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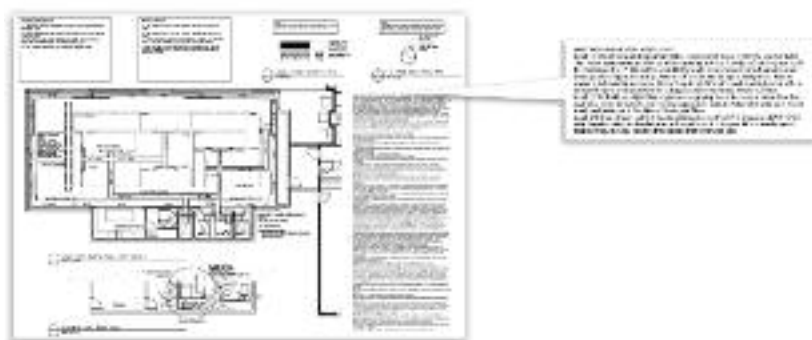


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The Tastes of Summer

By Eric Herman

For all the technical savvy, design sophistication and overall smarts demanded of those who reach for the heights in the aquatic arts, I'm often reminded that, at its core, watershaping is largely about fun and enjoyment.

For years now, that message has come through in any number of ways in these pages. Take the columns of Brian Van Bower: Just about every month, he does an amazing job of persuading us that watershaping is really about good times and the pursuit of the good life. And he's not alone in repeatedly driving home the point that a big part of this pleasurable scene revolves around dining and entertaining.

That's why I'm sure Brian and like-minded colleagues will particularly appreciate "Outdoor Living" by Scott Cohen, beginning on page 22 of this issue. Cohen is an accomplished designer and self-styled "garden artist" who plies his trade in the warm environs of southern California's San Fernando Valley.

At the same time as he's become widely known for creating scores of lavishly appointed backyard watershapes and landscapes, he's also become well known as an authority on designing and installing outdoor kitchens – so much so that he's one of HGTV's go-to guys on the subject.

In this month's article, he generously shares what he's learned in working with clients as they winnow through the vast array of options and possibilities that are part and parcel of these projects. He also makes it deliciously clear that spaces for cooking, dining and socializing outside can become a sumptuous form of art when approached with tasteful planning and a few dashes of design sophistication.



Inspired by that spirit, allow me to join the party and share one of my favorite summertime recipes – one that's particularly well suited for an outdoor grill.

It's a dish of my own concoction, based loosely on recipes picked up from Emeril Lagasse and Paul Prudhomme, two of my culinary heroes. I call it "Eric's Zesty Crusted Fish Filets."

The ingredients include four six-ounce fish filets (sole, talapia, sea bass, trout, redfish, halibut or any firm-fleshed fish), four strips of bacon or pancetta, a quarter cup of lemon zest, a quarter cup of grated fresh horseradish, a quarter cup of grated parmesan cheese, eight to ten finely sliced pepperoncinis, two eggs (whites only), a dash of red pepper flakes, a dash of black pepper and a healthy pinch of sea salt.

Prepare a sheet of aluminum foil for each of the filets. Lightly brush the fish with the egg white and then coat them with a mix of the lemon zest, parmesan and horseradish before dusting with the black pepper and sea salt. After placing them on the foil, spread the sliced peppers down the length of the filets, then lay a slice of bacon on top of each. Loosely wrap the filets in the aluminum foil.

Place the wrapped filets on the grill over medium heat for 15-20 minutes. When you can smell the bacon, the feast is ready. I would suggest serving this main course with grilled vegetables (asparagus is a personal favorite), a fresh baguette and sparkling fruit juice or a good chardonnay.

To the joys of summer – bon appétit!

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In This Issue

July/August Writers

Scott Cohen is president of The Green Scene, an outdoor design/construction firm in Northridge, Calif. An accomplished ceramicist and sculptor, Cohen specializes in custom-designed tiles and sculptures that add imaginative personal touches to his designs. His work has been featured on HGTV's "Landscape's Challenge" and "Designing for the Sexes," as well as in local and national media including *The Los Angeles Times*, *Sunset Magazine Pool & Spa Book*, *Woman's Day* and *Better Homes & Gardens*. Through the years, he's become a frequent resource for HGTV on subjects related to designing and installing outdoor kitchens. Cohen is a member of California's Contractors Board Industry Expert Program and lobbies for ethical Workers' Compensation practices in the construction industry.

David Tisherman is the principal in two design/construction firms: David Tisherman's Visuals in Manhattan Beach, Calif., and Liquid Design of Cherry Hill, N.J. A designer and builder of custom, high-end swimming pools since 1979, he is widely known in the pool and spa industry as an advocate for the highest possible standards of design, engineering and construction. He has degrees and credentials in industrial design, scientific illustration and architectural drawing from Harvard University and Art Center College of Design; has taught architectural rendering and presentation at UCLA; and is currently teaching a course on design and construction of residential watershapes at UCLA. An award-winning designer, he serves as an industry expert for California's Contractor State License Board. Tisherman is a co-founder

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of and principal instructor for the Genesis 3 Design Group and was also a 2008 recipient of The Joseph McCloskey Prize for Outstanding Achievement in the Art & Craft of Watershaping.

Kevin Doud is founder of Grand Effects, a fire and water-feature manufacturer based in Irvine, Calif. He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the California Polytechnic State University and has an extensive practical background in combustion technology gathered in ten years' employment as an engineer and regional sales manager for a leading manufacturer of industrial combustion equipment. Doud also holds a patent on Grand Effects' automated burner package.

Kevin Ruddy is president of Omega Pool Structures, a Toms River, N.J.-based firm that specializes in the design, engineering and construction of indoor swimming pools. Ruddy's career in watershaping began more than 25 years ago, after he spent some time in the home-building industry and decided to apply what he'd learned to building entire backyard spaces that included pools, spas, landscaping and associated structures. Before long, he saw the need in his area for a company focused on the indoor-pool market and established Omega Pool Structures in 1987. The company now works on indoor pools nationwide and established a pool-construction division in 1993 so it could build many of the pools it designs. Ruddy is both a Gold and Platinum member of Genesis 3 and a member of the Society of Watershape Designers.



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Premium Pages

By Brian Van Bower

If you're like me, you look forward to the arrival of every issue of this magazine.

As I see it, *WaterShapes* provides information that helps me become better at what I do. It's also fun to read, informative and wonderfully affirming in that it shows our industry at its very best. It's truly an indispensable resource, has been responsible for a good measure of the progress the industry has made in the past 12 years – and, unfortunately, it's also struggling to make headway in a tough marketplace.

Let me say this up front: I'm going to lay it on the line about *WaterShapes* in this column. I will do so not because I write for it, nor because publisher Jim McCloskey and editor Eric Herman are close personal friends, nor because of the great working relationship the magazine has had with my colleagues and me at Genesis 3. Rather, I do so because what's happening with the magazine might have tragic consequences for our continuing progress as watershapers.

The plain fact is, *WaterShapes* is an amazing gift, and we all should cherish it and do what we can to ensure its continuing presence in our marketplace and our professional lives.

As a result of the existence of this forum, our output as watershapers has become more beautiful and multifaceted than most of us would ever have dared to dream in the not-so-distant past.

tough times

It's obvious that *WaterShapes* is having a tough time of it, as is true of many other individuals and organizations throughout the industry. Nonetheless, I was shocked a while back to learn that the magazine had pared back its publishing schedule to every other month as a way to stay in the game – even though I really should have seen it coming.

Just stop and consider what's gone on in our own construction-related marketplace, and then put it in the context of everything that's happening to just about all print publications these days: It's a real double whammy.

Just this morning, for example, I read in the ever-thinning *Miami Herald* that one of my favorite magazines, *Wine News*, has closed its doors, joining an unsettling number of other magazines and newspapers that have broken under the stress. Now, basically through no fault of its own, *WaterShapes* has taken a hit – not a fatal blow, but one that changes our industry's routines and partially deprives me of a resource I always want more of, not less.

I'm certain I can speak for other readers in hoping that this situation is temporary, because we truly *need* this publication. It's plain to see that necessity when you stop to consider what's happened within our industry in the past dozen years.

Indeed, *WaterShapes*, in tandem with Genesis 3, ushered in a revolution at the end of the last decade – a revolution, as I've written in this space, that has resulted in the emergence of an entirely new industry made up of ideas, interests, technologies, trends and tastes welling up from the pool/spa realm, the landscape architecture and design communities, the fountain business, the pond and stream trades, the green movement and the fine arts.

Through the power of these pages, those elements have coalesced to create something truly new and tremendously exciting. By demonstrating the raw potential of watershaping, the magazine has been instrumental in inspiring a whole generation of established professionals to reach higher and higher and in introducing a new generation to fresh ways of thinking about water.

As a result of the existence of this forum, in other words, our output as watershapers has become more beautiful and multifaceted than most of us would ever have dared to dream in the not-so-distant past.

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A fresh look at world
trends and innovation

to the point

Examples of what I'm suggesting here are so numerous that it's tough to narrow the list: Every single issue is filled with such substance that you don't have to dig very hard to find columns or articles that are interesting and relevant. Invariably, issue after issue, quality steps forward the instant you crack the covers.

Where else (other than in some Genesis 3 classes) do you find contributions of eminences such as Anthony Archer Wills? Here's an artist who creates works that truly appear to be made by God and nature, often executed on massive scales – and he's written eight amazing articles for the magazine in just the past five years! The way he transforms spaces is stunning: It's watershaping at its absolute best.

If you're a pond and stream specialist (and even if you're really good at it), there's no way you can look at Anthony's work and not realize that you still have room to grow. And because of the wealth of information he has shared in the magazine, I'm certain that countless ponds and streams are more beautiful, better made and ultimately more likely to inspire others to consider owning one. If that's not advancing the cause of the industry, I don't know what is.

In a completely different vein, consider the frequent contributions of Paolo Benedetti. Considering only his recently started "Solutions" features (and not the seven other features he's written through the years), Paolo shares details and tips that he's picked up through years of experience, trial and error. Rather than keep his insights secret, he openly shares what he's learned simply because he wants others to benefit.

As an example, in my own practice we've picked up his detail for placing strainer baskets inside surge tanks. It's a fantastic detail that genuinely improves system performance by keeping the water in surge tanks cleaner, and until Paolo shared his approach, no one (so far as I know) was doing anything similar. On top of that, I'll wager that it won't be long before a manufacturer picks up his concept and creates an off-the-shelf product for the application. When that happens, the entire industry will have access

to a great tool that apparently did not exist before Paolo shared it in these pages.

In yet another completely different vein, I think about the influence that my good friend and Genesis 3 co-founder David Tisherman has had by way of his work with *WaterShapes* from its very first issue in 1999. His passion for quality in design and for incomparable construction has set entirely new standards for our industry.

Consider the current view of skimmer lids. There was a time where we simply accepted the fact that every pool had a round, white dot somewhere in the middle of the deck – sort of like a wart on the nose we simply accepted. David changed that perspective forever both with his bristling criticism of those who didn't see this as a radical flaw and with his detailed discussions of practical ways to cover skimmers with deck material.

It's reached a point where now, whenever I see a telltale white lid in the middle of an otherwise attractive deck, I instantly sense that the designer or the builder didn't think the work all the way through. It may seem a smallish sort of consideration, but as David has taught us in the past 12 years, excellence consists of complete mastery of such details.

into the breach

Let me be clear: In charting the enormously positive influence *WaterShapes* has had on our industry, I am in no way suggesting that the publication has accomplished what it set out to do and that we have so much momentum now that it can step aside and wouldn't be missed. Quite the opposite is true!

We've all effectively started a journey together, and *WaterShapes* has literally had the backs of all progressive-thinking watershapers from the very start. To proceed without its support will not only be harder and riskier, but also the pace of growth and development will be considerably slowed basically because there won't be anyone there to pick up the slack.

Further, this economic downturn has keenly demonstrated that there's a vast gulf between companies that operate on a quality basis and those that ply their trade based on price and volume. As I've noted in my columns many times, the

upper echelon of the trades – the segment that has joined the Watershaping Revolution – has fared surprisingly well during this recession while the volume industry has suffered grievously.

The reason for this is simple: In the new industry, artistry, quality, integrity and creativity (not price!) are the keys to progress, and the demand for those virtues never goes away. *WaterShapes* consistently reminds us of these facts.

Yes, doing business with clients who have money is some guarantor of success, but it's not the only or even the most important driver: As has been demonstrated in these pages time and time again, anyone at any level of the industry can improve his or her skills. Even the most ordinary of swimming pools can and should be made with sound hydraulics and structural integrity, for instance, and in most cases even modest pools can include aesthetic touches that will make them beautiful. Again, *WaterShapes* never ceases to impress this point upon us.

What the magazine shows us over and over, however, is that quality is transferable and that you don't have to be building quarter-million-dollar pools to understand and apply good design concepts and sound technical skills. In fact, in applying those qualities on more modest projects, you fill your projects with value – and will achieve success while performing on a higher plane than those who haven't embraced quality as a guiding light.

As I see it, the greater the degree to which the watershaping trades reject crummy design, bad hydraulics, substandard construction and lousy customer service, the better off we all will be. And don't even get me started about those who operate in the gray market and compete under the table with no licenses, no permits, no oversight and no quality assurance of any kind!

