

WATER SHAPES

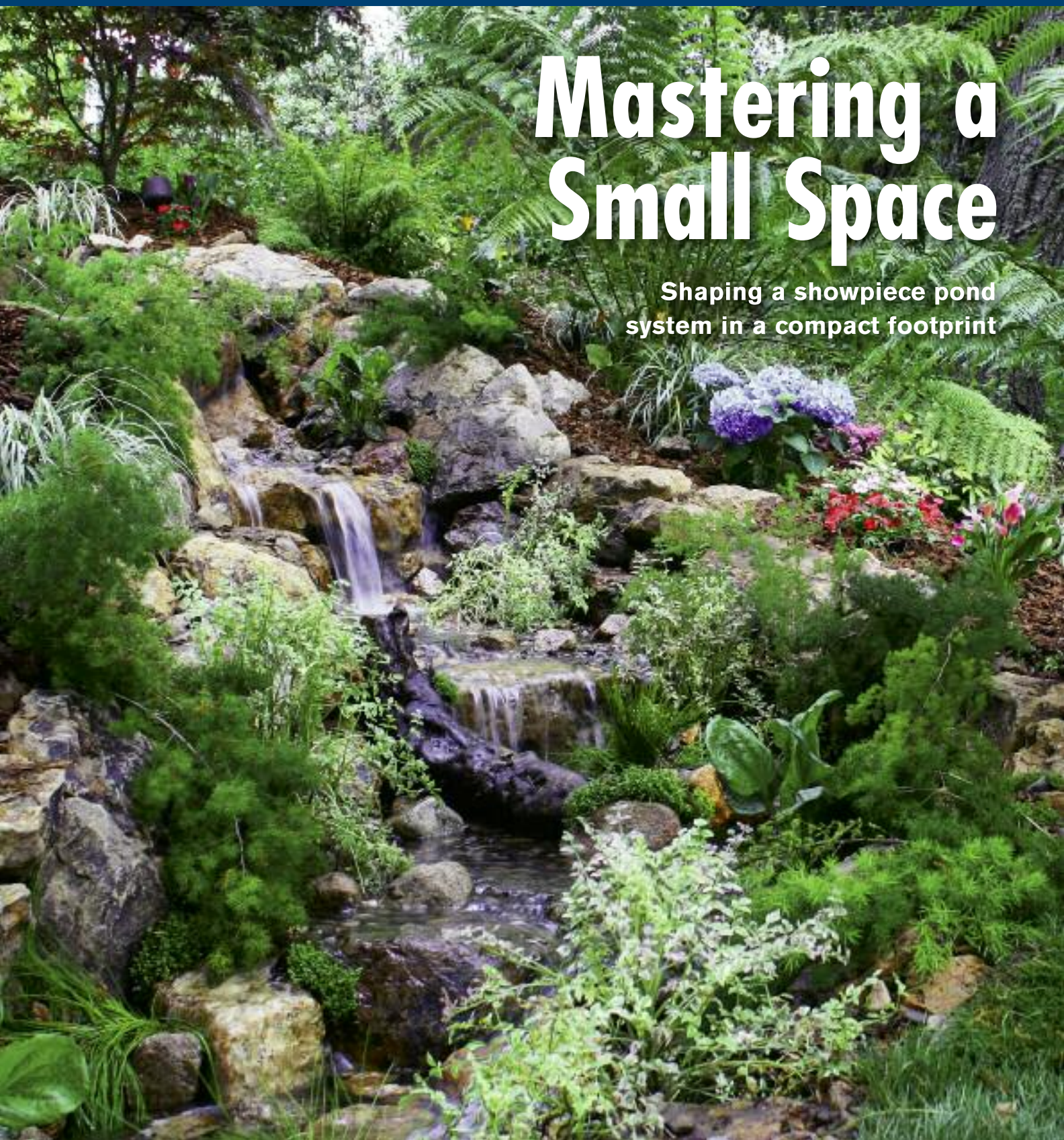
Design
Engineering
Construction

Volume 13
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Mastering a Small Space

Shaping a showpiece pond
system in a compact footprint

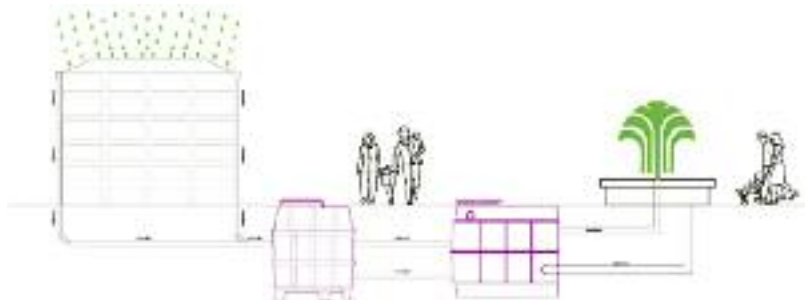




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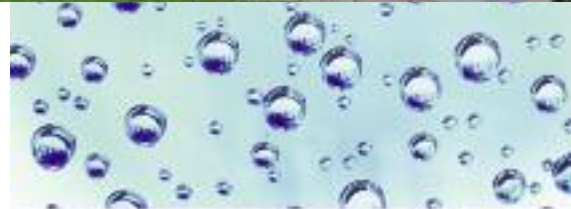
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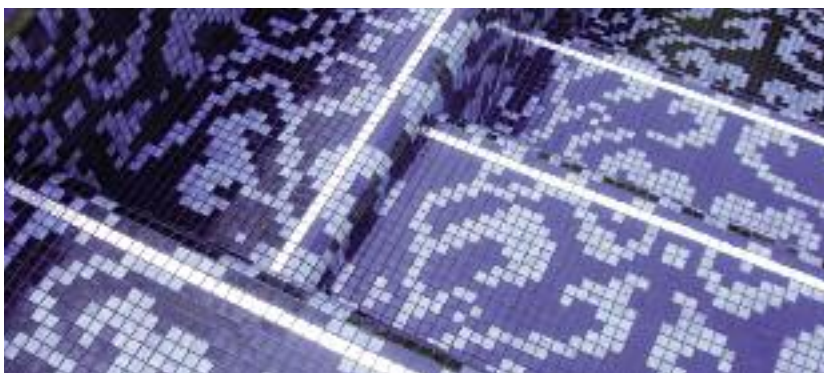


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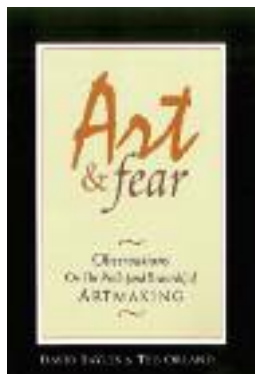


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On the Cover:

Photo courtesy Mystic Water Gardens, Encino, Calif.



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WaterShapes 2.0

By Eric Herman & Jim McCloskey

One theme we've worked into these pages more often than any other through the past 30 months has to do with the thought that we all need to find ways to respond to the rapidly evolving market conditions in which we find ourselves.

You've heard that message from our columnists and many of our feature writers: Across the board, they've argued that outlasting the recession – and, more important, coming out on the other side poised for success – is a matter of adapting and actively developing skills that make sense in light of today's reduced roster of clients.

In considering those same 30 months, we at *WaterShapes* see a business climate that is much different from the one we left behind in 2008. Just as potential buyers of your products have become fewer and more conscious of how they spend their money, our advertisers have as well.

Indeed, it's no secret that magazines have taken huge hits in recent years. It's because of the recession, of course, but it's also because marketers are shifting away from print and pursuing their electronic options. Making matters even more difficult, *WaterShapes* is a proud member of the construction-industry media: Of all sectors in publishing, it's the one that has been hit longest and hardest by virtue of its dependence on the housing and commercial-development markets as well as on conditions in the credit markets.

If ever there was a perfect publishing storm, we're caught in the middle of it.

In response to all of this, we're making our move, pushing on to what we see as our next evolutionary step by transferring most of our energy from our printed magazine to our e-mail newsletter and Web site. The most immediate effect? Well, this is the last printed edition of *WaterShapes* you'll see for a while. It may eventually come back on an intermittent basis, but we haven't as yet set any schedule.

In everything we do, our continuing mission will be to fire the imaginations of watershape designers, engineers and builders while providing powerful tools for professionals we've come to know, respect, value and appreciate through the past dozen years. Quite simply, our aim is to build our Web site and turn it into the premier digital resource for all things in the watershaping world.

We see this as a step forward in an environment in which solid information, sensibly packaged on the Web, is of superior value because it reaches users quickly with great depth and richness. Furthermore, we see the Web as a democratizing force that makes designers, engineers and builders more accessible to existing and prospective clients; simultaneously, the Web provides clients with information they need to make better, more informed choices about the environments they want you to perfect.

Will we miss publishing the magazine? Hell, yes. We've put our hearts and souls into its rhythms for nearly 13 years now and never foresaw a time when we'd move on. But it is time to move on.

If you want to continue being part of our family (and we hope you do), we urge you to go to www.watershapes.com/newsletter and provide us with your e-mail address. Then we can send you our newsletter, *WaterShapes EXTRA!* – the key to our new digital world. (If you already receive and read it, you're all set.)

So now it is time, as our good friend Vance Gillette is fond of saying, to invent our future. Here we go!



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In This Issue

July Writers

Steve Sandalis is founder and president of Mystic Water Gardens, an Encino, Calif.-based design/build firm specializing in custom streams, waterfalls and ponds. Sandalis founded the firm in 2000 after several years of pursuing watergardening as a serious hobby. Since then, he has immersed himself in arts and crafts of watershaping and currently designs and installs highly detailed features for a range of mostly residential customers across the United States. A former model and actor, Sandalis appeared on more than 700 covers of romance novels published by Topaz, a division of Penguin Books, and has appeared in a variety of movies, television programs and commercials. A native of Commack, N.Y., he began working in the construction trades as a child with his father and uncles – all of them contractors in the area.

Jimmy Reed is president of Rock Solid Tile, a tile

design/installation firm based in Calabasas, Calif. He founded the company in 1985 after spending his teens and early 20s learning the tile-installation trade. In between, he studied design at Art Center College of Design (Pasadena, Calif.) and spent several years working in the entertainment industry. His endeavors in that field included work as a set designer/builder for Playboy Enterprises as well as set construction for a number of pioneering rock video productions early in the MTV era. He was also an accomplished rock guitarist in the early 1980s, performing and recording with a number of artists in southern California's roots rock and post-punk scenes. For the past 20 years, Reed has focused most of his creative energy on designing and installing tile finishes for high-end custom watershapes, a process that has seen him work with some of the industry's leading designers and builders. He may be reached through his web site: www.rocksolidtile.com



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William Bennett is co-founder and general manager of Alpine Pool & Design Corp., a custom watershaping firm based in Annandale, Va. He has worked in the pool and spa industry in the greater Washington, D.C., area for more than 30 years, functioning in a variety of construction and management capacities. He founded his current firm with Walter Williams in 1987, responding to the impression that the market in their area was ripe for a firm dedicated solely to sophisticated, custom designs for affluent residential properties. **Walter Williams** is co-founder and principal designer for Alpine Pool & Design Corp. A graduate of Western Washington University, Williams has more than 30 years' experience in the construction industry and has partnered with William Bennett since their firm's inception in 1987. Williams now focuses primarily on technical and aesthetic design work, serving as the clients' ongoing consultant through all project phases.

Ben Dozier is partner and principal of design at Root Design Company, a landscape architecture, pool construction and estate management firm located in Austin, Texas. The organization focuses primarily on private commissions related to residential estates, with an emphasis on unique gardens and watershapes. A graduate of Western State College in Gunnison, Colo., with a degree in recreation business, Dozier has extended his studies in the industry through the Mike Lin Graphic Workshop and continuing education courses sanctioned by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals and Genesis 3. He has served as chair of ASLA's Design/Build Professional Practice Network.



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Taking Care

By Brian Van Bower

If you asked ten people to rank which was more important in their lives, I suspect seven or eight of them would reflexively say that physical health is more important than success in business. If you're not healthy, the reasoning goes, there's no way to enjoy the fruits of success. These people also recognize that being robust and healthy gives you a better shot at becoming successful in the first place – and of staying that way.

As obvious as all of this may seem, it's phenomenally easy to lose sight of the immediate importance of healthful habits. I know deep in my heart that being healthy is a long-term commitment, but I also know how easy it is to set that discipline aside. (As difficult as it may be for some of you to believe, I've been guilty of abusing my body from time to time.)

As we make our way through a summer season that many are seeing as the start of a real recovery for the watershaping industry, it's easier than usual to set aside concerns about healthy living in favor of aggressively pursuing business opportunities that had gone missing through the past two or three years. While it is certainly

We should incorporate rest and exercise into our routines during the week so we can stay sharp mentally and energetic physically. I know from experience that being healthy enables me to concentrate better, makes me more creative and helps me avoid stress.

wonderful to be busy, we should nonetheless be aware of the pitfalls that exist in living our lives out of balance.

finding balance

It's a fact: Not having *enough* work is stressful, but it's also true that having *too much* can take its toll. Overwork leads to a lack of sleep and to limited and insufficient exercise – or to too much exertion if you're in the service or construction end of the business. In these times, we fall into bad habits – eating fast food (or not eating at all) and consuming too much caffeine to get going in the morning and maybe indulging in a bit too much alcohol or sedatives in the evening to wind down.

The nasty thing is, you can find yourself on this slippery slope without even noticing it – or, more troubling, you may be aware of what you're doing but have rationalized your unhealthy behaviors as it takes to stay focused on work – and on catching up rapidly after a couple of lean years.

In most things and especially when it comes to health, I'm a firm believer in striking balances. As I've written here many times in the past, I love the good life and make a point of engaging it head on as often as I can. I love great food and fine dining, and I especially love drinking good wine. On top of that, I see the occasional cigar as a nice, special indulgence.

