

Inside: Brian Van Bower on Reaching the High End

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Design • Engineering • Construction

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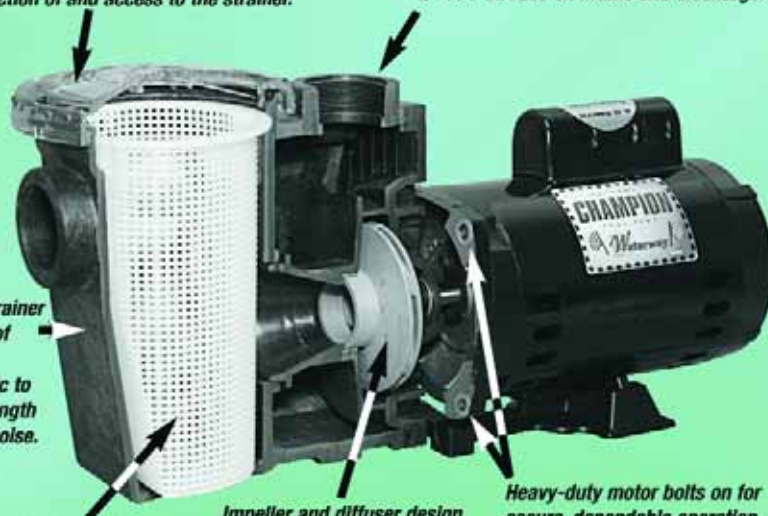
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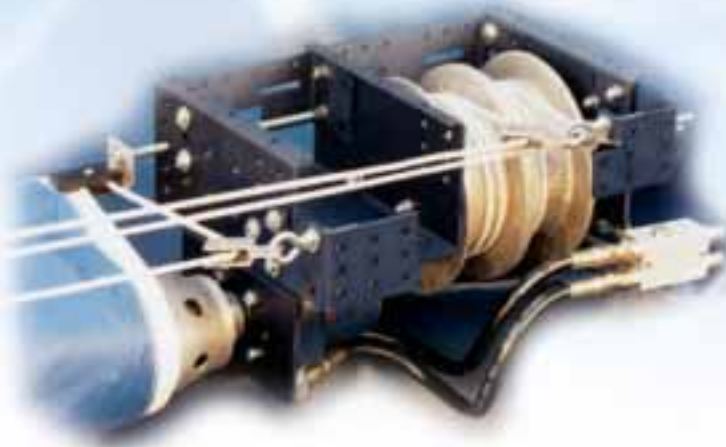
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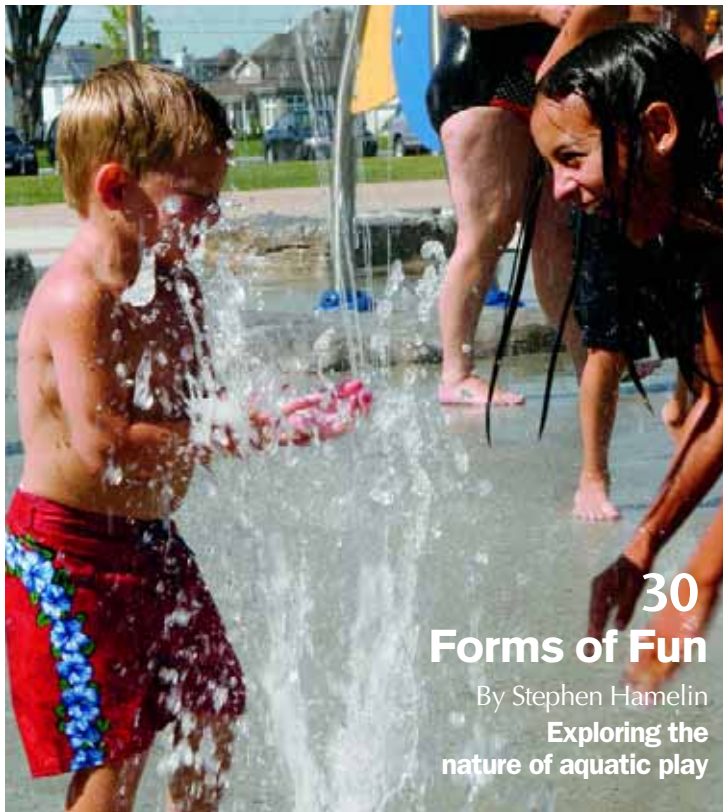


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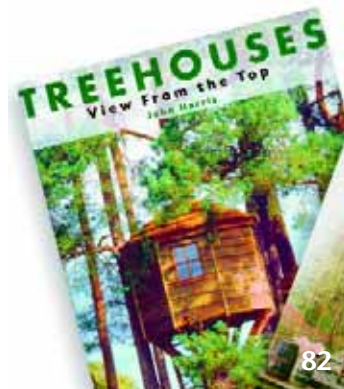
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Photo courtesy Michael Batchelor & Andrey Berezowsky, SWON Design, Montreal

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By Eric Herman

Ultimate Mystique

One Saturday during the summer of 2000, I sat down for breakfast in Santa Monica, Calif., with Suzanne and Ron Dirsmith. They had just published the first of what have now become several articles in *WaterShapes* and had flown in from Chicago to visit family in southern California. I was eager to meet them in person and happy that they'd invited me to join them for a beachside breakfast.

It was a great meeting. I already knew that the Dirsmiths were designers of international renown and had worked around the globe for more than four decades, but I soon discovered that they are also enormously engaging conversationalists – among the most entertaining storytellers I've ever met.

During our discussions that morning they regaled me all sorts of stories about their work and travels. That alone would have been memorable enough, but then they casually mentioned that they had spent years working on a unique project in the hills right near the UCLA campus – not far from where we were that day.

That project, it turned out, was the famous Playboy Mansion West, home to legendary publisher Hugh Hefner. Without any pretense, Ron and Suzanne casually explained that they had personally designed and managed the construction of the mansion's interiors spaces as well as the sprawling exteriors – including the famous swimming pool and the legendary grotto.

The conversation was amazing. We talked about the site, the pioneering naturalistic pool design and their experiences in working with Hefner, who, they explained, was a remarkably creative, sensitive and demanding client. Shortly after we started this discussion, I began thinking about the possibility of publishing a feature article on the project and, after a while, worked up the nerve to broach the idea.

They politely demurred and suggested instead that we proceed with publishing articles about myriad other projects – many of which have, in the years since, appeared in these pages. But they'd left the door open, and as the years went by, I occasionally reminded them of our desire to publish the mansion story whenever they were ready to tell it.

Years passed until, in the spring of 2005, the Dirsmiths made contact at my urging with Brian Van Bower, my good friend and *WaterShapes* columnist, who was in the process of lining up marquee speakers for Genesis 3's educational program at the Aqua Show, which takes place in November in Las Vegas. The Dirsmiths signed on – and decided as well that the time had finally come to publish the Playboy Mansion West story in *WaterShapes*.

It is with genuine pride that I introduce this feature, which begins on page 40 inside. It is a remarkable story of a great site, a fascinating client, a fabulously innovative design and an execution that embodied genius from the initial presentation to placement of the last plant.

In preparation for the story, publisher Jim McCloskey and I were granted the privilege of a private tour of the mansion's grounds, and I can say without reservation that, 30 years out, it remains one of the most remarkable built spaces to be found anywhere on the planet. The detail, the continuity of design and the sheer creativity make the project a true masterpiece of modern design.

And when you factor in the mystique radiated by the property and its owner, the place is truly the stuff of legend. Enjoy!



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Stephen Hamelin is founder and president of Vortex Aquatic Structures International in Montreal, where he plays a key role in day-to-day operations while providing the company with its forward-looking vision. Since he started this design/product development/deployment company in 1995, Vortex has installed more than 2,000 systems and has built a reputation for quality, attention to detail and innovative, unique designs in zero-depth aquatic play environments.

Ron Dirsmith is principal architect and co-founder of The Dirsmith Group, an architecture firm based in Highland Park, Ill., with operations worldwide. He and wife Suzanne


established the firm in 1971 following employment with the prestigious firms Perkins and Will and Ed Dart Inc. He has a BS in Architectural Engineering and a Masters in Architecture and Design from the University of Illinois. He is also a Fellow in Architecture of the American Academy in Rome, which for more than 100 years has been a research and study center for America's most promising artists and scholars. Dirsmith is one of only 172 architects to have been granted this honor. **Suzanne Roe Dirsmith**, president of the firm, holds a BS in Education from the University of Illinois and a Masters in Education from National-Louis University.


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She heads the education division of The Dirmsmith Group, an effort dedicated to forwarding design and architecture education within the architectural community and to fostering new thinking and raising awareness of architecture and landscape design as a blended whole.

Andrey Berezowsky is co-founder of SWON Design in Montreal. He is an artist and designer whose experience spans some 30 years and whose passions have included furniture and industrial design, stained glass and glass blowing. He worked in Germany for five years with some of Europe's finest glass and neon artists and has

developed a knowledge of materials and processes that has allowed him to work in a multitude of mediums with refined skills and a knack for creating beauty. **Michael Batchelor** is the other co-founder of SWON Design. He worked as an assignment photographer for 17 years in an operation with offices in Montreal and Toronto and has worked for some of the top advertising and design firms in North America. In addition to his award-winning work as a still photographer, he has been involved in the film industry and also worked as a design and communications director for Sonnet Media, where he honed his skills in design, marketing and product development.



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By Brian Van Bower

Life at the High End



Through the years, more than a few watershaping professionals have asked me how to break through and start working with high-end clients.

I respond by giving them the disappointing news that there is no magic key here: Serving the high end takes commitment, hard work and a willingness to focus your thinking on a distinct set of fundamentals that must take over and guide your work. Depending on the level at which you're currently functioning, getting to the high end may involve climbing a mountain or might simply be about making a series of crucial adjustments to the way you do business.

Figuring out where you stand involves asking and answering the following questions: Are you doing quality work? Are you *able* to do quality work? Affirmative answers here mean that you've probably spent years in the business; know quality materials and construction techniques inside and out; have a good working knowledge of hydraulics; are familiar with principles of exterior design, design traditions and maybe even art history; and finally, have a firm grasp on client relations and the business of contracting.

Point blank: If your internal responses in any of these areas leave you

Getting to the high end may involve climbing a mountain or might simply be about making a series of crucial adjustments to the way you do business.

with additional questions in mind, then you need to examine your work with a fresh perspective – and keep on being brutally honest with yourself.

they find you

This subject of approaching the high end has been much on my mind lately, as my Genesis 3 partner and co-founder Skip Phillips and I have been developing a seminar program on the topic. It's been a useful process and has brought some distinct patterns into focus.

We reinforced our sense, for example, that self-aware, brutal honesty is vital: You must be candid with yourself and avoid making the mistake of thinking that putting beer in a champagne glass is an elevating behavior. To reach for the high end, you must truly be doing top-flight work. If you're not, you have to step up your game in every area: Trying to perform at the high end with mid-level skills is a formula for failure.

In my experience, I've encountered businesses that try to have it all ways, working with mid-level clients as well as high-end ones, and some even structure their firms with two divisions to keep things separate. It's not impossible to make such arrangements work, but there's great difficulty, even if it's only at the ownership level, in maintaining that kind of split focus. I won't say it's impossible, but the constant shifting of gears between mid-level and high-end work seems undesirable at best and probably unworkable.

To advance this discussion, let's assume that you do top-level work and want to pursue the high end with a single-minded focus. How do you find these high-end clients? How do you work with them once they're on board?

Project acquisition at the high end is different: Usually, it's not about advertising or marketing in the traditional sense. Yes, slick ads



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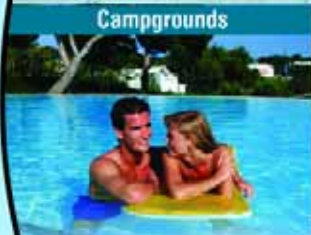
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in quality publications geared to the affluent may work, but experience tells me that attracting high-end clients is more about connections and penetrating groups of people who, while they may live in far-flung locations, all know each other and socialize when circumstances bring them together.

I've had high-end clients in Bermuda

and Florida give me referrals to their friends in New York and California. These people, who are generally well-traveled in addition to being well-heeled, operate in a world without borders and expect those who work with and for them to do the same. In this world, the significance of word-of-mouth referrals is amplified exponentially.

making headway

For one thing, people who enjoy lives of privilege and prestige also enjoy sharing what they know and experience with their peers. They also take pleasure in seeing those peers follow their lead. In my own business, fully 95 percent of the projects that come my way are through referrals. I might have reached some of these folks through conventional marketing, but that's highly unlikely.

To win these referrals, it is absolutely crucial to do quality work, but there's more to it than just that: You must also leave your clients smiling and feeling good not only about the end product, but the way the process has unfolded from beginning to end.

These people become your advocates and can be extremely forceful in convincing their friends when it comes to those with whom they simply "must" work. I've had clients introduce me to their friends and say words to the effect of, "This is Brian. He's the one who *must* design your pool, and it's going to cost a *fortune*!" They take pride in that kind of statement and I'll be darned if their peers don't respond favorably.