I get ill just thinking about the way some people still do business – and I've always seen *WaterShapes* as the antidote: It shows us all a better way to do things, a better way to relate to our colleagues and a better way to work with clients. In that context, I must finally pose the ugly question: Can you imagine moving forward in this industry without this publication?

pocketbook issues

Let me conclude this discussion by issuing a call to action to manufacturers — those who, with their advertising budgets, have choices when it comes to which publications they support and which they consider to be secondary.

Frankly, I just can't understand why *WaterShapes* isn't every relevant marketer's primary outlet: At a time when we who are still busy need information more than ever about who you are and what you have to offer, too many of you seem to be absent from the one magazine we all read, most of us cover to cover, as soon as it reaches our desks.

If I were you, I'd want my products to be associated with a forum that embodies excellence, a forum where people are constantly looking for new ideas and products and better ways of doing things. That environment, which fuels imagination as well as competitive fires, is exactly where, as a marketer, I would reach out to designers, specifiers and installers. These are people who not only will use my products in quality applications, but also are creative types who likely will find ways of using them that I might never have considered as their manufacturer.

On top of that, I'm constantly aware of the fact that *WaterShapes* reaches across industry lines. In marketing Genesis 3 schools, I know that the magazine draws responses not just from the pool/spa industry, but also from landscape architects and designers as well as the pond and fountain trades. The magazine has helped us expand our marketing reach among water-centered businesses in cross-cultural ways we couldn't have affordably achieved otherwise.

When I wear my marketing hat, I see *not* advertising with *WaterShapes* as a violation of my self-interest. I'm not suggesting that this is the only place I put my advertisements, but it's certainly at the top of my list because it reaches just the professionals I want to reach.

For many reasons, I'm deeply grateful to those companies that have always supported *WaterShapes*. I recognize that nobody makes advertising decisions based

on altruism, but at least the advertisers in these pages have made sound decisions that also do right by the watershaping industry as a whole.

In sum, we've become a better industry because of *WaterShapes*, and we need this magazine to continue so we will keep reaching even higher. **WS**

Brian Van Bower runs Aquatic Consultants, a design firm based in Miami, Fla., and is a co-founder of the Genesis 3 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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On the Level



Practical Passion

By Bruce Zaretsky

If you ask my employees and manage to get an unguarded response, they'll tell you that I'm an unrelenting pain in the neck – a real tyrant. That's because I'm always asking nagging sorts of questions such as, "Why isn't this project finished yet?" or "How much longer is this going to take?" or "Can you speed things up?"

My point in asking, of course, is to let them know on some level that if I were on site and was responsible for what was happening, we'd *already* be done and moving along to another project, no problems, no issues. Furthermore, our completed landscape or watershed would be a true work of art!

My questions, of course, are somewhat unfair and by implication tend to overstate the effect my superhuman presence might have on a project. We may joke about it, but I have no reluctance to come across as a tyrant because, although we are pursuing artistic endeavors, we also need to be efficient enough in doing so that we stay profitable and in business.

I recognize that it is frequently difficult to reconcile art and productivity, but it is some-

How can I afford to stay in a constant state of exploration and experimentation and keep assuming the risks associated with innovation?

thing all business owners and managers must do to keep the artistic concepts in our heads moving forward at the same time we're paying close attention to our clients' budgets and our own bottom lines. Frankly, working out these balances often keeps me awake at night and, truth be told, is what makes me occasionally cranky on job sites.

artistic inclinations

As is true of many of us in the watershaping and landscape trades, my goal is to create unique, dramatic, satisfying works of art for my clients.

I want them and their friends and their families to be awestruck when they walk into a space I've developed. And I love the fact that ours is an interactive pursuit: People don't just stand in front of what I do as they would if I painted landscapes on canvas. Instead, they actually walk into the spaces I've created and experience them with all of their senses.

My clients appreciate what I can do and come to me because they want landscapes or gardens tailored to their desires, lifestyles and quirks. Most know that just about anyone can invade their properties, slam down some pavers, jam in a few plants, collect a check and call it a day. But that's not me – never has been and never will be – because I want each and every project to be special.

But therein lies the rub: How can I keep reinventing myself and my outlook on each project? How can I keep creating individualized, idiosyncratic gardens – and do so without losing my shirt? How can I afford to stay in a constant state of exploration and experimentation and keep assuming the risks associated with innovation?

Although I'm not afraid of failure in a specific sense of something not working on a project and needing to redo things on the fly, I *am* afraid of failure on a grander scale and of putting my business at risk to the point of bankruptcy.

Happily, however, I've managed to keep that fear at bay for a long time and have stuck to my resolve to stay creative and do my absolute best for my clients. At the same time, I see the effect this sort of fear has on other businesspeople – see how the fear of failure drives so many watershapers and landscape professionals to the "safe harbor" of cookie-cutter designs.

These well-meaning (yet timid) practitioners use the same products and the same approaches on virtually every project

they tackle, regardless of the architecture of the home or even the clients' wishes. These are the ones who label themselves in Yellow Pages ads as "Certified Installers" of some product line or other and, appropriate or not, use it whenever and wherever they can.

They'll become affiliated with some paver supplier, for example, and will get pretty good at installing that particular product, increasing efficiency and helping the bottom line. And they'll benefit from getting volume discounts as well. Indeed, it looks so good on the account ledger that this sort of practice is hard to resist.

But look at the results: Every project with the same pavers, the same few tree species, the same plant selections, the same pool shapes – all of them familiar and shopworn and probably passé, regardless of what the architecture of the home calls for or the clients might really want.

In many cases, businesses are driven to the cookie-cutter approach in pursuit of budget-restricted projects where operational efficiency offers the only room to make a buck. As I see it, however, what this approach represents is the design equivalent of a buzz kill – the end of creativity, the demise of art.

both ways

In my years in business, I've had my share of great clients who've had grand ambitions and the resources to realize them. But along the way I've also worked with countless clients who had champagne tastes on beer budgets – and it took me a while to differentiate between those two client classes without getting myself into trouble.

In the old days, I used to ask what the budget was and, with beer-level clients, would get either blank stares or unreasonably low price points. Experience has since taught me to turn the tables and tell them, point blank, that what they're asking for in our initial meeting will work within a given price range I share with them. This lends a dose of reality to the discussions and puts us in a place where we can honestly figure out priorities and move ahead with realistic designs.

I also made the decision early on that,

just because a client has a beer budget, modest means would not preclude me from delivering a garden space or watershape that would satisfy his or her desires. This, in fact, is *exactly* where the art versus productivity issue jumps to the fore.

In giving our clients with smallish bud-

gets what they want, we decided that we'd avoid the temptation to break out the cookie cutters but would instead focus on being as productive as possible – our avenue toward keeping our prices down for these projects. Just as some cookie-cutter operations trim prices by being brutally efficient in installing certain products, we

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focus on efficiency as well—but we do what it takes to avoid having our production orientation drive us into any ruts.

A case in point is the large meadow garden we installed for Rochester General Hospital (shortly after completing the Woodward Healing Garden I described in my March 2010 column). We were asked to design the space in front of a newly built, state-of-the-art emergency department and proposed a wildflower meadow with walking trails, ADA-accessible paths, trees and sitting terraces.

Before the design work began, we were given a figure to work with—and what we were proposing went well over that budget. I didn't want to cut anything out, so I found a way to lower the labor cost by stepping in myself and running the job on site. We brought in our en-

tire crew of ten and planted nearly 2,000 perennials, 700 shrubs and trees and 20,000 square feet of sod in about a week, including all site preparation, grading, mulching and watering.

This approach allowed us to keep maximum artistic leeway while kicking up our production level and still meeting the highest possible standards. The key to making this work was the role I took on site: I kept things moving along at a brisk pace—acting *every* bit the tyrant—and did so knowing that this was the only way we could deliver champagne results on this particular beer budget.

I know my staff would rebel if I took to applying this approach on every job, but this was a special case and it turned out to be just what was required to ace the job with respect to both artistry and profit.

making things work

Through the years, I've found many other ways to give clients unique, creative installations while staying within budgets. Many times, for example, we'll come up with a design that just floors a client—a space he or she just can't live without but simply can't afford—and have had to get creative in bringing the design to fruition.

A perfect example of this is a Tuscan-style garden we devised a few years back. The home was set in a typical subdivision, surrounded on three sides by homes set too close for comfort. The one directly behind our clients' had a pool frequented by every kid within a three-mile radius, so the primary driver for the project was our clients' desire to isolate themselves in a walled garden.

As luck would have it, the home had



The Tuscan-style walls shown here were built inexpensively using a wood structure set on wood footings (similar to fence installation, but deeper!) that we faced with metal lath and stucco. It's a great way to build 'stone walls' on a budget.

a distinctive Tuscan look, so we proposed enclosing the yard with six-foot-tall stucco walls that would establish an enclosed outdoor space just outside the home's big family room. We planned on a terrace with a private, intimate, comfortable seating area and lush plantings – what I call a morning-cup-of-coffee/afternoon-glass-of-wine space.

They loved the concept, but the \$50,000 cost of the stucco walls made them blanch: This was far beyond what they'd budgeted, and I watched as their initial excitement deflated to disappointment. But I really wanted to do this project, as it's not often you encounter a Tuscan villa in Rochester, N.Y., so I asked them to give me a few days to figure things out.

After brainstorming with my carpenter and painter, we came up with a solution: We would build the walls like a fence, then stucco the fence. We set six-by-six-inch posts into the ground to the frost line and, above ground level, sheathed them front and back with half-inch exterior ply-

wood while leaving a two-inch air gap at the bottom of the wall. We then stuccoed this structure before hiding the air gap behind plants. Finally, we capped the wall with two-by-10 cedar boards to complete the look. The final cost was about \$15,000 – and the clients were thrilled.

(Ironically, we have since designed a Tuscan-style courtyard for other clients, this time using real stucco walls and stone veneers that will cost about \$70,000. It just goes to prove that one person's \$1,000 is another's \$100,000!)

We apply this same sort of needs-based logic to many aspects of our work, creating magical waterfeatures from off-the-shelf containers, cored-out boulders, slabs of stone – whatever it takes to give clients one-of-a-kind art pieces for relatively small sums of money.

We've used candleholders as light fixtures, wiring them up to serve as simple low-voltage sockets, and we'll mix materials to create "area rugs" of brick, flagstone and/or bluestone amid fields of pavers –

simple ideas that take less time to do than to think up but still manage to imprint a project with a unique, eye-catching (and typically client-pleasing) detail.

So, even though I will always struggle to balance artistry with productivity, I find that the quest always serves to keep my creative juices flowing and enables me to design without specifically concerning myself with a client's budget or demographics. As I see it, I do what I do as an outlet for my creativity – and projects with small budgets truly put my skills and determination to the test. **WS**

Bruce Zaretsky is president of Zaretsky and Associates, a landscape design/construction/consultation company in Rochester, N.Y. Nationally recognized for creative and inspiring residential landscapes, he also works with healthcare facilities, nursing homes and local municipalities in conceiving and installing healing and meditation gardens. You can reach him at bruce@zaretskyassociates.com.



The problem with products made with low-grade materials is that, in most cases, they do work – at least at first.

Material Standards

By Mike Gambino

Call it human nature, free-market economics, the profit motive or whatever – the fact of the matter is that too many landscape lighting installers rely on low-cost products made with low-grade materials.

Obviously, they do it to cut down costs either to squeeze more profit out of each job or to bring the price down to the level required to get clients to sign on the dotted line. So rather than reduce the number of fixtures used on a project or even turn down a project altogether, they're clearly willing to win a job by using equipment that has no chance of lasting more than a couple of years in the field.

I have no doubt that this is happening: In more than 20 years of working as a landscape lighting designer and installer, I've run across these cheap products countless times. And the upshot is always the same: I'm called to visit a relatively new installation that doesn't work – and in too many cases can't even be salvaged because, for example, transformers intended for indoor use have been used out-

doors or because design compromises have been so severe that a site's basic aesthetics are beyond help.

This willingness of some professionals to debase what good landscape lighting is all about is, I think, self-defeating. It may keep a company in business for a time, but it sets such a low bar for performance and reliability that the reputation of the entire industry suffers and even the ineffective players will ultimately vanish. The *real* bottom line? This approach hurts everyone, from the manufacturer and the installer to the consumer whose expectations have not been met.

meets the eye

The problem with products made with low-grade materials is that, in most cases, they do work – at least at first.

In other words, you can take the cheapest, flimsiest junk off the shelf at a store that sells irrigation or lighting products, install it with valid creative and aesthetic ideas in mind and, when the sun goes down and you throw the switch for the first time in the client's presence, he or she will likely be overwhelmed – exactly as would be the case had the project been completed with professional-grade equipment.

That initial impression, however, is horribly (and even fraudulently?) deceptive. The "lighting expert" who perpetrates such projects seldom offers ongoing service as part of the installation contract, so there's nobody to confront when, as inevitably happens, the system becomes problematic or stops working within a few months – or even within *weeks* in some egregious cases.

The client, of course, has no idea which products are inferior and all too often is left on his or her own to find another firm to set things right. I am occasionally called by these abused homeowners, and it's a horrible situation in which any good feeling the client might have is gone. What's worse, the original specifier or contractor has squandered the opportunity to have a well executed project stand as a constant form of promotion of the value of landscape lighting to other consumers.

That's just not right.