In other words, I'm in no position to preach, nor do I have a holier-than-thou attitude. And I'm definitely *not* saying that anyone should give up the things they love, because I, too, am put off by health gurus who speak in absolutes about what anyone should or should not be doing. I believe instead that each person should make decisions that are right for his or her situation and that it's not up to others to judge.

In plain terms, I suggest instead that we all need to seek balance in our lives. We should not hesitate, for example, to balance a week's worth of hard work with a relaxing weekend. We should also incorporate rest and exercise into our routines *during* the week so we can stay sharp mentally and energetic physically. I know from experience that being healthy enables

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To that end, I'm a confirmed believer that, when it comes to indulgences such as rich foods and great wine, those things are better enjoyed when you hold them in balance with healthy eating, proper hydration, adequate rest and reasonable amounts of exercise.

Balance is the key!

good to feel good

Again, none of this should be news to anyone reading this column.

But there's a subtler factor in play here: In our society, we like not only to *feel* good, but to *look* good as well. We like the idea of presenting an image of a fit and healthy person, and we know that, in our daily interactions with others, many of us are more positively disposed toward people who present a good appearance.

That doesn't mean trying to look like a model or a body builder, but it does imply that you should carry a reasonable weight, groom yourself well, wear presentable clothing and have a healthy complexion, clear eyes and a nice smile. Everyone's different, of course, but we all seem to value having someone we meet put his or her best foot forward.

We also seem to like the thought that we can do things of a physical nature – take long walks, swim in the ocean or outlast that large fish on the line. But as I've grown older, I've noticed a real divide in the way people approach aging, especially when it comes to notions of remaining physically active.

I know plenty of people who do a great job of staying active and exercising well into their 60s or 70s and beyond. I admire them, because I know they have a far greater chance of retaining their physical strength, mobility and endurance and are obviously taking reasonable care of their bodies. And what I like most about these folks is that their physical

health is almost always accompanied by a positive mental outlook.

I also know several people who have packed it in and have simply given up on their bodies – and then spend lots of time complaining that they can't do the things they once did. None of us is crazy about the physical changes that come with getting older, but I think these people are focused a bit too much on dying and have lost touch with the fact that they still have more living to do.

I personally believe that giving in to the aging process is a great way to accelerate it. Yes, we're all going to die, no exceptions, but none of us knows when, so I intend to live my life to the fullest and take care of myself as though I'll be around indefinitely. No one gets out alive, so why worry about it? I'd *much* rather think in terms of how I can live better today and ponder how I might live even better tomorrow.

Again, it's all about balance: We all need to exercise in ways that are appropriate (I, for one, have no plan to take up gymnastics, although my first steps in that direction might be hilarious to watch) and seek out activities that keep us moving, make our hearts beat a bit faster and maybe get us to break a sweat.

For example, I'm currently flirting with the idea of joining a four-man flag-football league. (That is *not* a misprint.) Honestly, I just found a local league that has set up different divisions calibrated to differing levels of fitness and competitiveness. I've watched a few games and I think I'm a perfect candidate for participation in the Couch Potato Division. Now all I have to do is find a couple other guys with similarly appropriate ambitions.

up to you

In my case, the urge to hit the gridiron has sprung at least in part from a weight-loss program I've been on for the past few months. At this writing, I've dropped 30 pounds and feel fantastic.

The program I pursued was pretty extreme, but it's what I needed to get myself on the right path. It's hard to imagine, but for six weeks I existed with an extremely restricted diet and a daily caloric

intake of no more than 800 calories. (I like to joke that I typically have 800 calories on my teeth after a good meal.)

The program forced me to change *everything* about my diet: no cooking oils, radically limited dairy intake, all starches eliminated (including bread and pasta, which was not easy in a household ruled by my Italian wife). Most painfully, I abstained from wine for 42 days, except for one evening where I cheated and had a couple glasses with a client.

I have so thoroughly retooled my dietary habits that it is my firm hope that now, as I allow some richer foods back into my life, I will do so in a more sensible way.

I can tell already that my personal boot camp for a healthier lifestyle has made a difference: I truly enjoy looking somewhat thinner, and I wasn't prepared for the extra energy. True, being without wine for so long has, as my wife Gina will attest, made me crabby from time to time, but I am confident my jovial nature will bounce back once I reset my internal balances.

Everyone is different, of course, and what's good for me might not be so good for you. In my case, I just couldn't find a way to ease into things and slowly build momentum and, instead, had to take extreme measures. However you approach being healthy, there's a strong chance that if you stick with it long enough to see some positive results, you'll become even more enthusiastic about what you're doing.

The toughest thing is getting started, and then the most important is sticking with the program. If you set your mind to it and truly want to become healthier, you will be able to do it.

One of the great things about modern life is that you don't have to look very hard or go very far to find resources that will help you get healthy. Fitness clubs are everywhere, diet programs are perhaps too plentiful, health-food stores are opening all over the map and the information available on television, online and in libraries is truly overwhelming. Lots of avenues to good health are available to all of us – we just need to take the first steps.

Continued on page 14



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industry focus

Tying this monologue back to a broader observation, professionals in the watershaping industry should also remember that one of the big selling points for pools and spas is the fact that they, in addition to being beautiful, foster healthy lifestyles.

Swimming and all forms of aquatic activity are known to be among the healthiest forms of exercise – a fact widely recognized by teams of researchers and scientists. Just glance at the flood of data coming out of research sponsored by the National Swimming Pool Foundation (which, by the way, is doing *amazing* work

on our behalf), you'll find that activity in water benefits almost every facet of physical and even mental health, can be a part of anyone's therapeutic regimen and even has been linked to increased longevity.

In a quantifiable way, we can say that our industry provides its clients with fountains of youth: The clinical data is incredible, far better than even the most optimistic of us would ever have imagined. Even though we've always known swimming is healthful, it's actually far better for us than we ever dreamed.

It's always bothered me that more watershapers don't make hay with the primary benefits offered by our products – but perhaps there's a balance to be struck here as well: After all, you don't have to give up on beautiful aesthetics to promote health benefits at the same time. These are not conflicting concepts, but instead are complementary ideas that consumers love once they put them together and they can use the healthfulness of aquatic activity as a rationale for an aesthetic indulgence.

So step back and consider: You look and feel great, and you walk into a client's home ready to discuss a product that not only will make the backyard more attractive, that not only will foster an engaging outdoor lifestyle, but that also stands to make the client more healthy. If you look at all this with the right set of eyes, your clients can have it all – and so can you.

To the extent that I'm preaching here, I hope that you're the choir and that you already know all of this. As I see it, there's nothing to lose and everything to gain by keeping health on the top of our "to do" lists – not just for our clients, but for ourselves. **MS**

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



The View from Inside

By Bruce Zaretsky

We water and landscape professionals literally *shape* the outdoor environments in which we work – cutting grades, building walls, planting trees, installing pools, ponds and fountains and preparing patios, decks, planting beds and lighting systems.

In designing these outdoor-living spaces, we spend the bulk of our time outside: walking the site, shooting grades, considering focal points and effectively visualizing the experience for our clients. If all goes well in installation, the upshot of this activity is that these homeowners will spend a considerable amount of time outside because we've succeeded in transforming their backyards into functional extensions of their homes.

Where I work in New York, of course, it gets sublimely cold in winter and nobody's much interested in going outside for any reason from December through March – but even here the interplay of interior and exterior is something we work with in every project. In my case, however, perhaps because I recognize

If we've done our job, homeowners will spend a considerable amount of time outside because we've succeeded in transforming their backyards into functional extensions of their homes.

that the season in which my clients are able to enjoy their exterior spaces is relatively short, I tend to spend quite a bit of time on the *inside* of the home in order to help my clients get the most of their *outside* experiences.

In my last column, I began what will be a series of discussions about designing gardens for human use. In that context, it's not much of a stretch to say that most of the humans we work for will use the gardens we design largely by looking at them from inside their homes. And that's true no matter where on the map we might work, no matter how fleeting the seasons might be: This is why I say it's never a bad idea to start the exterior design process by stepping inside.

for the people

I've always operated with a sense of this inside/outside balance in my head. Indeed, this is why I ask all of my clients to be ready to invite me into their homes so, among other things, I can visit each room that overlooks the space where I'll be working and look out the windows and doors to see what's to be seen from inside out.

Is there a view directly through the neighbor's bathroom window from this window or door? Is there too much sun exposure through this one big door? Would I be blocking out too much sun or losing too much of the view were I to build a pergola in this location? Once you start thinking in these terms, the questions to be asked and concepts to be considered flow *endlessly*.

And this is true no matter where you live and work: Regardless of climate, our clients have lives, careers and obligations, and as wonderful as it would be for them to sit in a garden all day, swimming or reading or sipping a crisp Riesling, the cold fact is that most days they get up, take showers, make coffee, eat breakfast and head for their cars to get to work.

At the end of the day, the process reverses – and in far too many cases, these folks never get outside to see or experience the garden. If they see it at all, in fact, they do so from inside the house as they move from room to room and wait for the daily cycle to repeat itself.

Continued on page 18

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On the Level

In a nutshell, however, this cycle and the breaking of it is precisely why I think it's so important for us to begin shaping our exterior ideas from an interior perspective. This is why I spend so much time in the house, looking out and designing spaces in my head as I pass from room to room and think of ways to draw my clients' attention (and maybe even their physical frames) out into the open air.

As I see it, the best way to coax them outside and invite them into their gardens to enjoy the fragrances, feel the breezes, listen to the waterfalls and add simple pleasures to their daily grinds is to make my garden spaces seductive: I want them to have the sense that in going outside, they will be warmly embraced in ways that will make the stresses of everyday life go away.

If I succeed in this, I have done my job – no matter what region I'm in or what design style I might be using.

into the air

To get this process started, I let my clients know that I'm a realist: I know for a fact, I tell them, that even though I am there to design outdoor spaces for them and earn my living doing so, I accept the fact that they will spend a majority of their time inside the house.

This in no way implies that I'm trying to talk them out of having me redevelop their outside spaces; instead, I want them to wrap their brains around the concept that they will usually experience these spaces from the inside of their houses and that, as a consequence, we must consider them from many separate perspectives.

In doing so, I know that a big part of what I'm doing is trying to overcome their end-of-day inertia and the powerful urge they might have to flop on the couch indoors to watch television. I know the odds are stacked against me when I consider tired people at the end of long

workdays, but flattening those odds is the challenge I face in getting them to choose my gardens over the local news or *American Idol*.

So how do we win? In most cases, we can do it by getting our clients and their guests to think about the garden before they manage to reach the front door. This is why, in our projects, we invariably install some sort of gate, arbor, stone threshold or other visual device to draw attention to the backyard from wherever the cars are parked.

What I want is for everyone to notice the gate as they move along the driveway. Maybe it's slightly ajar, beckoning them to explore where it leads – a subtle (yet powerful) detail that tells these people *this is the way, this is where I should be going*. If the draw is attractive enough, they'll follow along.

We do this again once they've passed inside, and with the same sorts of simple details. Perhaps it's the small deck



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terrace just outside the back door – the place where the grill is just out of sight but is still readily accessible even in winter, or where the comfy chair awaits with the side table close at hand to hold a glass of wine and a small plate of cheese, or where the afternoon light is particularly favorable when the desire to read the newspaper is part of their routine.

It's all a matter of thinking things through from this inside-out perspective, and it fascinates me how many designers and installers fail to take this step. In fact, I can't count all the times I've entered beautiful new sunrooms or remodeled homes with acres of glass overlooking drab patios with silly sets of stairs dropping off into the abyss.

A Fine Romance

Let me confess here to being an unabashed romantic who loves the thought of the spaces I create being enjoyed by couples walking hand in hand, speaking softly, taking in all the fragrances and observing the fish, plants, fountains or waterfalls together. As I see it, there's no more endorphin-producing feeling than romanticism, so why not use it to draw clients out into the garden?

With that in mind, one of my favorite details is what I call the Romeo-and-Juliet terrace.

More and more of our clients are building homes with first-floor master suites, which I see as the perfect opportunity to create a terrace accessible *only* from that special room. The result doesn't have to be terribly elaborate – perhaps a small deck or stone terrace surrounded by walls or plantings, maybe with a spa off to the side. Although it may stand in plain view from the rest of the yard, it is off limits to the casual guest.

The fact that it's not accessible by stairs or pathways tells those visitors that this is a private space for the homeowners' exclusive use. It's their place to sit in bathrobes sipping coffee, enjoying a candlelit dinner or just reading the newspaper. More important, it's another way to get them outside into the fresh air!

– B.Z.

In fairness, many of these sins are committed by general contractors who focus on the house itself and put in the steps and patio in a rush to obtain a certificate of occupancy. Still I'm left to wonder: How difficult would it be to include a small, tasteful terrace as parts of these packages?

But I guess I shouldn't complain too bitterly or be too ungrateful, as straightening out these tangled situations is one of the things that keeps my business going!

comfort in motion

This brings me to a key point in designing across the inside/outside inter-

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5000	1400	11.6'	115.0	1.00
6000	1664	11.6'	135.0	1.18
9000	2040	16.4'	125.0	3.10
18000	3317	25.0'	175.0	2.50



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On the Level

face: What do you do to ease the transition from indoors to out when the general contractor leaves you with an eleven-inch deep stair tread (or two or three or even four) when you know you're asking your client to feel comfortable walking from the kitchen to the deck carrying plates of steaks and shish-ka-bobs to the grill?

I start with my clients by reenacting a Jerry Lewis-style prat-fall (which always seems to give those of a certain generation a kick): It will only take a single near miss or an outright fall to dissuade them from ever using that door or grill space again!

I want to make these physical transitions both inviting and easy. On warm summer nights, for example, I want them to leave the doors wide open and treat the simple terrace as an extension of the home. This is a way of life in warmer climates and in Japan, for example, where homes are built around garden spaces and entire walls open up to the outdoors.

