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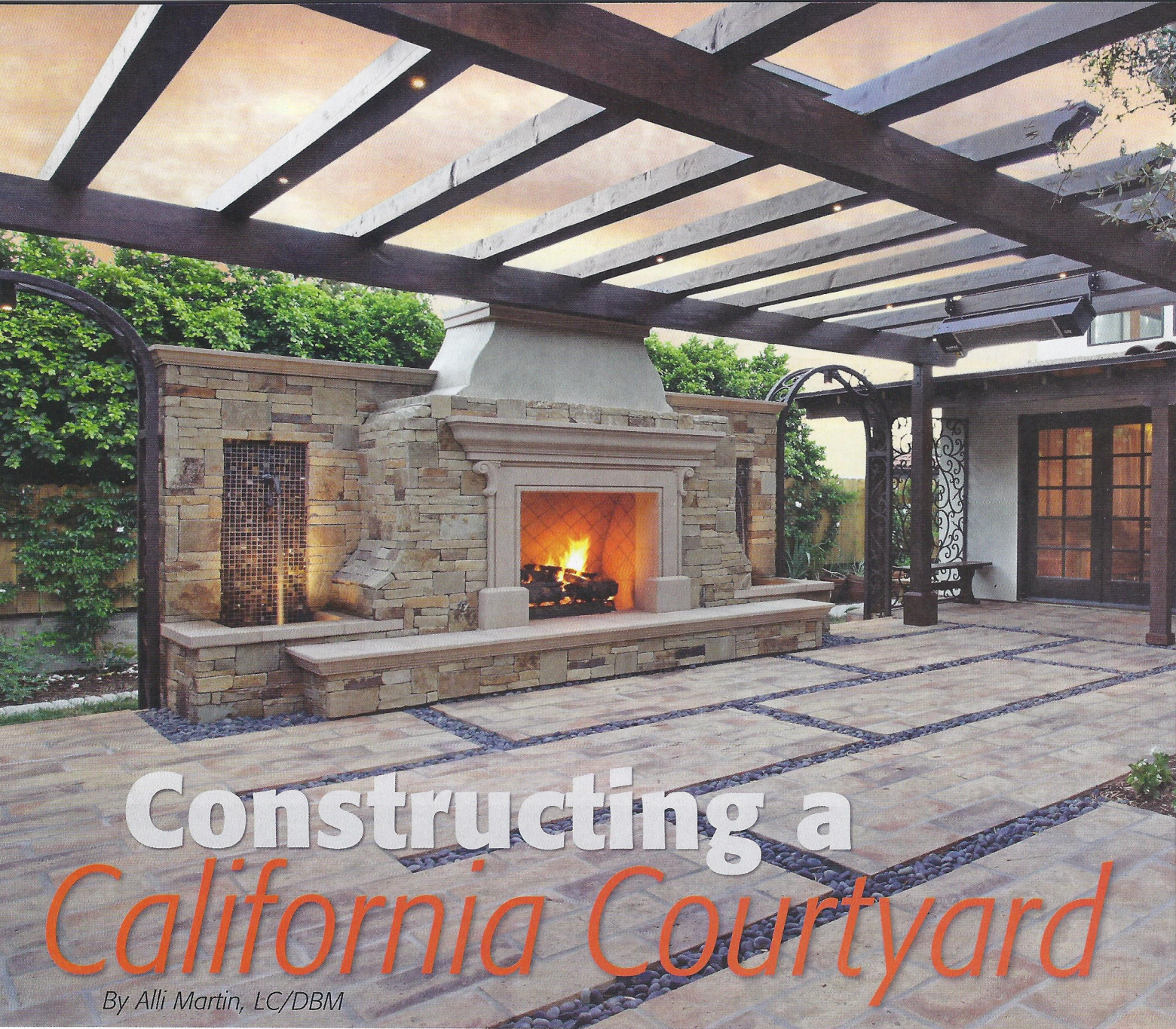


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# Constructing a *California Courtyard*

By Alli Martin, LC/DBM

When Altera Landscape started work on this backyard in Sierra Madre, Calif., all they had was a dirt yard and a design by Drew Sivgals from AMS Landscape Design Studios. Less than four months later, the four-man crew from Altera had made Sivgals' vision a reality, transforming the bare dirt space into a courtyard suitable for entertaining friends and family. The main features of the courtyard include an outdoor grill area, a fire and water feature with custom wrought iron details, and an overhead beam structure with space for an olive tree to grow through.