This is one of the reasons why, with every prospect I meet, I always stress the importance of working with professionals who at least *offer* maintenance packages: It is, I tell them, a demonstration of the contractor's belief in the end product and signifies a willingness to ensure long-term client satisfaction.

Indeed, for those of us who have made that ongoing commitment, the very idea of using inferior products is unthinkable, basically because we know that it will end up costing us more, a *lot* more, in the not-so-long run to use inferior products up front.

Part of the problem is the aforementioned consumer expectations and the fact that lighting systems are available in retail stores at price points aimed at every level and budget. Some of the better stores may have a good array of products to sell across the full spectrum, but the average homeowner's thinking is likely to be shaped by the lowest-cost items rather than the highest-priced ones.

If they get stuck conceptually at the level of the cheapest do-it-yourself-style products, it's up to us as professional lighting designers and installers to inform them of the distinctions and focus their attention on what's best for them for all the years they'll own their homes. As I tell them, what they've been exposed to on the retail level are toys compared to truly professional lighting products: Yes, what I'll be recommending costs more, but the equipment represents a far better value with respect to reliability and long-term performance and maintainability.

on the shelf

Any lighting designer or installer worthy of being called a professional knows these product levels and their differences, and any who are willing to work with the toys really shouldn't be in business. That's an open-and-shut case.

As I see it, the *real* problem comes in the middle or lower range with so-called "professional products": These are often made by reputable manufacturers with good brand-name recognition, but to reach a more cost-conscious market they use lower-grade materials for their fixture housings and mounting hardware. These products basically cost about half of what top-of-the-line models cost – and, regrettably, they are marketed and sold as durable, professional-grade equipment.

While it is true that these items will last longer and perform better than the toys mentioned above, the fact is that these aluminum and composite materials simply

are *not* durable enough for extended use in a landscape. For starters, most are still paired with halogen lamps, which generate tremendous amounts of heat and will, in time, break down the composite until they warp, crack, are no longer watertight, fail and decline beyond repair.

The other issue with composites is that

they are all susceptible to the threat posed by gardeners. I respect these maintenance professionals and have a great many friends in that trade, but there is no escaping the fact that they tend to be very hard on lighting systems. They'll kick fixtures, smack them with power tools, lash them with weed whackers, bury them in



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The quality of installed components truly makes a difference with landscape lighting, simply because the fixtures are exposed to more than just the weather. The plastic ground stake for the fixture at left, for example, wasn't up to resisting repeated blows delivered by weed whackers and lawn mowers, while the high-quality brass fixture at right is made to take most of such challenges in stride.

debris, bring down heavy limbs on top of them – or worse. Inadvertently (or not?), they'll also dig up cables, break junction boxes and seemingly do all they can to destroy lighting systems.

That's bad enough when you have heavy-duty fixtures in place that can take the abuse, but when you use equipment made with light-duty materials and put them in harm's way, it's just a matter of time until significant damage and failures will occur.

This is why, if I see these products when I'm called in to evaluate existing projects, I won't touch a renovation job unless the clients are willing to have me replace all of the low-grade fixtures with higher-quality versions. There is, I tell them, simply no way to fix the underlying problems while continuing to use products that *at best* represented a compromise when first installed.

metal works

The alternatives I define for these clients

come in two forms: The first level includes fixtures made of non-ferrous (and, therefore, non-rusting) metal that has been spun or stamped and turned to create housings. These are assembled using welds or stainless steel hardware, and the joints are sealed from the elements with various O-rings and heat-resistant sealant materials.

These products are superior to their composite and aluminum based cousins: They'll stand up to some abuse and, when damaged, can generally be repaired. To be sure, they aren't what I'd call top-of-the-line products, but I'd suggest their use in certain situations, as when a project requires use of dozens or even hundreds of fixtures and economizing makes sense.

I always make it clear to clients that these non-rusting metal fixtures still *do* require regular maintenance, as is true of all systems. I let them know as well that, although these products are reliable and durable, they don't approach either the reliability

or durability of the top products.

The problem at this level, I tell them, is that the metal stock can only be so thick when it goes into the bending and stamping processes. Moreover, seams secured by welds or screws can become weak spots when exposed to the elements and/or to repeated abuse by gardeners and their crews.

This leads us to discuss the top level – products I use wherever and whenever I can.

These fixtures are made of fully cast bronze, copper, brass or stainless steel. *Casted metal* are the key words here: These fixtures are made in foundries, typically die-cast or fabricated in sand molds, and are so thick-walled and heavy-duty that they'll stand up to almost any type of physical abuse. Not even a motivated gardener will win this contest!

As true professionals, these are the products we must strive to use. Yes, they are expensive – twice or three times as costly as inferior products – but I describe



Not all transformers and housings are created equal. The one at left, for example, was simply not capable of standing up to outdoor installation, while the one at right is set up to last through years of exposure to the most persistent insults nature and the elements can throw at it.

the difference to my clients as an investment in service life, serviceability and long-term satisfaction. Nowadays, I say, I'm currently servicing fixtures of this kind that I installed twenty years ago. Yes, I've replaced lenses, lamps, seals, O-rings and the occasional socket, but the fixture housings and mounting hardware are still rock solid.

And in situations where time and abuse have taken a toll on aesthetics, it's seldom a big deal to remove these fixtures from the site and send them to a metal shop for sandblasting and application of a fresh chemical-stain finish. Once such fixtures

are refitted with new wiring, O-rings, lamps, lenses and sockets, they're basically good as new (if not better).

In other words, with proper maintenance, these are the products that last indefinitely. They may become weathered and oxidized, but if you open up even an old one of these fixtures, you're likely to see an inside surface that looks somewhat new.

no ignorant bliss

The difference between fixtures made with cast non-rusting metal and all of the available alternatives are so great that

I find it difficult to accept the thought of using lesser-quality materials at the professional level.

I am so dogged on this point that it upsets some of my colleagues, but I look at it this way: Landscape lighting systems are not unlike most watershapes in that neither are necessities of life. These are luxury products, and therefore they are not something every home should have simply because not every homeowner can afford to have the job done right.

In this limited marketplace, I consider every system I install (and then subsequently maintain) to be a marketing device for my business. As a result, I want them to work properly so that, when potential clients see them, they will want something that performs just as well.

This entire referral dynamic breaks down completely when a system doesn't work.

Although some will say I'm being too rigid, I think it is better to walk away from a job when the clients don't have the budget to do things right (or are unwilling to pare back on the system and their expectations) than it is to move forward and do substandard work that will not perform in the long run.

Yes, times are tough, but if we professionals really do want to lay foundations for better times, the only reliable way is to deliver quality in all aspects of what we do. In this business, that means starting with the raw materials from which our products are made!

Even if the products you use in your designs don't have your name on them (as mine do), you should treat them as such because your projects can be no better than the weakest link in the systems you develop. And if that weakest link is related to reliability and longevity, it's easy to see that these product choices have a great deal to say about the ultimate success of your business! **WS**

Beyond Fixtures

The cables used in landscape lighting systems are among the most consistent products I've ever encountered: If the product is rated by the Underwriters Laboratories (and, frankly, even if it's *not* – although I'd never advocate the use of non-UL-approved cable), the copper used in cable is always going to do its job.

In all my years in this business, in fact, I've never once experienced a short in any cable that comes off the spool. Yes, there are differences in sheathings and coatings and some are easier to use than others, but in my experience, cable made for direct burial in general and for landscape lighting in particular can be used with great confidence.

For all that, once it's been in the ground for a while in direct contact with soil, it loses some of its flexibility and the sheathing may become hard and brittle – a point to note well if you're called in to do extensive work on an existing system.

(A side note: As I've mentioned before in these pages, I've taken to installing all my wiring in conduit. Not only does this protect the cable from damage, but it also makes installation and replacement easy. Direct burial is the accepted industry standard, but I prefer this approach.)

Transformers, by contrast, are different animals that are made to less rigorous standards when not specifically manufactured and listed for landscape lighting use.

This is a place where contractors can save a lot of money, but, personally, I recommend and install only high-end products that are designed specifically for landscape lighting use and have interior terminal lugs that accommodate multiple cable runs.

Without getting too specific here (given that transformers are a fairly complex topic unto themselves), let me draw some clear lines in the sand: First, pay attention to the enclosure. Some boxes intended for outdoor use consist of painted steel that just won't hold up to the elements. Instead, I use stainless steel, fully gasketed boxes that will perform reliably for years without creating any safety hazards.

Second, use only transformers designed and intended for outdoor use with proper, built-in primary and secondary circuit breakers or fuses. To do otherwise is to expose your clients or their landscape-maintenance crews to significant risk of severe injury (and yourself to possible liability). The frightening difficulty here is that most states (including California, where I work) have no permit or inspection process for low-voltage landscape lighting.

Bottom line: Transformers used in outdoor applications must always have been designed and intended for outdoor applications – no exceptions!

– M.G.

Mike Gambino owns and operates Gambino Landscape Lighting of Simi Valley, Calif. A licensed lighting contractor since 1990, he has specialized since 1995 on high-performance low-voltage systems. He may be reached via his Web site: www.gambinolighting.com.

Outdoor Living

By Scott Cohen



Southern California watershaper and landscape architect Scott Cohen is known for wildly creative designs that capture and express his clients' personalities and aspirations about luxury. Along the way, he's developed a special touch in developing outdoor cooking and dining areas—a pursuit taken up by many watershapers in recent years and one about which Cohen has written a book whose key recommendations he shares here.



If there's one thing that almost all parties in homes have in common, it's that people tend to congregate around food and drink in the kitchen. Almost invariably, that's where the action is.

As more and more homeowners are taking their indoor lifestyles outdoors into their backyards and landscapes, the "action" is moving outside as well, with *al fresco* kitchens becoming the new hub at social gatherings. This is why outdoor kitchens have grown so much in popularity in recent years, moving past being simple counters adjacent to charcoal barbecues to become, according to the American Institute of Architects, the number-one growth category in home improvement.

In plying my trade in a sunny, particularly warm part of southern California, I've had a front-row seat in watching this trend develop—and I've now been designing and building these amenities for more than a quarter century. It's reached a point where my company, The Green Scene (Northridge, Calif.), builds at least 25 outdoor kitchens every year across a range of styles and levels of complexity.

Experience has taught us that the more inviting and useful the kitchen is, the more time people spend outside using the entire space and the happier they are with their investment. Getting there, of course, is all about the planning.

Pass the Fun

Even in the soft economy of the past few years, outdoor kitchens have been riding high locally. In fact, it's not unusual these days for our firm to design and specify an entire space, then install only the outdoor kitchen as a first phase. The obvious reason for this is that the outdoor kitchen is what many homeowners want most—ahead of the swimming pools, fire pits, landscaping and other hardscape structures we've included in their master plans.

Part of the reason is that, by and large, men and women tend to agree when it comes to outdoor kitchens. In working with couples through the years, in fact, it's one of the few areas in which it's easy to find common ground when it comes to spending the money: Where a couple might be at odds about every *other* element in a design, they have a shared sense of the worth of an outdoor kitchen.

And the cool thing is that, in observing the way our clients actually *use* their outdoor kitchens, it's clear that these are spaces in which they are much more likely to work together in the food-preparation process than is the case in the cramped confines of an indoor kitchen.

Furthermore—and again this comes through watching behavior at parties, which is something I do as often as I can—



these outdoor kitchens are spaces where the tendency for men and women to divide into separate groups always seems to break down. And the same goes for kids and adults and for people at parties who don't know each other.

Check it out for yourself: If you want to see the place where everyone at a gathering spends time, you generally don't have to look beyond the outdoor kitchen. In fact, if you're at a party and want to have the chance to talk to everyone who's there, just hang out in this area and they'll all eventually come to you. It's where you'll hear the most laughter, receive the most hugs and by and large have the most fun.

All of this spontaneity and conviviality requires forethought. Indeed, proper planning by the homeowners is by far the most important factor in the relative success or failure of an outdoor kitchen project, which is one of the reasons I never approach these jobs with any preconceptions: No two outdoor kitchens are ever alike, and there are so many options in terms of appliances, layouts, locations and sizes that homeowners simply *must* get involved and take the time to consider, in detail, what they want most and what they'll be most likely to use and how.

In my 25 years with these installations, it's been my observation that some clients come to me already having considered many of the key issues and approach the design process with fairly clear ideas

about what they want. Far more often, however, they haven't stopped to think about the range of options beyond (maybe) a grill and need help walking through their options.

There was enough of this going on that, to aid the process, I finally sat down and wrote a book on the subject.

Living Color

Last year, I published *Scott Cohen's Outdoor Kitchen Design Workbook*, which, as the title implies, is something both designers and homeowners can use to focus their thoughts and efforts along productive lines.

The book's 170 pages go into tremendous detail – far beyond what I can cover here – and highlights the fact that the most important aspect of the planning process is to break things down into key areas of inquiry that will enable designers to determine and work with homeowners' needs, desires and personalities.

► **Style Preferences:** As with all aspects of watershape, landscape and architectural design, outdoor kitchens have a style. I always ask clients if they have a theme in mind for the space (tropical, classic, contemporary, nautical) or if they've seen something that has particularly caught their attention.

I also ask them to describe the style of their house, which, although it might be obvious, is often something of which they are unaware or simply don't perceive. If they can't get specific, I cast an

even wider net and get them talking about any memorable experiences, hobbies or locales they think they'd like to incorporate into the design.

