

# Second CHANCES

LOSS OF “GIVING TREE” PROMPTS ONE FAMILY  
TO REINVENT THEIR BACKYARD GETAWAY

By Lee Rhodes | Photos by Jim Schmid



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*The Giving Tree* is a poignant book by Shel Silverstein about a benevolent tree that gives its all to the little boy it loves. When the Robinson family built their Lake Norman home in 1998, they experienced the generosity of a real-life giving tree growing in their back yard. The 60-foot oak acted as a green umbrella shading the house, which they positioned based on the tree's location. But despite the efforts of several arborists, the tree eventually had to be taken down, and the family's outdoor living area was no longer livable. Heat shimmered off the terrace, and this, coupled with a too-small screened-in porch and lack of exterior deck, prompted the Robinsons to begin a radical remodel.

### A sweet escape

Today, they enjoy an all-seasons covered veranda, vanishing-edge pool and a spacious deck that steps down to a wooden boardwalk leading to the newly refinished dock. The existing porch was gutted and transformed into an outdoor kitchen.

"We've been really pleased," says homeowner Wade Robinson. "I'm a commercial developer and I can usually walk back through my projects and find things I would have done differently. But nothing major comes to mind."

In addition to his own expertise, Wade relied on three local companies to complete the renovation. Urban Building Group, a licensed general contractor focusing on residential remodeling projects, was hired to construct the addition. Lombardo Pool Company designed the pool while Freeman's Stereo Video installed the 40-inch television and outdoor sound equipment.

"It turned out to be quite a project," says Wade. "But we love our location, our neighborhood and our neighbors so we decided to figure out what we needed to do to make this place perfect."

The exquisite details that exist today made the early challenges

worth it. The flooring of the veranda and outdoor kitchen, for example, are stamped concrete created to have the look of slate. The deck is Trex Brazilian, a synthetic composite material that's easy to maintain and resembles hardwood.

Mike Funderburk, who has an architectural background and handles design and sales for Urban Building Group, describes the eye-catching columns that structurally support the veranda's ceiling. "You usually see white columns, but Wade didn't want that," he says. "We searched the whole country and found a column of Western red cedar and had it shipped."

While the trim on the coffered ceilings and the eaves are white to match the style of the house, the columns blend perfectly with the ceiling's beams and the screen under the deck, which is a custom Western red cedar lattice, also shipped from the West Coast.

"We wanted a stain-grade column that would look like an indoor piece of furniture," explains Wade. "They do have to be sanded and refinished every six months, but that's a small price to pay. They're just gorgeous and much warmer than plain white."

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**OVERLEAF:** Two Adirondack chairs lure family and friends to take a seat and enjoy the relaxing view of Lake Norman.

**ABOVE:** Dusk on Lake Norman, as seen from the veranda of Wade Robinson's home. **OPPOSITE:** The deck overlooking the pool is comprised of Trex Brazilian, a composite material that resembles hardwood.









## Guided by nostalgia

Wade shares that it was his memories of boyhood camping trips in which his family would bring along a small television that prompted the inclusion of the outdoor television within the vaulted ceiling. Controlled by a remote, the TV has the ability to swivel so it can be viewed from the pool, either end of the terrace and even the lake. It can also fold up and “disappear” into the ceiling via a touch of the remote control. The accompanying outdoor sound system encompasses 11 full-surround sound speakers built into the coffered ceiling.

Wade incorporated low voltage lighting throughout the area, including around the dock. An Italian-colored glass fixture and built-in, recessed lighting are integral to the veranda’s ceiling.

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**OPPOSITE:** The vanishing edge pool features a heating and cooling system, allowing the homeowners to enjoy the water year-round.

**ABOVE LEFT:** The covered veranda comes complete with a remote-controlled television that folds up into the ceiling.

**ABOVE:** The Robinsons decided to create their outdoor oasis after they lost their 60-foot oak, which provided plenty of shade.



**ABOVE:** A small, screened-in porch was transformed into a fully functional outdoor kitchen.

**OPPOSITE:** The elegant columns supporting the veranda's ceiling are made of Western red cedar.

Furthermore, the family can select one of 20 colors to light up the pool. With its infinity edge, the pool creates the illusion that it's suspended in air. It features a gas heater and heat pump for wintertime use, and can be cooled during the summertime, although the flow of water over the pool's edge and continual circulation keeps it fairly cool.

Only 14 feet at its widest point, the pool is enhanced by an outdoor spray system of misters at the bar, on the deck and around the pool. "I like to tell people it's either the largest hot tub or the smallest pool on Lake Norman," Wade says with a laugh.

### Dining al fresco

The outdoor kitchen is fully functional, with a stocked refrigerator, icemaker, garbage disposal, dual beer taps, a built-in grill and a sink. All the appliances are stainless steel, made for outdoor use and surrounded with cultured stone. The countertop is comprised of honed granite. "It's granite but not polished like you'd see in a conventional kitchen," explains Funderburk. "It has a bit of a matte finish with no shine, so it doesn't show dirt. It's really well-suited to an outdoor living area."

The finishing touch is a grouping of custom-made Italian furniture, comprised of rustproof cast aluminum. The fabric covering is weatherproof and can be left outdoors year-round. "Good planning, good design and good execution will produce a good job," says Funderburk. "If you leave out any of those three things, you're not going to get a good result."

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## RESOURCES

**Builder:**

Urban Building Group

**Pool:**

Lombardo Pool Company

**Sound equipment and television:**

Freeman's Stereo Video



**ABOVE:** The Robinsons built their Lake Norman home in 1998.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Strategically placed lights emphasize the dock, nearby deck and pool.



Clearly, the Robinsons got good results. Their outdoor living area has become a social hub for numerous friends and neighbors, including many who swing by via boat on a regular basis. “We’re almost empty nesters so we’re pretty active socially,” says Wade. “We love to entertain and have friends over, so this has really lined up well with our lifestyle.” 🍷