Just Add Water

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OUTDOOR SPACES | HIGH-PERFORMANCE WATCHES
Excerpt from An Affair with a House (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2005) by Bunny Williams with Christine Pitel

Was there an existing pool when you purchased the house?
No. A few years ago, my husband John announced: “What we really need around here is a swimming pool.”

How difficult was it to site the pool and the adjacent pool house?
My first thought was: “There is no place to put a pool.” But John had already figured that out. He picked out a sunny spot up on the hill. We sited the pavilion with the forest just beyond, so it would look natural, as if the trees had simply come out of the woods to make this building.

Describe the design process for the house.
I had no interest in the typical white-latticed pool house. While in France, I picked up a book on 18th-century garden follies and one picture caught my eye: a brick building with porch columns made out of tree trunks. That was the genesis of the idea, and then it grew from there.

How does the architectural style of the pool house relate to the main house?
The village in Connecticut where we live is full of wonderful Greek Revival architecture. We thought why not erect our own little Greek temple, and make it out of tree trunks?

Did you face any unique challenges?
I asked an architect friend to give me the mathematical formula for a classic Greek temple—the proportions of height, width and depth. Then I took these figures, sketched out a design on a napkin, and went to see our local carpenter, Gerald McMahon. He took it from there and did an amazing job. It is not easy to find 10 trees that could work as columns, but he located an old estate where a grove of white oaks was about to be cut down for redevelopment. He measured every tree and marked the ones he wanted. He had to wrap all 10 trunks in blankets, so the bark wouldn’t be rubbed off when they were chained together for transport.

When do you like to use the pool house?
We often go up before lunch, swim and then eat in the shade of the pavilion. In the fall, with the fire lit, it’s a lovely spot for drinks and dinner.

Describe some of the materials you used.
I wanted everything to feel organic. The expansive open-air room is furnished with rattan chairs and wooden tables. We shipped the bamboo umbrellas from India. A frieze of split logs runs along the top of the pool house. In a whimsical touch, I filled the pediment with pinecones.