

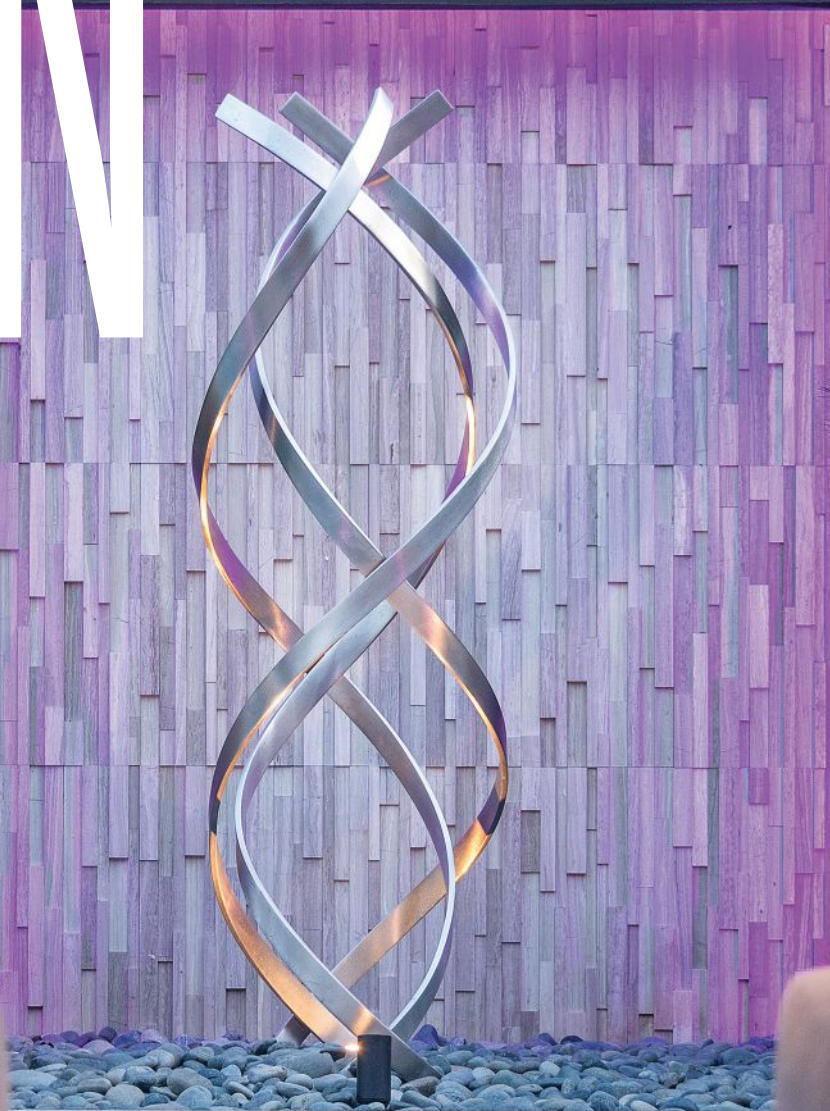
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ABOVE LEFT: DAVE SETTLEMYER  
ABOVE RIGHT: VANCE GILLETTE

