



THIS POOL HOUSE in Union County (left) resembles a backyard cottage, the owner says. Despite space restrictions, architect Al Bol came up with a floor plan flexible enough to accommodate large groups. **SOURCES:** contractor, William Mengert in Berkeley Heights; landscape design, including pool and patio layout and stairways, Brian Bosenberg and Associates in Far Hills; landscape installation, Cording Landscape in Ramsey; windows and doors, Pella.

■ The refectory table (above) expands to seat 14. Ample dining space was a priority for the homeowners, who often entertain 40 to 50 people. **SOURCES:** table, Guy Chaddock in Bakersfield, California (to the trade); chairs, Delvis in Fairfield, Connecticut (to the trade); kitchen built-ins, European Country Kitchens in Far Hills.

BUILDING THE IDEAL POOL HOUSE WAS A MATTER OF STRIKING THE RIGHT balance for a family in Union County. They had to balance the space limitations imposed by their town — 24 feet by 24 feet — with their desire to accommodate large gatherings. They wanted an eating area with the comfort and climate control found indoors but didn't want to sacrifice the feeling of being outside. They wanted a building with elegant details in an environment durable enough to stand up to wet swimsuits. And they wanted to entertain groups such as their children's scout troops and soccer teammates while keeping the mess and disruption outside their house. "We were looking for a wonderful refuge from our house where kids could

run around with wet feet, we could entertain, and have a weekend retreat in our backyard," said the homeowner, who called the project "a colossal success. The architect did a fabulous job in building a lot of functionality into limited space."

Al Bol, an American Institute of Architects (AIA) member who practices in Berkeley Heights, designed the structure with several pocket doors to provide areas that could be shut off for privacy. Built-ins in the kitchen and entertainment area offer much-needed storage. And five separate outside entrances — three sets of French doors at the front and two other doors on the sides — add to the flexibility: Someone can enter and shower without walking through the main entertaining area.

Another challenge was choosing the best

floor covering. The homeowners originally wanted wood or stone but were persuaded that tile is better in an area so frequently exposed to outdoor elements. "We went with a stone-look ceramic, a wonderful design. You can just mop it down, and it's not very slippery. It was really a perfect decision," the homeowner said.

Fabric also was chosen with durability in mind. Working with Mary Lou Sweeney, whose company is Mary Lou Sweeney Interior Design of Summit, the homeowners chose Pierre Frey fabric crafted to stand up to outdoor elements, but without the slick feel of many outdoor fabrics. The clients "were very insistent on durable fabrics," Sweeney said. "This is fade-proof, waterproof. Everything was made to be very durable."

The bright fabric, contrasting with white walls, gives a clean, summery feeling that's casual and comfortable, Sweeney said. Although casual, the interior of the pool house also has finer architectural details such as a cathedral ceiling, crown molding, and

wainscoting, noted Bol, whose firm is Alexander A. Bol AIA Architect and Associates.

Abundant windows, even in the cupola, provide views of the pool and let in sunlight, most of it from the north, which reduces heat inside. With all the windows, Bol pointed out that "you can eat inside with air conditioning and away from the bugs, but with the feeling of being outside."

The pool house was designed with careful thought about how it would fit in with the rest of the property, Bol said. "We wanted to make a statement," he said. "It's an attractive place to be drawn to. The pool and pool house down the hill create a beautiful view from the house. It creates a nice composite."

And the homeowner said that "one of the most unexpected and delightful benefits is the view [of the pool house] from the master bedroom."

What does the family enjoy most about the pool house? "It's like having a cottage in our own back yard, complete with picket fence."

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