► **Entertaining Needs:** I ask them whether their goal in the project is to have a place for entertaining family and friends – a question that begins the process of determining the amount of space needed for the kitchen and dining areas as well as the size and selection of the appliances.

How often do they anticipate cooking outside? How many people do they anticipate entertaining? Will parties include bartenders or caterers? Will they have a dining table? How much space will be devoted to furniture? My goal here is to get them to start visualizing the space and how people and furnishings will fill it.

► **Counter Configuration:** A few quick questions about counter space shift the attention from the social to the practical. How much food-preparation surface do they think they'll need? How many cooks will be at work when things get busy? Do they want single- or split-height counters?

Of course, there's also a social component to this resource issue, so we also ask: How many people do they want to accommodate right at the counter? (For some basic measurement guidelines, see the sidebar on page 29.)

► **Lighting and Fire:** It's important to know when clients anticipate using their outdoor kitchens: On weeknights or weekend evenings, or mainly for day-



In designing outdoor kitchens for residential spaces, we pursue four key goals: First, we make what we do fit within the style of the home and other amenities on the property; second, we accommodate the clients' de-sires when it comes to entertaining either small or large parties; third, we organize counters for efficient cooking – sometimes by multiple chefs – and allow for adjacent seating and dining areas as desired; and, fourth, we provide adequate illumination with either lighting or fire features or both. The best designs, of course, integrate all four of these keys into wonderfully complete packages.

time gatherings on weekends? Most people want the flexibility of using the kitchen day or night, so typically we need to consider illuminating the areas that need to be lit, beginning obviously with the kitchen counters. And if it's clear that they intend to use the space year 'round, fire or other heating elements generally become part of the conversation.

In each of these areas, there's room for excruciatingly detailed discussion – and each element should indeed be pursued fully and carefully. But there are two additional areas I want to mention, both of which are more crucial than any of the points just above in determining the overall success of the design: *location* and *appliance selection*.





The array of high-quality, reliable, fully functional cooking systems and accessories now available is truly outstanding and gives the outdoor-kitchen designer a wide variety of options to discuss with clients. Working with them to come up with the right combinations of grills, cooktops, drawers, beverage coolers and even paper-towel dispensers can take time – but decisions made here will determine whether cooking outdoors will be an occasional chore or a frequent delight.

Well Placed

One might argue that the most important of all decisions when planning an outdoor kitchen is where to put it. This can have a major influence on a space's functionality, aesthetics and effect on the rest of the property as well as on whether the space will be used constantly – or hardly at all.

As mentioned above, an outdoor kitchen is a place where people gather, so it should be put in a desirable location – perhaps where there are generous views of the rest of the yard or the surrounding area or it is nestled in beautiful landscaping. As with any other exterior room, you should also consider how the outdoor kitchen is seen from various points inside the house.

Many are situated near swimming pools or fire pits, and as a rule they're set up so they can be covered by some sort of shade structure. And while an *al fresco* kitchen can be set amid a lush landscape, it's rarely a good idea to put a cooking or food-preparation area under overhanging greenery: Having plant material fall into the kitchen space creates maintenance, cleanliness and even fire-safety issues.

Traffic patterns are another key consideration. This is going to be an area where people will pick up food and drinks, so it should be easy to move in and out with some sort of reasonable flow – meaning most of the time you're



not going to want to tuck the kitchen into a corner or a spot where bottlenecks will become an annoying fact of life.

In many cases, clients want their kitchen to be located near the home – or even made into an extension of the home's structure. To be sure, keeping things close can make a great deal of sense in a smaller yard, where you want to maximize the rest of the useful space. And it's certainly never a bad idea to have the outdoor kitchen within a reasonable distance of the indoor kitchen simply because there's generally a lot of back and

forth between the two spaces.

All that is true, but at the same time, it's *not* a great idea to place the indoor and outdoor kitchen areas immediately adjacent to one another. I've seen this layout quite a few times and have two observations: First, this approach tends to segregate men and women, with the men congregating outside and the women gathering inside. Second, the doorway between the adjoining spaces becomes a bottleneck – a problem minimized if there's a buffer zone between the two spaces.

Sometimes, of course, a buffer zone can be too large – a common problem on larger properties where the outdoor kitchen is placed well away from the house to create a destination in the landscape. This has the positive effect of drawing guests out into the yard to notice and enjoy their surroundings from different perspectives, but it also means the outdoor kitchen must be fairly well self-contained unless the homeowners want to wear themselves out moving back and forth from the grill to the house.

The key here is to think things through and know *why* you're placing the kitchen in a remote spot. If there's a rewarding view or this placement takes advantage of a great garden path or conveys people toward the pool area or gives them access to a special entertainment zone, all that distance might make sense.

In all cases, you also need to consider the elements, especially prevailing winds. This brings the physical orientation of kitchen elements into play, given the obvious fact that it would be undesirable to set things up in such a way that, most days, the smoke from the grill will waft across the kitchen space and into everyone's eyes and lungs. Having things blow around is not much fun, either.

Finally, consider privacy. Generally, it's not a great idea to put an outdoor kitchen in the direct line of sight of a neighbor's house. If this can't be avoided, we'll set up privacy screens or patio plantings to create a sense of division (and have noticed that the plants reduce noise as well).

Appliance Science

At the same time outdoor kitchens have been growing in popularity, there's been a parallel surge in interest among suppliers who want to meet the demand – and they're delivering big time, having come light years with respect to variety, special features and overall sophistication.

Given all of the possibilities, it's extremely important to cover appliances early on in client discussions: Their informed choices (and believe me, most of them are familiar only with a few of their options) will have a lot to say about the size of counter spaces and the overall functionality of the entire design.

To illustrate this point, here's a quick rundown of some of the currently available appliances and features that can make both large and small differences in how an outdoor kitchen will be designed, used and enjoyed:

▮ **Grills:** These have come a very long way in recent times, particularly when you consider approaches such as rotisserie cooking. There was a day when most rotisserie set-ups were awkward because, with their horizontal heat sources placed below the meat, they'd flare up and it was quite difficult to get even cooking.

Now rotisserie grills come equipped with vertical back-side burners – a significant advancement that enables the preparer to cook meat reliably without having to monitor its progress constantly. This enables the cook to spend more time socializing and tending to guests and less time micromanaging the rotisserie.

Also, grills these days can come with smoker drawers, steamers, fry cookers, searing zones (one of my favorite features – *wonderful* for preparing meats restaurant style), side burners, warming drawers, hot plates, griddle plates and wok burners. Most of these relate directly to the types of dishes clients anticipate preparing, so right from the start you must define some culinary specifics.

▮ **Beverage Centers:** I recommend some type of beverage center for all of my projects. These can be as simple as stainless-steel drop-in coolers that work like ice chests or as sophisticated as full-service cocktail stations with separate ice bins, bottle storage areas, cutting boards, drop-in ingredient containers and the like.

These areas are great because they provide ready access to drinks, are easily cleaned and are infinitely preferable to placing a separate, camp-style ice chest off to the side of the cooking area: They look a bit tacky, involve too much bending over and are simply a hassle relative to built-in alternatives.

Along similar lines, I'm not nearly as enthusiastic about outdoor refrigerators as I am about drop-in coolers. They work well, but they gobble up considerable energy to do little more than keep a few beers or sodas cold between parties. Truth be told, there's almost never a need to store food

Surface Materials

There are numerous materials you can use to create counters for outdoor kitchens.

Granite is extremely popular these days, largely for its durability and range of colors and patterning, as is tile, which is also quite durable and easily works in a range of styles.

Personally, however, I steer away from both of those options: Granite counters can be beautiful, but they require regular treatment to prevent moisture penetration and staining, and they have to be fabricated elsewhere and shipped to the site, which is expensive as well as risky. Certain tiles can be wonderful, too, but the grout is tough to clean and prone to discoloration.

In my projects, concrete is the material of choice – *decorative* concrete to be precise. This material can be made to look like anything imaginable, from wood or granite to marble or tile. It's also durable and can easily be fashioned on site. And if you mess up, it's easy to start over. Part of the fun is coming up with something unique, whether it's with elaborate, sculpted details or with wonderfully creative inlays or colors.

As with most other things, there's a learning curve with decorative concrete, but the time I've spent mastering its potential has paid off handsomely – both for me and my clients.

– S.C.



in an outdoor refrigerator, so they end up wasting space and money.

There are, of course, some exceptions: If there are a lot of kids using a nearby pool area on a regular basis, then an outdoor refrigerator might make sense to keep bottled water and soft drinks at hand (and keep the kids from traipsing in and out of the house dripping wet). Another special case is when the outdoor kitchen is truly remote from the home and there's some merit to the idea of making the outdoor kitchen more self-contained and complete.

► **Trash Openings:** This is a simple thing, but all outdoor kitchens should have through-the-counter trash openings. These allow for convenient disposal of cooking debris while also keeping trash cans out of sight and helping the whole area seem neat and clean. There are also trash receptacles that come out as drawers, which works as well – and some of these units come with built-in cutting boards, which can be mighty convenient for scrap and trimming disposal.

► **Drawers:** It's important to remember that even with an outdoor kitchen, most of the food preparation will still take place indoors. This puts a premium on having outdoor storage drawers that can be used to hold prepared foods in much the same way drawers are used to stash food in restaurants prior to



When spatially integrated with pools and spas, outdoor kitchens can become readily accessible hubs for all sorts of fun outdoor activity, recreation and entertaining – and definitely bring new life to the concept of swim-up bars.

cooking. With that in mind, manufacturers have developed models equipped with pullout liners for easy food transfers and drains to speed up cleaning.

► **Paper-Towel Holders:** I'm only half-joking when I say that the simple drawer equipped with a paper-towel spindle is, in my opinion, the biggest recent improvement in outdoor kitchens. Placed near the grill, these features help cooks (and others) resist the temptation to wipe their hands on their clothes. And the fact that the roll is hidden inside a drawer protects the paper towels from incidental spills – a great practical feature.

► **Sinks:** Although these are seemingly obvious inclusions in outdoor kitchens, they are certainly the most problematic. The reason is simple: Once potable water passes through human hands, by code it has become contaminated and must flow to a sanitary sewer instead of into a simple drainage system. This can mean significant effort in routing the drain to the sewer, which is why so many homeowners, balking at the expense, don't include these fixtures.

Truth be told, very few people are going to wash dishes in an outdoor sink. Indeed, simply rinsing hands is the likeliest use, so as an alternative, we commonly recess a hose bib in the side of the grill or counter structure that serves a dual purpose for quick rinses and for connection of a hose for post-party clean ups.

► **Pizza Ovens:** I love the thought of great pizza and understand why so many people request these ovens, but I've come to see them as impractical. They're quite expensive, take up lots of space, are tough to clean and use lots of energy. And on a practical level, unless you know your way around a real pizza



Many watershape spaces are used primarily in daylight hours, but when an outdoor kitchen is part of the exterior environment, it's a virtual certainty that these areas will be used after the sun goes down. This opens design possibilities to all sorts of great details – from special visual effects such as radiant countertops to warm and welcoming fire effects

oven through experience in a real pizza cookery, they're pretty difficult to use.

For those who insist, we're happy to oblige. But I'll spend a good bit of time making certain they know the practicalities and haven't simply been caught up in the romance of the idea. If they know what they're doing and we move ahead, *tremendous* pizza can be the result.

Good Times

If you do everything properly in working with your clients to develop their custom outdoor kitchens, much more than good pizza is on the way: Above anything else, these amenities are about fun and enjoyment.

Sometimes the results will fit seamlessly within the property's architectural themes, but other times our clients will see these kitchens more as extensions of themselves and their personalities than as reflections of their built surroundings. Whichever direction we take, we know that if we've listened well and have translated what we hear into outdoor kitchens they'll actually use, these spaces will help these homeowners experience the good life in myriad new ways — and enable them to bring their friends along for the ride.

As a designer, I've always approached outdoor kitchens with confidence, knowing that unless something goes seriously awry, the clients are going to spend quality time using the wonderful spaces I've devised for them over and over again. And if my own experiences in attending parties hosted by former clients are any indication, outdoor kitchens truly are where the action is!



Math Matters

When it comes to planning outdoor kitchens, I've encountered a handful of basic measurements I always keep in mind:

- ▶ Food-preparation counters should be 36 inches high – or 38 inches to accommodate an under-counter refrigerator or a tall cook. (In general, the counter should never be higher than the usual cook's bent elbow!)
- ▶ The standard height for tabletops is 30 inches.
- ▶ Bar counters are generally 42 to 46 inches high, while most barstools are 28 inches high (but can vary). In some cases, if the clients are intent on a particular style or model of barstool, we'll acquire them first and set the bar height accordingly.
- ▶ Allow 24 inches of width for each seat at the bar.
- ▶ Bar counters should be a minimum of 18 inches deep, thus leaving room for countertop dining with typical plates, which range from nine to 11 inches.

– S.C.

Through the Lens

By David Tisherman

Welcome to the first installment of “References,” an occasional feature that highlights professionals who contribute to the watershaping process. I (and eventually some others) will be using this space to identify people who have had a significant effect on my work – and to suggest how similar associations might be helpful to other watershapers.

This time around, I’ll deal with something that has always been dear to my heart: photography. Ernest Hemingway once said, “Anything that was ever any good, you pay for” – and I can’t think of an area where that’s truer than it is with quality photography.