When I design and install these terraces, I build them with no more than single steps down from the house at no less than five inches or more than seven inches below the interior floor. (In milder climates, of course, building terraces on the same level of the home is an even better arrangement; where I live, however, we need to consider snow build-up along the house and avoid any water intrusion that might result from snow melting up against the house.)

This single-step approach is ideal where I am, allowing for a casual, safe and elegant transition to the outside while inviting my clients and their guests out to use the grill or just sit and



This project involved expanding a long, narrow deck that was too narrow to accommodate guests and, with its full southern exposure, too hot in summer. By adding a triangular section to the existing rectangular deck, we were able to incorporate a large dining space (set on a travertine carpet) under a pergola. In doing so, we looked out from inside the home to make certain the setting was as attractive as we wanted it to be not only through the doors and windows at deck level, but also when our clients were observing the scene from the level above.

stare at the garden, listen to the waterfall, look at the fish or watch the kids play in the pool or spa.

To reward them for stepping outside, I deepen the experience by including small, trickling waterfeatures (bubbling urns, weeping rocks or traditional Asian details such as Tsukubais). At the very least, this will encourage them to open the windows to allow the sounds to come into their homes: Even if they don't go out, in other words, they're experiencing their exterior spaces and we're effectively bringing the outside in to them.

illuminating thoughts


Lighting is another key consideration in bridging the interior/exterior gap, because as we all should know by now, a properly lighted landscape is powerfully attractive. This is why, when I first meet with clients and walk into their backyards, one of the first things I do is to look for the typical 500-watt spotlight hanging over the back door and tell them point blank that this will be the first thing to go.

The blinding halogen glare might be acceptable if the patio space is commonly used as a stage, but by and large nobody is comfortable sitting on a deck where sunglasses are mandatory after dark. Instead, I paint a verbal picture of subtle, mesmerizing, even romantic lighting as a means of creating interest and drawing people outside to experience warm summer evenings, listen to the crickets and watch the moon go by.

While lighting is usually the first item cut from a budget when a budget must be cut, I always, always manage to keep it in to some extent. As I explain to my clients, it seems shortsighted to spend good money beautifying a property only to have it disappear once the sun goes down.

My point in all of this is that there's a real need on the part of designers and installers to make certain our clients – the human users of our designed spaces – have every opportunity to enjoy the gardens and watershapes we provide for them. In other words, why build them if our clients won't use them?

As I see it – and this may be an understanding most easily arrived at if you work in a place where the warm seasons are all

too short – I want my clients and their guests to experience my garden designs all year long. If the main reason I do what I do is to give people the opportunity to set aside stress and enjoy life more fully, what better way is there to do so than by establishing unbreakable links from inside to outside? 

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.

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Down to Size

In recent years, many of his clients have asked southern California pond/stream specialist Steve Sandalis to provide them with watershapes that are relatively modest in size – but that are still long on beauty, value and enjoyment. He explores this trend here, profiling a showcase-home project that demonstrates the creative potential (as well as the challenges) embodied in systems where a little bit less can add up to a whole lot more.

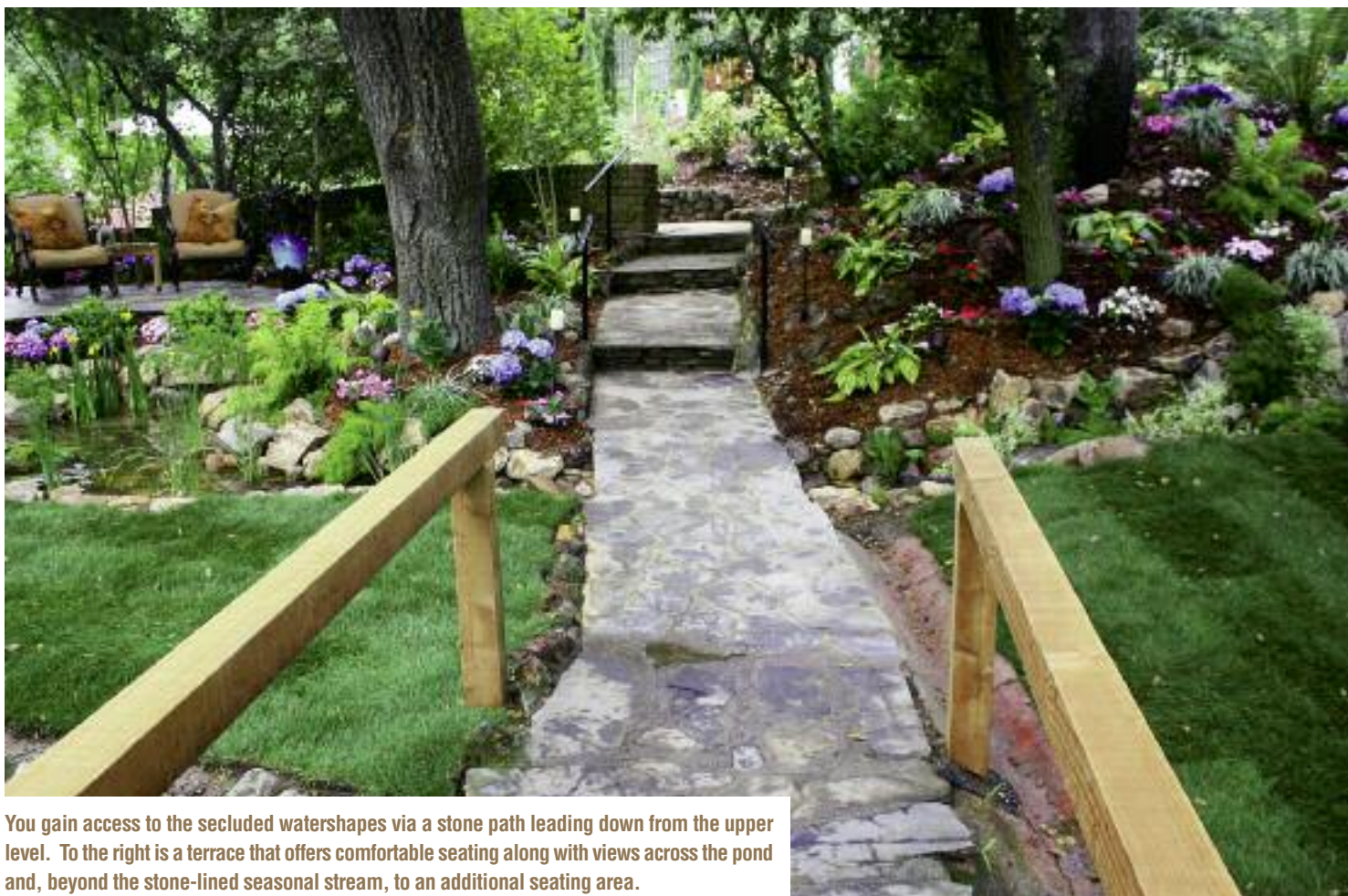
By Steve Sandalis

As the current recession has worked its way through the marketplace, I've found that, with increasing consistency, our projects fall neatly into two categories.

On the one hand are the grand-scale projects we do mostly for wealthy clients – ambitious designs that see us cover large areas with tons of rock, extensive plantings and complex hydraulic systems. While these jobs have dropped off somewhat, it's our observation that people with money can still afford to buy what they want and that this sort of high-end business has never really gone away.

On the other are more modest designs for people who want some form of water in their lives but are working with limited budgets and, often, with compact available spaces. In fact, these systems can be minuscule, all very simple, some without any pond component at all and many ensconced in places where we might have footprints of little more than 10 by 20 feet.

I've written in the past about some of our large-scale work; this time, let's take a look at a project of the smaller variety – specifically, a lovely pond and stream we completed for the 2011 Pasadena Showcase House of Design. We at Mystic Water Gardens (Encino, Calif.) have done a number of focused projects during this persistent economic downturn, but this one stands out as a perfect example of how, when done correctly and in response to the setting, even a small pond/stream composition can make a *huge* overall difference.



You gain access to the secluded watershapes via a stone path leading down from the upper level. To the right is a terrace that offers comfortable seating along with views across the pond and, beyond the stone-lined seasonal stream, to an additional seating area.

ABOUT THE HOUSE

The Pasadena Showcase House of Design is a privately sponsored program run annually by a local Pasadena, Calif., non-profit organization known as the Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts (PSHA). The volunteer membership consists entirely of women from all walks of life who live in the city, their mission being to celebrate the arts and their area's prominent role in the history of residential architecture and design.

While the modern city of Pasadena is perhaps best known for the Tournament of Roses Parade and the Rose Bowl, it's also a place brimming with beautiful homes built mostly in the early and middle years of the last century. It's justly famous as the incubator for Craftsman-style homes, many designed by Greene & Greene and other renowned architects, but it's also an eclectic place offering examples of beautiful, well-maintained homes of almost every imag-

inable style – a true laboratory for residential architecture.

To promote this rich local heritage, in every year since 1948, PSHA has chosen a single prominent home and treats it to an artistic makeover showcasing the talents of selected architects, interior designers, landscape architects and designers, fine artists, craftspeople and watershapers. Once the work is done – all in a frantic 90-day stretch – the houses are opened to the public for a month of daily tours.

Our firm has participated twice – first in 2008, when we built a large system that was a core feature of the program. We did well enough that the event's organizers brought us back for this year's event.

The 2011 house is actually located just beyond Pasadena's borders in the adjacent city of La Canada-Flintridge. It was built in 1927 by Paul Williams, an architect fa-

mous for some of Los Angeles' most iconic structures, including the Shrine Auditorium and the spidery theme restaurant at Los Angeles International Airport. He also designed more than 2,000 residences, including homes for stars such as Cary Grant, Groucho Marx, Lucille Ball, Barbara Stanwyck and Frank Sinatra, among many others.

This one is a 7,500 square foot Tudor Revival mansion situated on four acres dotted with beautiful Live Oaks and Redwoods and featuring winding trails and lavish garden areas. In all, PSHA pulled in 25 designers to renovate and upgrade almost every detail of the home and its landscape.

When I first saw the property, I walked its length and breadth several times and ultimately found what I considered the perfect spot for our watershape. It's down the slope from the house in an area under a canopy of overhanging oaks; it's also

visually isolated from the house by established stands of *Hydrangea* and other substantial plantings.

As I saw it, this was the perfect place for a secluded, intimate, small-scale destination within a spectacular, sprawling landscape.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Among its many virtues (and a big part of why I chose this particular spot for the pond and stream) is that the space already had a wet-season stream that cuts through part of the property.

My appreciation for small streams of this sort dates to my childhood on Long Island, N.Y. It's almost certainly why I ever started in the pond/stream business, as some of my favorite memories from those days involve going into the woods near our house and spending hours playing in a small stream.

I will never forget how I would divert the water flow, build little dams, observe

differences in water volume after rain episodes, watch the way the water interacted with rocks and banks – all of which informs the work I do today in both practical and emotional ways.

When we started on the showcase home in February 2011, southern California had enjoyed some heavy, much-needed rain and the little stream had a fairly robust flow. As time passed, it gradually declined – and by the time summer rolls around I'm certain it will be dry again. But it showed me distinctly how the presence of moving water and a few reflective surfaces could elevate this space on a year-round basis.

As I visualized the project, I saw more and more clearly how this was a situation in which a small, simple body of water set within the natural confines of the existing space offered the best opportunities for enjoyment by people moving through the property. There was just something about the space as it was, with

majestic oaks and redwoods creating a cathedral-like canopy overhead, filtering the light and rustling in the breeze.

To be sure, the pond and stream might have featured more prominently in the project had I selected a different location, but I've always felt that the positioning of any watershape relative to its surroundings means *everything*.

I get upset, for instance, when I see ponds sited smack dab in the middle of a yard: No matter how well formed they might be, they will always look artificial and unconnected to anything else around them. I also object to the easy solution of tucking ponds into corners, where, often hemmed in on two sides by fences, there's almost no way to create the impression that the water is there naturally.

While it's true that there are no hard, fast rules about pond or stream placement, I would argue that, as designers, we need to seek out places where the wa-



The Rule of Threes

There's an interesting phenomenon I've witnessed with small ponds – and apparently I'm not alone, as the folks at Aquascape, the pond supply giant based in St. Charles, Ill., have noticed much the same thing: Clients who start off purchasing compact ponds and other downsized watershapes will typically upgrade *twice* after making the initial purchase.

These upgrades can include increasing the size of the pond, adding a stream or waterfall or working in some form of garden art. Sometimes clients will want to add deck or seating areas adjacent to the water.

Often, this desire stems from their fascination with fish and the desire to add more of them to the system. This is why, when we work with them the first time through, we let them know that their ponds have limits and that they'll have to make the pond bigger and often deeper to accommodate larger fish populations while keeping the water healthy – thereby leaving them with a clear impression of what needs to be done to accommodate any growth in ambition.

The other driving force is just as elemental: When clients have the experience of owning a watergarden and see how much it adds to their property and their enjoyment of being outside, they simply want more. In the case of my own pond at home, I've rebuilt it three times now, increasing its size and complexity to a point where I finally see it as being *just right*.

Why these iterations come in threes is a mystery to me, but I'm amazed by how consistently it works out that way and how often our clients will come back for more. It also makes me conscious of the fact that I have to treat every job with the highest levels of care and artistry: Who knows where things will lead?

–S.S.

ter truly belongs, naturally or at least comfortably. In this case, thankfully, we had a visually secluded area next to a seasonal stream on a gentle slope off to the side of the property – just perfect!

INTO PLACE

The area in which we were working amounted to a healthy 6,000 square feet in all: Although the system itself was to be small with a stream running for 30 feet across an eight-foot drop in slope down into an 11-by-15-foot pond, this gave us plenty of elbow room and let us spread things out.