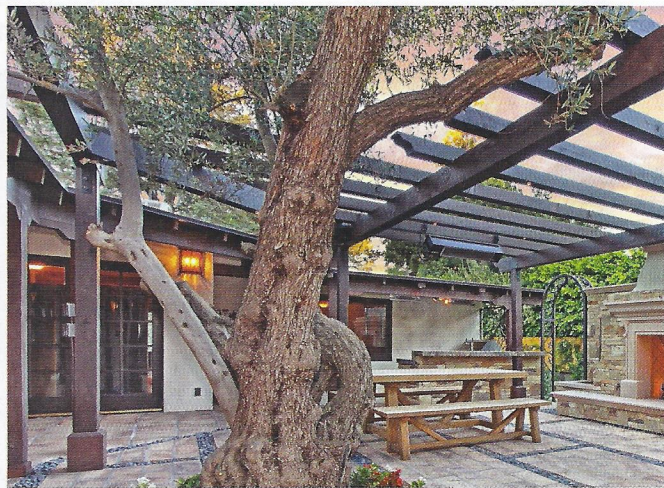
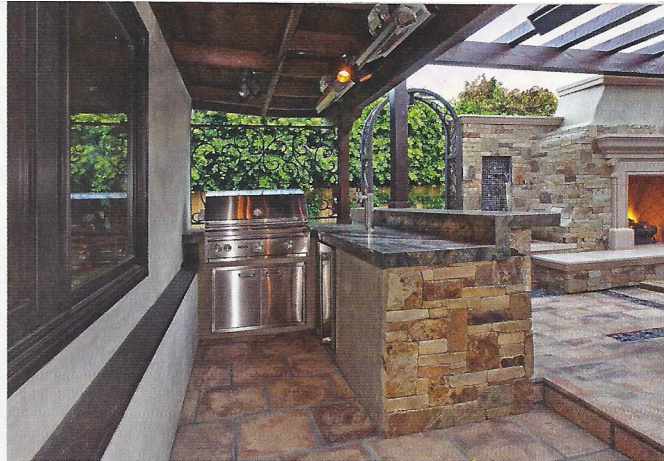
Accommodations had to be made for the outdoor grill area, as the homeowner-selected grill was too wide for the designated space. By enlarging the barbecue area slightly, the Altera Landscape crew was able to fit in the Lynx grill. Additionally, the homeowners requested a beer tap with space under the granite slab counter for keg storage. The barbecue entertainment cook center has Dakota natural stone veneer throughout as well as smooth stucco veneer.

The fire and water feature, flanked on either side by custom, handmade wrought iron arches, went through multiple designs before the final one was chosen. The fireplace structure is veneered with natural stone and has a precast mantle, hearth and firebox surrounds. The water portion includes wrought iron spouts on a glass tile veneer. The arches were custom designed by Sivgals, and handmade for this project.

The ground is tiled with Arto Brick and Tile pavers in a Hermosa blend with a Luna finish to give the space a rustic feel, matching the personality of the home. Black Mexican beach pebbles fill the gaps between the paver pads and the surrounding walkway.

The overhead open beam structure was constructed out of large distressed timber with corbel ends on each beam and semi-transparent stain. Sixteen custom made mini copper recessed lights were installed in the structure to properly downlight the courtyard area. A large opening was left to place the field grown Manzanilla olive tree in the middle of the courtyard. After

**Above:** Altera Landscape transformed a bare dirt backyard in Sierra Madre, Calif., into this stunning courtyard, complete with fire and water feature, outdoor grill area, overhead open beam structure, and a spec'd olive tree in the midst of it all. The courtyard, designed by Drew Sivgals of AMS Landscape Design, was meant to be the focal point of the outdoor space.



**Top, Right:** The outdoor grill area includes a Lynx barbecue and a beer tap with keg storage underneath the granite slab countertop. The tap and keg storage were specifically requested by the homeowner. Dakota natural stone veneer and smooth stucco veneer line the sides of the grill area.

**Middle, Right:** The fire and water feature went through many design phases before the final layout was selected. The fireplace has a stone veneer finish with precast mantle, hearth and firebox surrounds. The water features to the left and right of the fireplace have custom wrought iron spouts and glass tile veneer. The wrought iron arches on either side of the structure were custom designed and handmade. The Arto Brick and Tile paving is a Hermosa blend with a Luna finish, giving the space a rustic look to match the personality of the old home. Black Mexican beach pebbles fill in the spaces between the pads.

**Bottom, Right:** The 420-square-foot overhead open beam structure consists of distressed timber and corbel ends on each beam for optimal appearance, coated with semi-transparent stain. Sixteen custom made mini copper recessed lights are installed throughout the structure to provide adequate lighting for the patio area. Remarkably, the beam structure was put in place before the olive tree, which was hand chosen by Altera's president Ryan Suarez. A crane was used to put the tree in place without damaging the beam structure.

being hand selected by Altera Landscape's president Ryan Suarez, a crane was used to lower the tree through the patio cover and into its designated space. Fortunately, the tree was placed perfectly, without causing any damage to the beams or the rest of the backyard.

From design to completion, the project took only four months. Altera Landscape did all of the installation work except for the framing of the beam structure and installation of the granite countertop for the outdoor grill area. The design was by AMS Landscape Design Studios. A crane was rented to install the olive tree; other than that, Altera owned all the construction tools used on the project. The primary challenges were lowering the olive tree through the beams without causing any damage and fitting the grill in the small space. The project overall flowed smoothly with little hurdles to overcome. 