On the flip side, you'll find that many of these people are extremely private and tend to be reserved in what they say to others – a habit of the mega-wealthy I've known. Even here, however, high-end performance on the job will stand you in good stead because the word about what you've done still travels, albeit more slowly.

There is a catch here, of course, in that getting high-end clients to push you along to their friends, families and business associates involves landing one of them in the first place. Breaking through in this case is probably best accomplished by getting good press.

I have been extremely fortunate in working with the press and give the writers and editors I've worked with a lot of credit for helping me establish my high-end chops. I'm not talking about the trade press in this case, although working with magazines such as *WaterShapes* is a wonderful thing. What you need is exposure through the *consumer* press, which is a different animal altogether.

I've known people in our trade who

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have told me that appearing in print has transformed their businesses. The best way to get to that point is to be systematic and start by making yourself known to local publications – city business magazines, regional home and design publications and even newspapers. Once you're published in one, it's much more likely that others will follow suit. Indeed, there's a real snowball effect that comes into play: Much like clients who fall into a referral base, editors and journalists gravitate to resources they've seen in other magazines.

a need to communicate

The key to working with these professionals is to be responsive to their needs. Often, that comes down to a topic I've brought up time and again: You need to return their phone calls!

I've had a great many experiences with the press in which a call from a writer who wants information on one topic – the latest trends in swimming pool design, for example – will open up conversations on a variety of others. These professionals are paid to be good listeners: By giving them the time of day and treating them with respect, you set up a relationship in which they will come back to you over and over again.

To be sure, some journalists seem to specialize in making silly inquiries and engaging folks in time-wasting diversions, and this has led some watershapers to treat them with general disdain. There's also the fact that participating in the journalistic process can be intimidating – and more than a few cases in which the way things turn out can breed mistrust.

Let me say this clearly: You need to overcome whatever misgivings you might have about journalism if you want to garner the sort of exposure that will lead you to high-end projects. Media coverage leads to all sorts of unanticipated contacts and offers a level of exposure that will never come your way otherwise.

This leads to another important point having to do with the way you see and conduct yourself: Much of working in the high-end market boils down to developing a confidence level that enables you to move among these people with

comfort and confidence.

Few watershapers come from the highest social strata, and I've known a great many people who are simply uncomfortable around and perhaps intimidated by wealthy people. This is a real challenge for regular working folks and is entirely understandable. But the simple fact is that, unless you happen to

You need to overcome misgivings you might have about journalism if you want to garner the sort of exposure that will lead you to high-end projects.

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have been born into the social elite, you have to raise yourself to approximately that level in the way you present and carry yourself.

stepping up

One of my guiding principles is that I refuse to look down (or up) to anyone. I treat the people who serve my food,

wash my car and do my laundry with respect, and I know for a fact that people with money are no better or worse than anyone else.

In this business, we need to respect and understand people who earn their livings with their hands and their blood, sweat and tears to see our projects installed in keeping with our standards for quality.

We also need to work with those who run major corporations and everyone in between to keep ourselves busy.

To function at the high end, you can't be in awe of the prospect who flies to a meeting in a private jet. On the flip side, if you're thinking about picking that prospect up in a car that might have a dirty diaper in the back seat, the odds of working successfully with the guy in the jet are going to be tremendously reduced.

This is why I believe that demeanor and confidence are so important: You have to exude authority, perspective and knowledge of your profession, and if you do so successfully, even the corporate-jet guy will respond to you. It's something that has to come from inside you and can't be faked. If your work is exemplary but you can't communicate that excellence through your personal attitude and demeanor, you're not going to get referrals, good press or high-end clients. Period.

Personal appearance, courtesy and ease all come into play here. If you go into a meeting with wealthy clients with the conviction that they are going to look down on you because you make a living doing something other than moving millions of dollars around on Wall Street, then you've basically lost without even getting into the game. By contrast, when you walk up to wealthy prospects, shake their hands with confidence and communicate with them eye to eye, they don't see a designer or contractor; rather, they see someone worthy of respect who is approaching them with grace and confidence.

It doesn't really matter if you're a plumber or an entrepreneur (or both): You will always be your own best vehicle for communicating the values that permeate your business and your work.

I've worked many times with people who occupy stations in life and society far above mine, but it has never mattered because I approach these people as needing something I have to offer. I respect them, of course, but I go into these situations with a confidence that lets them know that when it comes to watershaping, I'm the authority and they must respect me in that capacity.



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la dolce vita

Let me bring this discussion to a close with coverage of the part of the high-end equation I enjoy the most: the good life.

The way I see it, watershapes are about lifestyle, enjoyment and prestige. Most high-end clients live the good life and are comfortable working with people who have a sense of what that means and can slide into that mindset. This does not mean that you necessarily have to share the sorts of experiences that define the lives of wealthy people, but it is an enormous advantage to understand and appreciate what the good life is all about.

(This is why in developing the Genesis 3 schools we've always sought to arrange for experiences in beautiful locations with great food and quality libations.)

Time and time again, the work I do with high-end clients involves social situations centered on dining, travel, wine and discussions of the finer things in life. You don't need to be a zillionaire to appreciate those things, but I must say that my experience with fine wine and dining through years of participation in the American Institute of Wine & Food has led to a great many enormously enjoyable situations with my clients. It's a big part of how I operate.

I do this because, first of all, I enjoy it and don't shy away from discussions of wine and great food with clients because I know it's likely they'll understand and appreciate what I have to say. But I could also fill page after page with descriptions of situations in which my work as a designer has drawn me into pleasurable social situations and great meals with clients. I'm not saying you need to become the world's leading authority on 30-year-old tawny ports; what I will say, however, is that it hugely helps if you're comfortable in conversations on such topics.

By the same token, if clients share something about aspects of their lives and you're unfamiliar with a topic, don't try to fake it. Just listen and learn, because it's human nature to appreciate courteous curiosity and your clients will be pleased. But if you can chime in with your own perspective or, even better, offer an opportunity to share such an

experience, then you're almost sure to find a terrific chance to blend business with pleasure.

Ultimately, ours is a business of pleasure, and when you work with high-end clients, you'll be exposed to elements of lifestyles that are going to enrich the way you live. Personally and professionally, I wouldn't have it any other way. **WS**

Brian Van Bower runs Aquatic Consultants, a design firm based in Miami, Fla., and is a co-founder of Genesis 3, A Design Group; dedicated to top-of-the-line performance in aquatic design and construction, this organization conducts schools for like-minded pool designers and builders. He can be reached at bvanbower@aol.com.

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By Stephanie Rose

The Accidental Designer



It'd be great if every project I was asked to tackle were about the complete environment – not only the planting plan, but also the watershapes, artworks, amenities and everything else a client might desire.

That doesn't happen often enough, probably because my portfolio is much richer in planting plans than it is in watershapes. But from time to time I find clients who have faith in me and my abilities as a designer and give me total control.

Late last year, I was fortunate enough to come across one such project. I had originally been brought in to design only the planting, but through various circumstances and discussions with the clients, I was able to instill enough confidence in them that they placed me in charge of designing the entire project, which included a pool/spa combination, artwork and various amenities beyond the gardens.

getting started

As I've mentioned before, I come at watershaping from a landscape designer's point of view, so I approached this project as I would any other – that

The project required coordination of pool, landscape and general contractors, an electrician, artists, two arborists, masons, a landscape-maintenance crew and a lighting designer.

is, by spending time with the clients, showing them suggested design styles and learning as much as I could about them and their preferences and dislikes when it came to various design elements.

I had been hired initially to design only the planting, so I'd put together a preliminary design that worked with the existing pool/spa combination – small, poorly situated on the site and, it turns out, unsuited to the clients' needs.

One key problem beyond the pool was that the yard had been repeatedly (and improperly) graded, resulting in tree bases at different heights and a newly installed ficus hedge that was quickly dying. There was little question that the property needed to be regraded and that the hedge needed to be replaced – preferably by something with not quite as invasive a root system.

During a brief discussion one afternoon, the homeowner asked me what I thought of the pool. Diplomatically, I said that I thought it could have been done better, but that as long as it served his purposes, I could work the planting around it to make it considerably more appealing.

He replied that he did not like the pool at all and was considering having it redone to raise the spa so it would spill into the pool. He asked if I could design something for him and I agreed to help. But my first suggestion was that we needed to explore the financial soundness of refurbishing compared to starting over with something that would completely suit his needs and aesthetic goals.

At that point, he asked me if I would mind working with the pool builder who had built a project at his other home – a gentleman named Randy Beard of Pure Water Pools in Costa Mesa, Calif. I told him that I knew Randy and that, although we'd never had the



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pleasure of working together, I believed we would be a great fit.

I contacted Randy right away and asked him to work up two bids: one for refurbishing the current pool and raising the spa, the other for building an entirely new (but very basic) pool. Given a host of factors, we decided it was best to abandon the current vessel and start fresh.

shaping designs

By that time, I already knew that the clients were art collectors, but I was not fully aware of the extent of their passion. One day, they showed me a picture of a steel-and-concrete sculpture by an artist named Guy Dill, asking me if I could work it into the landscape. I agreed, but the addition had a rippling effect on the entire design.

I had already put together preliminary planting layouts, but everything was scrapped at that point and I started fresh. The homeowner then came to me with a photograph of *another* piece he owned and wanted to place in the garden – this one a kinetic sculpture by an artist named Bruce Stillman.

Changing gears, I began to envision an outdoor art gallery. Where an indoor gallery tends to feature white walls and great lighting, I was thinking of using plants in flat planes that would create light-green backdrops to showcase the art pieces.

I showed the clients a picture of a perimeter-overflow pool and explained that I wanted to create a reflecting pool to enhance the visual appeal of Dill's sculpture when the vessel wasn't being used as a pool. This would maximize the impression of size in the small backyard, and the perimeter overflow would continue the concept of flat planes in the yard by creating a seamless deck level on the site.

They loved the look and acknowledged that we were moving into an entirely new realm as far as expense was concerned. By this time, of course, Beard had explained that this was a complicated project and would be considerably more costly than the basic pool we had originally discussed.

We also needed to take into consideration two mature trees on the property that had been surrounded by an unsightly planter wall. This structure, basically a stuccoed concrete-block wall, significantly impinged on useable space in the yard, but it did the job of retaining soil to the proper level for the root systems of the trees at a level about 18 inches above the rest of the yard. The trees were already stressed, however, having been planted at different times and having been subject to regrading that had covered an existing root system – a big mistake.

I consulted with an arborist who agreed that the best solution would be to build a wood deck over the bases of both trees, protecting the root systems and allowing for feeding and regular checks on their health. This would also let us expand the useable space, with the new deck holding lounges and serving as a viewing space above the pool.

Continued on page 20

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moving forward

With all the site issues resolved and a design in place, Beard and I moved forward with grading and pool construction. The heavy rains of southern California's last winter delayed us repeatedly and tested our relationship with the clients – as did some issues with local inspectors. (As Beard explained to me, relatively few in-

spectors are familiar with the engineering and construction of perimeter-overflow pools and therefore tend to address things in ways that slow down the process.)

At this point, however, I had the sense that everything was starting to come together. My role was to create the pool/spa and planting design and to serve as project manager. I was to consult on all de-

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sign details as well, including lighting, furnishings and other garden amenities. The key to success: working with top quality contractors and other designers who were able to take my design and vision and turn them into reality.

Before it was through, the project required coordination of the pool, landscape and general contractors, an electrician, the artists, two arborists, masons, the landscape-maintenance crew and a lighting designer. I will discuss the specifics of their roles another time; for now, I want to share my thoughts on this project from a landscape designer's point of view.

► First, it was important to me to work with individuals on this project who understood that a top-quality result was the client's most important consideration. Every line item was approved by the client with that in mind, and I had to make certain that the contractors and consultants were absolutely clear on this point.

► Second, I learned the extent to which the clients were depending on me as the design principal to ensure that the entire project would reflect their needs and desires. My specialty is planting, but I had to impose my design sense on all of the components that went into creating this beautiful space, including the watershape, the decking, the placement of the artwork and more.

They paid me to be sure that all the trades were properly and efficiently coordinated and that work was done to their satisfaction. If it wasn't, I took the brunt of their displeasure and made sure issues were satisfactorily resolved.

► Third, I discovered that even though I've been a faithful reader of *WaterShapes* from the beginning, I have a lot to learn about the practicalities of watershaping. I have a polished sense about what works in exterior environments, but even

though I can design the overall look of a pool, I now recognize fully that how one is built significantly affects how it will ultimately turn out.

Beard and his crews were great teachers, and I learned a great deal by developing a rapport with everyone and observing how they approached design details and made them work. They were very patient with me as well, explaining things that I'm sure seemed very basic to them.

► Fourth (and last), I reinforced my awareness of the value of developing good relationships with other professionals within the landscape, watershape and other trades. On so many of my garden-design projects, I work in a vacuum with a hand-picked landscape contractor. This project taught me new lessons on networking and nurturing relationships that will carry into other projects.