The course we chose cut across an existing walkway, giving us the opportunity

to include a small flagstone bridge. It also allowed us some opportunities to slow down the flow and let the water pool in a couple of key places amid the vertical transitions, gentle cascades and small waterfalls.

Creating a reflective pond surface was an important goal, so we also worked hard to calm the stream's flow where it reached the pond – all without skimping on the sounds the moving water would generate before reaching this key transition point.

With some effort, we ended up with a beautiful pond surface that brilliantly reflects the oak canopy – perhaps the most striking visual element of the entire system. We also produced a stream with a

The far seating area offers views of the seasonal stream in the foreground and of the new stream and its cascades across the way.



small, delicate flow that fits perfectly within the scope and scale of the setting.

We did this knowing that, all too often, small ponds, streams and waterfalls are established with flows that are simply too robust, so much so that they instantly reveal the fact that they are artificial rather than natural. In these situations, we say that less is almost invariably more: It doesn't take much flow through a well-crafted stream to create a wonderfully soothing effect that makes people want to be near the water.

In technical terms, this system is simplicity itself. We placed a single large skimmer in the pond opposite where the water enters from the stream. Up the

slope, water emerges from a small spring in the side of the slope as well as through a small, upwelling bog filter. In both cases, these sources are obscured by rock-work and plants.

We didn't really consider it at the time, but ours is the *second* waterfeature on the property. Up the slope from our site, there's a swimming pool seemingly fed by a waterfall – and a number of people I spoke with during the showcase had the mistaken impression that these systems were all tied together somehow. Although that wasn't the case, people seemed intrigued by the possibility – and at the very least it indicated that we'd done a good job of masking the water

source for our system.

We also had to deal with the natural stream, which looks great with water flowing in it but which, although it had some nice rocks along the edges, had been altered through the years by the addition of flat stones and some patches of concrete. Part of our original plan involved returning this streambed to its natural state, but the organizers decided to set that idea aside.

As it is, our new stream *does* visually interface with a portion of the existing watercourse: We set things up in such a way that there appears to be a fork in the streambed near the top of the system that is sometimes wet, sometimes dry.



ALL IN THE DETAILS

Small systems such as this can be exceptional in visual terms, but they're also quite challenging because, by nature, all of the details have elevated importance. (It's not that detailing isn't critical in large systems as well, but in these smaller settings, every element takes on greater visual importance because they are fewer in number, intimate by design and allow for very close viewing.)

Our detailing begins with the rockwork. In this case, we used an indigenous, earth-toned fieldstone with intricate surface features, placing each piece carefully to give the impression that the exposed stone is part of subsurface structures and also that it has been distributed in the landscape by erosion and natural movement.

This stone placement is, as I've mentioned in previous articles in *WaterShapes*, an improvisational art form – an activity in which long experience in studying nature plays a huge role for me and everyone on my team. There's no easy way to explain the process beyond saying it requires the examining of individual pieces and visualizing how they'll come together to create natural vertical transitions and ponding areas in the stream. As important, this exercise guides us in establishing edges and places where stone, water, plants and soil interact along the stream's banks.

In addition to the rockwork at and around the edges, we also set aside a portion of the verge for planting with Red Fescue, a grass that gently interfaces with the water as at the edge of a meadow. Having these areas is particularly important with smaller features because they offer visual relief from the rockwork and offer wonderful opportunities to build connections between the pond or stream and the surrounding landscape through use of emergent and terrestrial plants.

As I see it, this blending of plants into the mix of edge treatments is one of the key ways of creating the impression that the system is natural – or at least has been there for a very long time.

To one side of the pond, we used soil from the excavation to build up a small seating/deck area. Finished in beautiful

flagstone, this spot creates a lovely, rustic area where the homeowners and their guests can sit and observe reflections of the oak canopy on the water's surface while also enjoying intimate views of the stream.

Wherever we could in the pond and the stream's pooling areas, we placed a limited variety of emergent bog plants that seemed to draw an unusual amount of interest among visitors to the showcase home. The point here is that we didn't overdo it by using too many plants: Instead, we maintained a visual balance between plants and open areas of quiet water.

As a final point of visual interest, we added a pair of brightly colored Koi to the pond along with a pair of gold-and-white Schaboinkens.

ON WITH THE SHOW

In the usual run of things, 90 days is a quick turnaround time for any project of significance. But we made it work and, overall, were thrilled not just by the way our pond and stream turned out, but also by how the whole property turned out once everyone's work was done. The home's interior was wonderful, and it was amazing how one team turned an old stable into a terrific new guesthouse.

The home was open to the public through the month of April 2011 and was visited by thousands of people who paid the price of admission. Many of the designers were on hand throughout the month to answer questions and show off their efforts; I managed to be there for several days and was impressed by the fact that I saw as many as 1,000 visitors each time.

It was both exhausting and extremely gratifying to see how many people appreciated our small watershapes – so much so that we anticipate getting some calls about other projects in the weeks and months to come. I am especially pleased that this project was of such a modest scale that it could be within reach of average homeowners who might want similarly meaningful, beautiful and “intimate” ponds and streams for their own backyards.





The stream flows parallel to the seasonal watercourse as it approaches the bottom of the slope, passing under an unmarked bridge before flowing into the pond. The terrace above offers prime views of the pond and reflections off its surface of the tree canopy above.

Tile Lines

Tile specialist Jimmy Reed has spent a long career perfecting his approach to installing beautiful materials on the surfaces of high-end watershapes. Through the years, as he has guided countless clients through the tile-selection process and compiled a portfolio filled with visually stunning work, he's always taken pride in the fact that he is much more than a subcontractor and has indeed become a full participant on a broad range of creative teams.



By Jimmy Reed

I love tile. For years, it has pushed all my creative buttons and fired my desire to learn everything I can about all of its forms. From my first days in the business to this very day, I've been inspired by its beauty, its rich history, the challenges involved in installing it perfectly and the potential it has to transform spaces.

And it's no stretch to say I've worked with tile most of my life, reaching all the way back to when I was 12 years old, mixing mud and cleaning tools for a neighbor who was at that time a prominent tile contractor in Los Angeles and Hawaii. As a teenager, I worked weekends and summers (when the surf was low), eventually picking up what I needed to know to complete installation jobs on my own.

I tried a variety of other things – been in bands and played music around the world, designed sets in Hollywood, supervised a variety of construction projects, worked in a few restaurants. But I've always come back to tile, started my own installation business in the early 1980s and have been at it ever since.

As I've learned more and grown in skill, I've come to see tile design and installation as a form of surfacing art. And it's often exercised in places where people spend lots of their time, which is why I'm passionate about high-end residential interiors but thrilled even more so by the opportunity to work on swimming pools and spas.

For the past 20 years, in fact, my company (Rock Solid Tile, Los Angeles) has focused primarily on surfaces for custom watershapes. We still do design and installations of kitchens, bathrooms and

floors, but pools and spas really define what we do and who we are.

GREATER PARTICIPATION

I moved toward pools because, as I see it, they provide tile installers and designers with their greatest opportunities – especially for those interested in doing truly artistic work. These opportunities are particularly clear when it comes to all-tile pool projects: Here, where luxury is on parade, the designs are often ambitious and the settings beautiful. These are, in essence, projects that call for skills of the highest order.

Better yet, these jobs put us in the company of successful, creative designers and builders and, quite often, bring us into direct contact with clients who want something different and exciting when previously they had nobody they could depend on for the tiled portions of their specific projects. Much more so than interior work, our experience with watershapes has opened these doors and enabled us to become more than just installers; instead, we're now executing high-level design programs with artisanal skill.

To be sure, this elevation isn't a part of all our projects, but quite often these days we find ourselves becoming involved as part of the design team. As such, we work directly with residential architects, landscape architects, pool designers and interior designers. We offer feedback on their ideas, define how tile fits within the overall program and, quite often, work directly with clients in making material selections.

None of this happened overnight, of

course. It has developed gradually and extends, I think, from the way we have always striven to be better at what we do and what we can provide. We have always delivered superior results and, as important, have always been articulate ambassadors for our specialty and what it can bring to a project.

I also know that we have benefited from what's been happening with watershaping in the past dozen or so years: As designs have become more sophisticated and elaborate, tile installation has come along for the ride. So where all-tile finishes were once scarce in the United States, they're now fixtures of the watershaping scene – and that's just the way we like it.

Of course, it helps that the combination of tile and water is legendary for beauty as well as practicality. Whether it's ceramic, porcelain or glass tile, the surface is close to impervious and, when installed properly, remarkably durable. I may be biased, but I also think it is by far the most beautiful of all finish materials.

In our business, we've also been helped by the emergence of glass tile as a regular finish option since the late 1990s; in fact, we are considered on the short list of the very best glass-tile specialists. Helpfully, there's a good range of quality products now available in the marketplace: In our experience, working with these tiles gives us the most frequent opportunities we have to create surfaces that are truly stunning, even mesmerizing.

That hypnotic potential is especially present with swimming pools, where the scale is grand enough that the visual effects are amplified. As we often tell our clients, you can look at pictures of glass tile in books and perceive the beauty on some level, but when you stand there and can watch the visual interplay across a broad surface, it's tough to resist the temptation to look at it for hours on end, tracing different effects as the sun moves across the sky and direct or reflected light hits the surfaces at different angles. It is truly a breathtaking experience.

STRIVING FOR THE BEST

It bears mentioning that this growth in the glass-tile market has come with

some challenges. First, it's not cheap: The materials are expensive, the installation process is very detailed and expensive – and both come at a high premium. But that's as it should be, because producing the tile takes rigorous manufacturing processes, while installation requires extremely high skill and technical expertise.

With glass tile's growing popularity, however, less-expensive products have come into the market – and the trade-off for the savings seems to be an array of problems with cracking and pop offs. Moreover, there are lots of tile installers who claim to be qualified to install glass tile in pools and spas who lack the skills or knowledge required to do so and are clearly more focused on price than quality. As a result, another point we always make with our clients is that they'll get what they pay for.

For clients inclined to go with glass, I've noticed that they tend to be very serious about the decision-making process. Many I've worked with, for example, do a great deal of research and have been careful to find out how the material performs underwater – not just physically, but also in visual terms.

In working with these clients I typically become a consultant, guiding their research and becoming a resource based on my own studies and years of experience. I help them visualize how their watershapes will look when completed and, once I sense the direction in which they're heading, offer recommendations on how to proceed.

I take this responsibility *very* seriously, staying on the cutting edge of industry installation products and procedures by attending and participating in shows, seminars and workshops around the world; by constantly doing my own homework in ferreting out new materials; and by finding out all there is to know about new products, installation techniques and long-term performance.

Through the years, I've come to rely on a collection of glass-tile manufacturers whose products I know and trust: Oceanside Glass Tile (Carlsbad, Calif.), Sicis (Ravenna, Italy), Trend Group (Vicenza, Italy), Lightstreams Glass Tile (Santa Clara, Calif.), Elementile (Royal

Palm Beach, Fla.) and Bisazza (Vicenza, Italy). Even with just these six companies, my clients and I find myriad choices across a range of visual characteristics, reflective qualities, levels of transparency, sizes, shapes, colors and textures – not to mention the mosaic possibilities.

Each product is slightly different, which brings me to another key point I stress with clients as well as other members of the project team – that is, the importance of following surface-preparation and installation instructions to the letter. That might sound so obvious that it's not worth mentioning, but the fact of the matter is that I continue to encounter numerous glass-tile failures, and the majority of the issues have to do with improper surface preparation, inferior materials and inexperienced installation.

By and large, manufacturers we work with do a good job with their instructions and are perfectly willing to answer any questions that might arise in the context of a specific project. In our company, we are risk averse and do what the manufacturers specify: In other words, we avoid introducing variables into the process that may compromise the integrity of the installation and give us something to answer for down the line. After all, we are responsible for the entire installation process, from the raw shell to the finished, polished surface and all the steps between.

LOW TOLERANCES

As was suggested above, preparation of the surface is the key to successful tile installation – which is why it occupies about three quarters of our time on most projects.

It is relatively easy to install tile onto perfectly prepared, completely smooth, flat surfaces. In fact, the process of achieving perfection can be quite reasonable for pools and spas if the processes of waterproofing, surface preparation, layout, making certain everything is plumb and level and actually applying materials all go as they should.

