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For centuries, backyard oases have been coveted for their tranquility and beauty. ARBORS HELP CREATE A BACKYARD RETREAT

Perhaps the most famous of these personal retreats are Victorian-era English estates where friends and family gathered to dine, converse and relax in nature. Today, backyard gardens are no longer limited to the landed gentry but can be found in yards of all sizes and styles, extending available spaces for entertaining and increasing home values.

"People need a place to relax and enjoy life and that is what being outdoors on a patio delivers," says Barbara Hargrove, saleswoman at Weir's Furniture on Knox Avenue in Dallas. "With our busy lives, we need a place where we can sit and enjoy the roses in bloom."

A pergola, also known as an arbor, is an open-air roof often covered by flowering vines. Its introduction can transform a drab landscape, giving the yard a focal point where homeowners can stamp their personal style in a natural setting.

In sunny North Texas, shaded outdoor areas are prized elements in most backyards. Swimmers often welcome a cool area where they can take cover from the searing sun while remaining outdoors. These refuges are also enjoyed as outdoor escapes for quiet contemplation, an afternoon nap in a hammock or a dinner party under the stars.

Woody, deciduous vines are ideal arbor coverings, creating shade during the spring and summer and dropping their leaves in the fall to permit the sun to shine through during the cooler months. Fast-growing and sweetly scented wisteria is a popular choice, although its size requires a strong arbor structure, such as cedar, to bear its weight.

Another shade option, awnings, can fully or partially cover the top of an arbor. As a partial covering, a central awning — in a color chosen to



Photo by Stephen Reed

Stone flooring is a classic choice in this backyard kitchen and entertaining area in Dallas built by Walton's Garden Center on Garland Road, across from the Dallas Arboretum.

harmonize with your home — can be surrounded by vine-covered beams.

"A roof with vines gives homeowners the best of two worlds — you can have vines and be outdoors and not get wet," says Chuck Walton, owner of Walton's Garden Center in Dallas, located across from the Dallas Arboretum.

Roman-style columns add architectural impact to gardens and can be found paired with garden fountains and Grecian-inspired statues.

Stone flooring is the classic choice for its natural beauty, durability and color range. Flagstone, often quarried in Tennessee, Arizona and Pennsylvania, is typically available in red, blue and buff and according to Walton, easily creates an aesthetic link to the surrounding landscape.

In contemporary-style homes, thick, white granite tile is often chosen for its clean appearance.

Stamped concrete, available in a variety of colors and textures, is an economical option that

achieves a look similar to stone, tile or brick pavers.

With the popularity of al fresco dining, outdoor kitchens have become a trend in backyard renovations as they permit cooks to serve freshly prepared meals without leaving their guests. The grill is often the focal point and its quality is directly linked to the type of cooking a homeowner plans to do. Cooks wanting to serve restaurant-quality steaks will gravitate to a higher-end grill. More often, though, outdoor cooks will prepare hamburgers or seafood a couple of times a week and choose a simple backyard grill.

"It is all about a look," Walton says. "The kitchen area needs to look great when homeowners entertain."

Strategically placed furniture can help define separate intimate seating and entertainment spaces and serve any mood, whether solitary or festive.

"People will often choose a table and chairs for outdoor eating or have a living area to accompany their kitchen," Hargrove says. "Living areas often have a love seat, club chair and/or a sofa and a center table."

She adds that her customers want comfort, ease of care and an expensive look.

A drapery hung from a portico's edges can create privacy and shade. The effect of lights glowing through the hanging material can set an elegant mood as a party continues into the night.

"From my experience, the attraction of arbors has something to do with family and friends," Walton says. "Most people are interested in expanding the areas where their guests, children and grandchildren can play."

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VIRGINIA COOK

Firm participates in Open House Weekend

With historically low interest rates and attractive prices, there has never been a better time to buy a home, according to Virginia Cook, CEO of Virginia Cook Realtors.

"A changing environment for mortgage financing is another reason why prospective buyers and homeowners wanting to move up, down or away should consider acting now," Cook says. "Lending standards are

getting tighter and as the government debates proposed new guidelines, banks are gearing up for even more stringent standards."

To make it convenient to see the diverse home choices available throughout North Texas, Virginia Cook Realtors is participating in the Realtor Nationwide Open House Weekend. Many of the homes listed See COOK on Page 7H.



The home at 3405 Princeton will be held open from 2 to 4 p.m. today, part of the Realtor Nationwide Open House Weekend.

ALLIE BETH ALLMAN

Doris Jacobs offers estate in Old Highland Park area

Located in Old Highland Park fronting Dyckman Park, the Neoclassical estate at 3709 Gillon Ave. is offered by Doris Jacobs, executive vice president and founding partner of Allie Beth Allman & Associates, for \$5,949,000.

"The design elements in this residence include 12- and 14-foot ceilings, ebony-stained wide-plank oak wood and French limestone flooring, cove molding, custom art lighting, Murano chandeliers, slab marble and granite and onyx throughout," Jacobs says.

