

Canadian Architecture & Design Magazine

Pools For Thought

These days the backyard pool is more than just a swimming hole, it's a work of art



Gene Brown has been in the pool business for more than 30 years and he says that the traditional kidney-shaped blue gunite backyard pool is becoming a thing of the past.

“We stay away from body-part pools,” says Brown, who runs Valley Pool & Spa in Kelowna, B.C. Why?

“Because they don’t reflect the architecture of the house,” he says. These days, homeowners want their pools to be an integral part of their property, blending with the landscape as well as their home. It’s part of a design trend that aims to bring the outdoors in and the indoors out,” he says.

Brown cites a current project where he is installing an outdoor pool on the second floor of the house. When you enter the home, on the lower level you can look up through windows in the floor at the pool. And one whole side is a window into the inside of the house. The pool also has a vanishing edge, a feature that Brown says is the most popular new trend in pool design today.

“The water is the same level as the deck,” he says. “It’s really neat. It looks like a great big sheet of glass sitting there.” One side of the pool disappears as if into infinity, pulling the eye out over the surrounding landscape and creating the illusion that the man-made pool is inseparable from its environment.

And because the angles of the pool, its shape, echo the roof angles of the house, the pool actually integrates the house with the land and sky around it.

Barry Justus, of Burlington, Ont.’s Poolscape Inc., says that his clients want pools with superior reflective qualities. One of his installations for an Oakville, Ont., client recently won an award for the best concrete pool in Canada. To enhance its reflective qualities, Justus lined the pool with black tiles.

Justus’s prize-winning pool also features a cold-water spa with a neck massaging waterfall, as well as three wet walls covered in blue glass tiles. “They look spectacular,” says Justus, “in the sunlight with water pouring over them.”



These pools are so beautiful that their owners keep the water just-above-freezing, at 38 degrees F in the winter so that they can feast their eyes on their “water feature” all year round. But summer is still the best time of year to enjoy your pool. Indeed, one can practically move in to some of these high-end pools.

Swim-up bars with built-in stools are a very popular idea that has been imported from tropical island resorts. And some new pools are equipped with threaded cups so that sun umbrellas can be screwed right into the bottom of the pool. Add waterproof patio tables and chairs, and who cares how hot it gets outside?

“These days, people are traveling a lot and seeing things they like,” says Brown. “Then they come home and say ‘can you do this?’ and we say ‘why not?’”

One trend that Justus thinks is on the wane is what he calls “pile of rock pools” with their faux streams and waterfalls. “Go and see them and you’ll find that they’re never turned on, because they don’t work, they leak and they look ugly. They look like a pile of rocks.”

Justus also cautions that these high-end pools are not for everyone. His company only builds two or three a year in Canada. “Not many companies can build them and not many people can afford it.”

Certainly it seems that spending a million dollars on a swimming pool in a climate like Canada’s is the ultimate in luxury. But the demand is there. “These are people who want a work of art,” says Justus. “They want other people to walk into their yard and be amazed.”

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