I am particularly grateful to Randy and Marti Beard for their guidance and support on this project and for building a most amazing pool and reflective surface for this outdoor art gallery. I look forward to working with them again in the future and with the other professionals who joined us for this project. (Some have already referred me to other clients – a welcome and reassuring bonus.)

At this level, it's all about collaboration. As I and many other watershapers have pointed out on these pages, communication and relationship-building are the keys to success and to elevating our profession and trades. In addition, it's always good to know that there are like-minded people out there who are willing to work on spectacular projects and take you to places you never thought you could go! **MS**

Stephanie Rose runs Stephanie Rose Landscape Design in Encino, Calif. A specialist in residential garden design, her projects often include collaboration with custom pool builders. Stephanie is also an instructor on landscape design for the Genesis 3 Design Group. If you have a specific question about landscaping (or simply want to exchange ideas), e-mail her at sroseld@earthlink.net.



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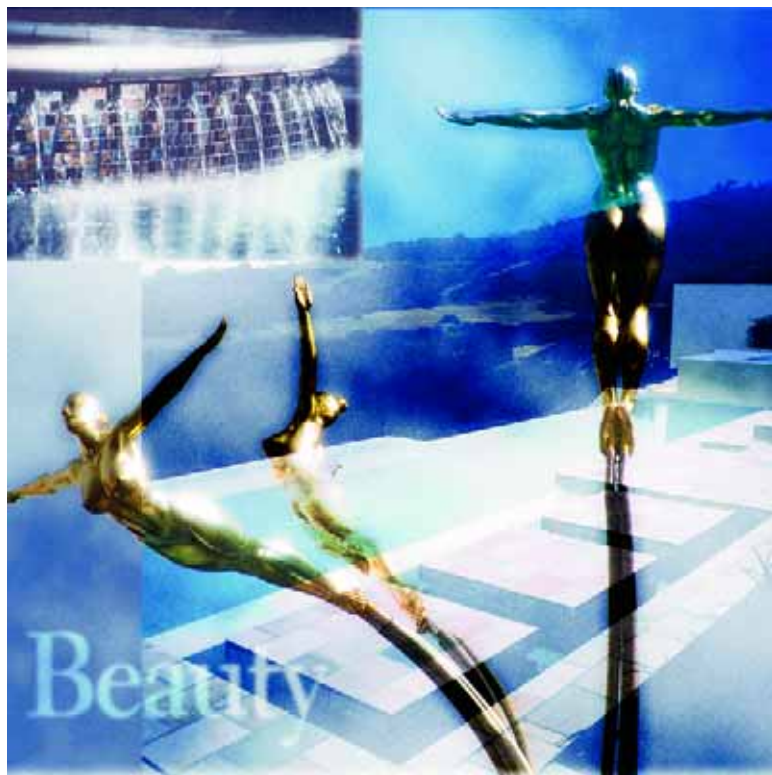
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By David Tisherman

For the Love of Beauty



If there's one theme that permeates every page, every word and every photograph in this publication, it is this: The creation of something outstanding, something that stirs an emotional response, something that establishes an ongoing, extraordinary experience for clients and anyone else who sees our work – it all starts with the passion we have in our hearts for art and its intimate relationship to what we do as watershapers.

That's a big concept. *Really* big. And I believe that unless you appreciate and (on some level) understand the raw power of artistic creation, then what you generate will seldom be true to the ideals of beauty, balance and harmony toward which we all should be striving.

Furthermore, this unrestrained sense of passion is an important one for us to embrace as professionals because it can serve as an internal compass that will guide the way we approach our work in an infinite number of practical and tangible ways.

Design is about bringing something to our clients that emerges from our talent, educational background, insight into a setting's dynamics, experience and, ultimately, our own hearts.

the taste of elegance

I've written over and over in these pages about what it means to be a designer. Some of you have come to the conclusion that this line of discussion is meant to exclude all but an elite few, but I can't think of anything that is more off base.

In fact, I believe that most everyone possesses some artistic ability. This is why I spend so much time in front of classrooms: I hope to unlock that ability in others, and it's clear to me through more than 20 years of teaching that those talents lie untapped within many of my students, their true passion hidden behind a detrimental set of preconceived notions.

Let's get specific about this with the pool and spa industry, where, to me, the worst of the detrimental preconceptions is the "retail mentality."

This mindset says that when we work with clients, we are there to sell them anything and everything, including the kitchen sink, because it means the project will generate more money for us. The last thought in mind is to select carefully or artfully among available materials to find things that go together: This is about jamming as much into the project as possible to extract as much money as the traffic will bear.

If you ask me – and lots of you have, believe me – this retail mentality is the main hurdle that stands between us and the potential we have to deliver great work.

Design is *not* about riffling through options and pulling things off a shelf without a care in the world about how the tile, for example, works with the coping and all the other stuff we've pulled. It's about bringing something to our clients that emerges from our talent, educational background, insight into a setting's dynamics, experience and, ultimately, our own hearts.

To explain this with more clarity, let's step be-

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yond watershaping and explore a topic to which we can all relate – *food*.

When you have a dinner party for friends or family, you don't buy canned or frozen tamales; you *make* the tamales. If you want to serve a great steak, you don't buy a chunk of meat and serve it as is. Instead, you accentuate the meat's potential with spices and seasoning, garlic, pepper, bleu cheese and butter and cook it with care and precision.

We do this because we want our guests to experience something beyond the ordinary, something that flows from our passion about food and our desire to use it as a means of expressing our affection for friends and family. This simple process of making dinner guests feel pampered requires thought, preparation and the ability to translate basic recipes into a true culinary extravaganza.

design by design

In the pool and spa industry, it's too easy to crank out projects and forget the



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value of creativity and presentation. If the restaurant industry operated the way we seem to, then most everything would be fast food. Sure, there's money to be made with mass-produced burgers and fries, but it's not something we would classify as an expression of the fine arts of food, wine and dining.

To me, watershaping is every bit as valid and valuable an experience as fine dining. Think about it: We have the opportunity to bring beauty, balance and harmony to the lives of our clients, and they've come to us because that's what they want in their backyards. Unless we step back from the volume-over-quality mentality, we will, like purveyors of the fastest of fast foods, always be thoughtlessly slinging hash.

And this is not strictly a matter of working at the high end of the market – far from it.

Indeed, I don't think about what I do in that way, because I think the level at which I generally operate is a byproduct of my approach to the work in just the same way a cookie-cutter builder's approach determines his or her level of operation. On that basis, what I do boils down to looking at materials with a fresh eye and using them in innovative, creative and visually appealing ways that work with the site and the client's needs and desires. By contrast, the volume builder looks at materials as commodities and thinks in terms of what's on the shelf rather than what's creatively possible.

In the last issue, for example, I wrote in this space about tile and color: You can look to standard suppliers who offer a standard array of tiles in standard colors, or you can use your own experience and powers of observation to peruse the universe of tile options in ceramic, porcelain or glass and guide your clients to a choice that is perfect for the setting and context in which it will be used.

That last point is important. Which would you prefer, having your dinner guests say, "Oh, what delicious tamales," or "What a wonderful meal"? No matter what level I operate on, I don't want my clients and their guests to view my work and say, "What pretty tile!" Instead, I want them to walk out into the yard and

say, "What a beautiful space."

Yes, the nuances of the tile (or stone or plantings) and the overall composition contribute to that impression, but it is the way they all work together that creates the experience. We design and develop a beautiful experience, and the tile, for all its individual beauty, is just one of many components.

subtle arts

This principle of defining wonderful and elegant elements that comprise a whole composition is the essence of art. Consider writing, for instance: A well-composed sentence in a novel is made up of often-ordinary words and phrases, yet the deliberate way in which those components relate to one another can convey



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a thought brilliantly.

Watershaping works in the same way. Yes, there may well be a spillway or tile or a construction detail or a water effect that is beautiful unto itself, but it is the context and the interrelation of elements that carries the experience to a richer potential. This is why, when I discuss projects with prospective clients, I don't have a sense that I'm "selling" anything. Instead, what I'm doing is presenting ideas – specific ingredients as well as the possibilities embodied in an overall concept.

As a recent specific example, my partner Kevin Fleming and I are working on a project in the Northeast that features a grotto spa. This part of the project includes amazing blond/brown stone from Arkansas, a beautiful Italian glass-tile blend that picks up on and complements the stone's colors and a host of great details including a built-in ice chest hidden by stone veneers and a weeping wall with multiple stone



A design in which various components and materials are assembled without consideration of the setting or the style of the home may function well, but there's something 'off' about it, a visual tension that gets in the way of appropriateness and beauty.

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shelves on which the clients will place large candles.

Are we selling the stone, the tile, the ice chest or the candlelight? No. Instead, what we are doing is collaborating with the client and working to develop a design that will provide an elegant experience rich with the color, sound, warmth and beautiful water.

This is quite a change for Kevin, who came out of a background where the retail mentality dominated and where his basic impulse was to sell as much as humanly possible into every project. It took a while, but he now sees, appreciates and participates in the sort of process I'm after – a process in which my clients and I interview each other and decide whether we want to work together to make art.

In some cases, I walk away after the interview because what they want and what I want cannot be reconciled in a way that will, at any price, give me pride and satisfaction in my work.


Look: Great painters don't market their paintings by talking about the specific pigments or brushes they use. Even though their choices may be extremely interesting and reflect a great deal about their training, background, experience and professional preferences, the artist is providing a composition of texture, line, color and image that creates an experience that *in totality* has almost incalculable value for the viewer or the collector.

Some of those elements may be bold and expressive, while others may be retiring and subtle. It is the aggregation of the painter's choices that makes the "design" worthwhile. The exact same thing can be said for watershaping.

which end?

I recently completed a project in southern California that consists of a simple rectangular pool with green plaster, ceramic waterline tile and tasteful decking and plantings. If I had a "sell, sell, sell" mentality, I probably could've convinced the client to up the ante and go with more expensive and elaborate components, but to my way of thinking, this would have been a betrayal of what the situation required.

In this case, the project checked in at



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well under six figures – sort of unusual in my practice. The point is that the client and setting called for a composition that relied on simple shapes and materials. Was I working at the high end? I don't really know or care: What I was after was a composition that worked, and in this instance the outcome was both absolutely beautiful and utterly appropriate.

Just as with projects with budgets many times greater, this simple composition is an art piece and will for years provide beautiful daily experiences for the client. If I had approached this project with the retail mentality, I might have pushed for expensive glass tile and goodness knows what else. I almost certainly could have put more money in my pocket, but the result would have been diminished by a lack of artistic appropriateness and cohesion.

Creating that modest project and the others I design and build has never been about extracting dollars by using a limited and preconceived set of options. Instead, it is about finding beauty and elegance of the most appropriate kind, given the specifics of settings and clients.

As for the perception that I'm different from other watershapers because I work only at the highest end, that's just a crock. What is important is to approach the work as a designer and artist, forget about selling in a retail sense and focus on collaborating with the client in useful and creative ways.

In other words, embrace the passion that might yet still be locked in your own heart behind the preconceived notion that tells you watershaping is about selling and commerce and bells and whistles. In my book, it's about education, aesthetics and experience; more than that, it's about *art*. **WS**

David Tisherman is the principal in two design/construction firms: David Tisherman's Visuals of Manhattan Beach, Calif., and Liquid Design of Cherry Hill, N.J. He is also co-founder and principal instructor for Genesis 3, A Design Group, which offers education aimed at top-of-the-line performance in aquatic design and construction. He can be reached at tisherman@verizon.net



Quite often, there's beauty in understatement: When offered distant views, for example, a harmonious design that leads the eye to the horizon works well; by contrast, a project crammed with jets and waterfalls might try to compete visually in a setting such as this – and generally will not succeed.



Words can't adequately capture the dullness of this design and its antiseptic look in a setting that called for warmth and color rather than plain-vanilla expansiveness. That's probably why it's gone now and has been replaced by something much more visually engaging – and suited to the wide-open space.

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Forms of Fun

By Stephen Havelin

As the popularity of interactive watershapes continues to grow, more and more architects, aquatic designers, home and resort developers, city officials and others are recognizing their value to communities. Indeed, says Stephen Havelin, founder of Vortex Aquatic Structures, working with these exciting manifestations of aquatic fun is a positive experience at every level, especially given the opportunities they offer to help children learn through play.





Fifteen years ago,

aquatic play attractions were found mainly in commercial waterparks in the form of large, multi-level, themed structures. Some smaller elements were found in the shallow ends of swimming pools, but they were generally limited to a few play apparatuses such as water umbrellas.

Much has changed in recent years, and aquatic play systems are now featured in a greater variety of settings including city parks, recreation centers, resorts and a range of other recreational spaces. This trend did not surface overnight: For more than ten years, our firm and others have been helping things along by focusing attention on the value of concepts related to zero-depth aquatic play.

