THE KYARD

OASIS

BY PAT WATERS



The best place to relax, play and enjoy the season could be right outside your window. Trees, awnings and pergolas aren't just great adornments in this Linden Estates setting. They provide much-needed shade for daylong enjoyment when temperatures soar.



Built for Serious Outdoor Entertaining

Homeowners continue to stretch the limits of outdoor living. Swim-up bars. Kitchens outfitted as luxuriously as their indoor counterparts. Folding walls that link indoor and outdoor rooms.

Jason Decker, owner of Elite Landscaping in Omaha, has watched the outdoor movement gain momentum during his 12 years in the business. "My clients – whether they are empty-nesters or have children at home – like to entertain," says Decker. "The weather here in the summer is beautiful and people like to be outside. It's all part of the backyard oasis trend." Here are six dynamite outdoor living trends that you can either adopt or adapt, depending on your budget and space.

JEFFREY BATES

1.

Smokin' Hot

Fireplaces and fire pits are red hot. If you really want to make a statement, you might opt for a fireplace made of stone or brick that matches your home. A fire pit allows you to pull up a chair, roast marshmallows and easily share conversation.



At left, a flagstone stream cuts through a cobblestone hardscape at West Shores near Waterloo. The 20-by-40-foot pool (installed 30 feet into the terrain to obscure it from boaters' views) has an automatic cover. A sunken fire pit with a glass finish, LED lighting and variable water jets are handsome accents for saw-cut stone walls and steps and pillars with polished stone caps. The custom outdoor kitchen has a granite countertop and high-grade appliances.

Featured properties at West Shores, Linden Estates and Springfield are Elite Landscaping projects. Jordan Michael Signature Homes was the general contractor for the West Bay Woods II project. Lanoha Nurseries was among the subcontractors.

WEST BAY
WOODS

For a West Bay Woods II homeowner who likes to entertain, Interior Designer Eric James created several small furniture groupings for mingling, sunbathing and relaxing. A cabana and waterfall fire pit at the pool's edge see a lot of use from early spring through late fall.

Water, Water Everywhere

The popularity of simple backyard streams and waterfalls has receded a bit, but demand is still high for the ultimate water experience. The centerpiece of these projects is, of course, a pool, which is often surrounded with pavers that mimic natural slate or stone. Swim-up bars, waterslides and swim-out areas are replacing ladders. Also popular are covered, raised dining areas, sunken hot tubs and terraced patios to allow for private sunbathing.



SPRINGFIELD

If you're thinking you need new outdoor furniture, this is a good time to buy. But before you get swept up in a great summer closeout sale, consider the weight of the pieces. Do you want heavy furniture that won't whip around in the wind, or lighter furniture that you can move around and store yourself? Teak, aluminum, wicker and wrought iron are durable choices. Just make sure your selection is water-resistant and rust-proof.

JOYCE BAUER

WEST BAY WOODS

The owner of our West Bay Woods II home bought a vacant lot next door and ramped up his outdoor living space with a sport bottom pool, stamped concrete patio and natural-screen landscaping. Lounge-style seating, an outdoor sound system, and a weather-protected big-screen TV (lower right) make the backyard a natural hub for gathering and entertaining. The homeowner takes full advantage of the space, inviting friends over at least weekly during the summer for mojitos and turkey burgers.



The backyard of the Linden Estates property was a selling point for the current owners, who saw an opportunity to create a multilevel retreat. This view shows a portion of the kitchen and pergola; a fireplace and sunbathing area are nearby. The hardscape was created with colored, oversized pavers that look like slate. The project included replacing the pool's surface with glass mosaic tile and building a hot tub from Italian stone tile.