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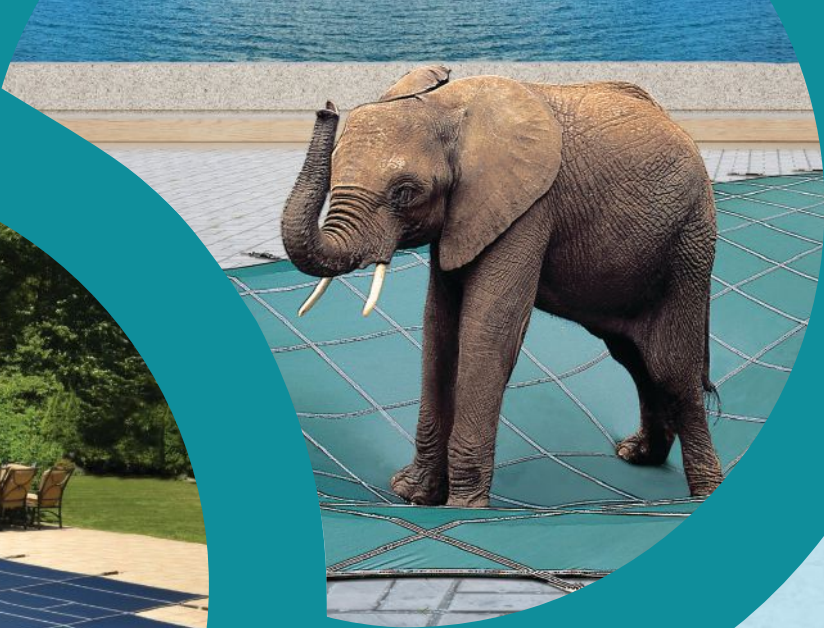
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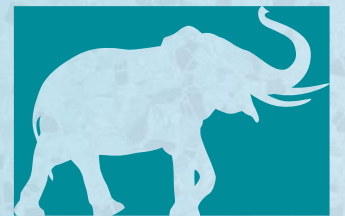
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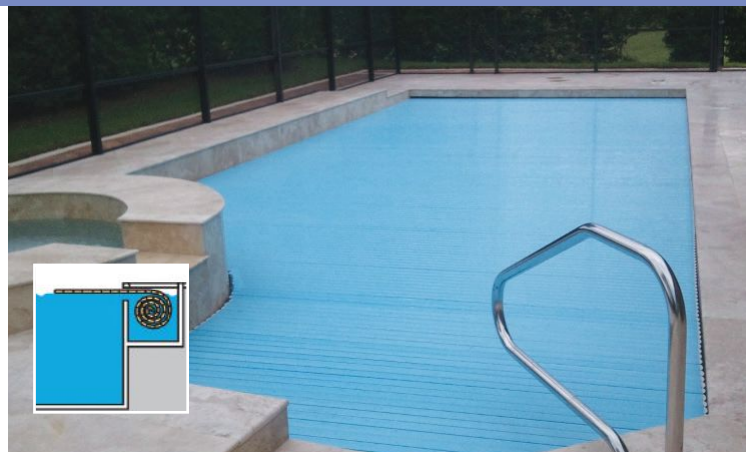
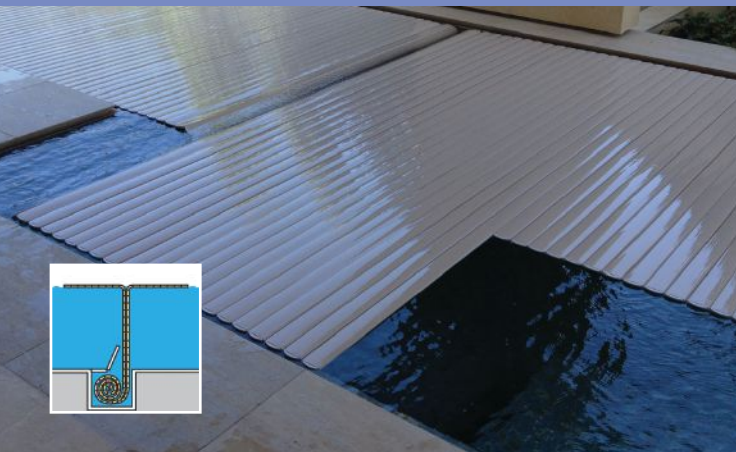


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# A Lesson from Mother Nature's Pool



**Joanne McClain**  
Editor-in-Chief, PSN

**Recently, I found myself** in Austin, Texas with an afternoon to myself, so I set off to see Barton Springs Municipal Pool. It's a large, natural, spring-water-fed pool that's been cooling off Austinites for decades, and the 100-degree temperatures made this decision a no-brainer.

I arrive, and oh, how charming, how lovely and idyllic a setting it is! Shady trees dot both sides of the wide, 3-acre pool, and the refreshing 68-degree water offers bathers a blissful respite from the heat. It's a joy to watch families gathered in and around the water, spending their lazy summer Sunday making lifelong memories. Lifeguard stands are stationed judiciously along the sides, with attentive guards scanning the water to ensure everyone is safe.