And no matter how talented a shotcrete or gunite installer might be, we're aware that it's impossible to shape a watershape to per-the-plans perfection. As a result, we know going in that we will

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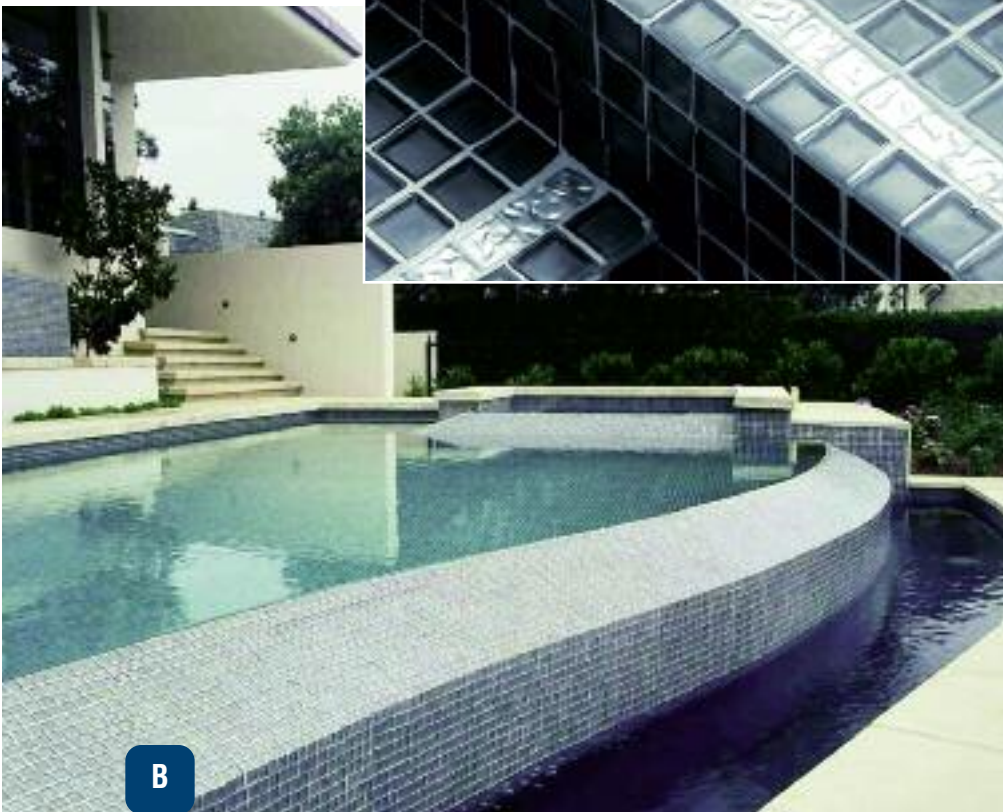
Subtle Variations

On this all-tile project – designed and built by Gary Morris Designs of Los Angeles – we used a combination of Tessera Fleet Blue iridescent tiles (on the vanishing edge and spa weir) and Tessera Fleet Blue non-iridescent tiles (for the field), all from Oceanside Glass Tile. Then, to highlight the edges and weir with stronger, more radiant colors and bolder visual textures, we introduced strands of Bisazza Oro Pavimento 20.206/P, which includes white gold in a glass tile.

The radiused vanishing edge offers a prime example of the importance of achieving absolute perfection in leveling. As mentioned in the accompanying text, we work at zero tolerance: There is no other option, and we check and recheck our work with both water and laser levels to ensure perfection.

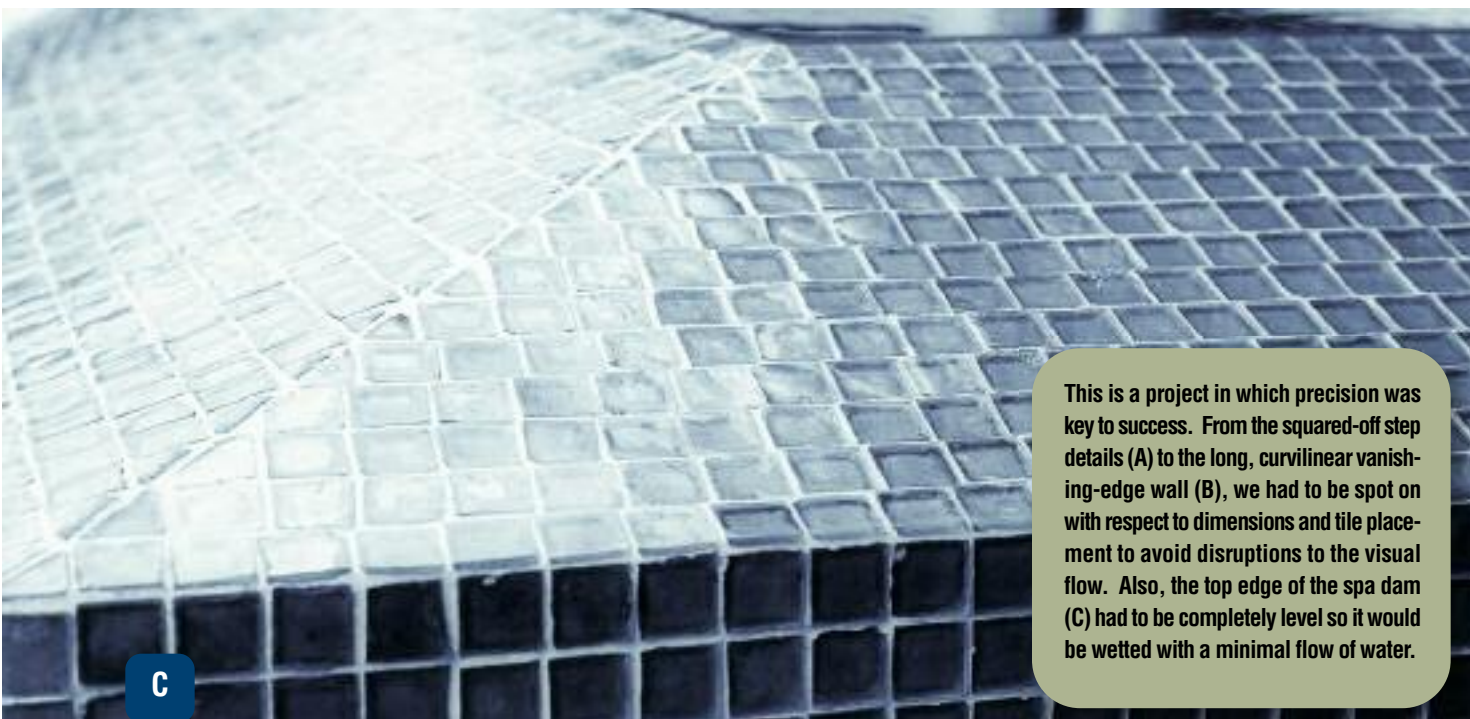


A



B

Photos B & C courtesy Oceanside Glass Tile, Carlsbad, Calif.



C

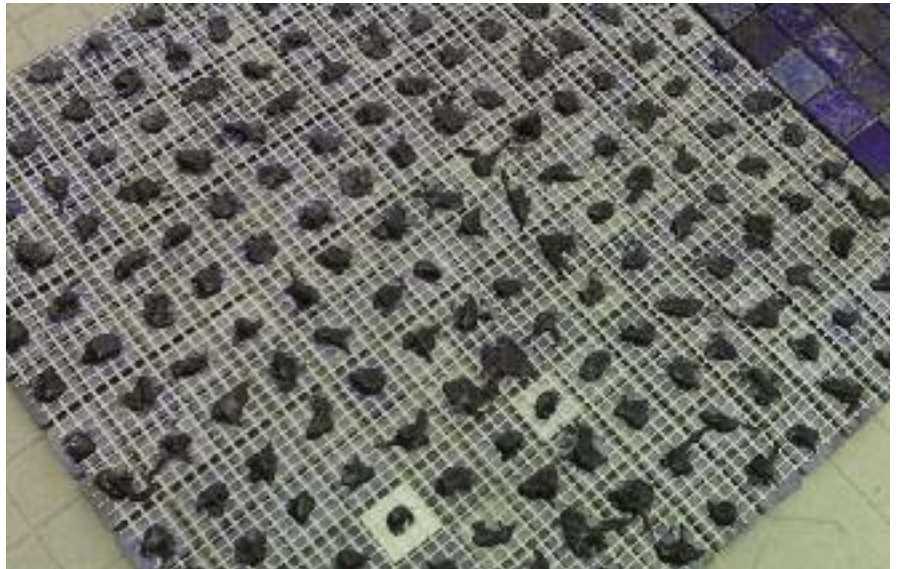
This is a project in which precision was key to success. From the squared-off step details (A) to the long, curvilinear vanishing-edge wall (B), we had to be spot on with respect to dimensions and tile placement to avoid disruptions to the visual flow. Also, the top edge of the spa dam (C) had to be completely level so it would be wetted with a minimal flow of water.

Stone Cold

We worked with an unusual material for the pool on this project: Lapis Azule, a beautifully vibrant, blue-colored stone mosaic imported from Turkey. Just looking at it we knew that the pool, designed by Juan Pablo Molyneux (who has offices in New York and Paris) and Skip Phillips of Questar Pools & Spas (Escondido, Calif.) and built by Pooltastic of Thousand Oaks, Calif., would look great when we completed our work.

Personally, I prefer working with paper-faced materials because of the control they give us during installation, but in this case the tiles came with a mesh backing. This can pose at least two challenges: First, in working with the mesh, we'll sometimes need to cut it in order to achieve perfection in the layout – but in ways that can compromise the waterproofing membrane we've previously applied. Second, depending how the mesh is attached, we can run into problems where the mesh adhesive creates spots where the tile won't adhere to the thinset.

In this case, the tile was beautiful, but the glue on the mesh had been so badly applied that it created a series of little bumps we had to sand down before applying the tile. This was an unanticipated extra step that added a tremendous amount of time to the installation, but the results are quite gorgeous – and nobody knew about the hassles but us.



Here's a case where, as a subcontractor, you do what you have to do to get the job done right. In this instance, the imported stone tile had a mesh backing that had been applied with irregular blobs of adhesive. We had to grind off the peaks to make it work – and the result looks beautiful without reflecting the extra effort it took.

Desert Dazzle

For this project in Palm Desert, Calif. – one that, overall, won Guy Dreier Designs of Palm Desert the *Robb Report* “Ultimate Home 2009” award – we were recommended as installers by Roger Gariano of Vita Nova Enterprises (Pacoima, Calif.), which supplied us with Bisazza’s Vetricolor 20.64 mosaic glass tile for the purpose.

In all, we covered more than 25,000 square feet of surface area within the three-vessel main pool, the master-suite pool, the cascading falls and all of the surrounding water surfaces. It’s among the most beautiful and amazing of all watershaping projects I’ve seen on the residential level: The center vessel *alone* is more than 200 feet long and features multiple water-in-transit edges that had to be exactly level.

To make installation possible in the desert heat, we required the pool builder (Site Development Studios, Costa Mesa, Calif.) to install an air-conditioned structure over and around the entire pool area. It was the perfect solution, allowing our crews to work all day long in an 80-degree space sheltered from the 120-degree desert heat. This enclosure enabled us to conduct the installation process within the manufacturer-specified temperature range and also helped us manage setting times without any hitches.



This was an extraordinary project in an amazing setting, but the work had to be done in the desert’s summer heat. The builder set us up in an air-conditioned tent that kept the working temperature down to about 80 degrees – a good range for the materials we were using and all of the detail work we had to do with the pools’ wonderful, sweeping curves.



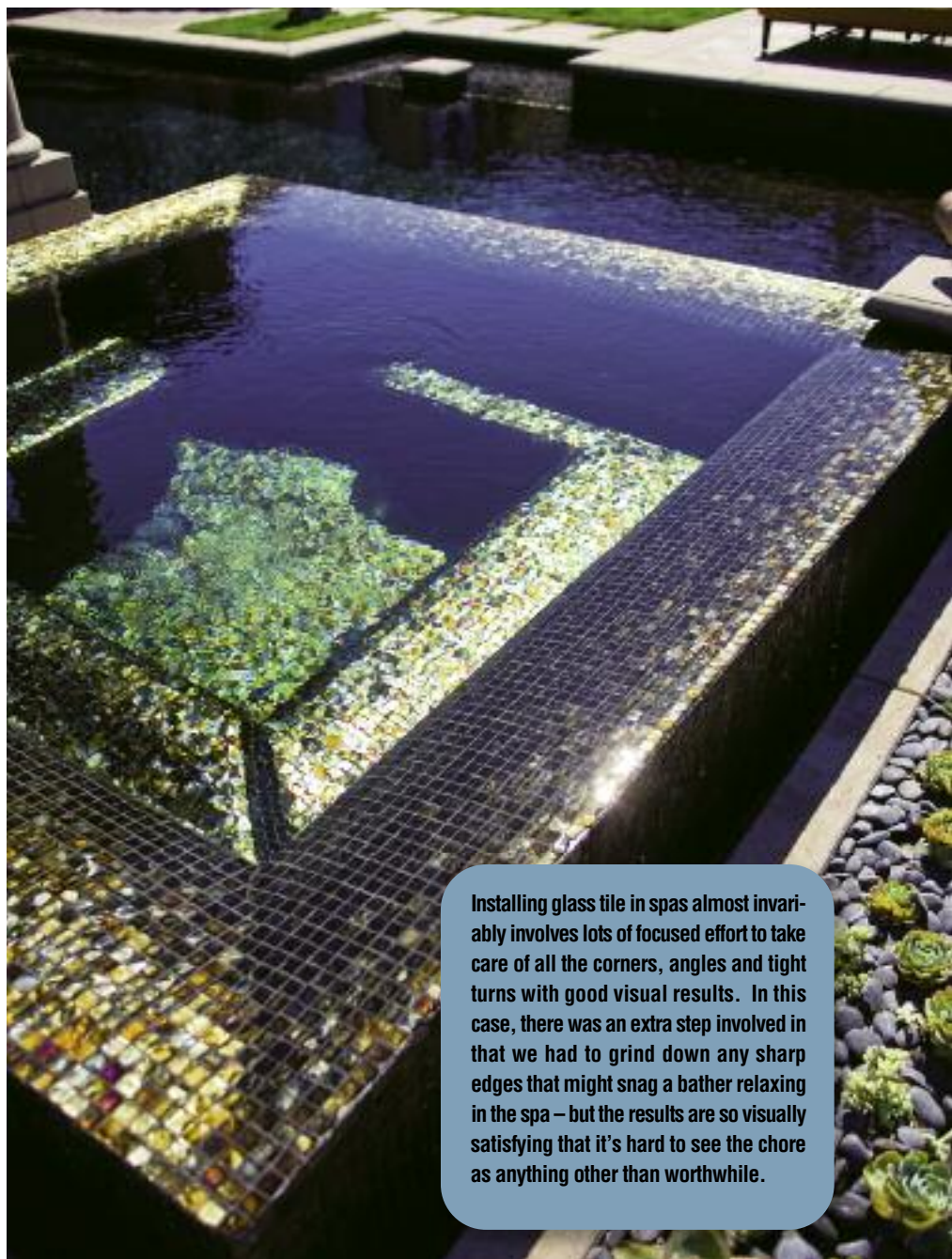
Spa Comfort

This all-tile spa offers a fine example of how glass tile can create truly stunning, intricate visual displays. The homeowners had requested a spa that they could use for regular relaxation, so we designed and sculpted large, soft radii for the headrest, back, seat and knee areas.