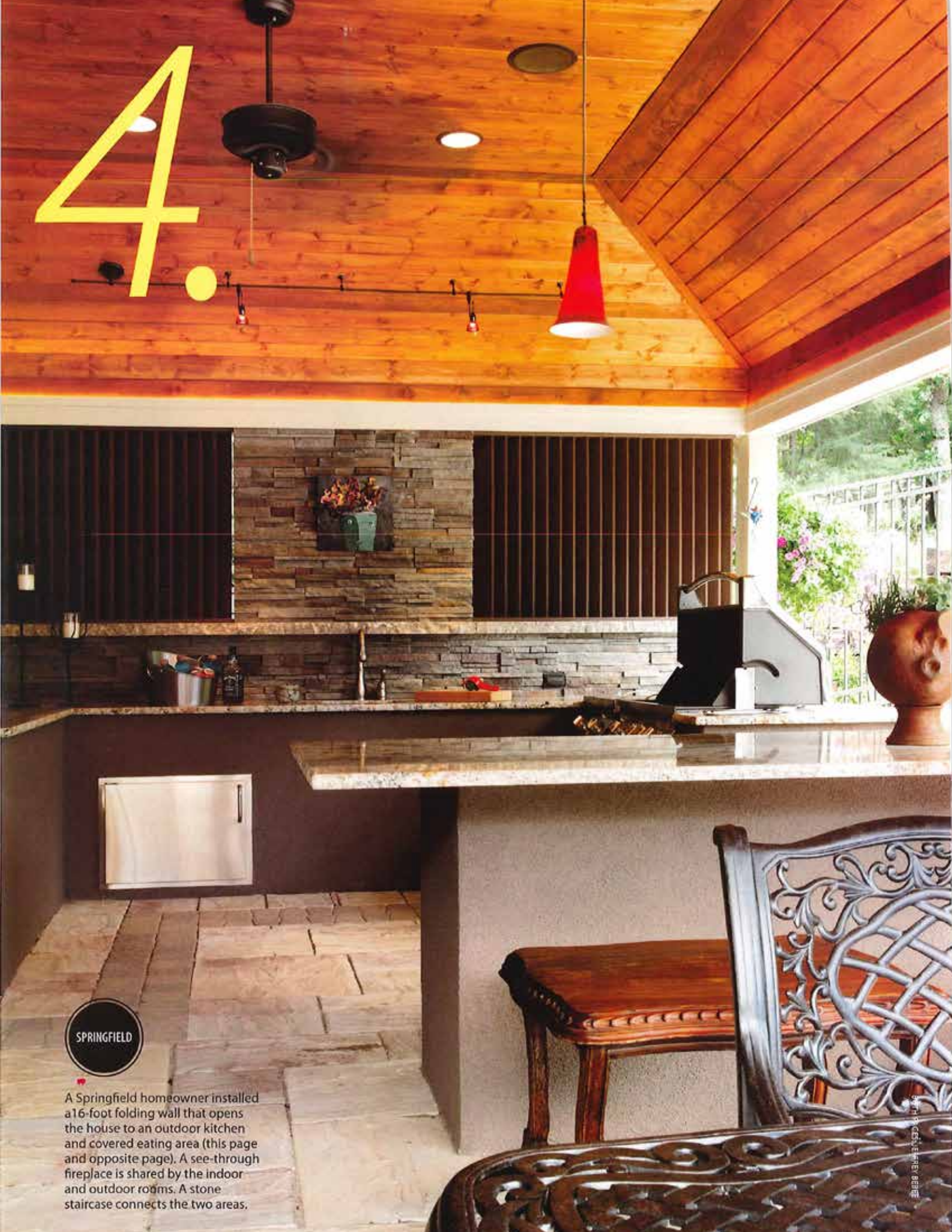


The Big Cover-Up

Outdoor rooms such as decks, patios and porches are increasingly being covered. These coverings can be actual roofs outfitted with ceiling fans, lighting and outdoor stereo speakers, for example. Or the covering can be a pergola. A pergola's primary purpose is to provide shade, but if planted with vining plants it can also be quite dramatic. Roofs are becoming more elaborate in both design and construction materials as well.



4



SPRINGFIELD

A Springfield homeowner installed a 16-foot folding wall that opens the house to an outdoor kitchen and covered eating area (this page and opposite page). A see-through fireplace is shared by the indoor and outdoor rooms. A stone staircase connects the two areas.



Open the Wall

Many builders, rather than installing French or sliding doors, are putting in folding or movable walls to link indoor living spaces with outdoor rooms. Decker has seen these panels in lengths ranging from 12 feet to 22 feet. While still outside the mainstream, a few such projects have been done for Omaha-area homeowners who want to move effortlessly between their indoor and outdoor spaces.

Everything Including the Kitchen Sink

Outdoor kitchens have been around for a few years, but the current generation now is likely to include gas and charcoal grills, sinks, refrigerators, freezers and bartending centers. Also look for bar or pub-style seating and electrical outlets to power blenders, Crock-Pots and other appliances. Outdoor kitchens with "the works" can be expensive, but Decker says that this project can also be adapted to smaller areas.

6.

Finishing Touches

Keep things informal and comfortable. Plump, oversized pillows make seating more inviting. Add an all-weather rug to define a seating area, and stash blankets in a storage ottoman or stool for cuddling up on cold nights. Set the mood with ice-cold beverages and accent lighting that casts a warm glow when the sun sets. The final element: Background sounds, whether it's trickling water from a fountain or tunes from your iPod.

At right, setting styled by
Interiors by Eric James.



DANIEL JOHNSON