The three-story, approximately 11,800-square-foot home provides six bedrooms, seven baths, two half-baths, eight gathering areas, five refreshment



The home at 3405 Princeton will be held open from 2 to 4 p.m. today, part of the Realtor Nationwide Open House Weekend.

centers, two utility rooms, three interior fireplaces, an elevator and two balconies. Included are surround-sound entertainment systems, 13 HD plasma televisions and an air-conditioned three-car garage.

The first floor features a foyer with French limestone and oak-inlay flooring. See ALLMAN on Page 2H.

WINDSOR

Cumberland Crossing celebrates Phase II



Most floor plans at Windsor Homes' community in Allen feature rooms such as playrooms, mudrooms, studies and media rooms.

Windsor Homes has announced the grand opening of Phase II in Cumberland Crossing.

The Allen neighborhood features parks, greenbelts, walking trails, a 3-acre lake with fountains, a community pool, creeks, trees and miles of future hike-and-bike trails.

"Homebuyers should act quickly to take advantage of this opportunity to build their home in this neighborhood, as lots are pre-selling quickly," community sales professional Alicia Stuart says.

Windsor Homes' new floor plans are "fresh off the press" from well-known local architects. They offer spacious room sizes and open plans that are ideal for entertaining. Most plans also feature specialty rooms, such as playrooms, mudrooms, studies and media rooms.

See WINDSOR on Page 13H.

RON DAVIS

Lakewood Home Tour presented

Ron Davis Custom Homes will present three "Smokin' Sizzlin' Summer" open houses from 2 to 5 p.m. today in the Lakewood area near White Rock Lake. To visit the homes, go east on Mockingbird, right on Williamson, right on Sperry and right to 6845 Southridge.

The three Texas Hill Country homes offer more than 4,400 square feet of living space with two-story foyers, clean lines and natural finishes.

The homes feature four or five bedrooms, four-plus baths, studies, two living areas, media rooms, wine grottos, butler's pantries, mud cubbies, outdoor living areas with fireplaces and wiring for outdoor televisions, as well as unfinished bonus spaces and energy-saving features.

"We are very busy with our build-to-suit homes, due to our full-service ap-



Homes in the Lakewood area will be held open from 2 to 5 p.m. today, including 6845 Southridge.

proach and commitment to each customer," says Ron Davis.

"We are delighted to showcase our innovative Hill Country Contemporary designs with all the latest custom amenities ranging in price from \$899,000 to \$960,00," says Shirley Davis.

For a map, see today's HomeCenter section, visit www.rondaviscustomhomes.com or call 972-680-0365.

BRIGGS FREEMAN SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

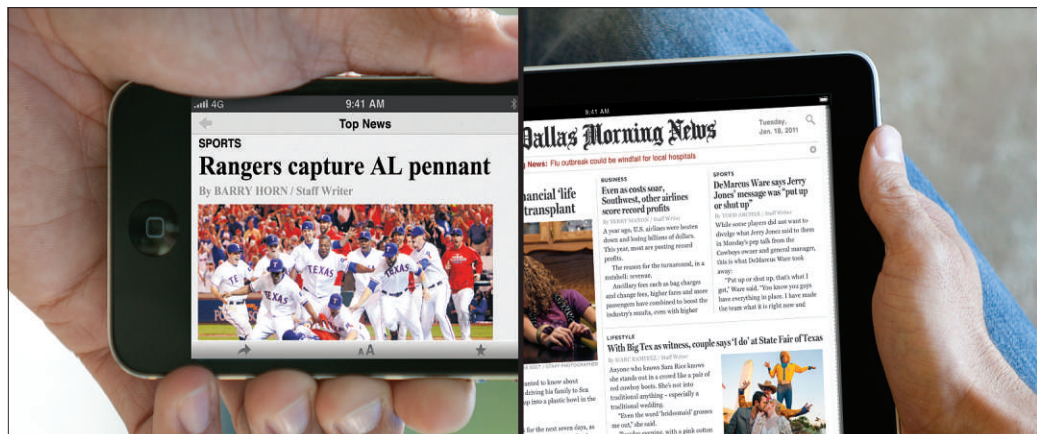
Highland Park home has European glamour

From the imported antique materials and hand-carved mantels to the elaborate front garden surrounded by box hedges, no detail was overlooked in the home at 3801 Normandy Ave. in Highland Park. Joan Eleazer and Layne Pitzer of Briggs Freeman Sotheby's International Realty have listed the custom home, just completed in 2009, for \$6.85 million. The 10,000-square-foot home was designed with generous family and entertaining spaces, built by Tatum Brown Custom Homes with the finest quality construction and fixtures, and decorated with a stately joie de vivre by noted interior designer Betty Lou Phillips.

A highlight of this French-style home is the 700-bottle wine room with rich woods, iron fixtures, worn brick flooring and a sturdy tasting table. This room is just off the limestone floored entry with its sweeping hand-scraped wood staircase, including See BRIGGS on Page 5H.



This classic French Provencal home at 3801 Normandy includes spectacular living and entertaining spaces.



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