I walk the length of the long pool, eagerly looking for a spot to settle into the water. I relish the thought of cooling off. As I look into the water, though, I suddenly realize that a "natural" pool also means natural *things* in the water. Carpets of bright green algae float on the surface, dark slimy moss coat the concrete floor, mysterious fields of aquatic plants sway underwater, ducks actively poop nearby, and I see scum.

I pause, undecided. I see a lifeguard supervisor walking my way, so I strike up a conversation with him and ask about the pool's history and engineering. He explains that the water continuously flows in through an underground vent, and that both ends of the pool have dams that prevent the "dirty" water from the nearby river from coming into the pool. The biggest danger comes from people over-

estimating their swimming abilities and underestimating the depth of the water, which can go as deep as 18 feet. Oh, and the pool is actually a federally protected habitat for the state's endangered salamander.

Armed with these very interesting facts, I'm determined to enjoy the water like everyone else. I muster up the courage to step into it from the zero-depth entry area. The water is shockingly and wonderfully cold! But, oh, the feel of the slippery algae under my toes and seeing debris, sediment and who knows what else clinging to me as I rise from the water is more than I can take. I scamper out after about 10 seconds.

Now some may call me a wuss for leaving so quickly — swimming in natural bodies of water, such as lakes, ponds, rivers and creeks, are the norm for many people. And natural pools continue to have a small toehold in today's market. But I'm willing to bet the vast majority of people are like me, and strongly prefer swimming in pristine, manmade pools with well balanced, clean, treated water.

In the end, I left Barton Springs Pool in a grateful mood. It gave me a renewed appreciation for our industry and all the ways in which we make pool water clean, clear, safe and accessible. It took a natural pool to show me how much I love unnatural pools!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne McClain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

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IN MEMORIAM: VANCE GILLETTE 1948-2024

# The Industry Remembers Its Image Guru

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

**Industry icon Vance Gillette** passed away Aug. 10 after battling a long illness. He was 75.

Last serving as vice president of business development for Zodiac Pool Systems before it merged with Fluidra, Gillette served the industry for 47 years before retiring in 2013.

Those not familiar with Gillette nevertheless have been influenced by him. For decades, he was the face of any company that owned the Jandy brand — first Jandy the company, then entities that acquired it, with the last being Zodiac.

But his impact reached well beyond the Big 3 manufacturer. Indeed, he largely reframed the industry's image of itself, the value it provides, and its approach to customer service and sales.

At a time when many pool professionals arguably overlooked their products' life-improving potential when approaching sales and marketing, Gillette provided good-humored talks and wrote articles that combined motivational speech with his vision for changing that.

Because most builders started as craftspeople before becoming business owners, they largely focused on the nuts and bolts of their products when selling to customers. In presentations, many would put the emphasis on construction methods, equipment, materials and individual features to show the high quality of their product. Gillette would implore them to "sell the steak, not the sizzle," to focus on the lifestyle that pools and spas promised rather than the nuts and bolts.

"He was never just about parts

and filters and motors and cleaning systems," said Lewis "Buzz" Ghiz, former owner of retailer/builder Paddock Pools and manufacturer Paramount Pool & Spa Systems, both in Scottsdale, Ariz. "He was about lifestyle. So he had such an impact on the way people presented their swimming pools."

Over the years, that approach became the industry's default. "He was saying that so early on," said Scott Frost, executive vice president of sales and service for Fluidra. "...The backyard vacation or staycation — anything about the experiential part of the pool — he started it."

Gillette cautioned the industry from letting its safety messages become too dour. And he reminded pool/spa professionals every chance he got that they deliver joy. To get the point across, he would joke that he wasn't in the pool industry but the entertainment industry, Frost remembered.

Gillette got his message across and held such influence through discipline to his message and an ability to immediately engage virtually anyone.

"He was one of those guys who you kind of fell in love with when you first met him," Ghiz said. "And he walked the walk and talked the talk."

Vance Gillette was born Nov. 2, 1948 in the San Francisco Bay area. After a challenging childhood, he entered the industry in 1966, as a teenage telemarketer selling pool cleaners for Arneson Products. He would cold-call customers over the phone, and secure appointments for a representative to visit homes and sell the new and expensive technology. He eventually was

promoted to salesperson. "He had a pitch and a way of approaching that you didn't say no to," Frost said.

