

A photograph of a backyard swimming pool. The pool is in the foreground, with a metal handrail visible in the bottom left corner. The water is clear blue. In the middle ground, there is a concrete patio with a dark brown outdoor sofa and a dining table with chairs. A large beige patio umbrella is open over the dining area. In the background, there is a two-story house with light-colored siding and a grey roof. A wooden fence runs along the back of the yard, with several small evergreen trees planted in front of it. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

A Family

One backyard's journey

By Wendy Helfenbaum



y Affair

from grass to greatness

Photography by Studio Zoom Tech



landscape | a family affair



The dramatic transformation left no stone unturned. Everything from the greenery, to the deck, to the patio furniture is new.

Colomba Monteleone believes in keeping things all in the family. When the Pierrefonds, Quebec, mom of three sons, and her husband Mark Oleksiw, decided it was time to transform their sprawling suburban field of grass into a spectacular family space, she turned to the best landscapers she knew: her father Mario and brother Lino, who have more than 50 years of experience between them.

“When we bought our brand-new house in 1994, there was just a bunch of dirt in the back,” recalls Colomba. “Initially, it was just the two of us, and since we’re both accountants, we focused on paying down the house. We put grass down, and my dad and one of his employees built us a wood deck,



but that was it. When our twin boys were born in 2000, we wanted to keep that green space for them to run free.”

But the couple longed for poolside gatherings with friends and family.

“Our sons’ soccer team is very tight-knit and family-oriented; we often ended up at friends’ pools after a soccer game, having drinks, watching the kids swim, and I thought it would be nice to have one as well,” says Colomba.

Last summer, after the kids had clearly outgrown their tiny inflatable pool, the couple took the plunge.

Colomba sketched out her ideal backyard space and met with pool company representatives. The couple chose Trevi, a leading Canadian pool manufacturer, to build their 18x28-foot in-ground pool with a bull-nose edge.

“We love our community and we don’t plan to move, so while an in-ground pool is more expensive than an above-ground, we felt it would be more enjoyable to swim in,” she says. “Also, with an above-ground, we would’ve wanted to build wood decks all around the pool, and we wanted a very low-maintenance space. The day our whole yard was ripped up, we thought, ‘Ah, the fun is just beginning’.”

The first thing brother Lino suggested was tossing the couple’s relatively new garden shed.

“It was way too big, and the door opening was in the wrong place for the pool, so it wasn’t functional and wouldn’t have looked good,” he explains. “When you’re doing a job of that magnitude, don’t look to save \$3,000 or \$4,000. You’re going to be looking at your yard every single day.”

As with any major renovation, the homeowners faced

some unexpected kinks in their plans. Initially, they wanted a simple, open wood deck with three stairs. “But I didn’t envision the pool ending up being so close to the house (when it was installed), and I panicked, imagining that if a kid slips off our deck, they’re right in the deep end,” says Colomba. “So we built a landing with a railing so no one would fall over. That actually cost us quite a bit, because we went with a cedar deck from Patios et Clôtures Beaulieu, a company that does great work.”

Working with family comes with some big perks, such as trade discounts on materials and, of course, a break on labour costs. “That was huge. I don’t think I would’ve been able to manage this cost otherwise,” notes Colomba.

Lino, who started landscaping with his father at age 12, notes that “it’s a lot more challenging when you’re working for a family member, because you want to make everything perfect. My father taught me that ‘hard work is good work and it always pays off.’”

Lino had to fit in Colomba’s project between ‘real’ clients over the course of the entire summer. However, that didn’t deter the family, who insisted on baptizing their new pool despite being surrounded by piles of mud.

“As soon as the pool was ready for use, the boys went in, not caring about what the rest of the yard looked like,” recalls Colomba.

But once the pool was installed, Lino noticed something odd: his sister’s property wasn’t level. “One side was sloping towards her land, the other was sloping away, so we had to gain some space by levelling out their whole backyard,” he recalls. “I had to put in two retaining walls to regain seven or eight feet of land to hold up their backyard, support the pool and have proper drainage and positive slopes away from the pool so they could enjoy their sitting and deck areas.”

Lino and his crew dug for days to correct the grade of the land. “My main concern was sloping everything away from the house and the pool, so the water feeds the greenery around the pool,” he says.

The couple also made sure their back property was totally fenced in with automatic spring locks on their gate, since they didn’t have room for a safety fence around the pool. They also had lighting installed around the new garden shed and throughout the row of cedar trees and greenery designed by landscape architect Lori Del Torto.

With the project completely done the week before school started, the boys were delighted when a heat wave blew through their city. “Every day after school, our kids and their neighbourhood friends enjoyed our backyard pool,” reports Colomba.

Taking advantage of Lino’s new outdoor furniture importing business, the homeowners added the final touch to their space this past spring. “We got a sectional, dining table and chairs, and a couch. It looks really sharp,” says Colomba.

Colomba jokes that she and Mark are living proof that even accountants go over budget on big home improvement projects. “But I look back and say we wouldn’t have done it any other way. We’re so happy with our new outdoor living space.” **HC**