



A NEW ORLEANS COURTYARD

BY MOLLY FROMKIN
AFTER PHOTOS BY NATHAN BERRY

“I love New Orleans. I've always loved New Orleans,” says homeowner Wes Kraker. What was once an overgrown, functionally useless piece of land abutting the Kraker home has been transformed into a little bit of the French Quarter right here in East Memphis. Wes and his wife, Becky, have been in their home for fifteen years, but it wasn't until another remodeling project two years ago that they committed to transforming their outdoor space into the stunning, comfortable courtyard it is today. “The area was just kind of overgrown, all azaleas and monkey grass. Not a lawn we could use or enjoy. Just wasted space,” says Wes. “So when we had to replace some windows in the house, we

decided to turn them into doors, which forced us to take the plunge” and finally construct the New Orleans patio area that Wes says he's wanted forever.

Choosing builder Tim DiSalvo to design and implement the project was, Wes says, an easy decision. “I didn't want a yes-man. I wanted somebody who would say, ‘Based on my experience and my best practices, this is what we should do.’” The Krakers had heard and read about Tim's stellar reputation, and when he made his proposal, Wes says, “I just said, ‘That's our guy.’” When Wes told Tim about the New Orleans feel he was looking for, DiSalvo actually made a trip down to the Crescent City for ideas. “Now that's impressive,” says Wes, “when your contractor takes a road trip just to make sure he's got the right image!”

Before





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After



Looking around the Krakers' finished courtyard, it's easy to see what DiSalvo learned from that inspirational trip to NOLA. Graceful columns and elegant ironwork combine to make a space that is both airy and intimate, reminiscent of the French Quarter's lush urban gardens. "What I noticed in New Orleans was

bluestone everywhere, and the way it combined with the brick and the gas lamps," says DiSalvo. At the Krakers', serene bluestone paving in an ashlar pattern and reclaimed Memphis Red brick anchor a beautiful, open entertainment space surrounded by nature, insulated from the surrounding neighborhood just

like a Garden District courtyard. "At first, all I knew I wanted was the fountain," says Wes, citing a similar work in the famous Pat O'Brien's restaurant as its inspiration. "Tim's vision went so much farther than my imagination would ever have taken me."

A family friend, blacksmith John



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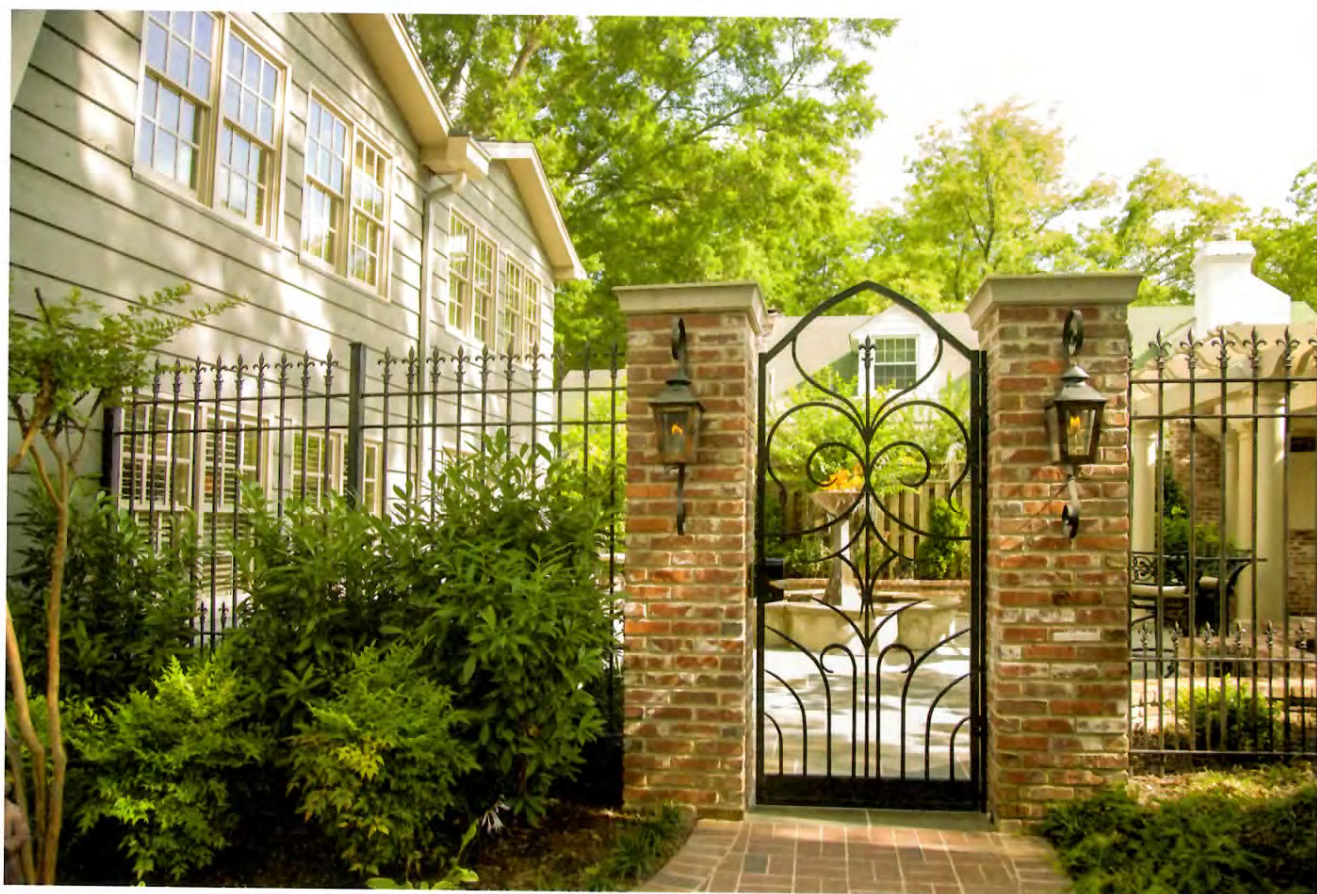
Argroves, handcrafted the fountain and the focal fleur-de-lis on the back wall, as well as the elaborate scrolled gate, and Michael Christie of Christie Cut Stone laid the stonework. "The pier caps, wall coping, and the water feature were all cut from Indiana limestone, explains Michael. "The challenge was to make sure that what we fabricated fit the areas that Tim

built, especially with such an elaborate fountain with that many angles." Christie Cut Stone used a GPS to gather extremely precise measurements for the limestone.

DiSalvo adds that it was important to create separate spaces within the overall courtyard. "Outdoor spaces are just like the home, you have entertaining

areas, gathering spaces, a quieter sitting area," he says. The showpiece quatrefoil fountain is open to the air and surrounded by high tables—perfect for parties. The outdoor kitchen area is illuminated with gas lamps that could have come straight from the streetlights on Bourbon Street, and the open design and carefully laid out landscaping





facilitate cross-ventilation that makes the area breezy and comfortable even on the warmest evenings. DiSalvo notes that the construction is reminiscent of the way things were built before air-conditioning,

The kitchen area is also equipped with a sound system and flat-screen tv. "I didn't even know I wanted an outdoor kitchen!" laughs Wes, but DiSalvo knew what an asset it would be for the

week, shares Becky Kraker. "It's just so comfortable. First thing in the morning, with a cup of coffee—it's an ideal paper-reading spot. We'll cook breakfast out there on the weekends, and it's great