We at Vortex Aquatic Structures in Montreal, for example, have designed our “Splashpads” to bring the joy and recreational value of aquatic play to almost any space. Among our many objectives is bringing a measure of the commercial waterpark experience to places such as neighborhood parks, housing developments, campgrounds and other facilities, thereby allowing everyone within a community to experience aquatic play in safe environments.

Fun Functions

Early on, our company focused on city parks and settings where playgrounds, basketball courts and sports fields provided primary recreational outlets for their communities. Our observation was that, with shrinking recreational budgets and outdated swimming pools, cities all over North America were looking for new ways of providing their citizens with aquatic recreation.

What was needed in many of these cases was a solution that involved small capital investment, low operating costs, safe fun with minimal supervision and, of course, a good aesthetic fit with existing environments.

That last point about aesthetics was particularly important: In the early days, the visual appeal of interactive water products was limited by the fact that their designs were greatly influenced by playground equipment. What this meant is that most first-generation aquatic play systems consisted of combinations of arches, spray posts, canes and other rectilinear shapes.

As time passed and the products continued to evolve, we at our company made a conscious decision to break that boxy mold and push interactive water in a new direction in which motion and the concept of living, organic features keyed our designs.

We were challenged by this desire to create products that were visually appealing in ways that spoke to designers and clients. We also placed an emphasis on developing features that would provide fun and excitement while meeting the needs of children to develop physically, emotionally, socially and even educationally.

This is where, before long, we began seeing the intricacies involved in achieving a genuine balance between form and function.

We kept at it and did our homework, spending a great deal of time and

effort in studying the behaviors of children in aquatic play settings. We watched them and cross-referenced our observations with child-development theory. Before long, we found patterns and began using what we'd seen to guide product design.

After studying several aquatic play areas, for example, we found that children under five years of age weren't getting much attention. With all the excitement of spraying water cannons and big, dumping water buckets, toddlers were intimidated and often stayed on the periphery or in the arms of a their parents.

To be sure, there were play products designated for children in this youngest age group, but they were often positioned in areas right next to features that encouraged high-energy play and often attracted teenagers. Again, this caused the younger children to shy away.

Delight by Design

As our research continued, we noticed other important factors – one of them centered on “time of play.” This is a term we used to describe the length of time or the level of frequency with which children interacted with play products.

This factor has particular importance because aquatic-play products are expected to have a life expectancy of more than 20 years. Every installation generates an immense amount of excitement for the community when it goes into service; what our observations of time of play told us was that, done right, aquatic play areas have an ongoing, positive effect on their environments that does not diminish with time.

In other words, we found that maximizing the various play opportunities that exist within well-developed product arrays can preserve that initial, peak level of excitement. A system filled with large spraying palm trees and water arches may meet aesthetic criteria, but it offers a limited range of play opportunities and will see a gradually diminishing time of play. In fact, we came to see these unsatisfying results as inevitable in cases where thought wasn't giv-



The tendency among early interactive waterfeatures to follow the lead of fort-like playground equipment took its toll on design freedom, as can be seen in the pair of images of older-generation Splashpads at top. At the bottom, however, it's easy to see the influence of the more organic forms being used today – and understand their growing popularity.



In our approach, the water elements in 'discovery bays' are scaled to the play level of the youngest toddlers. These features introduce them to the joy of aquatic play in a non-intimidating environment that is isolated from the activities of bigger kids.



en to maximizing time of play.

Complicating the emergence of our philosophy of product design was the fact that there was a gap in regulations, standards and design guidelines for zero-depth aquatic play. That in mind, we leveraged the experience gained from thousands of Splashpad installations; solicited feedback from customers; observed and interviewed users; applied child-development theory; and consulted with designers to formulate a program that would assist customers and designers in their quest to design effective aquatic play areas.

This design philosophy is based on the recognition that any effective play area provides a variety of play opportunities for intended users. Our Splashpads are, for example, intended for users of all age groups and abilities. Although there are various types of play that require different levels of physical development and various skills, water is always the common element.

Whether you're considering a toddler

playing in a puddle, a family running through the sprinklers on a hot afternoon or a group of teenagers waging a water fight with garden hoses, water is an endless source of play and fascination for kids. That in mind, we began categorizing forms of play, skills, learning and developmental issues into three defined "zones," creating systems based on design principles that would create a balanced play environment and allow all users to experience the spirit of play offered by that environment.

In the Zones

The first of these zones is what we call the "discovery bay," which serves to introduce infants and toddlers to the interactive aquatic play environment. The bay features above-grade products that are scaled down to a level that's not intimidating to the very young. In other words, there aren't any buckets pouring torrents of water or similar large-scale features. Instead, there are

compact features that might completely escape the attention of older children or adults (and perhaps even designers).

This approach emerged from our observation that small children have a significantly different level of attention to detail. They readily respond to vibrant colors, slight differences in water temperature or subtle variations of depth and flow. They are also captivated by the differences between a gentle misting spray compared to a gentle laminar flow or soft cascade — things we tend to overlook as adults.

This may seem simple — and in concept it is — but achieving these subtly distinctive effects and controlling water flows in these ways requires deliberate attention on the part of suppliers and designers and vision on the part of clients, which may be why these details are so often absent from interactive installations.

The next area is what we call the "adventure bay," an area that encourages cross-generational play. An adult, for ex-

ample, might pick up a small child and walk through a series of dumping buckets or a spraying arch or loop. This isn't a high-energy play area, but instead encourages socializing in a casual walk-through, park-like experience. It is an area that encourages imagination through exciting and refreshing play.

This area often serves as a natural centerpiece for a splash area, allowing for integration between the discovery bay and the high energy play environment featured in the third area, the "action bay," which is where older kids experience high-energy activity – water fights, heavy flows of water and basically a good soaking.

One of the keys in this third bay is developing systems that encourage and require teamwork and friendly competition. We have a feature, for example, in which a flag rises as kids cooperate and cover ground sprays around its base, thus redirecting the water flow to the flag. In order to make the flag rise

Our 'adventure bays' constitute an intermediate ground in our three-level approach, offering a form of walk-through experience that enables everyone from confident older toddlers to playful adults to join in the fun.





to its full height, a bunch of kids have to work together.

This multi-bay concept can be applied in play areas of all sizes, from waterparks to community aquatic centers. Regardless of project scope or scale, the three-level approach requires the supplier and the designer to consider systems from the child's perspective – and that, we've observed, is the key to a successful system.

Elevating the Game

Interactive aquatic play areas almost always represent a significant investment, and it's critical to suppliers, designers, installers and clients alike that the money be spent as wisely as possible. We believe that the three-bay approach – or other approaches that embrace the basic philosophy behind it – carries us a long way in the right direction by providing opportunities for kids of all ages and abilities.

We believe so because our research has shown us that by increasing the usefulness of splash areas across generational boundaries, we unlock a powerful means of enhancing the relationship that inherently exists between people of all ages and recreational water. And as this design sensitivity grows, interactive water systems will more easily be translated into an ever-broader range of settings.

This evolution, however, has created some very specific challenges:

- First, in designing with access for everyone and multi-generational users in mind, suppliers must develop (and designers and clients must consider) smaller water elements. For settings such as housing developments where aquatic play areas are established as common ground for residents, developers want waterpark-level excitement but at a fraction of the budget.

Again, understanding the needs of children enables watershapers to make cost-



For bigger kids who delight in rowdier forms of play, the water cannons and high-flow sprays and deluges of our 'action bays' complete the three-level philosophy with which we approach interactive splash-area design.

effective decisions in terms of the specific features of a given composition.

► Second, safety is a key issue for the entire play environment. When interactive aquatic play areas are installed outside waterparks or aquatic centers (where there are lifeguards and ready access to emergency services), there's an increased need to ensure safety. This has led us to be more conservative with certain features. If we know there will be inconsistent supervision, for example, we'll recommend systems that operate without any standing water. And we'll also consult with the clients to ensure that the product choices suit the environment.

In addition to the safety of the structures we must also consider the safety of the water. With concern about waterborne pathogens on the rise, we must always ensure that the water is of pristine quality, which is one of the reasons our company now offers complete water-quality-management systems that not only control the distribution of water to the play features, but constantly monitor



Our research into the aquatic play habits of kids in multiple age groups showed us that it was possible to teach cooperation and socialization skills through structured water play – as in this case, where coordinated effort increases everyone's fun.



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water quality as well.

This is critical: Splashpad water-quality management is, for example, very different from that of a swimming pool. The system needs to be able to handle a much higher ratio of bathers to gallons of water, so where a typical pool might need water turnover every six hours, a Splashpad needs complete turnover every 30 minutes. Clearly, this requires specialized equipment and a formal, engineered approach.

► Third, budget is a factor. Pragmatism is the key: There are situations in smaller systems where constraints will not permit development of all three bays. If that's the case, we tend to focus our design efforts on features that fit the "adventure bay" model: This offers the most cross-generational play opportunities for all age groups.

► Fourth, aesthetics are an issue, as are the more refined tastes and expectations of designers and clients operating beyond the utilitarian waterpark realm. This leads us to develop facilities that look great while providing ample play opportunities. (More on aesthetic factors below.)

The Common Factor

Fortunately for all of us in the interactive-water business and regardless of the setting, children aren't significantly different from place to place, so responses to the play elements we develop and install remain fairly consistent across a widening range of project types and locations.

The complexity comes with the need to determine ways of combining available elements in an overall composition that works in practical terms of dynamic entertainment while at the same time embodying an aesthetic approach that makes sense to clients, users and observers who see the facility on either a regular or occasional basis.

The physical configuration of the play elements can vary tremendously, and we've observed the greatest design challenges when it comes to support equipment – that is, the structures that give shape to the facility and serve as a framework for the interactive water systems.

Often, decisions in these aesthetic areas

are driven by budget and space. Other times, regional or local codes also come into play, as in California, where particularly stringent standards for water quality in interactive water systems means accommodating the necessary filtration, pump and control systems. Handling these variables requires close coordination among suppliers, designers, installers and clients as well as regulators.

In other cases, challenges arise from the way interactive systems have traditionally been sold. Often clients approach suppliers directly, are given catalogs and are asked to make choices. This random, pull-it-off-the-shelf selection process – which often happens with designers as well – seldom leads to results that satisfy. In our experience, far better outcomes are achieved when there's wall-to-wall communication among all key players in a given project.

With collaboration, we avoid the inadequate communications that can make projects more expensive and, yes, less visually appealing than they should be. We also avoid the problems that arise when the needs of end users – that is, children of a variety of ages and abilities – are not met. Finally, a more integrated approach stands a better chance of avoiding problems with health and building inspectors.

A good part of the burden for making this multi-layered developmental team coalesce around interactive water projects rests on the shoulders of suppliers. We need to inform water-shapers, architects and landscape architects about the range of issues they face and what they should consider in designing these features. We need to do what we can to get involved (and stay involved) at the system-selection and design phases and pursue our mission through to installation and start-up.

Put another way, we need to become advocates for our whole category of products and do what we can to make certain they are used in ways that address the issues of form and function.

Perceptual Shift

The trends discussed here have been ongoing for approximately 15 years, and it's no secret that much of the original de-



The greatest success an aquatic recreation facility can have comes when multiple generations, from the very young through to parent and grandparents, all find ways to have fun in the water together.

mand for interactive water was generated by waterparks. As more and more consumers have had positive experiences in these settings, more and more have sought to replicate their experiences in other places.

For many years, that process was all about transplanting those same features to a different type of property. That has changed, however, and we're running into an increasing number of designers who embrace the fact that interactive aquatic play is about more than excitement and also includes a strong aesthetic component.

This evolution in thinking is a driving factor in today's marketplace, with many of the newer systems bearing little resemblance to the grand-scale fort approach that dominated product design and development in years past. It's all still fun, but it is gaining in sophistication with almost every new project.

In reaching for sophistication, of course, we must never lose track of the fun and excitement these installations bring to children in all age groups and at all socio-economic levels. Our products have the ability to be waterpark by day and sculpture by night.

For me, however, there's nothing better than seeing the simple joy in a child's face as he or she plays on one of our Splashpads. Ultimately, such results speak for themselves.



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It's speculated that the exterior spaces at Playboy Mansion West must be the most photographed in the world.

That's hard to quantify, of course, but it's certainly safe to say that since construction began in the 1970s, the home of publisher Hugh Hefner and its famous swimming pool and grotto have been used ceaselessly to promote his unique lifestyle. Indeed, the residence

has attained near-mythic status as the world's most elaborate adult playground.

For about 20 years, we had the fantastic experience of working with Hefner and his staff on a range of projects as his design consultants for architecture, landscapes, nature and built environments. Before he acquired the mansion, we had designed and supervised the construction of *Playboy's* corporate offices in Chicago as well as Hefner's home and personal working spaces and the interior of Big Bunny, his corporate airplane. Ultimately, those ef-

forts would lead him to invite us to shape the environment of his Los Angeles home — its pool, ponds, grotto, landscapes, gardens and much more.

The genesis of this project is the subject of this article and defines a series of undertakings that enabled us to know and appreciate this remarkable man as we worked through detailed design after detailed design. At one point, we had 87 distinct projects running on the grounds of the California mansion, each one the product of collaboration with one of the world's most imaginative clients.