The pool and spa were designed and built by Harper Pools & Landscape of Chatsworth, Calif. The tile we chose here is Tessera Bronze from Oceanside Glass Tile, giving this project wonderfully rich, deep color reflections and visual textures. Although the Tessera material has sometimes been subject to criticism because of subtle inconsistencies in individual pieces, as I see it, these idiosyncrasies are what make the material so unique.

To cope with the slightly irregular shapes and uneven edges of the Tessera line, we've developed a patient process that enables us to install this beautiful material perfectly, smoothly and safely: For edges of benches, steps and dam walls, all we do is give the tile a very light sanding with special glass sandpaper, just to be certain that everything is smooth to the touch.

As we see it, this is just another minor installation issue for qualified, knowledgeable installers: Being aware of the material and its characteristics, we've built a step into the process as a means of assuring our clients that we'll leave them with a trouble-free finish.



Installing glass tile in spas almost invariably involves lots of focused effort to take care of all the corners, angles and tight turns with good visual results. In this case, there was an extra step involved in that we had to grind down any sharp edges that might snag a bather relaxing in the spa – but the results are so visually satisfying that it's hard to see the chore as anything other than worthwhile.

Photo by Bradley Girard, Mission Viejo, Calif.



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always need (and want) to sculpt the pool or spa with our float to our own specifications and to the exact dimensions and level of detail needed to perform a flawless tile installation. As a result, we often make up variations of an inch or more and focus particular attention on corners, wall-to-floor transitions, steps and benches. This part of any all-tile job is absolutely critical.

In particular, we're maniacal about vanishing-edge and other water-in-transit details: We know that it's the tile installer who is responsible for making sure these critical edge details are exactly level with no tolerance whatsoever for variations. In our case, we use both laser and water levels to make certain the edges are absolutely perfect – and we don't stop until we're certain we've hit the mark.

One of the great advantages we've found in being involved early in the design process is that we can include consideration of the need for precision from the ground up. If we can help in specifying even simple details such as steps and benches, for example, we can set things up in such a way that clean lines

with zero to minimal necessary cuts in tile are the rule, thereby reducing installation time and cost while eliminating visual inconsistencies that can stand out so sharply in all-tile installations.

Even when everything goes well in all of the steps leading up to actual tile installation, we know that the work itself is strenuous and very hard on eyes that get tired along with the rest of our bodies. But we're accustomed to the job's rigors and have a practiced ability to stay focused and consistent in the way we proceed.

The reward comes not only from getting paid a fair wage for hard, precise work, but also from the thrill of seeing results that are often described as a property's "crown jewel." The completion of our work on these rare gems has the wonderful effect of getting us excited about moving on to other projects and performing this magic all over again.

Our goal? To exceed client expectations in such a way that, at the completion of every project, we know we've been instrumental in creating an object of beauty that will last several lifetimes.

Contoured Elegance

This project offers a prime example of how a tile specialist can step in and assist with key design decisions.

Before I came aboard, this large remodeling project was in the hands of a well-known interior designer (Johnna McHugh, Los Angeles) and a very detail-oriented homeowner. When I joined them, I broke through a significant impasse by making a number of suggestions about revising the pool's interior, including the reshaping of the shallow-end steps, the addition of new benches running the full length of the vessel on either side, raising the floor in the deep end, squaring up of the transitions between the floor and the walls and, most important, creating a vanishing-edge spa in place of the standard coping atop the original design. Through it all, the designer and I worked seamlessly – and the results speak for themselves.

The builder in this case was Water FX Unlimited (Thousand Oaks, Calif.) The tile came from Bisazza's line of designer mosaics – a pattern called Domasco Opale – and brings elegant graphic relief to the rectangular watershape and its raised walls.

Installation Materials

When you work with quality tile products, it's also crucial to work with quality *installation* products, from waterproofing agents and floats to thinsets and grouts. There are several reliable suppliers of these materials, but through the years I've come to rely almost exclusively on the broad line of products offered by Laticrete International (Bethany, Conn.).

We're convinced by the experience we've had through the years that there's value in working with tile-related products that have been formulated to work together seamlessly. If, for example, we were to use a float from one company and a thinset from another and waterproofing from yet another, we'd have to worry about product compatibility and possible bond failures. And in the event of failure, we'd have no way to tell which material had failed.

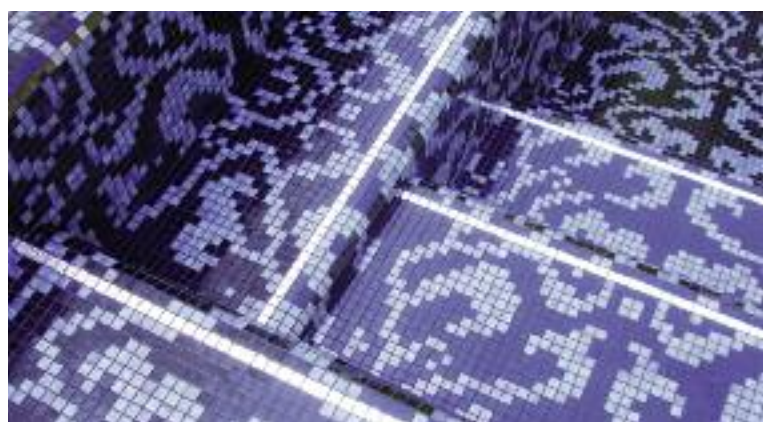
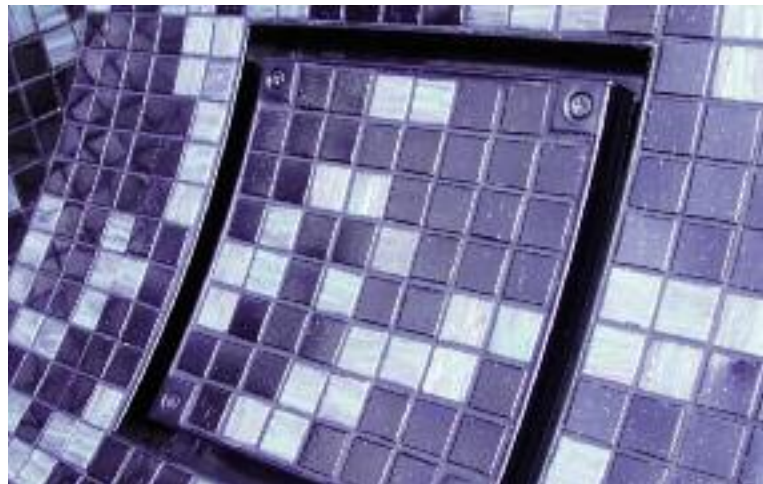
This is one of the reasons why we conscientiously stick with one company's products, confident that they've been designed to work together and knowing from years of practical experience what we can expect in a whole range of applications. In my mind, this is an important key to reducing the pile of variables that can have an effect on the work we do – and guides us to desirable outcomes.

Bottom line: No matter whose products you use, be informed before you use them, make sure they're compatible and pay attention to how they perform after the fact: Your long-term success depends on it!


– J.R.

Photo by Jim McHugh, Los Angeles





We played an usually strong role in this remodeling project, reshaping an old, simple pool to make it ready for a wonderfully intricate mosaic-tile finish. Surface preparation was the key: The dimensions had to be just right so the pattern would lay out with no obvious visual disconnects and the whole composition would become a tapestry to delight the eye, day or night.



Solid Solutions

As part of their work in crafting custom pools for high-end clients in the Washington, D.C., area, Bill Bennett and Walter Williams are often called on to find creative solutions to substantial design challenges. For two recent indoor projects, for example, both clients wanted to be able to transform their indoor pool areas into dry spaces suitable for large gatherings – but they wanted to do it without resorting to either automatic solid covers or moveable floors.

By William Bennett & Walter Williams



It was quite a coincidence: Within the span of just a few weeks, we at Alpine Pool & Design (Annandale, Va.) became involved in not one, but two highly unusual projects that offered us the exact same challenge.

Both were indoor swimming pools for well-to-do clients living in the vicinity of our nation's capital. Both were rectangles, with each one situated beautifully within magnificent surroundings. Finally, both enabled us to work with our good friend and long-time professional associate Kevin Ruddy of Omega Pool Structures (Toms River, N.J.)

Ruddy is something of a guru when it comes to indoor pools, and as builders as well as designers we appreciate the care and detail he puts into his drawings, plans and construction documents. From experience, we know that he's a fantastic working partner and as creative as they come when it comes to addressing the unique needs of indoor watershapes.

For the first of these two projects, Ruddy designed the pool and acted as a consultant in specifying the heating/ventilation/air conditioning system as well as the dehumidification system (manufactured by PoolPak Technologies Corp., York, Pa.); for the second, we designed the pool and retained Ruddy as a consultant in a variety of technical areas. For both, our own company was contracted to take care of pool construction.

Precious Spaces

Indoor pool projects are seldom easy. Invariably, they require greater-than-usual levels of coordination with other trades engaged in building the structures that contain the pool area. And in both these cases, the pools were part of grand-scale renovations where much more was going on beyond simple addition of enclosed, rectangular watershapes.

In appearance, the first one included a few deluxe frills, including deck-level laminar jets and a spectacular lighting system; for its part, the second was reasonably straightforward compared to the usual run of our projects.

The unusual touch that both projects had in common – and the reason we're telling this story – is that the owners both wanted to be able to use their pool areas to host large social functions, meaning they both wanted us to find a way to transform the pools' surfaces into open, solid floor space.

Such requests are not terribly strange, but in both of these cases neither client wanted to undertake the expense or deal with the technical complexities of a moveable floor system or any sort of hard, retractable decking.

The former point wasn't one we could argue, as even a wealthy person would blanch at the cost (which is perhaps why these systems are found almost exclusively in commercial facilities). Nor could we dispute the amount of engineering and the high-stakes installation that go along with these sorts of pool-covering systems. In addition, this was something the clients said they'd need only a couple times each year at most – a level of use that simply didn't warrant exorbitant expense.

As it turned out, Ruddy had the perfect

The system is manually installed and removed in a process that takes two people about half a day depending on the size of the pool. It's all pretty straightforward because of the way everything snaps together.

solution at close hand: At the time, his firm was in a working partnership with a company called Liquid Cover Systems (which now operates under the Omega Pool Structures corporate banner). The system his colleagues had developed is wonderfully simple: a network of powder-coated aluminum trusses (actually bar joists) and crossbars that form a rigid

grid that is then topped by two-by-two-foot acrylic panels.

The system is manually installed and removed in a process that, either way, takes two people about half a day depending on the size of the pool. It's all pretty straightforward because of the way everything snaps together. The resulting surface is rated to support 100



pounds per square foot and feels rock solid when you walk or stand on it.

Set in Place

In the first of the two projects, Ruddy had designed a coping treatment to support the joist system in such a way that the suspended panels would be flush with a raised surrounding deck. In the second, we worked with him to modify the edge in such a way that it met the client's specific desire for a somewhat subtler edge detail.

One key point: As is the case with most indoor pools, both of these were equipped with automatic cover systems as a means of limiting the burden on the dehumidification system. It's important to note that these covers must be fully retracted and completely out of the way to allow

for insertion of the modular solid cover.

For the first project, the pool measured 18 by 50 feet. To accommodate the system, Ruddy's design included a 14-inch wide, six-inch deep shelf in the form of the pool's coping, essentially creating a small platform all the way around the perimeter of the pool. The grid's trusses are laid on the shelf and span the width of the pool; the crossbars are placed perpendicularly to cover the pool's full length.

This was early on in Ruddy's involvement with these cover systems, and basically he inherited the wide-shelf concept from the system's original design. Without a doubt, this approach works beautifully and creates a flawlessly flush deck when installed. With the cover system removed, however, the shelf creates

an awkward sort of step down into the water – not unsightly, but rather ungainly in practical and functional terms.

For the second project, we brought Ruddy in at the design phase, in this case to work on a longer, narrower lap pool that measured 12-1/2 by 75 feet. When the client indicated his desire for a solid cover system, we visited the first project – and both the architect (Ankie Barnes, principal at Barnes Vanze Architects, Washington, D.C.) and the client let us know clearly that they wanted a different and more elegant solution to the truss-support issue.

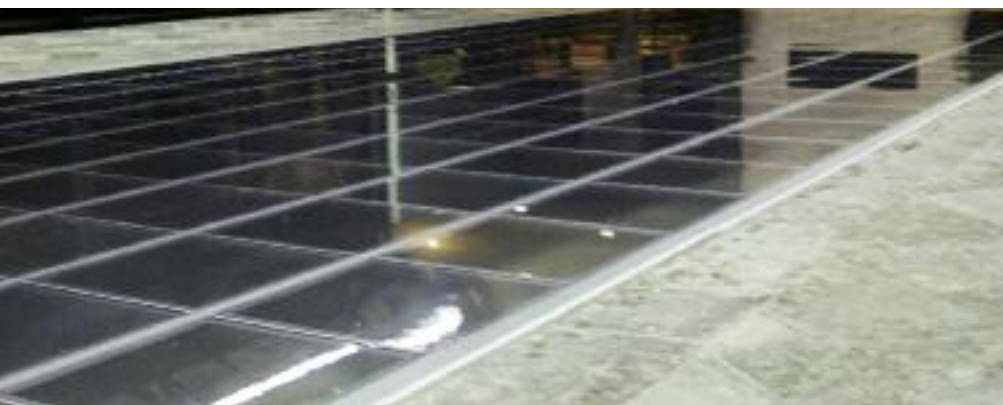
It all worked out because the narrower pool width significantly reduced the support requirements of the load-bearing trusses – meaning we could reduce the shelf width by more than half, all the way down to a reach of just six inches, *and* that we could place it right at the waterline.