In the watershaping business, it’s extraordinarily important to present clients with options and directions. You can do that to some extent with drawings that conceptualize what might be created, but I’ve always believed that photographs are more powerful: They show complete scenes that actually exist and do a great job of helping clients visualize the potential of their own properties. In short, great photography drives desire, stokes the imagination and demonstrates and defines value.

Someone I truly admire in this respect is an amazing artist: Cristian Costea of Costea Photography (Santa Ana, Calif.). I met him several years ago when he shot one of my projects, and I renewed the acquaintance when he recorded one I completed in Malibu, Calif., not long ago. In both cases, he’d been brought in by the architect – and after seeing what he achieved with those projects, I was hooked: He’s now my go-to photographer.

Be forewarned: Quality photography can be an expensive proposition, and work of this caliber does not come cheap. But to my way of thinking, if you’re serious about recording your work on a level that sets you apart, you *must* find someone with this kind of skill and talent, whatever the cost.

References

A Brief Interview with Cristian Costea

WaterShapes: *When you show up at a site you’re going to shoot, what are you looking for?*

Costea: I’m interested in the “big gestures.” In almost all forms of architecture or landscape architecture, there’s a gesture, something that makes a defining statement. In some places, such as the Disney Music Hall in Los Angeles, the curvilinear architecture is an obvious gesture, but then there are other elements within the space that are not so obvious but are also extremely important. In just about every setting that’s been created by a talented designer, there’s going to be something that can be found and expressed using the camera.

WaterShapes: *In the Malibu project you shot – the one for which David Tisherman designed the swimming pool – what was the big gesture there?*

Costea: Certainly the swimming pool, with its long, rectangular shape, was the key feature in the landscape. It worked beautifully with the house, which had beautiful arches and geometry all surrounded by beautiful landscaping. Yet it was the pool that really captured the scene with its reflections and the way it drew the eye toward the house. So I exploited it along with the rock wall and cabana next to it.

WaterShapes: *Why should watershapers invest in professional photography?*

Costea: From a purely pragmatic point of view, if someone has spent so much and worked so hard to create something unique, it makes no sense to record it poorly. You can really kill the soul of a place by representing it poorly in photographs: Everyone who subsequently comes to know the place by way of those images is, in a way, prevented from truly understanding it.

In a more emotional sense, if you're the creator of something special, why would you not want to capture the essence of your work and keep it? After all, things change – and there may well come a time when the place doesn't exist in that same way anymore. To honor your work, you should capture the soul of the place when it is finished and completely represents your work.

‘If you’re the creator of something special, why would you not want to capture the essence of your work and keep it?’

WaterShapes February 2009 Cover



Photo by Cristian Costea, Costea Photography, Santa Ana, Calif.

WaterShapes: *On your website, you demonstrate how photos can be altered and improved. What role does editing play in your work?*

Costea: In many situations, there are small elements that really shouldn't be there from a purely visual standpoint – for example, shadows that aren't where they should be, or glare from surfaces, or colors that aren't as expressive as possible. That's on the creative side, but on the practical side there are things such as fire hydrants, pipes, sprinkler heads and electrical outlets – visual noise that disrupts the scene and can and should be removed.

WaterShapes: *How do you approach photographing water?*

Costea: It depends if it's moving or still. Photography is

frozen in time, so you have to decide whether you're going to show motion or not.

When I see water that has vertical elements, such as a fountain, for example, then I know it has to demonstrate motion and I look at how the lines created by the movement participate with the surrounding lines of buildings or landscapes. By contrast, when it comes to pools, I like to create photographs where the surface appears solid, because we naturally respond to hard surfaces visually.

What I do is create ripples, sometimes by tossing a piece of ice into the water, and expose the image long enough so that the surface becomes just slightly opaque. This gives the water visual weight – meat on the bones, something we think we can almost touch. It's all about knowing how to exploit water visually.

WaterShapes November 2009 Cover



Photo by Cristian Costea



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A Flair with Flames

By Kevin Doud



Photo courtesy Wise Pools, Controe, Texas

Once known only as rare and unusual elements in watershape and landscape designs, fire features have now become familiar in both residential and commercial settings. As Kevin Doud explains, firms dedicated to meeting this growing demand typically offer fully engineered, pre-assembled systems that meet rigorous safety standards – but still have the flexibility it takes to enchant clients while adding flames to the spectrum of aesthetic possibilities.

Fire effects have grown tremendously in popularity in recent years, especially among swimming pool designers and builders who use them in developing various fire-on-water features.

On one level, it seems that these professionals (and their clients) have noticed that systems that contain and control fire serve as wonderful complements to systems that contain and control water. On a grander scale, however, it's apparent that, as watershape designers and builders have become more and more creative, fire features have risen in the estimation of those who want to give their clients something special – something few others have.

At my company, Grand Effects of Irvine, Calif., we've focused on making it easy for watershapers, general contractors and landscape designers and architects to bring fire into the picture across a range of applications. To that end, we've developed an array of completely off-the-shelf systems, ready to install, and have done all of the engineering and testing required to build confidence into every product.

In doing so, we've studied possible effects and developed systems that tap into fire's elemental appeal across a broad spectrum of applications. In particular, we've explored combinations of fire and water, our conclusion being that we've only just begun to scratch the surface when it comes to exploiting their amazing synergies.

Lives of Their Own

So much of this is unexpected, because fire and water are typically seen as having opposite characteristics. But it's actually quite the contrary: In fact, when it comes to using fire in the vicinity of water, we've come to observe several important and even profound similarities.

Both fire and water can be extremely dangerous, for example, yet both bring life. They can both be soothing and exciting; bring distinctive points of interest to landscapes; serve as warm, welcoming gathering places; and carry tremendous cultural and even spiritual meanings.

And because both fire and water can cause tremendous damage when not contained properly, those who design with and install these systems must know a thing or three

about how to use them effectively and safely in either residential or commercial settings.

Now that more and more of these systems are out there in conjunction with watershapes, the feedback we've gotten tells a compelling story: For whatever aesthetic, sociological or psychological reason people care to summon up, fire and water are a perfect fit.

Indeed, there's a yin/yang relationship between the two that creates fascinating tension and simultaneous harmony within a scene. Firelight reflecting off the water's surface lends a mysterious, even mystical quality to a setting, while water emitting from a fire structure is counterintuitive and fascinating. And where water provides a soothing cooling factor in hot weather, fire offers complementary warmth to a space when the air turns chilly.

On its own, fire offers a form of illumination that is unlike any that can be achieved using electricity. Its ephemeral quality and dancing motion are hypnotic and entertaining to human beings in ways matched only by motion pictures and television – the only other visual effects I can think of that motivate people to sit and watch quietly in darkened spaces for extended periods of time.

It's reached a point where we can take all of those impressions and emotions and think about them in practical and even cold commercial terms. This is why fire shows up in so many restaurants: Fire pits and fireplaces entice people to sit while consuming food and beverages and in that sense have taken on direct revenue-generating roles. This ability to attract attention also explains why fire figures so prominently in the entrances to hotels and casinos.

Boiling it down, fire provides an elemental brand of fascination that simply cannot be obtained in any other way, and with ready-made systems now widely available from a number of suppliers, designers and builders are now seeing a multiplicity of ways to use fire in adding value to their work.

Many Forms

The role of system suppliers in all of this is simple: We're here because the



Fire features gained their original (and still enjoy much of their enduring) popularity as space heaters – purely functional units that keep people warm and happy to be outside when a chill fills the air.

vast majority of designers and builders have a healthy respect for fire and aren't inclined to improvise or try to cobble together systems on their own. So we take on system development and testing – and all of us have learned in the process that these are indeed specialty items that take time to master.

In that sense, what we do is analogous to sculptors or statuary companies that offer decorative items meant to increase

the beauty, interest and value of an overall project. Very few landscape architects or pool contractors are interested in becoming sculptors themselves, so they seek outside sources and assign them responsibility for what often turn out to be highly significant aspects of these projects.

Fire functions in that same sort of role, and time and time again we've heard from homeowners or property managers who say that it's become the favorite part

Photo courtesy Landmark Pools, Ladera Ranch, Calif.



Photo courtesy Bella Vista Pools, Corona, Calif.



Photo courtesy Bella Vista Pools



Photo courtesy Down Unda Pools, Houston



In recent years, fire has increasingly been used strictly for its decorative potential. These units may warm the occasional passerby, but they're basically there to create a visual focus, draw the eye to a desired perspective, call attention to key structures or bring a sense of dynamic, continuous motion to otherwise static settings.



of their swimming pool, fountain or landscape design. To meet that need and the different sets of expectations different clients always have, we've created families of products that enable designers to go simple – or mix and match different features and materials to come up with looks that appeal to the specific needs of certain clients.

In order to be effective in this marketplace, we've spent a great deal of time listening to what people tell us – professionals and consumers alike – about what they need or want. By doing so, we've been able to develop ranges of systems in various sizes, shapes and styles for use in an array of settings.

In our case, we also will tackle custom configurations on request, but given the expense associated with developing and testing these fabrications for safety and performance, most of our clients select from among our standard pieces (fire pits, fire-pit inserts, rock inserts, vertical torches, fire-and-water bowls, wall torches and more) and then focus on making things unique with materials and creative placements within overall compositions.

Through the years, we've found that by keeping things simple, we offer a resource that works with a broad range of architectural and landscape styles, from the very traditional to the highly contempo-

rary. By working with basic linear and curvilinear forms, we make certain our features don't get in the way when it comes to a project's overall look, whether the need is to create a small accent or frame a vanishing-edge detail.

We've also found that, even with the growing acceptance of fire features in watershape and landscape settings, this is still a major way to bring uniqueness to a project: It's human nature to want to have something different from what everyone else has, and in that sense we're in the business of making that perceived exclusivity a reality.

Material Choices

In developing our systems, we've encountered a range of materials that can be used in effectively containing fire.

Chief among these when it comes to providing flexibility in terms of appearance is glass-fiber-reinforced concrete (GFRC), which is both relatively lightweight and extremely durable. As those of you who work with decorative concrete or artificial rockwork already know, it's a medium that works across styles and in an almost limitless range of colors and textures.

At our company, we achieve different looks with GFRC using various combinations of stains and washes. We'll pour the concrete in a base color and engage

in processes that can take up to a week in which we'll treat the concrete with layers of stains and washes to create colors and textures that are integral, not just on the surface. (Paint is out of the question for coloring these items: It will invariably crack and chip when exposed to fire, treated water and the elements.)

We also use lots of copper – another material that holds up very well in the presence of both water and fire. Ours is sourced from a place in Mexico where artisans use a traditional method of pounding and firing the copper in a unique combination of flames and smoke – the result being a beautiful and incredibly durable material. (As a rule, it's more practical to do purely custom work in copper than in concrete because of the costs associated with preparing concrete molds.)

As suggested in passing above, a number of our systems involve placing water right in the fixture with the fire elements – mainly in the form of water spilling out of fire bowls, either through scuppers or over the bowl's rim. In the latter case, the water and fire appear to emerge from the same surface, although in our systems they're never in contact with each other. (Some companies offer these direct-contact systems, but we never have.)

Once the effect and the form are selected, a big dose of design flexibility comes



Through the years, the materials used in fire pits and bowls have come a long way in design terms. From lava rocks and sculpted concrete to various colors of glass, these options enable designers to fit their fiery ideas into a number of styles, from classic to contemporary.

with the choices of materials used to fill the fire containers. We provide traditional lava rock, which is prized for its chunky, porous, dark-brown/red appearance; we also change things up with an “accented” lava rock (featuring a prismatic blue look), lava spheres (a beautiful architectural look); tempered fire glass (available in various colors); and a material made from basalt, a beautiful natural stone.

Even staying with our off-the-shelf product list, the options available with materials, finishes, sizes, shapes and accessories give designers plenty of leeway in striving for the unique as well as the practical.

Technical Responsibility

At a certain point in all of this comes the recognition that, after all, we are in some sense playing with fire: Aesthetic flexibility is one thing, but when it comes to installing and living with these systems, reliability, safety and sheer practicality take over and assume paramount importance. Let’s face it, if systems that contain fire are not made to high standards, failure is a distinct possibility – and danger a reasonable one.

The upshot is that we allow no room for compromise on the fundamental technical features of our products. This is why we deal primarily in turnkey systems that require little or no on-site as-

sembly: At this point in these products’ developmental history, it’s simply unreasonable to expect those with expertise in setting equipment pads, pouring decks or planting trees to become proficient overnight in installing fire features by reading a manual.

This is why we keep things as simple as possible with respect to installation and reserve tasks related to engineering, testing and assembly to ourselves.

Our systems all come in one of two basic formats: user-started (meaning the user inserts an ignition key of the sort used with indoor fireplaces and lights the fire himself or herself) or fully automatic.

We offer user-started systems basically to keep system costs down: There’s a real premium when it comes to the fully automated option in which the fire is ignited at the touch of a button. These devices operate on any auxiliary circuit in a pool- or fountain-control system and are housed in their own weatherproof boxes.

In our case, these automatic systems use what is known as flame-rectification technology. This includes a monitoring unit that detects and will shut down when it notices any disruption in the flame’s status. If, for example, the fire effect is on and it starts to rain or the wind kicks up to such an extent that the flame is extinguished, the system turns off the flow of natural gas or propane. Later,

when it’s safe to do so, the system will automatically turn on the gas and relight the flame.