Special Interests

The story of how we originally became involved with Hefner in our shared hometown of Chicago is a long one and reaches beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that, through our work with him, we became familiar with the unique and dynamic way he liked to work, how quickly his mind turned, his fantastic ability to listen and process information, and especially his delightfully direct and energetic way of pursuing *exactly* what he wanted.

Our long involvement with Playboy Mansion West began at a time when Hefner was traveling back and forth between Chicago and Los Angeles to film his television show, "Playboy After Dark."

He'd stayed in a luxurious penthouse on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood during those frequent trips and had fallen absolutely in love with southern California, its freewheeling lifestyle and its particular fascination with glamour. To that point, he'd spent most of his time sequestered in his Chicago mansion, rarely emerging as he saw to every detail of the construction of his publishing empire.

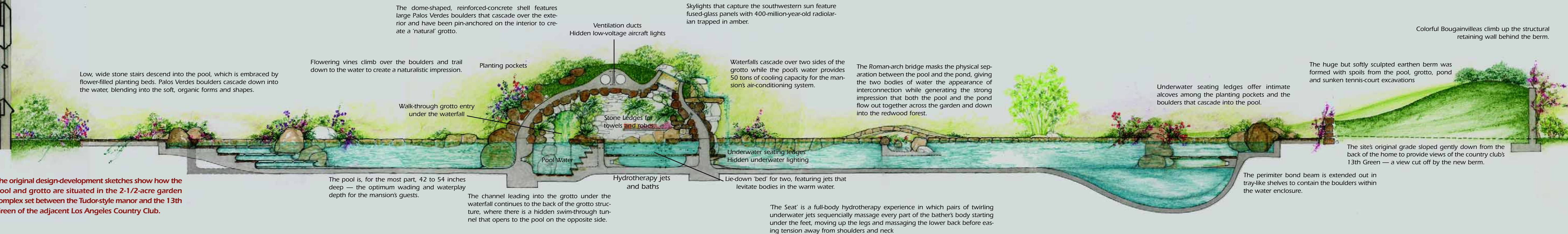
In California, however, he envisioned a lifestyle that reflected his own progressive attitudes about openness, wealth and physical freedom. In purchasing the 5-1/2-acre property, he began his pursuit of a modern Shangri-La, a place where he could, to the fullest possible extent, pursue a way of life that embodied the values reflected in *Playboy*. We were part of a large team of people, all of whom were to play unique roles in bringing that dream to reality.

For our first visit, we traveled to California with Hefner and his

Text continues on page 47



The original design-development sketches show how the pool and grotto are situated in the 2-1/2-acre garden complex set between the Tudor-style manor and the 13th Green of the adjacent Los Angeles Country Club.





The grotto at Playboy Mansion West is among the world's most famous (or notorious) play spaces and has been emulated countless times since it was built in the 1970s. The walk-in entrance through the waterfall, the dry tunnel entrance to the side and the swim-tunnel entrance (shown under construction) combine to lend an air of mystery to the space while giving it an otherworldly glow.

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The Birth of a Dream

For more than 30 years, the water-shapes and grotto at Playboy Mansion West have generated a mystique uniquely their own. Designed by Suzanne and Ron Dirsmith and installed along with the rest of the home's interior and exterior environments, this amalgamation of stone, water and plants ushered in the era of naturalistic pools and has utterly fascinated generations of homeowners seeking their own slices of the good life.

By **Suzanne & Ron** Dirsmith



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entourage on his private plane. As we first toured the site and walked around the existing Tudor structure and its sprawling grounds, he casually and prophetically said to us, “I would like this place to be something that nobody else has and everybody can dream of having: a fantasy land, a dream land.

“And when it is finished,” he added, “it should look as though it has been here forever. And remember, whatever you show me is the minimum I expect at the end. You have no other restrictions.”

To begin our own thought processes, we decided to stay on the estate for a couple of days with property superintendent Dick Hall, who was soon to become our good friend. We gathered detailed information about the property and its background and studied the existing drawings and surveys to familiarize ourselves with the various existing buildings as well as all of the mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.



The yard was basically featureless when we arrived, more focused on the golf course beyond than on any potential it might have had. Our plan changed all that, inserting a large pool and an elaborate system of ponds and streams that reshaped the space and took full advantage of the property's natural contours.



On High

We knew from the start that we faced an enormously vague challenge with few guidelines or any real limitations in scope. Further, there was nobody anywhere to tell us where the open-endedness stopped and practicality began.

Those initial days were filled with excitement and trepidation. We'll never forget the feeling of walking onto that property for the first time and seeing what was already a magnificent estate with a 2-1/2-acre "backyard" open to the sky and distant views. The property abutted a redwood forest and sloped down some 75 feet to street level – a prominence set in one of the most beautiful settings in all of southern California.

And there we were, left by this dream weaver, Hugh Hefner, with only a few words to describe what he was thinking.

To get going, we enlisted the inspiration of another set of words we came up with on our own (including beautiful, sensuous, intimate, natural, relaxing and pleasurable) to define a fantasyland we could wrap in our own thoughts and dreams. For quite some time, however, we wondered just what we'd gotten ourselves into.

At precisely 10:30 on the morning following our initial tour of the site, a helicopter appeared over the horizon and landed smack in the middle of the backyard. We had asked Hall to arrange this transportation for us so we could study the terrain, the existing architecture and the estate's surroundings.

As we began spiraling up, out and around the property, our minds were whirling with all kinds of thoughts about what we would see, how it would relate to the walk-through and meeting with Hefner the day before and, most important, what inspiration we might glean. The helicopter wound slowly around the perimeter of the property and then expanded the circuit outward beyond the property lines and upward to 1,200 feet to give us a wider-angle perspective.

During the flight, we both recalled that one of Hefner's young female friends had mentioned the pool at Hadrian's Villa outside Rome, which cued us to recall our own first visit to that Villa, where we had been mesmerized by the great Canopus pool surrounded by a colonnade of marvelous Greek and Roman statuary and immense thermal baths, arcaded courts, terraced gardens and fish ponds. Might any of those elements be replicated below?

We circled the area several times, clicking dozens of photographs. Once we'd seen enough of the immediate area, we asked the pilot to show us Bel Air and the canyons beyond. This gave us an



eagle's view of glorious old estates with their pools, ponds, classical gardens, terraces, sculptures, fountains and never-ending variety of architectural styles and forms. These were among the most opulent spaces in a part of the city built largely on generations of Hollywood-style success.

Classic Inspiration

The helicopter flight was an amazing visual and emotional adventure. By the time we landed, we were both exhausted, perhaps because we recognized that now the real work would have to begin. We again walked the property with Hall, then sat in the kitchen and talked for a couple of hours about the property and buildings.

We left Los Angeles the next day with a complete set of drawings and surveys of the property. Safely back in Chicago, we began to marshal our resources, gather even more information about the property and confer with friends, associates, consultants, staff, artists and sculptors. We also pored over books at the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago.

For initial inspiration, we drew on our own studies in Rome and our extended visits to Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli and especially the transcendent Villa d'Este, where one walks around, under, through and over glorious fountains

Construction of the pool and pond systems involved deployment of countless boulders and smaller stones in elaborate, well-engineered structures. By design, however, much of the stonework has been obscured by installation of huge quantities of plant materials that now have the visual upper hand.







and cascades. (For a wonderful introduction to this place, see Mark Holden's article, "Water Everywhere," in the November/December 2002 issue of *WaterShapes*, page 34.)

The sights, sounds, smells and feelings we retained (and fondly treasure to this day) from our many visits to the Villa d'Este's wondrous watergardens flooded our thoughts as generalized possibilities. Again and again, we asked ourselves if any of these incredible concepts from 16th-century Italy would be appropriate for modern California. What elements might we bring into play?

The house structure certainly lent itself to an exterior appearance steeped in classical design. Built in 1926, it was a good, working replica of a 16th-century Tudor mansion from Northamptonshire, England.

The estate had originally been built for Arthur Letts, who had been born in Holdenby in that same county. He was from a wealthy family of merchants who'd come to America and, in 1896, founded the

Broadway department stores in the Los Angeles area. The neighborhood around Letts' home became known as Holmby Hills in memory of his birthplace in England.

The architectural details were historically true to the period, although the "stone" used in the California version was actually pre-cast concrete designed and fabricated on site to resemble the original's carved English limestone. The building itself was extraordinarily well constructed, with all flutes, finials, moldings, copings, textures, carvings and decorations from the English original replicated with an obvious concern for historical accuracy. This included leaded-glass windows inset with stained-glass panels of gnomes, figurines and landscapes.

A Presentation of Sensation

Sloping down some 75 feet to the street, the low side of the property contained one of the largest stands of *Sequoia Sempervirens* in all of southern California. They'd been planted by Letts' gardeners

when the home was built and by the time we arrived nearly 50 years later had grown to a height exceeding 100 feet.

The rest of the existing landscape was filled with all sorts of mature trees, flowering shrubs, gardenias, jasmine, camellias, cedars and thousands of flowers. A 10-foot-tall system of wrought-iron and stone fencing surrounded three sides of the property, and the rear yard opened directly onto the 13th green of the Los Angeles Country Club.

In rolling through how to work with this amazing canvas, we took two more trips to Los Angeles to confer with Dick Hall, local soils engineers and other consultants before beginning to formulate a plan that we believed might please Hefner. The biggest challenge we faced, in retrospect, was deciding which design elements would actually be a part of the project's initial phase. After all, we were working on a project with just one guiding principle: "No restrictions!"

From this welter of ideas, some pre-



liminary sketches and, eventually, models evolved for the pool, pond, grotto and waterfalls. Instead of sticking with the formal and traditional architectural setting, we evoked natural formations associated with some of the world's most exquisite landscapes. From our perspective, it was a matter of uniqueness that would hold true to Hefner's desire for an illusion of permanence and antiquity.

Of course, we had no idea if this unconventional scheme would catch his interest at all, but we believed it was worth a try.

Just four weeks after our first inspection of the property, we were called in for an initial presentation at 5:00 on a Friday afternoon at the residence. We set up our drawings, sketches and models, and Hefner arrived dressed in his trademark satin pajamas and blue-suede slippers embroidered with his HMH logo. Carrying his ever-present Pepsi in the crook of the little finger of his left hand, he was also clutching a pile of small, handwritten notes on stationary embossed with his initials.

He was smiling, exuberant and friendly. We said our hellos and began our presentation with the following words: "Evolution! You asked us to create something that will look like it has been there forever."

The vision we laid out was geological in scope – that out of its turbulent, subterranean realms, our earth had erupted in this place with organic forms of gray and beige rocks and boulders that had been hewn to construct the Tudor mansion. This emergence, we said, might have occurred during the Ice Age, a reminder of the retreat of the glaciers and the tumbling of stones and the rushing of water in distant history.

Natural Fusion

In such a formation, we continued, there would be masses of boulders and stones with soft, naturally sculpted forms and shapes that would embrace and enclose a pond and pool and cascading waterfalls. The pool, ponds and waterfalls were to appear as one continuous, intertwined watercourse, a meandering pastoral stream.



Whether seen from the mansion's balconies or looking back to the home from the berm that now blocks off views of the golf course, the backyard and swaths of lawn large enough to accommodate more than 1,500 guests have become the property's focus for entertainment and fun in the sun – and under the stars.

The impression would be that the landscape, ponds, pool and waterfalls had been on the site for ages before the nearby buildings were constructed. Lush plantings would cascade, intertwine, nestle amidst and overrun the boulders and stonework, trailing into the ponds and streams in organic, natural profusion.

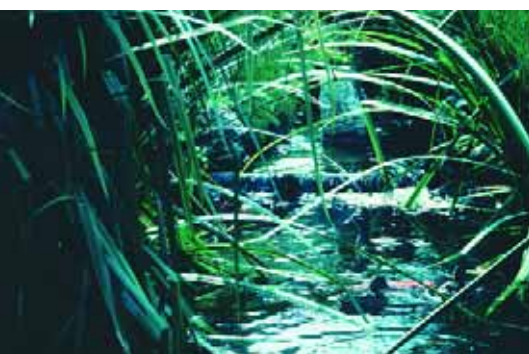
To maintain the illusion's continuity, a small, unobtrusive stone bridge would gently arch over a concealed dam that would separate the natural pond from the heated, chemically treated pool – but

both bodies of water would appear to be part of the same system, with a small stream emerging from beneath the bridge to feed one side of the pond. It would seem as if the virgin springs that must be feeding the pool's cascades also flowed to the pond below.

The soil from the pool dig would be mounded up as a giant berm, 10 to 12 feet high, that would separate the backyard from the golf course beyond. This berm was to be supported on the far side by an eight-foot retaining wall for privacy and security. Waterfalls would flow down the berm, and a stream radiating from the pond would traverse the entire garden area before disappearing into the redwood grove below.