In 1975, he moved to chlorine-generator manufacturer Geni-Chlor, where he served as vice president of marketing and sales. Two years later, he was hired by Jandy Pool Products Founder Andy Pansini as executive vice president of the San Francisco Bay-area controller manufacturer.

By all accounts, he quickly became the face of the company and shaped its culture. "It was Vance's culture of being so laser- and hyper-focused on the customer and being customer-centric," Ghiz said.

Gillette remained with the Jandy brand through various acquisitions, including by Teledyne Laars, Waterpik, then Zodiac Pool Systems, which has since merged with Fluidra. An interesting thing would happen after each acquisition: Jandy's culture would infuse its acquirer rather than the other way around, and Jandy executives often would take top positions with the new owner. "I would suggest that was 95% Vince Gillette," *(continued on page 12)*



Vance Gillette

# New President Takes Helm at Pool Scouts

BY REBECCA ROBLEDI

**Pool Scouts**, the Virginia Beach, Va.-based pool/spa service franchiser, has a new person at the helm.

With the departure of founding President Michael Wagner, the company has recruited David Mele to take that slot.

Mele brings 20 years of experience in business leadership, with an emphasis on digital marketing. He most recently served as president of the home search website *Homes.com*. In nearly a decade heading the company, Mele said, he saw it go from receiving approximately 6 million unique visitors per month to more than 100 million in the same time period.

His digital-marketing experience comes from his time working for a regional media company, whose services included building digital marketing programs for local businesses, as well as his time with newspaper *The Virginian Pilot*, first as digital marketing manager, then publisher.

“What I’ve really been doing for the last couple of decades is building and growing businesses, particularly through the use of digital marketing and digital media,” he said.

He expects this expertise to serve Pool Scouts franchisees well as the company helps them grow their locations.

“One of the key things that we help our franchisees with is marketing and helping them grow their business through customer acquisition and consumer outreach,” Mele explains. “And that’s one of the things that I bring a lot of experience to the table with, that I’m eager to help leverage so that we can continue to grow the customer base for Pool Scouts.”

Mele will work from Virginia Beach, where parent company Buzz Franchise Brands, is headquartered.

The company holds a presence in 18 states, with a total of 89 franchises sold among 42 franchisees. Currently, 74 of those locations are operating.

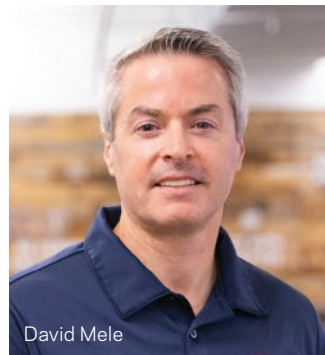
Pool Scouts plans to focus on further growth, more than likely taking place next year. It plans continued expansion in the sunbelt, particularly the South and Southwest. But it also expects to target the Northeast, where it currently just has a toe hold.

“We would really like to continue to expand in the Northeast, and

particularly the Tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut,” he said. “We have very low penetration right now. There’s a large population, a large inventory of pools, and a lot of demand for pool service. There’s plenty of untapped potential.”

In addition to growing geographically, the company continues an initiative it began in 2023, working to increase revenue per location by providing new services, such as renovation, cover installation, vinyl-liner replacements and even construction.

Wagner served as president of Pool Scouts for nine years. During his tenure, the company grew to a \$24-million per year operation.



David Mele

---

(continued from page 11) Frost said.

As a manufacturer, Ghiz said he modeled his approach to customer service after Gillette. “He knew how to build an enduring, meaningful, heartfelt relationship with his client,” Ghiz said.

Gillette left Jandy briefly in 2009 to start his own consulting firm. He returned the following year as vice president of business development.

Throughout his career, Gillette served on several committees and councils for the national trade association now called the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, such as the Builders and Manufacturers Councils.

Gillette also played an important role in the formation of Genesis in the late 1990s, signing on to the organization’s message immediately and signing up his company as one of its

first sponsors. Over time he became known as an honorary founder.

Last year, Genesis presented Gillette with its Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the industry and the organization.

“Vance was big on relationships, and he had an ability to make people feel like they were the most important customers,” said Genesis Co-Founder Brian Van Bower.



