

A River Runs Through It

This Rowayton backyard with its century-old magnolia tree embraces public and private. BY MEAGHAN O'NEILL



The house on Five Mile River had terrific views across the water of a local park and charming downtown Rowayton village, but the homeowners wanted to maximize the long,

narrow lot for outdoor living. And while they wanted a certain amount of privacy, they were also acutely aware that their home was part of the visual landscape, too. The resulting

For a waterfront home in Rowayton, Kathryn Herman Design removed existing paving that was crowding the roots of a 150-year-old cucumber magnolia and sited a new pool to meet strict coastal requirements. Hydrangea and boxwood along the foundation add shape and long-lasting color without a lot of fuss.

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plan for the outdoor spaces, by Kathryn Herman Design, was driven by both ideas. “They wanted to be part of the community, which is a unique way of looking at things,” says landscape architect Joe Werner, director of operations at Kathryn Herman Design and lead on the project, “but it’s also very private.”

In the backyard, which leads to a private dock, the designers created a covered terrace and beautiful granite



ABOVE: An intricate linear path across the back of the house adds visual interest and draws attention to the magnificent magnolia. **LEFT:** Having a fire feature was important to the homeowners; the design team fabricated one from reclaimed granite atop a bluestone terrace with Belgian block walls. Liriope and other plantings soften the stone.



fire feature, however, the existing pool needed to be replaced; its paving endangered the roots of a stunning, roughly 150-year-old cucumber magnolia, a rare survivor of 2012’s Hurricane Sandy.

Because it sat in a flood zone, though, the new pool would have to be sited within the footprint of the original one. Working closely with the architect, engineer, and pool contractor, Werner and his design team devised an elegant solution that maintained the natural grade, could withstand a flood event, and, importantly, created a permeable surface surrounding the magnolia. As a bonus, the terraced pool coping now doubles as a

pretty seat wall.

To add layers of visual interest out front, the Kathryn Herman team redesigned the driveway as a curvilinear path that lends “a meandering, experiential quality” to the linear plot, says Werner. Transplanting existing arborvitaes and rhododendrons along neighboring properties added screening, while new dogwoods and a deciduous beech hedge surrounding the parking area complement existing plantings. And while some trees were carefully removed, certain mature varieties, including white oaks, Norway maples, dogwoods, and a magnificent columnar beech specimen tree, were kept in place.

“This added nice age to the property, so it doesn’t feel like it’s all brand new,” explains Werner. “It’s rare to come onto a property and have two awesome specimen trees, so we were really lucky.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: For details, see Resources.



ABOVE: A stately columnar beech sits in the front yard of the roughly one-acre property. The design team rerouted the driveway to create a curvilinear entrance to the house and surrounded the parking area with a deciduous beech hedge.

LEFT: A cut through at the edge of the garage, which features fieldstone veneer cladding, leads to the backyard, while a curtain of Boston ivy delivers texture and red-orange foliage in the fall.



LANDSCAPE DESIGN: Joe Werner, Kathryn Herman Design

ARCHITECTURE: Vicente-Burin Architects

BUILDER: ERI Building & Design