As installed, the shelf extends no more than five inches beyond the coping, so it's much less visually "present" than the wider shelf of the first project.

In both cases, the aluminum system components are all powder-coated with a high-grade, chemical-resistant material chosen by the system designers to withstand basic environmental challenges – in both these cases from the corrosive influence of saltwater chlorination systems.

Careful Details

As for the covering system itself, it's so simple in concept and design that it really didn't give us any trouble in construction beyond the rather precise specifications required for the shelves. In fact, the only special requirement for the system was that we had to place the skimmers in such a way that they would not be locat-



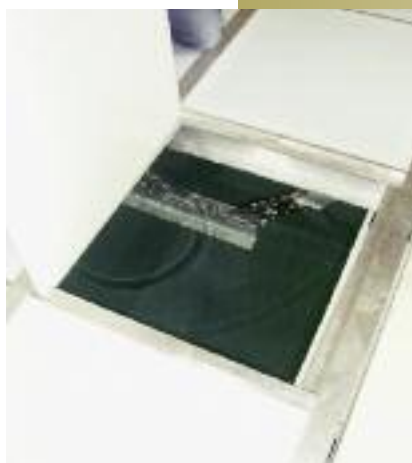
We worked with the system's original design specifications for this project, building a step-down shelf to accommodate the required framework. In this case, the client opted for clear panels, making anyone in the room aware of the fact that the platform was suspended over water.

ed at any truss-bearing point.

Clearly, keeping everything level and flush required precision in execution, but this was certainly no more difficult than adhering to the sorts of tolerances we encounter with vanishing-edge and perimeter-overflow systems. As it is, the deck system's panels fit neatly into place with no significant gaps around the pool's perimeter. And this was true for the first pool even though we had to do some notching of the trusses to accommodate the in-pool spa's dam wall.

One of the nice things about this system is that the client can choose among different forms of panels for specific aesthetic effects. In the first project, the client chose clear panels to achieve a sort of walking-on-water effect. In the second, by contrast, the homeowner selected a frosted, semi-translucent finish that blends nicely with the pale stone decking.

This was indeed an unusual pair of projects, and to have them both come up in such a narrow time frame was quite a coincidence. With Kevin Ruddy's help, we took both in stride – and learned a few tricks that will keep us a few steps ahead the next time a client wants a pool space to double as a banquet hall.



The network of supporting trusses installs with relative ease and is rated to carry 100 pounds per square foot, making it more than adequate for foot traffic, tables, chairs and even large gatherings – whatever the homeowner desires.

On the Way

In the time since we finished the projects described in the accompanying text, Kevin Ruddy of Omega Pool Structures (Toms River, N.J.) has told us that his firm is currently developing a new version of the modular pool-covering system suitable for use with existing pools.

In this case, rather than resting on a shelf, the trusses can be telescoped to fit various pool widths and are supported by the coping and bond beam. Although this involves a slight change in elevation relative to the surrounding deck, it's an interesting possibility for clients who occasionally want the option of using the surfaces of their watershapes for other than aquatic purposes.

– W.B & W.W



The narrower profile of this pool made it possible to alter the edge detail and in this instance set up the supporting shelf with a thinner profile. We were also able to place it at the waterline so that it visually disappears when the pool is open.

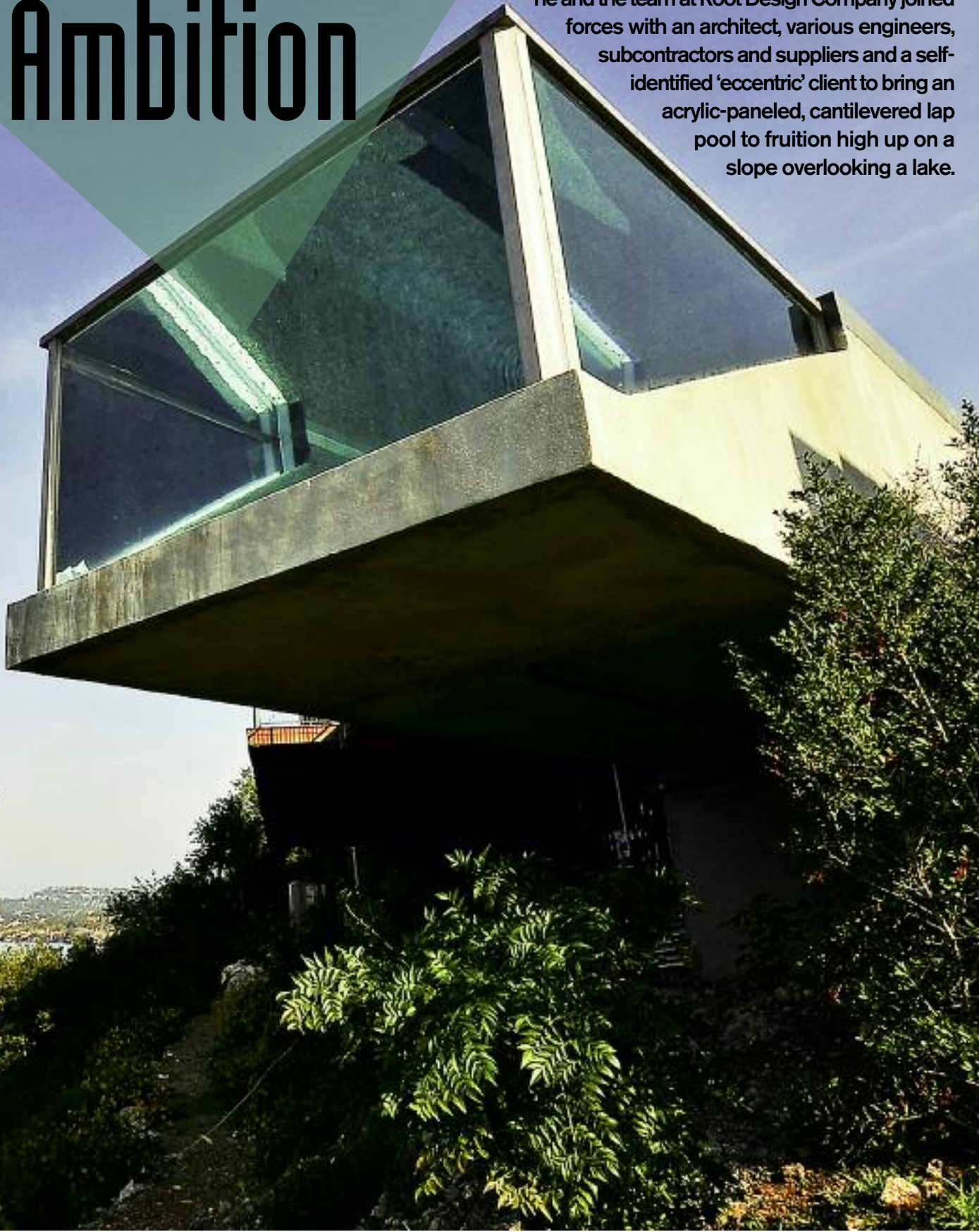


The client in this case went for opaque flooring panels, giving the long, narrow, colonnaded space an elegant look – the perfect setting for social gatherings of all kinds on occasions when the pool is not to be part of the fun.

Transparent Ambition

Ben Dozier takes pride in his company's ability to work with all the details of complex and unusual design programs.

A case in point is the project described here, in which he and the team at Root Design Company joined forces with an architect, various engineers, subcontractors and suppliers and a self-identified 'eccentric' client to bring an acrylic-paneled, cantilevered lap pool to fruition high up on a slope overlooking a lake.





By Ben Dozier

Any

number of the projects we've worked on through the years have given us at Root Design Company (Austin, Texas) the sense of pride and satisfaction that comes with doing the big jobs well. Only a handful, however, rise to another level and foster a sense of accomplishment, thereby making what we do both fun and entirely special.

The project covered here is one of those amazing exceptions. It came to us through the architect, Arthur Andersson of Andersson-Wise Architects (also based in Austin), which is well known locally for its daring contemporary homes and commercial structures. In this case, the architect had suspended a modern home on a steep slope overlooking Lake Austin. It had a distinctly bare-bones, utilitarian look about it, distinguished mainly by an unusual, inverted-butterfly roofline.

His ideas about the swimming pool were ambitious, to say the least. The drawings called for an elevated, cantilevered lap pool constructed *entirely* of clear panels – a bold statement that would simultaneously harmonize with

the stark simplicity of the house itself.

The slope on which this was to happen was quite severe, meaning the home itself is half suspended over the hillside with the other half mounted on piles. The result would be breathtaking, and we could see how a glass-panel pool made aesthetic sense.

It also fit perfectly with the homeowner's desire for a stripped-down, hyper-simplified approach to materials and appointments: A self-confessed eccentric, he was all about editing things down to their basic functions, and he would hear nothing of fancy tile or expensive finishes. All he wanted were the basic elements you might find in a home of far lesser ambition – and visually speaking, the panels were a perfectly austere fit.

Stripped Down

As we soon discovered, the no-bells-or-whistles approach wasn't about keeping costs down (although that was part of it), but more that he wanted to keep things simple.

Of course, this sort of approach isn't typical for us. When we get involved

with clients on this level, in fact, there's a process of inclusion in the early design work – free-flowing ideas with lots of additive elements considered along the way and edited out or refined as the design takes shape. Here, however, it was a matter of starting from the most basic possible level and then doing as little as we could to interrupt the starkness.

And it wasn't just the pool or the exteriors: The client was single-minded about the interiors as well and rejected any forms of ornamentation, any fancy details or finishes or lighting that went beyond the most basic and functional. The kitchen, for instance, features plain counters, cabinets and appliances – no intricate backsplashes, no flourishes with hardware, nothing that made any sort of statement at all.

He was, however, truly intrigued by the all-glass-panel pool concept, which ironically would have been among the most extravagant of all possible statements the project might have made. Checking on feasibility, we approached Reynolds Polymer Technology, an acrylic-panel supplier based in Grand Junction, Colo.,

to run through some technical details and get a basic price for the materials that would be involved.

The number that came back was not a surprise, but it caused the homeowner to dial things back and consider his alternatives. This is where we began our direct participation in the design process and began drawing up a variety of suggestions for how to handle an 83-foot-long, ten-foot-wide lap pool with 60 feet carried on the slope and another 23-plus feet cantilevered over it.

As the work progressed, the client agreed to augment the basic watershape with a shallow, triangle-shaped shelf reaching from the pool to a band of decking that surrounded the house. The triangle's legs are 24 feet long, with a 36-foot-long hypotenuse. In all, the surface area is 1,100 square feet, with the 10-inch deep shelf providing dramatic reflections of the house as well as easy access to the water from the back of the house.

Perhaps most significant, the client also agreed to preserve a portion of the transparent-wall program in the form of acrylic panels that were to stand at the very end of the pool. Not only was this a dramatic touch for the structure, but it also did a nice job of tying the end of the cantilevered pool into the lake views beyond. In addition, the side panels were to be triangles and would complete a set of three-sided forms that now starts with the slope, moves up to the pool end, carries on with the triangular pool entry and concludes with the butterfly-wing-inspired roofline.

Engineering Feat

Once we settled on a basic design scheme, we went to work on the practicalities in conjunction with Architectural Engineers Collaborative (Austin), the firm that had taken care of the civil and structural engineering associated with the house. After reviewing our ideas in light of extensive soils and geological reports, its engineering staff did a masterful job of devising structural interfaces between the home's foundation and the pool's structure, fully integrating the latter with the former.

Following the engineers' recommendations to the letter, we installed the fric-



The support structure for the deck lent some perspective to our initial work on the pool: Ultimately, using as much of the slope as we had available – along with an impressive scaffold system – we brought the pool up to deck level and pushed its cantilevered end to a point 23 feet beyond any ground support.

tion piles that now support both the shallow shelf and the cantilever. These extend about 30 feet down to competent, load-bearing material and support a huge I-beam rib that extends from the home's foundation and runs below the first 60 feet of the pool's base. This massive bond beam includes a "box" of epoxy-coated #8 rebar and supports a pool shell made with a grid of #8 rebar along with double mats of #5 and #6 rebar.

Our construction was as precise as the engineering. Indeed, we approached the project with a zero-tolerance mindset, making everything perfect with respect to level, steel placement, wall thickness, finish dimensions – every conceivable measurement: Absolutely *everything* was built per the engineering plans to the most exacting standards possible – a level of quality attributable in large measure to the daily role our project manager (and business partner) Duke Cowden played on site for more than a year.

We paid particular attention to the steel, making certain, for example, that there would be no possibility of vibration during shotcrete application. In fact, we had to redesign some portions of the

structure and add more steel to reach the level of rigidity we thought necessary for such a critical application.

This degree of care in construction is in no way unusual for us, but even so, we were fully aware that we were building a steel, concrete and glass structure that would hold tons of water out over the slope. As a result, we knew every square inch of the structure in intimate detail and never blinked or sneezed unless the plans called for it. We also recognized that we needed objective advice in some procedural issues – a need generously filled by Skip Phillips of Questar Pools (Escondido, Calif.).

The forming, of course, was quite as critical as the steel. To access the cantilevered portion of the pool, we had to construct an elaborate scaffolding system to support a large platform beneath the pool. We then brought in a local forming contractor who specializes in steel-plate forming of the sort used on high-rise structures.

Once everything was ready, we applied shotcrete and finished it with a skim coat to replicate the clean appearance we might have achieved with a





As might be expected, there's a good amount of steel in the shell, with everything engineered to handle any deflection that might be caused by the weight of the cantilever and the water the vessel would eventually contain. The shoot went off without a hitch, and stripping away the forms gave us a full appreciation of the dramatic scope and scale of what we'd undertaken.