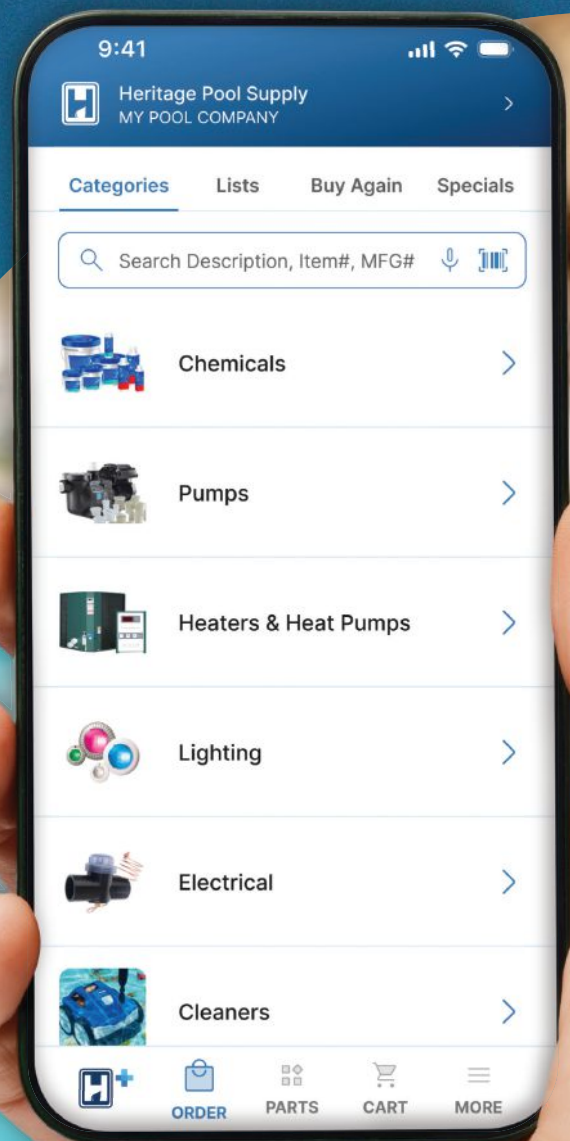
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# Bill Introduced to Make Swim Lessons More Affordable

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

**Legislation has been introduced** to qualify swimming lessons as a medical expense covered by flexible spending accounts and health savings accounts.

H.R. 9298 by W. Gregory Steube (R-FL-17), also known as the “Safe Water Instruction for Minors Act of 2024” or the “SWIM Act of 2024,” would do this by changing the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

If passed, it will allow this accommodation to be made for water competency and water safety lessons, which it defines as basic water safety and basic swimming instruction or equipment necessary for such participation.

It would allow up to \$500, or \$1,000

in the case of a joint return or head of household. Amounts for equipment cannot exceed \$100, and the allowance does not apply to instruction related to competitive swimming.

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance and the Florida Swimming Pool Association support the bill.

“It aligns with our mission to enhance water safety and prevent drownings,” said Justin Wiley, PHTA’s vice president of government relations, standards and codes. “The act ... makes it financially easier for families to access these lifesaving skills. This initiative is especially important as it addresses the increasing number of

drownings, particularly in minority and low-income communities which are most in need.”

The organization sees it as a net positive for the industry as well.

“It encourages a culture of water safety and education, which leads to a reduction in drowning incidents,” Wiley said. “This not only enhances the industry’s reputation but also supports its growth by ensuring that more people feel confident and safe using pools and spas. Additionally, by addressing financial barriers to swim education, the industry can reach a broader audience, including underserved communities, thereby expanding market reach.”

## Haviland Has New VP

**Haviland Enterprises** promoted Brian Schoen to Vice President of its Pool and Spa Division. He will report to Haviland CEO Meg Post.

Schoen first joined the company as a seasonal employee working on production lines while attending high school and college. In 2010 he joined as a full-time inventory analyst. He has taken on several roles, including inventory manager, operations manager, and senior director of supply chain and operations, then most recently as interim vice president.

In his new position, Schoen will be responsible for the strategy, growth and culture of Haviland Pool and Spa.

## Basketball Performance Coach to Keynote PSP

**Alan Stein, Jr.**, a professional basketball performance coach, consultant and author will open this year’s International Pool | Spa | Patio/Deck Expo with a keynote address.

