



A Makeover in Engineered Stone

When Gail Bartels of Watertown, Wisconsin, entered the online Belgard Hardscapes Backyard Makeover Sweepstakes, she had no idea that her lifestyle was about to change. “I hoped I’d win a grill, but never expected to win such an amazing prize,” said Bartels. “To be honest, I wasn’t even sure that people really did win things like this. And I surely never imagined it would be me.”

Above: The versatility of the stone-like BelAir wall product allowed for a variety of curves and angles, providing a medium for creating the various elevation changes and planter boxes, as well as the walls for the grill area and seat walls that define the space and surround the patio.

Left: Old World pavers were used to tie the entire design together. In addition, a splash of the Old World pavers was used to create an element of interest by placing a random pattern that led from one interior wall and meandered to the circular center of the patio in the back. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BELGARD

Twenty-five year residents of their suburban home located in the community nestled midway between the cities of Milwaukee and Madison, Gail and Ron Bartels enjoyed occasional gardening, but rarely spent leisure time in their yard. The still waters of their above-ground pool gave no indication of its former life, once rocking with the summer splashes of their two children now grown and living on their own.

More than 50,000 entries were received with a grand prize that included design services, materials, outdoor appliances, landscaping, and construction of an outdoor kitchen and living room. When the Bartels’ winning entry was drawn, Nate Gish, Belgard representative for Wisconsin and Minnesota, put the wheels in motion for the whirlwind makeover event.

Gish pulled together a local design team, enlisting the services of landscape architect Doug Corning of Corning & Associates of Fitchburg, WI, and landscape contractor Unique Services, Inc., of Westbend, WI. Together, they met with the Bartels to plan the transformation.

Since the Bartels no longer had a need for their above-ground pool, it was removed to make way for their new outdoor living space. A number of challenges were encountered during this phase of the construction.

“Access to the yard was limited, requiring the removal of a few pine trees in order to get the equipment in to effectively and cost-efficiently do the work,” explains Gish, project coordinator.



Top: The column units of both the outdoor living area and the kitchen area were accented with Bevolo lighting for evening entertaining, which have already been put to use for that very purpose.



Left: The walkway sections were created using the large modular format of the Mega-Lafitt natural cut faux flagstone pavers along with the Mega-Arbel pavers which offer an irregular pattern to provide more of a natural random-looking footprint. A contrasting reddish color was used to accent the design transition.

since their backyard renovation. “And the walled planter boxes surrounding the grill were perfect for adding annuals for that punch of color to the patio.”

The design team also pulled various elements from the concrete paver lines to add additional color and texture to the outdoor living area. They were selected to add both contrasting color and shape to both the grill and patio areas. Although similar in texture to the Mega-Lafitt, the Mega-Arbel pavers offer an irregular pattern to provide more of a natural random-looking footprint to contrast with the modular lines of the Mega-Lafitt. Available in a variety of colors, a contrasting reddish color was used to accent the design transition.

“Our first order of business was to throw a party for the neighbors on our street who were so gracious about all of the workers involved in the renovation,” laughs Gail.

The Bartels have also enjoyed cooking in their new outdoor kitchen, complete with granite countertops, stainless gas grill, outdoor refrigerator, built-in garbage can, and ample drawer space for storage.

Additional landscaping provided the final touch to the backyard makeover. However, the design team felt that only minimal applications were needed to complete the desired look. “The trees surrounding the backyard provided a great backdrop, so there was no need to clutter the patio with overdone landscaping,” said Gish.

Perennials, along with annual accents, were added to the perimeter of the patio wall area. Splashes of brightly colored flower-producing annuals were placed in the planter boxes, as well as in strategically placed floral pots on the patio area.

In addition to their new-found hobby of entertaining, the Bartels also enjoy spending alone time in their new outdoor living area. “Our back yard is secluded and surrounded by trees,” says Gail. “The new patio created a park-like setting, and we now enjoy relaxing outside and watching the numerous birds in our yard.”

“In addition to removing the pool, we had to remove a good bit of soil and replace it with engineered stone to provide a better foundation for the project.”

In addition to the space constraints, time constraints also created a unique obstacle for the makeover team. A video crew was enlisted to document the step-by-step makeover process to be used for education purposes. “We tried to be sensitive to the needs and time demands of the video crew and completed the entire renovation project in only five days,” says Gish.

Once the foundation was in place, the transformation could begin. The project design included a combination of textures, colors, and elevations to provide a contrast to the straight lines of the home’s exterior.

BelAir Wall was used to form the skeleton of the project. “A portion of the seat wall actually served a dual purpose,” says Gish, explaining how the wall flanking the grill area was used to camouflage the home’s utilities, as well as provide seating for guests. By camouflaging the utilities with the seat wall, the Bartels were able to avoid the cost and hassle of moving the equipment to another area of the yard without impeding access for any future maintenance needs.

“The seating walls have been invaluable for hosting large numbers of people,” says Gail Bartels, who now spends a good deal of time entertaining neighbors and work colleagues