As was just mentioned, our systems can work with either natural gas or propane. Propane is two-and-a-half times heavier than natural gas, so in both user-started and automatic systems, we deploy additional safety equipment in the form of a valve upstream of the feature that cuts off the gas flow in the event of a leak or a loosened connection at the feature itself.

Safety Concerns

When dealing with fire (or water, for that matter), safety is always a paramount concern – and we who are in the business of supplying fire features make it a priority in everything we do.

In our case, we subject every system we develop to extensive testing and submit all components to a range of agencies for approvals. Our control panel (mentioned just above) is approved by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Our actual fire systems are tested and approved by both the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the American Gas Association (AGA). In addition, we adhere to guidelines mandated by the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA).

We don’t want to take even the remotest chance that a problem will arise – and we see it as our responsibility to



Photos courtesy Island Projects, Turks & Calcos Islands



Photo courtesy Bella Vista Pools

assure those who specify and ultimately use our systems that they can feel completely confident that the effects will perform properly and safely.

Such testing and approvals are required in most commercial applications, but fire effects are so new in residential settings that the regulations haven't quite caught up. (There are a few notable exceptions, including Clark County and the city of Las Vegas in Nevada; Palm Springs, Calif., and Mesa, Ariz.) As we see it, this is a temporary blind spot in the rules, and we wouldn't consider taking advantage of the situation — there's simply too much at stake.

Here and elsewhere, we simply apply common sense to what we do, operating within basic principles that we know will enhance the safety and increase the enjoyment of our fire features. Similarly, we've come up with a basic set of guidelines we offer to designers and installers to help them come through the process without concern for either performance or safety.

We recommend, for example, maintaining buffering, non-flame zones around

Photo courtesy Aqua Construction, Florida



each feature. With a fire pit in a commercial application, that means we suggest a minimum 15-inch buffer zone — or more depending on the situation. We also strongly recommend that the features be kept at a reasonable distance from combustible material, including plants that might drop debris into the feature.

Some people find this surprising, but we also recommend *against* putting most fire features on timers: We want these systems to be activated only when the homeowner or property manager is

around to be certain that conditions are safe. We also advise against placing fire features within or immediately adjacent to pathways or other high traffic zones. And we certainly recommend in the strongest possible terms that they be placed in such a way that they are well beyond the reach of children!

We also pitch in with some aesthetic suggestions. Through experience, for example, we've learned that elevated fire elements make an incredibly strong impression by creating compelling visuals



Photo courtesy Richard Tuil Designs, Los Angeles

that can be seen from multiple points in a given space. We also know that fire pits and fireplaces become prime gathering locations, so we always recommend planning for ample seating areas in which people can watch the flames and relax comfortably in the warmth.

Our ambition here is not to call the shots, but to open designers' and builders' eyes to the potential of these features and see to it that they're put to the best possible use. It's a two-way street: We're constantly learning from our clients and hap-

pily pass ideas along as we see how things work out and our products continue to be used in the field. And truth be told, we are constantly amazed at the design solutions we see.

That's the great fun of this business: By making reliable, flexible, safe systems, we've put ourselves in the wonderful situation of working with designers and installers who have confidence in what we do and share our conviction that fire brings real drama to their projects. What could be better than that?

With increasing frequency, designers are finding ways to use fire to spectacular effect – particularly in commercial settings where calling attention to a restaurant, nightclub or hotel entrance is much to be desired. But that doesn't mean residential applications are far behind: The effects in these contexts range from the surprising to the surprisingly subtle, frequently with beautiful results.

INSIDE MANEUVERS



BY KEVIN RUDDY

WITH VAST EXPERIENCE in both the residential and commercial markets, Kevin Ruddy is one of the watershaping industry's foremost experts on the design and construction of indoor swimming pools and their surrounding environments. Here, in this first of two features covering a complicated residential project, he discusses the painstaking process of designing a pool and the systems that integrate it with the surrounding structure.

It seems counterintuitive, but indoor swimming pool environments are wholly and entirely distinct from their outdoor cousins.

The differences are mostly contained in the fact that, indoors, the designer needs to consider not only the pool and its hydraulic performance, but also the enclosure and the air-handling and dehumidification systems that makes these spaces comfortable and enjoyable for clients and their guests.

Through years of designing and installing indoor pools, we at Omega Pool Structures (Toms River, N.J.) have learned – sometimes the hard way – what works and what doesn't. Now, supported by more than two decades' experience, we've expanded our business and have started designing projects for others to build.

This has been an education in itself and has taught us what we need to do to simplify the process for those who don't have the track record we do.

EVOLVING APPROACHES

One of the first things we learned was where and when to exercise some restraint.

When writing specifications, for example, we no longer call out particular products; instead, we provide performance specifications that contractors can meet while making their own product selections. We're certainly willing to make recommendations if asked, but by and large we've found value in stepping back here and giving contractors options to consider. And we'll also listen to evaluate whether they have good reason to request a variance.

By contrast, one area where we stick to our own programs is with energy efficiency. We've gone green in important ways, but what we run into with relative frequency is a contrary attitude among some manufacturers (and others who serve our market segment) that anyone who can afford an indoor swimming pool can also afford the elevated energy costs associated with ongoing operation of these systems.

We've never believed in this philosophy, knowing well that even wealthy clients are sensitive when it comes to outlays for operating expenses. This is why we avoid designing systems in which the pool water is heated using the dehumidification system but instead rely on fossil-fuel heaters that we supplement when possible with solar or geothermal heating systems. We do, however, recycle the heat generated by the dehumidification system, sending it back to the room to supplement the air-heating system.

We've explored just about every conceivable green option in recent years and have watched as renewable energy sources (solar and geothermal among them) have become more and more commonplace in our work. To date, however, the greatest energy-saver we've found comes in the form of an automatic cover.

Indeed, we've found that solid covers reduce energy consumption of indoor pools by 60 to 70 percent, on the one hand by cutting costs associated with heating the water, and on the other by minimizing evaporation and slashing the work the dehumidification system must do to maintain low levels of indoor humidity.

If the water is maintained without a cover at the typically desired level of 82 degrees Fahrenheit, massive evaporation occurs and what happens is that the air-handling system actually works *against* the heating system, essentially wasting energy on both sides of the equation. Covers virtually eliminate that problem while also dramatically reducing the odors associated with indoor pools – a significant concern for many clients.

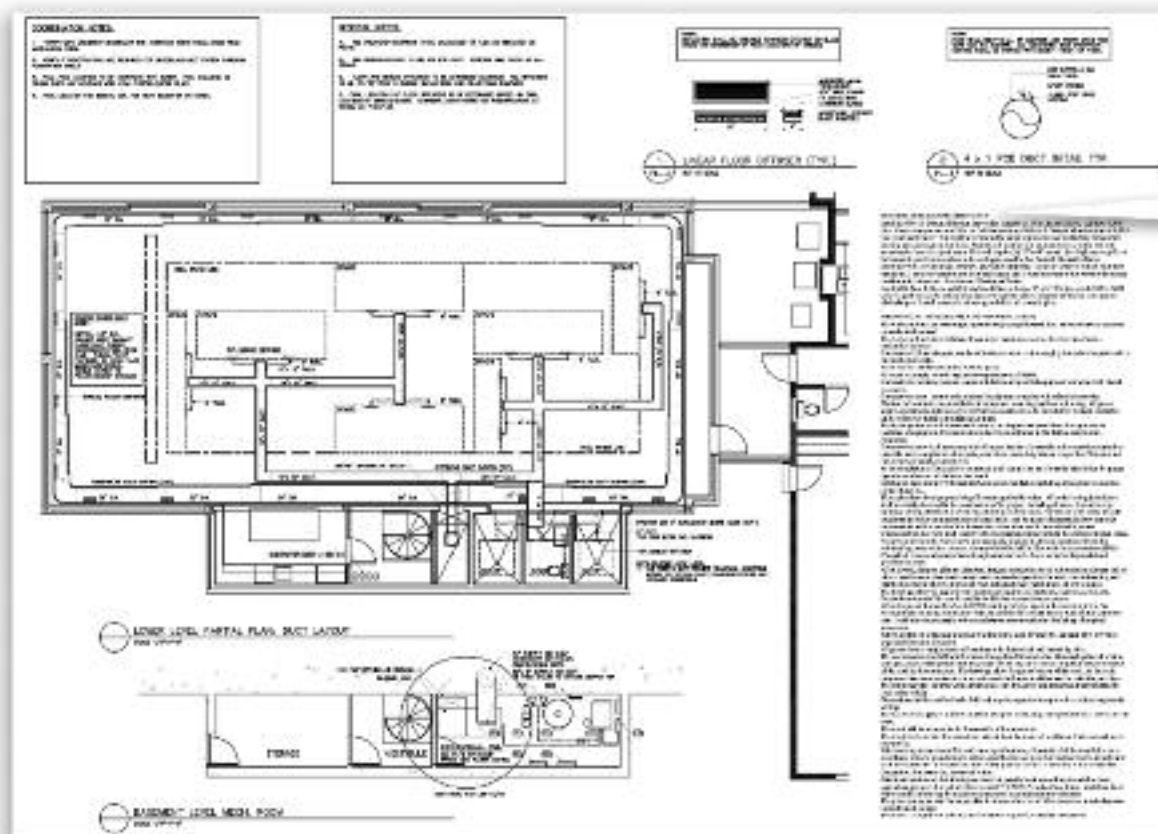
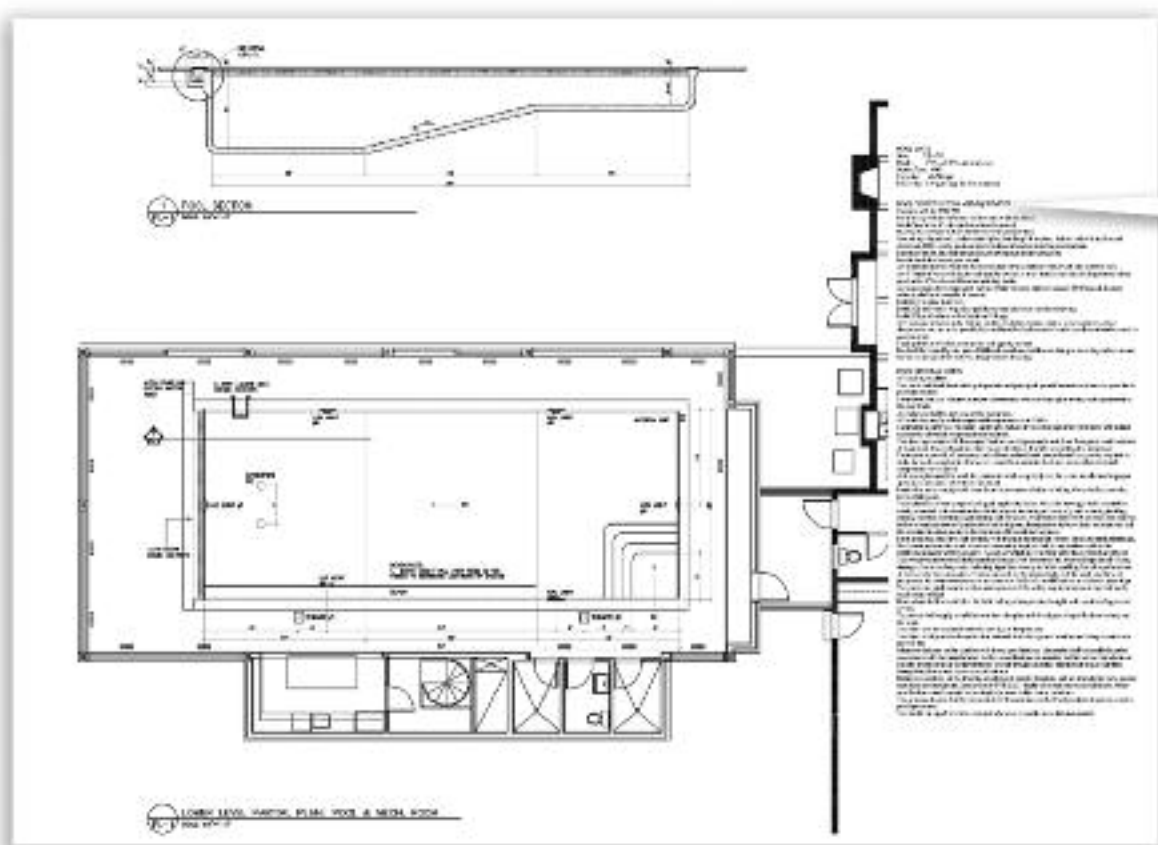
With automatic pool covers – which we install with about 90 percent of our projects – we recognize that they tend to place limits on design possibilities, basically because it's easiest to work with covers on rectangular pools. Although we'll occasionally run into clients who have their hearts set on freeform pools of one type or another, most of the interior spaces we work in are themselves rectangular or at least rectilinear, so rectangular pools look right at home and our clients are satisfied with simple designs.

We know, of course, that covers can be made to work with pools of just about any shape, but even our most affluent clients will balk at the costs of such creativity and tend to settle easily on basic rectangular shapes.

LUXURY RESTORED

In a typical project, we're called in by an architect who has come up with a general design that meets the clients' needs and desires and is looking to us to define structural and functional details that will make the entire environment comfortable, serviceable and, ultimately, as enjoyable as possible.