The pool was to have no diving board, no hallmarks of the typical California swimming pool. Surrounding the water-shapes would be grassy knolls, rich plantings, natural stone decks and stone stairs with weathered edges that would descend from the pool's edge down to intimate alcoves, underwater seating ledges and waterfalls one could walk under, swim through and sit beneath or behind. The entire space would be intimate, romantic, surprising and mysterious.

Along one side, tucked into a corner among the trees, flowering bushes and planters, would be an all-weather, natur-



Although the pool and grotto get the lion's share of publicity and attention, the ponds and streams have an appeal all their own – especially, of course, to the hundreds of koi that call the water home as well as to the incredible array of exotic birds that basically have the run of the property.





al-stone bar and relaxation area with refrigerators, grills, sinks, cooking areas and storage cabinets – the intention being to cater to the needs of large gatherings that might include as many as 1,500 guests or more. There were to be spaces for tables, chairs, lounges, umbrellas and all sorts of conveniences for guests and visitors.

Out of the pool would rise the Grotto Spa, the sort of cave-like environment one might find along the cliffs of the Amalfi coast. Indeed, we might grace the Grotto Spa with some of the characteristics of antiquity's famed Blue Grotto, a storied space of Imperial Rome nearly 2,000 years previously. But ours would be a 21st-century adaptation: The space (covered in more detail in the sidebar on page 45) would delight the senses and also provide restorative hydrotherapy.

The Go Ahead

As we moved through and concluded this elaborate presentation, we kept glancing at Hefner to see if we could get any sense of what he might be thinking. He seemed to be smiling, but we'd learned long before that he smiled most of the time and that this was more a signal of his general affability than a window to his thoughts. As we wrapped things up, we still had no idea how we'd done. He suggested we go for a walk.

As good fortune would have it, part of our game plan for the presentation had involved, with Dick Hall's concurrence, actually laying out the entire backyard by sprinkling lines of flour on the lawns to show the outlines of the proposed watershapes. The gardeners had helped by care-





fully grooming the planters and trimming the grass, and we'd gone out early that morning to inscribe the verdant lawn with long, neat, sensuously curving lines, marked at key spots by scale drawings that defined various features and specific details.

We'd also set up little flags all around the garden with notes attached that simply described what would be seen from the marked spots. We went into great detail in some spots, literally drawing boulders in the desired sizes and shapes as they cascaded down into the pool from the grotto mound and the berm and from the deck into the pool and pond water.

The grotto was specially marked out with all the various elements that we had just finished describing to him. Our thought had been that once the presentation was over, we would ask Hefner to come outside to see how it would all look in full scale and in a form he could study for a couple of days if that was what he wanted.

With his suggestion of a walk, of course, he beat us to the punch and was delighted that we had anticipated his desire to visualize things in place. He had only seen

the drawings once, for no more than the duration of our 45-minute meeting, but it was clear that he was right there with us in envisioning the design concept in the minutest detail.

It was a "go," but the next few months nonetheless featured intense, marathon meetings in which we learned a great deal about the man and how he conducted his business, managed his staff, guided his investments and was pulling together his personal life in his new Holmby Hills home. His ability to conjure vivid images and define precise details was astounding – and little did we know at the time how his amazing capacity for and interest in detail would govern our activities through the next several years.

Generated Mystique

Ultimately, our design work on the mansion included not only the pool and grotto and acres filled with gardens, waterfalls, ponds and streams, but also aviaries, animal habitats, guest rooms, game rooms, exotic greenhouses, aquaria, film-screening rooms, saunas, bath-

houses, changing rooms, outdoor/indoor showers, tennis courts, boulder-wall showers in Shangri-La-like enclosures, food-service facilities, outdoor stone bars and entertainment alcoves, nearly a mile of secluded walkways through ferns and redwoods, trysting places, intimate dining alcoves and all of the back-of-house facilities that were to support and operate the property and guide its development.

And eventually, we also were charged with designing and building his private living environment and work areas – more than 7,000 square feet of carved, shaped and sculpted space that consumed two levels tucked beneath the attic. This was late in our working relationship with Hefner and was probably the most fascinating phase of our two-decade journey with him.

By this time, we'd come to know and understand him in all his complexity and really had a sense that we knew what made him tick. Some things we could ask outright and get straight answers. But a lot of the time, we still had to surmise and even guess – to the point where it often became a humorous challenge.



Our work on the estate occupied us for many years and included not only the water-shapes but also a variety of outdoor amenities – including a huge outdoor cooking/bar space near the pool; long, wandering pathways that lead visitors through a small but magnificent forest; and small, cooling (and air-freshening) waterfeatures in the animal habitats.



We've commuted back and forth from Chicago hundreds of times since our work on the mansion commenced. This project, among all those we've completed through the years, stands as the most particular point of pride for us as well as a point of curiosity and interest among associates, friends, family and random acquaintances.

Everyone seems to get around to asking, "What was it *really* like to do all this and work so closely with Hugh Hefner?" As we see it, the process was about defining a lifestyle, and it seems that we did so not only for Mr. Hefner, but also for countless others who've been caught up in the mansion's mystique.

For us then and now, there is always a sense of magic, mystery, ever-unfolding surprise and multiple sensory pleasures in the environments we create and build – an experience not unlike a long-enduring love affair and marriage. Hefner prodded us to reach for the stars, and that remains our mission today as we research and study concepts for our built environments in accord with today's technologies and potential.

Due credit



None of the achievement of the watershapes and environments at Playboy Mansion West would have been possible without the challenging and extraordinary words of wisdom from Ambrose Madison Richardson, a professor of architecture who prodded and urged his youthful students to approach each new design project as though they were coming from another planet.

This sentiment was put another way by Hugh Hefner, who told us to "Reach for the stars: You have no other restrictions."

Within the corporate world of *Playboy*, we were capably guided through the bureaucracy by Dick Rosenzweig, Hefner's trusted and most senior executive vice-president. While on the property itself, we delighted in the rare and remarkable skills and expertise of Dick Hall and his associate, Hank Fawcett, who literally facilitated and figured out how to get many of the most unusual design and engineering concepts actually built.

And finally there are the hundreds of dedicated "Old World" artists and craftspeople who turned drawings, discussions and ideas into reality – without whom only hand-drawn paper designs would remain. One such individual is Catarino Barragan, a wonderful gardener on *Playboy's* in-house staff who also quietly asked one day if he could help with the wondrous woodcarvings for Hefner's private suite.

After a day of intense gardening work, he would take home little pieces and parts of the English Brown Oak rosettes and carve delightful little figures, flowers, gnomes and gremlins that appear throughout the woodwork. He was self-taught and had developed this skill through sheer interest, enthusiasm and dedication.

– S. & R.D.

Glass Works





Exploring the synergy among glass, light and water is what SWON Design is all about. From their roots as glass blowers and neon artists, the firm's founders Michael Batchelor and Andrey Berezowsky have branched out to create elaborate, vivid sculptures for architectural and landscape settings that reflect their interest in developing shapes, colors and textures that both complement and accentuate the surroundings in which they appear.

By Michael Batchelor & Andrey Berezowsky

All artists and designers have to come from *somewhere*, creatively speaking. In our case, we came to watershaping via the world of glass arts and crafts, a starting place that led us first to create unusual sculptures in glass and light – and then to carry our work out into landscapes and especially into settings that feature water.

In collaborating mostly with architects and landscape architects and designers, we at SWON Design in Montreal have found what we believe to be an incredibly rich vein of aesthetic potential. Indeed, we have come through the years to recognize with greater and greater profundity that water and glass are a natural pairing: What light does with water and what light does with glass are similar in many ways.

To be sure, all of us at the firm appreciate other materials. These include stone, for example, which can be used beautifully, elegantly and artistically but is, in our view, ultimately a static medium. By combining glass, water and light, we've found a more dynamic niche that enables us to create wonderfully original and endlessly intriguing combinations of visual effects that range from the subtle to the startling.

Neon on Steroids

Our work together began at a firm called Skunkworks, founded by Berezowsky in 1991. We focused, exclusively at first, on neon art and set out to break the rules of artistic conformity by creating exterior installations well outside the traditional gallery and formal-arts settings in a form of "guerrilla art": We set up exhibits in all sorts of places, from staircases and abandoned buildings to architectural façades and even cemeteries.

The bent, twisted and arcing pieces of neon-filled tubing that made up these early installations were meant to stand for no more than 24 hours. We'd invite the public and managed to kick up

quite a stir among those who took the time to show up. Looking back, it was all terrific fun, and we ultimately managed to capture a good share of attention in the media and within the more traditional arts community.

What we did grew out of our near-compulsion to use large architectural environments as canvases for our hand-blown neon-lighting installations in riots of form, color and light.

Steadily expanding our capacity to confront conventional expectations, we began doing permanent neon-lighting installations in a variety of commercial and public settings in North America and Europe. In the background, however, we were experimenting and looking for new applications that involved neon and sculpted glass.

This process led us to increasing involvement with architects, landscape architects and designers: As we began working in a greater variety of settings, we started seeing almost limitless creative potential for glass in the landscape, especially when the setting involved water.

In 2001, we reformed our business and adopted its current name, and we've now expanded our repertoire to include work with cast, blown and flat glass. With this expanded palette, we're bringing a fuller measure of the excitement and vibrancy of glass art to each and every one of our projects.

In designing our pieces, we rely heavily on organic shapes and textures. Our aim is compositions that complement both natural and architectural environments,

and we've found that combinations of glass, water and light are remarkably adaptable to that mission. Glass in particular has both formal and informal qualities, depending on how you work with it and particularly on how you establish its relationship with other elements in a setting.

Finding a Way

Our work is highly "experimental," meaning we engage in a tremendous amount of trial and error as part of the developmental process.

We have studied art history as well as natural forms, and by now the registry of creative influences we bring to bear is quite vast. We've also kept pace on the technical side: In working with glass, it's crucial to have a firm understanding of materials science and to be able to accommodate its physical characteristics. So while we hang things out over the conceptual edge, we do so with careful planning that takes into account such factors as structural loads and stresses.

In these areas, the community of experts is a fabulous resource. We work in collaboration with other glass artists and engineers and all share technical information about techniques and the characteristics of different materials that basically keeps all of us out of trouble.

Even in a creative environment filled with experimentation, however, we follow a pattern in the way we do things. Our design process, for instance, starts with the environment in which the installation will be placed, basically because

we're convinced that the setting dictates almost everything.

Whether we're working with water-shapers or landscape architects or directly with clients, we engage in extensive discussions about their desires. We generate piles of preliminary drawings to hone in on the basics of the design until everything is clear. We take great pains at this stage for an obvious reason: Glasswork is so precise and painstaking that it's very difficult to change directions midstream, so we work very hard to be sure that all the principal players in a given project are on the same page before we begin fabricating anything.

Once the direction is set, we start generating glass samples and play with colors, textures and shapes. We pass these samples to clients so they can follow along and see how materials will relate to the environment. Once that stage is complete, the production process begins and all components are assembled.

We generally do our own installations, because we're quite picky about how our sculptures are set up in the field. And if we don't do the installation ourselves for some reason or other, we'll always have one of our designers on hand to supervise every step of the installation.

Progressive Vision

To date, the response to our work has been decidedly encouraging, and we've been emboldened by this acceptance to expose our work to a broader audience.

In doing so, however, we've run into a problem familiar to anyone who has tried to break new ground: It's difficult for others to envision the full spectrum of aesthetic effects that can be achieved using these combinations of glass, water and light. So what we see as limitless, others still view in conventional terms and have a hard time stepping beyond what they know and into the experimental realm we've been exploring.

For all that, we're confident that as more people see what we and other glass artists are doing, acceptance will grow alongside a willingness to step outside the box. And as we've seen, the area for exploration beyond the bounds of convention is vast indeed.

Boon Companion

The vast majority of our raw material is purchased through a New Zealander who lives in Corning, N.Y. Louis Olsen is a brilliant chemist, engineer and glass blower, and we've never met anyone as knowledgeable as he is about glass and the gas and electric furnaces used to melt it.

Olsen has been instrumental in our work almost from the beginning. In fact, he designed and built the electric furnace we now use. (We chose electric power because it's more efficient than gas and is more precise.)

Our furnace holds about 500 pounds of glass in a crucible inside the furnace body. Depending upon the application, we can heat the material to between 1,800 and 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit.

— M.B. & A.B.

Continued on page 60



We started as renegade neon artists, setting up displays meant for 24-hour exposure in unusual environments – such as, in the case seen here, in a cemetery.

Fluid Applications

It was a beautiful swimming pool design, with slate-gray materials, a vanishing edge and a beautiful architectural design – and it's also where our work with water officially began.

Our piece consists of a large, freestanding wall with an inset glass-block panel. There's a weir that sends a sheet of water over the glass portion of the wall, but what we did was set things up in such a way that it looks as though water is flowing even when the water is turned off.