Following the supplier's instructions to the letter, we carefully prepared the slots in the shell to receive the acrylic panels, craning them all into place before installing the assembly's stainless steel frame.



poured-in-place approach.

With so much of the work exposed to view, we were keenly concerned about the possibility of leaks. This led us to use a surface-applied, penetrating water-proofing agent from Aquaron Aquatics (Rockwall, Texas) on the entire shell and to apply a special topical sealer around any penetrations.

Keep It Simple

We were all keyed up as we filled the pool, knowing this was literally the acid test for all the hard work we'd completed to that point.

Obviously, we were confident in the structure and its engineering, but we also were focused on the weight of the water

Acrylic Structure

One of the trickier aspects of the project described in the accompanying text involved the engineering and installation of the acrylic panels at the end of the pool's cantilevered section.

Originally, we wanted the panels to be chemically welded together to create a monolithic appearance, thus avoiding the need for any obvious support structure. While that would have been a great look – and a nice gesture to the architect's original all-glass design – the cost of the chemical welding was prohibitive and we opted for a steel framework instead.

Preparing the way for this clear extension, we notched the concrete to accept the acrylic panels and a system of stainless steel plates and mullions that were to hold them in place. Once everything was in position, we sealed all the joints with a special adhesive system specified by Reynolds Polymer Technology (Grand Junction, Colo.), which was extremely helpful in working with us to make inclusion of this detail possible.

– B.D. & Duke Cowden

and the extent to which it might cause the structure to deflect off the level along the 23-foot length of the exposed structure. We also watched the acrylic panels with interest, looking forward to seeing them withstand the weight of the water without any shifting.

Actually, we watched *everything* as the water flowed into the pool – and were relieved to find that absolutely everything on the project performed as planned, a complete success.

For all of the project's engineering intricacies, however, the watershape itself is fully in keeping with the austere philosophy that guided everyone's design work. In many ways, in fact, the pool it-

self is quite unremarkable – minimal penetrations (floor penetrations for six returns and two drains along with wall penetrations for two skimmers and three lights), 12-inch-square Bluestone tiles at the waterline and a blue Pebblesheen interior (Pebble Technology, Scottsdale, Ariz.).

There's also a small spa hidden to the point of invisibility in a corner of the shelf space – not surprisingly with a minimal number of jets. The equipment set – featuring pumps, a diatomaceous-earth filter and a high-efficiency gas heater from Pentair Water Pool & Spa, Sanford, N.C. – is similarly hidden away in a space beneath the cantilevered por-

tion of the house.

Through the entire process, we enjoyed the incredible level of cooperation among all the members of the design team, from the architects and engineers straight through to the subcontractors and suppliers. We were all keenly aware that success of the entire project depended on the success of each project element, and it made for frequent, productive communications and seamless mutual support.

The result speaks for itself: It's a wonderfully unusual swimming pool built to perfection – no bells or whistles, perhaps, but a proud statement just the same.

A Hardwood Alternative

The decking around the pool is made with a Brazilian hardwood known as Massaranduba – a material quite similar to Ipé in its density, strength and appearance.

This was chosen because of the homeowner's concern for the environment. As we understand it, Ipé is a flowering tree that supports a variety of bird and insect species. Although it has commonly been used in construction projects for several years now, there's concern that overharvesting will have dramatically adverse effects on the ecosystem.

By contrast, we gather that the Massaranduba tree is not a flowering species and is therefore not the subject of such a high level of environmental concern. And using it for this project represented no aesthetic sacrifice: As installed, it has a dark, rich appearance that harmonizes with the wood siding used on the house itself.

– B.D.





The watershape fits perfectly into its space alongside a modern yet refreshingly simple home. From this perspective, Lake Austin never looked so good – and now both bodies of water reflect the sky while flowing together visually.



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In the Spotlight

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Ground Sprays



WATERPLAY SOLUTIONS CORP. (Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada) has added eight new ground sprays to their product line, each of which can be interchanged with the others to bring ongoing variety to play pads. The line includes some sprays that reach high instead of wide and others that reach wide rather than high – and there's one in which the water stream is illuminated in four colors.

Glass Aggregate



AMERICAN SPECIALTY GLASS (Salt Lake City, UT) offers recycled-glass aggregates for use in decorative-concrete countertops for outdoor kitchens and entertainment spaces. Designed to bring color, variety and depth to anything from a small detail to a full-sized slab, the terrazzo-style glass used in these applications comes in a wide variety of colors and sizes – and sample kits are available.

Air Diffusers



OTTERBINE BAREBO (Emmaus, PA) has expanded its Air Flo 2 product line by releasing two-dome and one-dome diffuser manifold options to accompany the original four-dome option. All allow for efficient air diffusion and maximum oxygen transfer in the full range of ponds, from large or small to shallow or deep. The units are corrosion-resistant and come with self-cleaning domes or traditional air stones.

Diving Board/Waterfall



INTER-FAB (Tucson, AZ) has introduced Duro-Beam Aquaboard, a unique accessory that is both a diving board as well as a lighted, spill-way/waterfall that can be installed with the board or later, at the client's option. The units come in a variety of colors, including tan, gray and black as well as the more traditional blue and white, and are all finished to match the latest in deck treatments and backyard décor.

Continued on page 56

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Landscape Loader



BOBCAT (West Fargo, ND) has introduced the A770 all-wheel-steer/skid-steer loader for greater versatility under a range of working conditions. Designed for use by landscape contractors and retaining-wall installers, the unit has a vertical lift path and a 3,325-pound operating capacity while meeting the needs of those who require maneuverability, low ground disturbance, reduced tire wear and faster travel speed.

Rainwater Capture



ATLANTIC WATER GARDENS (Mantua, OH) has introduced the Clean Rain Ultra Downspout Diverter, an all-in-one rainwater filtration and collection system that gathers water from downspouts and then cleans and filters it for use in ponds, streams, gardens and even pools and spas. Multiple screening steps deflect leaves, debris and insects after a first-flush system disposes of the initial flow off the roof.

Anti-Slip Finish



DECK-O-SEAL (Hampshire, IL) offers Deck-O-Grip W/B, a non-yellowing, water-based, blended, high-solids, liquid polymeric sealer for decorative concrete. The product is clear, transparent, chemical-resistant and applies easily to form a hard (yet flexible) film. It also includes a slip-resistance additive that makes it ideal for use in the residential decorative concrete market in applications around pools and spas.

LED Fountain Lights



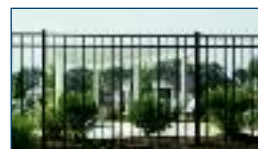
PEM FOUNTAIN CO. (Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada) has teamed with Unmei to introduce a range of new LED lights available in 12VAC and 24VDC. They are designed so that, with only two wires, you can select a single color or an RGB version that will change colors automatically. There are also DMX versions with four- and six-wire connections for easier programming and reduced installation time.

Tiered Fountains



KENNETH LYNCH & SONS (Oxford, CT) offers the model 947, a multi-tiered, flexible-height, bowl-and-pedestal fountain. Made of rugged, frost-proof cast stone, the unit's bowls come in five diameters ranging from 18 to 84 inches, while the pedestals come in five heights ranging from nine to 36 inches. Easy to assemble in the field, the unit features a metal armature through which the water recirculates.

Aluminum Fencing



DELAIR GROUP (Delair, NJ) offers Delgard Premium Aluminum Fencing. Extruded using 50-percent recycled aluminum, the products come in five styles as well as the pool-code-compliant Guardian line. The strong, rust-proof pickets are one-by-five-eighths inches and are provided, ready to install, in six-foot sections. Matching gates are available in straight, arched and double-drive configurations.

Commercial Heaters



HAYWARD COMMERCIAL POOL PRODUCTS (Elizabeth, NJ) has introduced the Universal H-Series of gas heaters. Designed for application with new projects or in renovations, the compact units combine refined hydraulics, high performance, energy efficiency and reliability, all with low NOx emissions. They come in 250,000 and 400,000 Btu models and will work with either natural gas or propane.

Composite Decking



FIBERON (New London, NC) has introduced Pro-Tect Decking, a high-performance composition decking and railing system available at an affordable price. Grooved for fastener-free installation and designed for stain-, scratch- and fade-resistance, the richly grained material also resists mold and mildew, requires no staining or painting and comes in two colors: Canyon Brown and Harbor Gray.

Debris Drain



PARAMOUNT POOL & SPA SYSTEMS (Chandler, AZ) offers the MDX-R3 VGB Compliant Debris Drain. Designed for safety and debris removal, the unit eliminates debris that is delivered to it and offers several layers of anti-entrapment protection. It is available for use with concrete, vinyl and fiberglass pools and has a flow rate of 132 gallons per minute at a velocity of 1.294 feet per second.

Green-Roof System



HENRY CO. (El Segundo, Calif.) has published a brochure on its Vegetative Roof Assembly. Highlighting the use of time-tested, highly reliable 790-11 hot rubberized asphalt roofing membranes, the piece also discusses the environmental sustainability and economic benefits of installing these systems and covers accessories, systems and plants available to designers who need to organize and install these spaces.

Strapless Pool Cover



PEN FABRICATORS (Emigsville, PA) has introduced a pool safety cover that does not use straps along either the length or width of the pool. This solid cover can be made to fit even the most freeform of pools and has no stitching; instead it is made using lightweight, reinforced vinyl materials with a clear, attractive appearance – no more worrying about making sure all the straps are straight around the pool.

Waterfeature Brochure



HARMONIC ENVIRONMENTS (Juno Beach, FL) has published a brochure on its Bellaqua Series. Defining a streamlined approach to enhancing any space with the magic of falling water, the literature defines the company's ability to customize the finishing of its water walls to any space or need. It also discusses technical details – hydraulics, lighting, water treatment and more – and offers information on sizing.

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Book Notes

Overcoming Fear

By Mike Farley

I was recently rummaging through my local bookstore, searching for the next pearl to unveil in this space, when I came across a book that stopped me in my tracks just because of its title: *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*.

This slim, 122-page volume, written by David Bayles and Ted Orland (Capra Print Editions, 1993), is so provocative and insightful that I think I could fill a year's worth of columns with my observations of how what they say ties into what we do as watershapers.

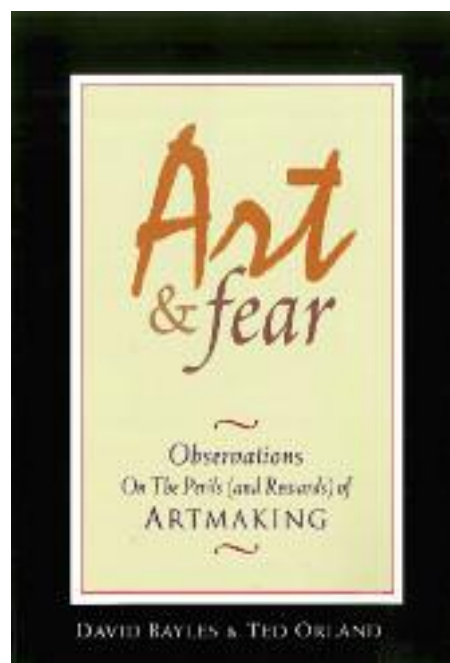
Keeping it brief, however, let's begin by assuming that what watershapers do is an art form and therefore that we are artists – or are, at the very least, striving to *become* artists. In that sense, we share in challenges that are not so different from those faced by painters, photographers, musicians, dancers, writers, sculptors and practitioners of just about any other creative endeavor you might mention.

According to Bayles and Orland, the root, common issue that confronts everyone involved in creative pursuits has to do with overcoming fear. Indeed, their discussion spins off the simple observation that the toughest part of making *any* kind of art is getting started, and the reason for this difficulty is primarily the artist's fear of failure.

To illustrate this point, the authors relate the story of a university-level ceramics instructor who conducted an experiment in which he told half his class that they would be graded strictly on the volume of their output and the other half that they would be graded on only a single project. The result? Many of those being graded on one project turned in nothing at all or incomplete work – with lots of obvious false starts included. By contrast, those working in volume turned in great profusions of work, and almost all of it was superior to the output of those who'd focused on just one object.

The idea here is that by removing the fear of failure for the multi-project students, the instructor had unleashed their creativity. By contrast, the other students for whom singular achievement was the goal were doomed to failure because perfection or even an approximation of it is elusive under so much pressure. The big point, say the authors, is that creativity requires one to engage in the creative process over and over again, facing different variables and scenarios and, along the way, developing skills and problem-solving techniques. That, note Bayles and Orland, is how art and artists develop.

They go on to say that most would-be artists never make



the grade, and it's not because they lack talent but is instead because they stop trying. In many cases, in fact, those with the greatest aptitude, those who have an easier time getting started, are often the ones who pull up short when they encounter the first waves of resistance. By contrast, those who keep at it are the ones who eventually find success.

Turning to watershaping, we're often told that to do volume work is not to do *creative* work. Weighing what I glean from this book, I would say that's true when you deal exclusively with cookie-cutter projects and simply do the same thing over and over again. But now I'm left to wonder how anyone truly improves by pursuing only a small number of projects: Where the person using the same template time and time again might be driven by fear of trying anything new, the one who mulls over a single design for months on end opens himself or herself to creative paralysis resulting from fear of imperfection.

As I see it, the bottom line is that we all need to strike a balance, doing work steadily enough to force us to hone our skills, while at the same time making certain it offers a variety of challenges that further polish what we do. On one hand, as the authors say, you need to avoid getting lost in a fantasy land where everything must be a work of pure imagination; on the other, you also need to avoid being an order taker who operates without creative outlets.

Both extremes can lead to fear-based failure, say Bayles and Orland, while success requires they we free ourselves from the shackles of fear and do what best suits our creative personalities. Sounds attainable to me. [WS](#)

Mike Farley is a landscape designer 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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