In this role, we deal primarily with



POOL CONSTRUCTION AND EQUIPMENT

Concrete will be 3500 PSI.
Reinforcing #4 bars deformed in floor and walls as noted.
Slab/floor-to-be 8" min. (unless otherwise noted).
Pool walls and floor to have PebbleTech finish (color tile).
Grounding of pool racks, under water lights, handicap lift anchors, ladders and rails by licensed electrician, MISC, not by pool contractor unless otherwise noted in pool contract.
Electrical control and components must have ground fault protection.
Pool to be full of water year round.
An expansion joint is required between entire vertical surface of pool wall and concrete deck.
An 8" band of stone 400 (color and type by owner) is to be installed on the inside perimeter of the pool, and a 2" band of all broken red iron brooks.
All components to be separately valved. Water velocity shall not exceed 10 ft/second. Suction velocity shall not exceed 8 ft/second.
Install (2) water skimmers.
Install (2) anti-vortex. Acrylic tile pebble tag maintenance as noted on drawing.
Install (5) pool rooms with directional lighting.
All necessary power supply wiring, starters, switches, fuses, fuses, sensors, clocks, power disconnects, etc. are to be provided for and installed by licensed electrician unless otherwise noted in pool contract.
Coping shall be 2" thick stone (color and type by owner).
Pool will be heated by one pair of 96,000 BTU stainless steel heat exchangers receiving its heat source from a natural gas fired boiler as designed on drawings.

Developing plans for indoor pools is a complicated matter because, in addition to the usual structural and hydraulic issues related to shells and moving water, we also tackle air-conditioning/dehumidification systems and place everything within completely encapsulating shelters. It's complicated enough that we provide builders with performance specifications rather than component lists, giving them the ability to work with their preferred vendors – and some creative options when it comes to getting the job done.

HEATING/DEHUMIDIFICATION DATA

Install (1) OM-11 Dehumidification Unit with a capacity of 55 lbs/day at 82-85% RH. Air flow 4,200 cfm. Power requirements are 220V with 90 amps using AWG cu 2. Weight of unit is approx. 1,100 lbs. Condensate line 1". Unit will be controlled by single microprocessor controlling temperature (heating and cooling) and humidity. Remote cond location (for air operation) by other. Remote sensor to be located in pool room. Unit will require (1) 30" x 40" access, stone high remote grills to be located in pool room as close to the ceiling as possible See General Mechanical Notes.
Install (1) Weil-McWright Capi-8 Natural gas boiler supplying 1 zone hot water to radiant floor heat manifold, 1 zone hot water to pool heat exchangers and 1 zone hot water to hot water coils located in dehumidification unit. See General Mechanical Notes.
Install (20) floor diffusers and (15) skylites diffusers that are 3" x 16" Celconmaster LDWF-13-08 with flanged serrated modified aluminum floor grates with 15 degree deflection and opposed blade design. Install as noted on drawing and direct air towards glass.

air-handling, dehumidification and swimming pool operation, but experience has also led us to contribute in other areas (sound absorption, lighting and vapor barriers, for example) – so much so that we now see these as typical inclusions in our design work on indoor pool environments.

All of these factors (and more) come into play in the project covered on these pages. We were tapped to participate in the mass-scale remodeling of an upscale home in a rural Connecticut neighborhood for clients who knew what they wanted and had the wherewithal to get it all. Larson and Paul Architects (New York, N.Y.) ran the project, and we worked directly with them as well as the clients in developing the plans and specifications for the pool and the pool area's systems. In our office, Jeff Bova led the architectural and design department in performing all tasks involved in seamlessly integrating our design solutions into the overall plan.

Once our plans were complete, we were then to hand a contract to a local pool construction firm, after which we were to function in project management and oversight. Fortunately, we knew the builder who won the bid quite well: William Drakeley of Drakeley Pools (Woodbury, Conn.), who will be writing the second of the pair of articles *WaterShapes* will publish about this project.

Back to the design: The home itself displays a subtle mixture of both contemporary and country architecture and was being completely rebuilt while maintaining some of the original structure. The swimming pool was to be included in a new wing that extended well beyond the home's original footprint. Once all the spaces were finished, the house was to be 10,000 square feet larger than it had originally been.

The remodeled home was to be outfitted with a new driveway, garage, kitchen, slate roof and floor plan; completely new interior finishes, fixtures and appliances; and a brand-new heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system. Materials for the floors, fireplaces, doors and other architectural features came from China and other exotic locales – and as the project progressed, the clients requested numerous changes and revisions that most definitely expanded the original budget.

The pool addition also includes a bar area, a maid-service facility, men's and women's dressing rooms, a spacious veranda overlooking the property and a host of other amenities. The pool space features beautiful limestone floors with a crisply contemporary grid pattern, skylights, elegantly appointed ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and doors that pivot to open, thereby creating a refreshing indoor/outdoor ambiance.

As a rule, surfaces in indoor pool spaces may be made to appear as regular interiors, but they have much more in common with exterior finishes. In this case, for example, the ceiling appears to be ordinary plaster, but it's actually backed by a vapor barrier to prevent moisture from migrating into the structure.

In addition – and considering the abundance of glass – we had to design the air-handling system with both floor and ceiling supply and return grills – which brings up a major point about these environments: One of the most important design details is making certain the air-handling system delivers proper air flow to all glass surfaces to keep them from fogging!

TOUGH GROUND

When our firm gets involved in design tasks for any indoor pool – whether commercial or residential – we require a complete, comprehensive set of plans from the architect or general contractor. We want to know all there is to know about the foundation and, perhaps most important of all, the condition of the soil in which we are to work so our engineer will be fully informed in creating structural details.

It's important that we see the construction documents early on, because we're also designing air-handling and dehumidification systems and need to place equipment, ductwork, building penetrations and more in addition to our basic work on the pool – which is also helped by early access to the plans.

Likewise with the soils and geology reports: We need to know what the site requires so we can exceed the minimums and eliminate any prospect of the pool failing and taking the surrounding structure down with it. We are among those firms that believe no pool should ever be designed without information about soil conditions in hand. As we see it, moving forward without such reports is both unprofessional and ridiculously and unnecessarily risky.

In the project described in the accompanying text, the soil was rock-solid shale, meaning we had no concerns and would be building atop fully competent, load-bearing material. We also knew that explosives would be needed to clear the site and get the contractor ready to build the pool with free-standing forms.

All of this information was, of course, provided to all bidders so they knew exactly what they faced.

– K.R.

A COMFORTABLE RETREAT

Backing up once again, it's important to point out that this design was the result of a wonderful team effort. In some cases, architects are reluctant to allow anyone else to have direct client access – and that's especially true with clients of great affluence. In this project, however, we were able to work with the clients ourselves, and it proved extremely helpful to us in understanding exactly what they wanted and why.

For starters, we learned in our conversations with the clients that this was to be a second home and to be occupied on occasions throughout the year. For this reason, they wanted the pool system to be relatively inexpensive to operate and maintain while they were away – but to be ready to go upon their arrival.

Just being aware of this was a help, because it gave us design parameters for the requested water and air temperatures we had to achieve without creating a muggy indoor room.

The pool cover truly was the key here: With the pool covered during their absences, the water temperature could be affordably maintained. Also, the lack of evaporation resulting from the cover minimized the need for rapid turnover in the air-handling/dehumidification system.

The pool itself is a simple, easy-to-cover, 20-by-50-foot rectangle ranging in depth from three-and-a-half to six feet. They requested no railings or ladders and wanted nothing more than a slightly cantilevered coping treatment.

It was all straightforward, except for one complication: The clients did not want to see the lead rail or tubing at the front of the cover when it was stored in its vault. That issue was among those solved not in the design phase, but in the construction phase when Drakeley and his staff figured out a clever detail in which they extended the L brackets over the vault so that the bar would be concealed.

The clients were also concerned about water quality, expressing a desire for the clearest, cleanest water possible whenever they might want to use the pool. This is one of those cases where their resources made it possible to reach beyond the ordinary to something truly special.

What we settled on was a saltwater chlorination system combined with an ozone system – not an unusual conclusion, but one with some twists to it relative to a low-use, covered pool: Even at minimal operating levels, it was almost impossible to keep chlorine levels within the one-to-two-parts-per-million range because there was really nothing there by way of organic compounds or microorganisms to deplete the supply.

This situation was also of some concern because a salt system makes the water slightly corrosive. This left Drakeley and his crew to make some adjustments he'll discuss in the second article on this project.

AIR PLAY

The importance of good air-handling systems can't be overstated with indoor pool environments – and the project at hand is a classic case in point.

In this instance, both the pool and the air were heated using a heat exchanger tied into the home's propane-powered heating system. The calculations required to size both the air-handling and dehumidification systems are fairly complex to the uninitiated, but it basically breaks down to balancing the total volume of the space with the desired turnover rate (measured in cubic feet per minute) – all relative to the surface area of the refrigerant coils in the heat exchanger.

The American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) sets standards for these systems, and as is the case with the pool industry, offers bare minimums that must generally be surpassed to achieve quality results. As a consequence, we always design our systems to exceed those standards by a good measure: Where, for example, ASHRAE recommends designing systems to maintain 55-to-60-percent relative humidity, in our work we typically aim for and hit 50 percent – a much more comfortable level in an indoor-pool area.

(The sheer inadequacy of minimum standards in settings as challenging as indoor-pool rooms become even clearer when you consider the large number of remodeling jobs we've had to tackle

in which nobody seemed to appreciate the special needs of indoor pools. It probably doesn't help that ASHRAE starts with recommendations against including windows, skylights and bodies of water in conditioned spaces: This has left us to develop and adhere to our own best-practice approaches for these environments.)

As mentioned previously, once we completed the plan, we participated under contract in the process of putting the pool out for bid and stayed on board as supervising consultant. This involved us in interviewing both pool and HVAC contractors and providing them with the technical specifics they needed to develop their estimates.

Three contractors placed bids on the pool and had full confidence they could do the job. All seemed pleased that we offered performance specifications in-

stead of calling out specific products: This gave them some room to maneuver, and we were always there to let them know if variances they wanted to propose would be allowed.

In this case, the bids were all relatively close, which we like to see but often don't. Usually, there will be at least one bidder whose proposal will come in at a dramatically lower level than others, leaving us to worry about what was left out or what corner might be cut.

With all the bids in, we met with each contractor again to discuss specific issues. We want to make certain they know what's entailed by indoor work, including the necessity of working with and around other trades (carpenters, electricians, finish carpenters, plumbers and more). We also talk about scheduling and how their work must fit within the project's overall work flow.

It's a bit out of most contractors' comfort zones, but experience has taught us how to deal with issues such as keeping even skylight windows defogged above indoor pools and developing spaces where our clients' desires for comfort are met with efficiency and style. Partly, what we do is treat these indoor spaces as though they were exteriors, using materials and applying finishes that can withstand the unique challenges posed by indoor-pool environments.



MAKING THE CHOICE

Once this process is complete, we make a recommendation to the architect and homeowner, based not only on price but also in the context of answers to specific questions we ask each bidding party. We also point out that we will be on hand as project consultants and that we know what it takes to achieve excellence with projects of this sort – and that we know the sorts of things builders will do to increase their margins.

This position of knowledge and insight helps inject a great deal of confidence into the decision-making process: We let clients and the project's general manager know that we are familiar, wall to wall, with all of the complexities and idiosyncrasies of indoor pools and assure them that we will leave no room for compromise. With that much on the line, we assure them, our only aim is to work with firms that are dedicated to excellence.

As you'll see in the next installment of this series, that's exactly what happened.

THE WARM BLANKET

Managing temperature and relative humidity in any indoor pool environment is arguably the most important aspect of the facility's design. Within that task, one of the most important elements of the system's operation is to keep a warm blanket of air flowing across any glass surface.

As an example, if you have water that's 82 degrees and an indoor air temperature of 84 degrees, it's critical to keep air flowing over the glass because the outdoor temperature will determine the dew point from which condensation will occur. By supplying a warm dry air blanket over the glass, you prevent the risk of condensation.

For the project described in the accompanying feature, the space included floor-to-ceiling window and door treatments as well as nine skylights. This meant that we had to specify both a ceiling system to blanket the skylights and a floor system to take care of the doors and windows.

The doors and windows required placement of a continuous grate around the perimeter of the building. For its part, the skylight system featured a loop in which each of the vents delivered an equal amount of air flow and pressure (in much the way you balance flow with spa jets by using a plumbing loop).

In this case, we also had to design the system to suit four separate scenarios: unoccupied in winter, occupied in the winter, unoccupied in summer and occupied in summer. As mentioned elsewhere, the presence of a cover made a huge difference – a key design element in both the occupied and unoccupied modes.

– K.R

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At a key point in this process, we turned our plans over to a pool company that prepared the watershape (seen here in finished form) for our clients. An upcoming article in this magazine will walk through this construction process step by step, defining in detail what it takes to install a high-end indoor pool.

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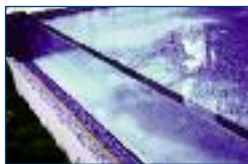
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In the Spotlight

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Underwater Windows



AQUA DESIGN GROUP (Brooklyn, NY) offers underwater acrylic windows for pools. Designed not only to allow interesting light to filter into the pool but also so people outside the water can interact with swimmers and bathers, the units are designed with high-quality acrylic that is both UV- and chemical-resistant and come framed in FRP or marine-grade stainless steel – or bare for concrete applications.