The tessellated, differently shaped blocks include aquamarine, greens and blues, but each of the 77 units in the wall has its own hue and color density. Much of the light that penetrates and reflects back through the glass distorts and reinterprets the views of trees and landscape – especially early in the morning, when there's an interplay of light and glass and surroundings that is truly surprising and exciting. As the day goes on, the wall takes on a different appearance until, in early evening, it reflects warm colors and takes on almost-pink colors. And when the fiberoptic lights are turned on, the composition takes on an entirely different quality.

We drew inspiration for the tessellation from the mind-bending works of Swiss graphic artist M.C. Escher, who used the technique extensively in his mesmerizing designs, but we're also thinking of quiltmakers and Moorish architecture in creating a wall that stays away from conventional, repeated squares and reveals truly dynamic visual patterns – even within individual blocks.

The work is durable, too. This project is set near Lake Ontario and has been subjected to radical swings in temperature with no signs of cracking or damage of any kind. While many people think of glass as a fragile, breakable material, it is in fact remarkably tough when used on this scale.





Glass Hills

In this project, the design was determined entirely by the setting on a 28th-floor penthouse terrace in Toronto. The space was very long but narrow; the client wanted something sleek and modern that could be enjoyed both day and night.

The composition started with five-by-five-foot sheets of half-inch plate glass. We designed what we referred to as “contoured rocks” from those sheets, using forms based largely upon rocks used in Japanese gardens. The panels were cut into these organic shapes and then set upright with 3/4-inch gaps between them in a channeled metal frame buried under river rock and glass stones.

The piece consists of three “rocky” masses and measures 14 feet long by four feet wide. The individual glass panels were contoured in subtle, seductively flowing shapes, and a shallow sheet of water covers the base to create reflections and the impression that the massed forms are islands. All the fiberoptic lighting comes from underneath the glass, giving everything a soft glow.

It's amazing how much the appearance of this piece changes in the course of a day, sometimes in ways we didn't anticipate. We didn't know, for example, that some mornings condensation would form on the glass and give it an unusual, opaque quality – and were more than pleased that the resulting effect was so beautiful.





Diamond Light

This project, which was one of several submitted by artists invited to create art for a garden setting, was installed in conjunction with an international design festival at the British Arboretum in Westonbirt, England, about an hour's drive from London.

Basically, we went nuts with the opportunity. Adding to the fun was the fact that we were collaborating with an amazing landscape designer named John Thompson, a good friend of ours, a great artist and one who had begun his career studying traditional Japanese carpentry and working as a temple builder for several years.

For our sculpture, we crafted five 6-1/2- to 7-foot glass panels, each with a thickness of 3/4 inches. We used what is known as "float glass," which has a texture on its surface, and applied silver nitrate (the same material used on the back of mirrors) to the glass before placing it in huge kilns for 24 hours.

We removed the panels and washed off the silver nitrate, which left behind a beautiful amber-colored hue. The glass looked fantastic: While the panels retained all of their translucence, when sunlight hit the glass they took on a phenomenally rich, warm glow.

We placed the composition in a large, shallow pond within a spectacular landscape dotted by all sorts of wonderful pieces supplied by other participating artists.





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You have to choose: The five courses all run concurrently during the Aqua Show for 20 full hours each – starting the day before the show with eight hours on Tuesday, November 15, and four hours each on the mornings of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, November 16, 17 and 18. The cost for each course is \$990 (\$890 with registration before September 15, 2005), with all classroom materials included as part of the fee.

Don't miss out: Enrollment is strictly limited and will be available on a first-come first-served basis. For registration information, contact the Aqua Show office at (800) 536-3630 or visit www.aquashow.com.

The five courses described at right are part of an ongoing Education Revolution that includes a series of Construction Schools (premiering in October 2005) taught by recognized designers, engineers and builders including hydraulics expert **Steve Gutai**, tile artist **Scott Fleming**, control specialist **Tom Schoendienst**, watershaper **Paul Benedetti** and engineer **Ron Lacher**, P.E. There's also an expanded roster of seminars at the Aqua Show in November, including outstanding sessions led by landscape architect **Mia Lehrer**, lighting designer **Janet Lennox Moyer**, watergardener **Anthony Archer-Wills** and environmental artists **Ron** and **Suzanne Dirsmit**.

This level of education has been a long time coming for the watershaping trades and will be the key to establishing a new Society of Watershape Designers (SWD) in the months to come. We're also proud to note that these courses are accredited by IACET, AIA and ASLA.

For more information on Genesis 3 programs, contact our office at (877) 513-5800 or visit us at www.genesis3.com.

GENESIS  DESIGN GROUP

Basic Color Theory

What happens visually when you place green grass next to a border of red brick as opposed to one of blond stone? What surrounding colors make a watershape recede – or take center stage? This course offers a detailed exploration of color perception that starts with the color wheel and carries you through to individual experimentation and practical applications related to art, architecture and the dynamics of the colors found around water. *Instructor:* **Judith Corona**, a teacher and visual artist whose work has been exhibited in U.S. and European galleries and who is also a fellow of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Elements of Design

Design is a specific educational discipline that is taught and can be learned – training that enables those who possess it to do extraordinary work for their clients. This course, which introduces participants to the principles of line, texture, shape, balance, proportion, scale, spatial relationships, color interaction and more, will begin developing your perceptual skills and creative awareness in ways that ultimately shape a true designer. *Instructor:* **Donald Gerds**, author of *Perspective: The Grid System* (now in its sixth edition) and an industrial designer with more than 30 years' teaching experience in eight countries.

Measured Perspective

The path to success in watershape design has to do with creating visual representations that let clients see and fully understand the potential harbored in their projects. This advanced course in perspective drawing and rendered elevations cultivates those specific communications skills, developing your competency with two-point perspective while focusing on scale, proportion, structured layouts, grid systems, tone, shadow and more. *Instructor:* **Lawrence Drasin**, an industrial designer who focuses on special-effect interiors and a long-time instructor recognized as Teacher of the Year at UCLA in 2002.

The Vocabulary of Architecture & Style

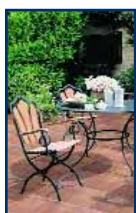
When you speak with prospects and clients, does your level of knowledge of art and architectural history position you to communicate with them in designing a watershape that meets expectations? Can you make your watershapes harmonize with styles found in their homes and the artworks they love? To stimulate that conversational and practical ability, this course surveys architectural history from ancient to modern, including Greek, Roman, Islamic, Renaissance and contemporary examples. *Instructor:* **Mark Holden**, landscape architect and guest instructor at California Polytechnic State University at Pomona and other educational institutions.

Understanding and Designing Fountains and Waterfeatures

Designing a fountain is about much more than sticking a pipe in the ground and watching what happens. Instead, it's about hydraulics and sound and light and control systems that take common head pressure and turn it into something magical. This program offers an intensive examination of the principles and technologies involved in making water flow in precisely controlled patterns to achieve defined and spectacular visual effects. *Instructors:* **Paul L'Heureux** and **Larry O'Hearn**, fountain designers and engineers with years of experience teaching designers and clients what can and can't be done with water in motion.

PORCELAIN TILE

Circle 135 on Reader Service Card



SAICIS has released the new Giaietto porcelain-tile series. Designed for extreme strength and durability, the tiles come in sizes from as large as 18 by 18 inches down to 4 by 4 inches and work either indoors or out. Hexagonal, octagonal and square mosaics are also available in mesh-mounted 12-by-12 sheets. The tile comes in eight colors in three finishes and can withstand heavy foot traffic.

Saicis, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

GUTTER FORMS

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LAWSON AQUATICS has introduced Foam-Form as a construction resource for the forming of difficult-radius concrete gutter systems. The forms are manufactured with a hardened polyurethane coating that makes them easy to set in place and just as easy to remove when the concrete sets. They tie into the steel for stability and are custom-designed and cut to specific job specifications.

Lawson Aquatics, Naples, FL.



CHEMICAL-STORAGE SYSTEM

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ACU-TROL PROGRAMMABLE CONTROLLERS offers the Stor-Pro chemical-storage system. Designed for safety and security indoors or out, the container system is available with a reusable two-gallon container, features a locking lid and can be permanently mounted to a flat, level concrete or wood surface or simply set in sand for a non-permanent installation.

Acu-Trol Programmable Controllers, Auburn, CA.

LIGHTING TRANSFORMERS

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INTERMATIC offers safety transformers that supply 12 volts to pool/spa lights, submersible fixtures and garden lights in systems of up to 600 watts. The P/N PX600 has a grounded shield between the primary and secondary windings for safe operation, and built-in circuit protection disconnects power to the transformer in case of overload. The steel housing is coated to protect its surface.

Intermatic,

Spring Grove, IL.

Continued on page 72



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PARAMOUNT POOL & SPA SYSTEMS offers the Air-Port. Designed to provide spa owners with a quieter bathing experience, the device is easy to install, improves the efficiency of the spa's air-intake line and reduces the noise created at air-intake points in the spa deck when air is drawn into the line. It also eliminates the hassle of setting the air-intake pipe far away from the spa. **Paramount Pool & Spa Systems**, Tempe, AZ.

CONDENSED LIGHTING GUIDE

Circle 140 on Reader Service Card

KICHLER LANDSCAPE LIGHTING offers a condensed guide to its Professional Line products. The eight-panel brochure covers accent, deck, path and spread lighting and includes overviews of low-voltage transformer and control technology as well as the company's complete line of accessories. There's also information on the company's line-voltage H.I.D. products. **Kichler Landscape Lighting**, Cleveland, OH.



CHLORINATION SYSTEM

Circle 141 on Reader Service Card



PPG INDUSTRIES offers the Titan GT100 chlorination system. Designed to be compact, low-cost and hard-working, the device delivers safe, simple and accurate chlorination for commercial pool applications in above- or below-grade installations and is effective for stabilized outdoor vessels up to 150,000 gallons; non-stabilized pools up to 60,000 gallons; and indoor pools up to 500,000 gallons. **PPG Industries**, Pittsburgh, PA.

AUTHENTIC COBBLES

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MONARCH STONE INT'L is the exclusive importer of an authentic antique cobble in the Historic European Cobblestone line. The cobble is available in three shapes – small mosaics, three square sizes and two rectangular sizes – each in two natural forms: granite and sandstone. The stones are available at full 3-inch height for sand applications and at 1-3/4 inches for cement bases. **Monarch Stone Int'l**, Carefree, AZ.



Continued on page 74

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COMPACTING RAMMERS

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Multiquip, Carson, CA.

MULTIQUIP has introduced three gasoline-powered rammers: the MT-65HA, MT-74FA and MT-84FA. Designed for the compaction of cohesive and mixed soils, the devices are ideal for use in trenches, around retaining walls and in solidifying bases for water-shapes and many similar applications. All include spill-free fuel caps as well as contoured handles that reduce operating vibration by up to 61 percent.

CONTROLLER FLOW CELLS

Circle 145 on Reader Service Card



the quality of the controllers' pH and sanitizer measurement. **Advanced Control Logix**, Colfax, CA.

ADVANCED CONTROL LOGIX offers the new Flow Sense industrial-strength flow cell and sensor system with its chemical controllers. The flow cell is injection molded with a removable transparent lid for sensor inspection and comes with a built-in flow-cell switch for safety. It was designed specifically to enhance

GARDEN FOUNTAINS

Circle 144 on Reader Service Card

HADDONSTONE USA has added a Lotus Flower Fountain to its Arcadian line of garden products. Designed for indoor or outdoor applications, the fountains are made of a cast-stone material that is naturally waterproof and frost-resistant, come in three colors (coade, slate and limestone) and feature a self-circulating design in which water cascades down four tiers from a small lotus bud. **Haddonstone USA**, Bellmawr, NJ.



CONCRETE ADHESIVE

Circle 146 on Reader Service Card

KEYSTONE RETAINING WALL SYSTEMS offers KapSeal adhesives that are compatible with slate brick, stone, wood and concrete. Available in premium and solvent-free formulations, the materials apply easily and are specially formulated to secure retaining-wall caps and pavers in place. A 1/4-inch bead backed away from edges by two inches forms a rock-solid bond. **Keystone Retaining Wall Systems**, Minneapolis, MN.



Continued on page 76

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COMPACT STONE COVER

Circle 147 on Reader Service Card



SAVIO ENGINEERING has introduced new stone covers for its line of Compact Skimmerfilters. The covers, which have the appearance of real granite outcroppings, conceal pond equipment while still providing for easy access. Manufactured from durable, UV-resistant materials to prevent discoloration, the covers are also available in larger sizes

for use with the company's full-size filter systems. **Savio Engineering**, Santa Fe, NM.

NON-SLIP PROTECTANT

Circle 149 on Reader Service Card



DECK-O-SEAL offers Deck-O-Grip, a non-yellowing, high-solids, acrylic-based cure-and-seal product. Transparent and easy to apply, the material provides a clear, flexible, durable, abrasion- and stain-resistant protective film

that retains and enhances the appearance of colored concrete and exposed-aggregate surfaces. Ideal for pool decks, the compound also has a slip-resistance additive. **Deck-O-Seal**, Hampshire, IL.

INTERACTIVE WATERPLAY

Circle 148 on Reader Service Card

WATERPLAY offers Storm, a new spray-park component that is part of the I-Spy line of transparent-pipe water-features. Water sprays from the base, while a tornado-like helix of water rushes to the top to create a dome of spray. This unit is compatible with all other transparent components in the I-Spy line or may be mixed and matched with solid-colored components. **Waterplay**, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.



DIVING-BOARD COLORS

Circle 150 on Reader Service Card

S.R. SMITH offers new designer colors for its diving boards. The colors – Silver Gray and Pewter Gray – were chosen specifically to blend with the latest in decking and interior finishes as well as patio furnishings. The boards, whose colors are coordinated with matching diving board stands, are available in 6-, 8-, 10- and 12-foot lengths. Color and texture samples are provided for client review. **S.R. Smith**, Canby, OR.



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ROBOTIC POOL CLEANER

Circle 151 on Reader Service Card



WATER TECH has introduced Blue Diamond Pro. Designed to clean a 25-by-75-foot pool in four hours or less, the robotic device is programmed to change cleaning directions automatically to ensure coverage of every inch of a pool, thus eliminating extra time used by cleaners that follow random patterns. It also has an obstacle-detection system and a remote controller for quick spot cleaning. **Water Tech**, New York, NY.

SALT CHLORINATOR

Circle 152 on Reader Service Card



PENTAIR WATER POOL & SPA offers IntelliChlor, which uses table salt to produce chlorine in swimming pools. Designed for safe, effective and automatic performance, the system combines electrolytic chlorine generation technology with user-friendly controls to produce softer water that is not subject to chlorine spikes. It also has a self-reversing feature to prevent scale build-up. **Pentair Water Pool & Spa**, Sanford, NC.

POOL ENCLOSURES

Circle 153 on Reader Service Card



CCSI INTERNATIONAL offers Garden Prairie pool and spa enclosures. Designed to stretch the swimming season by weeks before and after the summer season, the enclosures are designed for beauty, longevity and structural integrity and have features including tempered-glass walls, powder-coated colors, roof-opening systems and fully engineered, heavy-duty aluminum construction. **CCSI International**, Garden Prairie, IL.

integrity and have features including tempered-glass walls, powder-coated colors, roof-opening systems and fully engineered, heavy-duty aluminum construction. **CCSI International**, Garden Prairie, IL.

PORTABLE POOL LIFT

Circle 154 on Reader Service Card

AQUA CREEK PRODUCTS has redesigned its Pool Pro Lift for complete portability. No anchors are needed: Just wheel the device poolside and start using it. The system features a 400-pound lifting capacity and can be moved easily by tilting the lift structure back onto its built-in casters. Existing Pool Pro Lift models can easily be upgraded to full portability with a simple kit. **Aqua Creek Products**, Missoula, MT.



Continued on page 78

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OUTDOOR FANS

Circle 155 on Reader Service Card



INTELLICOOL offers the Axial Fan Collection in four styles for outdoor use. The fan heads adjust a full 180 degrees and feature many times the rotational speed of standard ceiling fans for extra cooling power. The steel fan bodies come in several finishes (including brushed nickel or polished chrome or copper), and the blades can be either mahogany or metal that matches the body finish. **IntelliCool**, Richardson, TX.

POND SYSTEMS

Circle 157 on Reader Service Card

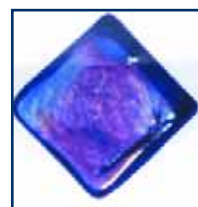


CAL PUMP has released a brochure on the Cal Pond System, in which fittings and connections are designed in such a way that no tools are required for installation. Components include various pumps, power-control centers, pond skimmers, biological filters, UV clarifying systems, non-kink hoses with swivel fittings, fountain spray heads, underwater lighting, spillway systems and more. **Cal Pump**, Valencia, CA.

GLASS-TILE MOSAICS

Circle 156 on Reader Service Card

BOYCE & BEAN offers the Water & Light Mosaics series of glass-tile products. Designed for rippling visual effects, the material is available in 13 colors and three finishes (clear, frosted and iridescent). Individually cast and ready for use in any application, from pools or spas to interior or exterior walls and floors, the tiles are paper-mounted on 12-by-12 sheets and are nominally 3/8-inch thick. **Boyce & Bean**, Oceanside, CA.



SAFETY POOL COVERS

Circle 158 on Reader Service Card

LOOP-LOC offers Ultra-Loc safety pool covers. Made by adding a patented, proprietary copolymer coating to the company's strong, lightweight mesh material, the resulting solid covers weigh about a third less than standard vinyl covers and can be set up with automatic drainage pumps or with "invisible" drainage panels to which surface water is guided to prevent surface accumulations. **Loop-Loc**, Hauppauge, NY.



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LANDSCAPE LIGHTING GUIDE

Circle 159 on Reader Service Card



LUMIÈRE has published a guide to help in making selections among its line of landscape lighting products. The eight-panel, full-color brochure features small photographs of the company's H.I.D, low- and line-voltage accent and floodlights, pathway lights, bollards and step, inground, wall, sign and specialty lights. Details on lenses and louvers are included, as is a rundown on finish options. **Lumière**, Peachtree City, GA.

GARDEN AMENITIES

Circle 161 on Reader Service Card



GARDEN ART INTERNATIONAL offers a complete line of vases, bowls, jardinières, urns, planters, wall and freestanding fountains, benches and more in a range of styles (Greek, Chinese and Italian, among others) and a wide variety of materials (terra cotta, cast stone, concrete and more). Custom finishes are available, as are custom-made, hand-carved limestone pieces. **Garden Art International**, Santa Ana, CA.

PVC VALVES

Circle 160 on Reader Service Card



DURA PLASTIC PRODUCTS offers a catalog on its PVC valves. The 28-page booklet covers single-union ball valves made especially for pool/spa applications as well as a range of ball, butterfly and check valves in a wide range of sizes. It also offers complete installation instructions as well as technical specifications, complete engineering details and replacement-parts lists. **Dura Plastic Products**, Beaumont, CA.

FOUNTAIN AERATORS

Circle 162 on Reader Service Card



AQUAMASTER offers the Masters Series of fountain aerators. Designed with a wide variety of spray patterns, the devices feature interchangeable nozzles, low-profile floats, underwater cable disconnects, intake-debris screens and efficient motors and pumps in systems ranging from 1 to 5 horsepower. Optional underwater lighting systems are available, as are multi-unit controls. **AquaMaster**, Kiel, WI.

Continued on page 80

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POOL PRODUCTS CATALOG

Circle 163 on Reader Service Card



ZODIAC POOL CARE offers a combined catalog on its Baracuda line of pool-cleaning products; the Nature2 collection of water-purifying products; and the Clearwater line of chlorine-generating products. The 100-page booklet includes information on specific products as well as complete parts listings, troubleshooting tips, warranty information and details on marketing. **Zodiac**

Pool Care, Pompano Beach, FL.

EROSION-PREVENTION SYSTEM

Circle 164 on Reader Service Card

U.S. GYPSUM has introduced Enviro-Shield, an erosion-defense system that prevents both water and wind erosion while promoting plant growth. Safe and non-toxic, the bonded-fiber matrix installs faster than sod or erosion-control blankets because it is spray-applied on anything from steep slopes to flat areas subject to heavy rainfall. The crust protects seeds and promotes growth. **U.S. Gypsum**, Chicago, IL.



STREAM JETS

Circle 165 on Reader Service Card



PEM FOUNTAINS offers the 800/810 Series of brass stream jets for use in fountain applications. Some units offer near-laminar performance at lower spray heights, and all are fitted with ABS multi-vane flow straighteners and sized for use with fittings

from 1/4 to 1-1/2 inches. The jets are available in other materials for use in high-pressure, saltwater or specialty applications. **PEM Fountains**, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada.

STAINLESS STEEL SPAS

Circle 166 on Reader Service Card

DIAMOND SPAS manufactures stainless steel spas, including a model built with three separate areas for enjoyment and hydrotherapy, one with four shoulder-cradling seats with foot and calf jets, another with two lounges offering full back recline and knee elevation, and a third dedicated to exercise. The vessel is 60 inches deep and features built-in grab bars for bather comfort and stability. **Diamond Spas**, Broomfield, CO.



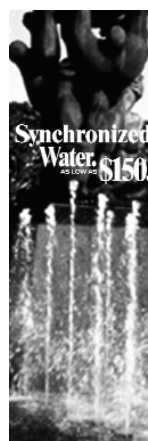
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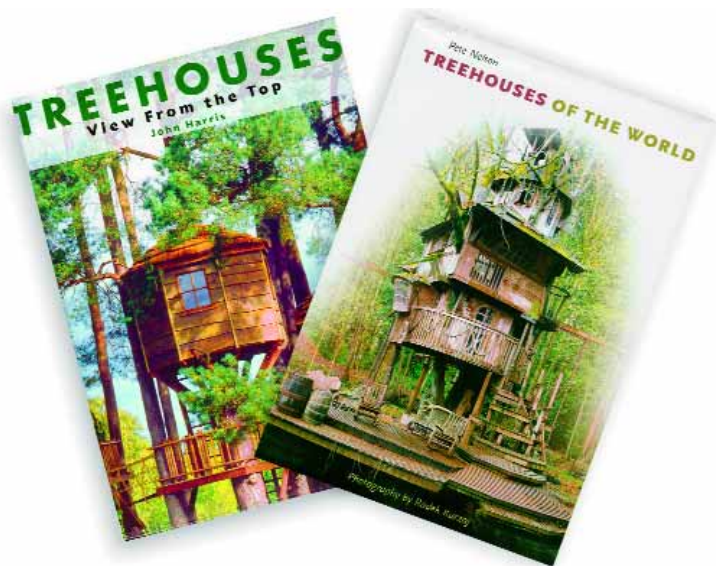
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WATER SHAPES

By Mike Farley

Up a Tree



When we think about tree houses, most of us probably think of the ramshackle platforms built by kids and suspended precariously up in backyard oaks or sycamores. (Those of us who are a bit older might also think about the amazing makeshift domicile in the movie “Swiss Family Robinson” or the wonderful “ride” of the same name at Disneyland.)

Not long ago, however, my daughter guided me to a trio of publications that cover tree houses from an entirely different perspective. In reading them, I was enlightened to the fact that, first of all, tree houses aren’t just for kids. Moreover, I discovered that there are some surprisingly sophisticated designs out there and, in fact, a great worldwide tradition of tree-house construction.

It may be hard to believe, but it’s true: There are structures in trees that serve as offices, homes, resort accommodations or even corporate headquarters. And these days, even tree houses built for children have reached a level of precision, design and creative flair that is truly impressive.

In a very real sense, tree houses, like swimming pools, are all about fun and adventure. And having seen the sophistication of tree houses as captured in these books, it no longer seems unlikely to me that, one of these days, creating such a structure might well be part of one of my project designs.

► The first text is *Tree Houses of the World* by Pete Nelson (Harry Abrams, 2004). This 223-page, heavily illustrated text covers (as the title suggests) tree houses as a global phenomenon. Nelson is, it turns out, something of a tree-house guru: he’s built some remarkable structures, conducts conferences on tree-house design and construction and even invented an anchoring device designed to allow these structures to move safely in heavy winds.

His book covers tree houses for adult use and offers 50-plus case studies with some truly mind-blowing designs – including one, mentioned above, that serves as headquarters for a thriving corporation. He also covers tree houses dressed up as everything from private residences and personal offices to resort lodgings. Along the way, he goes into impressive detail on construction, covering lumber spacing as well as tree species best suited to this sort of construction – and those that should be avoided. He also provides a comprehensive set of resources.

► In *Tree Houses: A View from the Top* by John Harris (First Lyons Press, 2003), you get a good look at structures built for both kids and adults. Harris is from Great Britain, and the 174-page book and its 25 case studies reflect a variety of elaborate tree-house designs that have been executed in Europe.

He also covers fictional tree cities, exploring the elaborate Ewok Village built for “Return of the Jedi,” one of the Star Wars movies, and the elaborate sets for Lothlorien, home to elves in the first movie in “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy. Here and elsewhere, he slides easily into technical details about platforms, stairs, ladders and rails.

► Then there’s *Ultimate Tree Houses* by David Clark (Salamander Books, 2003). This slim, 80-page book examines the surprisingly rich history of tree houses and includes wonderful photographs of incredibly elaborate structures – including a section on tree houses of the future featuring a design in which a platform is suspended on bungee cords amid a stand of palm trees.

Bottom line: This is all terrifically fun stuff. No doubt it will be a rare design project in which I’m asked to throw a tree house in along with an elaborate watershape, but knowing more about the topic now, I know I won’t be shy about offering the possibility of a bit of arboreal luxury if the situation seems right. **MS**

Mike Farley is a landscape architect with more than 20 years of experience and is currently a designer/project manager for Gohlke Pools in Denton, Texas. A graduate of Genesis 3’s Level I Design School, he holds a degree in landscape architecture from Texas Tech University and has worked as a watershaper in both California and Texas.

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