Garden Walls



EVOORGANIC (Lexington, KY) offers the WonderWall Vertical Garden System. Designed to turn any wall into lush greenspace, the self-contained, space-saving modules fit in small or large spaces, from balconies to the entire sides of buildings. They accommodate a wide variety of plants – flowers, vegetables and fruits – while cleaning the air and even reducing heating and air conditioning costs.

Waterpark Ride



WHITEWATER WEST (Richmond, British Columbia, Canada) has introduced the MEGATube series of waterslides/raft rides. Engineered to include more twists, turns and surprises than any other raft ride, riders enter a 20-foot-diameter cylinder by way of a steep downward ramp, and then oscillate up and down its inner walls, climbing up to 10 feet as the raft works its way through the cylinder and down the waterslide.

Air-Cleaning System



PADDOCK POOL EQUIPMENT CO. (Rock Hill, SC) has introduced the Evacuator, a system that reduces the risk of asthma reactions among users of indoor pools by drawing off chloramines and other irritants into a deck-level venting system. Clearing away these airborne contaminants also improves HVAC performance and extends the working lives of metallic building components.

Drain Covers



HAYWARD POOL PRODUCTS (Elizabeth, NJ) offers high-flow drain covers and frames that comply with the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act. These anti-entrapment devices are intended for use in both new installations and retrofits, are designed for fast, easy installation and come in multiple square sizes to accommodate requirements of both commercial and residential projects.

LED Fountain Fixtures



ROMAN FOUNTAINS (Albuquerque, NM) has introduced an advanced line of super-bright LED/RGB submersible lighting fixtures for use in decorative fountain applications. Designed with high-output, magnified LED diodes in a 12-volt DC configuration, the fixtures are made of bronze and brass and come ready for use in either recessed, freestanding or low-profile/surface-mount applications.

Pool Heaters



ZODIAC POOL SYSTEMS (Vista, CA) has introduced the Jandy Legacy line of pool heaters. Designed specifically as a replacement product for the renovation market, the reliable, easy-to-install units come in two versions: Model LRZE Electronic is equipped with a feature-rich digital control panel, while Model LRZM Millivolt operates with an on/off switch and includes simple temperature controls.

Deck-Joint Sealant



DECK-O-SEAL (Hampshire, IL) offers Deck-O-Seal, a two-part, polysulfide-based joint sealant that is pourable, self-leveling, non-staining and cures at ambient temperatures to form a firm, flexible, tear-resistant rubber. The resilient material has excellent recovery characteristics after extended periods of compression or elongation as well as resistance to most chemicals, weather, aging, and shrinkage.

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In the Spotlight

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Commercial Drains



PENTAIR WATER COMMERCIAL POOL & AQUATICS (Sanford, NC) has introduced StarGuard, a complete line of main drains, frames and grates for commercial aquatic swimming pools and facilities. All main drains comply with the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act, are available in black or white and come in nine-by-nine-, 12-by-12-, 18-by-18- and 24-by-24-inch versions.

Pond Skimmer



TETRA POND (Blacksburg, VA) offers an in-pond skimmer that acts as a prefilter for the pond's filtration system. Easy to install with no liner-cutting necessary, the unit operates with a floating weir to maximize surface cleaning; a large debris-collecting basket; and a filter pad. It can handle a pond holding up to

1,000 gallons and is held in place simply, using four corner pockets filled with gravel or sand.

Compact Excavators



BOBCAT (West Fargo, ND) has introduced the model 324 compact excavator. Designed to reach farther, dig deeper and dump higher, the tail-swing unit's boom cylinder is attached to the top of the boom instead of the

bottom, giving it more protection from damage while digging and resulting in a maximum dig depth of 8 feet, 6 inches; a reach at ground level of 14 feet; and a dump height of 8 feet, 8 inches.

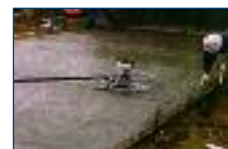
Ball-Valve Actuators

ASAHI/AMERICA (Malden, MA) has introduced the Series 83A Electromni actuator for ball valves as a successor to the original Series 83 quarter-turn actuators. The new units maintain the original units' compactness and reliability while offering improved quality, design and performance with Nema 4X type enclosures, flanged covers and baseplates and full-gasket Nitrile seals to keep out external water.



Concrete Finisher

FRANK WALL ENTERPRISES (Columbus, MS) now offers the Power Pole Finisher, an innovative concrete power trowel that is ideal for leveling and finishing pool decks, patios, walkways and flatwork. Designed to start finishing on wet concrete – thereby reducing time and labor costs – the unit is controlled from the side of the concrete field using snap-together poles that allow for a 30-foot reach.



Decorative Wall System

ANCHOR WALL SYSTEMS (Minneapolis, MN) has introduced LedgeWall, a retaining wall system with a decorative face that offers the appearance of stacked stone. Made using the company's rear-lip locator system for fast, easy installation, the system complements landscape features and includes five separate four-by-12-inch modules, each with a different face pattern, as well as five matching cap stones.



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Water/Fire Kit



EASYPOND PRODUCTS (Grant, MI) offers a new Fire & Water Kit that includes everything else needed to build a 48-by-43-by-11-inch-deep vessel with a 22-inch-square firebox in the center: a custom vinyl liner, a firebox with 12-inch-diameter natural-gas burner, lava rock, a pump, a waterfall diffuser with a copper flange, a copper sleeve for the firebox and all fittings, tubing and valves.

Low-Voltage Well Lights



ORBIT/EVERGREEN (Los Angeles, CA) now offers the 5010 series of low-voltage well lights with adjustable gimbals. Available in a range of finishes including cast aluminum, cast brass, stainless steel, marine-grade 316 stainless steel and fiberglass, the new adjustable gimbals allow the light to be precisely directed for optimum illumination of architectural details, landscape features or watershapes.

Paver Drains



QUAKER PLASTICS (Schuylkill Haven, PA) now offers its paver drain in both tan and gray colors in addition to standard white. Designed to match the latest in deck treatments – and specifically made to work with pavers that are the standard 2-3/8-inches deep – the drains have clips to secure them to adjacent pavers. Those clips can be alternated from side to side or all placed on one side to fit flush against walls.

Anti-Entrapment Device



PARAMOUNT POOL & SPA SYSTEMS (Chandler, AZ) has introduced MVFuse, a magnetic safety vacuum-release system (SVRS) designed for use with the company's in-floor cleaning devices and other suction-based devices. The compact anti-entrapment system fits within the debris-collecting canisters of the company's cleaning systems – or in-line with a variety of other pool-suction applications.

Continued on page 56

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Deck Lighting



TIMBERTECH (Wilmington, OH) has expanded its line of DeckLites to include models in Coastal White. Made for use with the company's rail and fence systems, some of the products can be used on any decking or railing system. The low-voltage line includes post-cap lights, baluster-mounted accent lights, post-mounted accent fixtures, stair-riser lights – and all units come with bulbs and installation hardware.

Mortar-less Retaining Walls



ALLAN BLOCK CORP. (Minneapolis, MN) has introduced the AB Fieldstone Collection, an eco-friendly, mortar-less retaining wall system. Made using recycled concrete materials and available with different face textures,

the lightweight units have the appearance of natural stone and lock together securely for construction of everything from small landscape walls to large commercial retaining walls.

UV Systems



EMPEROR AQUATICS (Pottstown, PA) offers SafeGuard CLP UV Systems. Designed to deliver reliable protection against the microorganisms responsible for recreational-

water-related illnesses, the units feature non-corroding, long-lasting, inexpensive plastic construction, remote power-supply enclosures and low-pressure ultraviolet lamps with high UV-C output.

Fountain Basins



ATLANTIC WATER GARDENS (Mantua, OH) has introduced the Pro Series Fountain Basins. Designed for use with everything from bubbling urns or rock columns to disappearing fountains, the one-piece basins have channels for easy plumbing at the top; include seven molded cones that support the top panel; and offer the features, strength and ease of use preferred by professionals.

Vinyl-Step Safety



VYN-ALL POOL PRODUCTS (Newmarket, NH) has introduced a textured material for the stairs of inground vinyl-liner pools that offers greater slip-resistance than standard vinyl material. The new PosiTrac units are made of 26-mil fabric and come in white, blue, powder blue, aqua and dove-gray colors to match many liner patterns. In addition to steps, the material can be applied to swimouts and benches.

LED Spa Lights



PENTAIR WATER POOL & SPA (Sanford, NC) has introduced IntelliBrite White LED Spa Lights – energy-efficient lights that consume only 26 watts while providing illumination equivalent to a 100-watt incandescent bulb. Designed with superior lens geometry and an exclusive reflector design, the long-life, solid-state units deliver more uniform light distribution and come in both low-voltage and 120-volt versions.

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Shades of Paradise

By Mike Farley

One of the most common things I hear from my clients is that they've been inspired by experiences they've had at vacation resorts and want to recapture those good times in their own backyards.

I've heard this often enough that I keep an eye out for volumes on resort design as I wander through bookstores and hunt for material online. It's a narrow subject, of course, so I don't run across too many relevant titles. That's why I was immediately pleased to find *Paradise by Design* by Bill Bensley (Periplus Edition, 2008).

My pleasure quickly turned to delight: The book is certainly about designing resorts – but it goes so far beyond expectations that I believe Bensley's work will have an invaluable influence on the rest of my career.

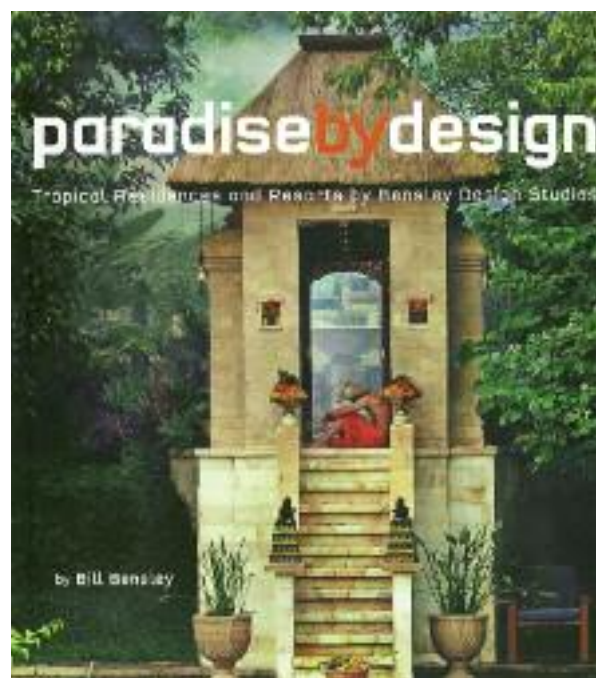
He's an American architect/landscape architect who, since graduating from the Harvard School of Design in 1984, has spent his entire career working in southern Asia through a practice based in Thailand. In 2007, *Architectural Digest* honored him as one of the world's 100 top designers, citing a body of work that includes designs for more than 100 resorts in 20 countries from India and China to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

To begin with, I was *stunned* that someone who graduated just a year before I did had amassed such a large and beautiful body of work. True, he has a staff of 45 designers, engineers, sculptors and artists who work with him, but to perform so consistently and persistently at so high a level is truly remarkable – and the results are nothing short of spellbinding.

Bensley has become famous for wildly eclectic, daring designs that take cues from the local culture and environment. He's particularly acclaimed for lush, intricate planting plans that are obviously influenced by his observation of tropical flora. And although he defies labeling, his "style" is clearly influenced by Asian traditions.

In reviewing his work, I'm now inspired to learn more – *much* more – about Asian design history. As he points out in the text, those cultures are rich with artisanal traditions of all types, and the resulting objects play significant roles in the lives of huge numbers of people living in these societies, few of which are very well known in the West.

With all that as a backdrop, Bensley's work is both vast and incredibly focused. In fact, the majority of the images and text in this book are dedicated to an endless array of details



he folds into his projects: As is true of Frank Lloyd Wright and a handful of other great designers, Bensley and his associates design *every* aspect of a property, from the structures and the landscapes to the sculptures, textiles, furnishings, railings, floors and waterfeatures.

What impresses me most (and I'm obviously becoming a big fan) is that he applies this level of control over resort-scale spaces. Some of these are huge: Hundreds of acres, hundreds of rooms all rendered down to the finest details, all beautifully integrated and internally consistent in ways that create rich environments overflowing with romance, ambiance, elegance and even spirituality.

Working at that scale is clearly a team effort, and another of the things I admire is that Bensley consistently credits his associates and various collaborators and is generous in discussing those who have influenced him.

As I marveled at this epic body of work, it occurred to me that a great many of my clients these days are Americans of Asian descent or recent immigrants – and that Bensley had expanded my sense of the importance of the rich design traditions of their cultures. I can only think this book has started me on a path that will enable me to do a better job of meeting their needs and desires.

On top of that, I can't wait to see what Bensley achieves in the future. If you're unfamiliar with the great artist and have a taste for integrated design at its best, you're in for a treat that comes from deep in the shade of paradise. **MS**

Mike Farley is a landscape architect with more than 20 years of experience and is currently a designer/project manager for Claffey Pools in Southlake, 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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Photo: One of 25 all-tile swimming pools at Jade Mountain Resort, St. Lucia. Each pool is tiled in one color of Lightstreams Glass Tile.

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