Stein spent 15 years as a basketball performance coach, helping professional players, including Kevin Durant, Steph Curry and Kobe Bryant. Now a consultant, he teaches strategies for improving organizational performance, creating effective leadership, increasing team cohesion and collaboration, and developing winning mindsets, rituals, and routines.

He wrote the book *Raise Your Game*, addressing how organizations can improve productivity and achieve higher levels of success.

## AquaStar Names New Regional Sales Manager

**AquaStar Pool Products** hired Teresa Smith as regional sales manager covering Florida and Wisconsin. Before joining the manufacturer, she worked as a pool design consultant for builders in Texas and as a business development manager for pool equipment distributors JetLine and PoolCorp.

In her new role, Smith will manage and grow the manufacturer’s presence in her states. “She brings not only a depth of knowledge about the industry but also a digital savvy that will help her build relationships,” said Todd Pieri, president of the company. “Her experience as a pool designer gives her a unique perspective on the consumer that will no doubt benefit pool builders and service professionals.”

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# Hot Tips

Key steps to ensuring the beauty, safety and longevity of fire features

BY SCOTT RICHARDSON AND MATT SHARP



**Fire features make up** some of the most popular additions to today's pools and backyards. It's hard to resist the ability of flame to transform the space at night by casting its warm light on the landscape, its reflection on the pool, and added sparkle on falling water.

Ensuring the proper operation and safety of these products has become easier than ever with the introduction of pre-manufactured fire features and components dedicated to introducing this flame to the backyard. However, it still requires multiple disciplines to design and install these spectacles

in any backyard — both to ensure optimal beauty, proper operation over the long haul, and safety.

Here, we offer five key guidelines for ensuring the success of backyard fire features.

## BEGIN WITH PROPER PLANNING

Always consult with the manufacturer's instructions before designing the features into the backyard. This way, you can factor in guidelines about such issues as ventilation and placement of backup valves.

In the planning phase, also make

sure to check and doublecheck the combined BTU demand for all gas- or propane-fueled elements, including fire features. This assists when it comes time to size the gas lines. If this step is done incorrectly, the fire feature may not perform correctly. You'll also want to find out early if total demand rises above what the existing natural gas meter or propane tank can accommodate, so you can upgrade the service.

## PROVIDE PROPER VENTILATION, DRAINAGE AND A BACK-UP VALVE

Fire needs air to breathe. So even though the unit is gas-driven, it still needs fresh air ventilation, for a couple of reasons.

First, it helps achieve that nice, yellow, robust flame that we all want. Proper ventilation also prevents overheating of the burner. Most importantly, it adds a crucial measure of safety by providing a way for the substance to disperse. If a leak occurs, you wouldn't want gas to accumulate in a cavity or enclosed space, lest it cause carbon monoxide poisoning or other potential safety hazards.

Most jurisdictions adopt the CSA/ANSI standards, which stipulate that space be left free 4 feet around the gas appliance's perimeter and 6 feet above it.

Additionally, ensure that anything flammable is positioned well beyond the ventilation zone, to guard against the possibility of unintentionally igniting it.

All fire features also should include

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drainage measures so any water that accumulates from rain and other issues can escape. Follow the installation manual to the letter here.

Many premanufactured features are designed with drainage and ventilation in them. This may come in the form of small openings, or feet on the bottom that lift the bowl slightly to make space for air flow. When installing premanufactured fire elements,

keep these drainage openings or spaces intact. We have seen installers fill the openings with grout or file the feet down so the bowl will sit flush on the deck or pedestal. In the case of a fire bowl, doing this essentially guarantees that the unit will become submerged in water when it rains, and it could compromise ventilation. In some cases, units have had to be torn out and replaced. At the very

least, this will void the warranty.

If installing a burner into a fire pit that you have designed, be sure to follow manufacturer instructions for providing adequate ventilation and drainage, and build that into your system. Also factor in burner tray expansion with regard to the heat of the flame. Assuming that a typical burner tray is composed of stainless steel, there needs to be play or room for metal expansion in the space between the pit structure and the burner tray. Without adequate room for expansion, the burner tray may put pressure on the pit structure, causing it to crack or break.

Finally, install a manual gas valve within arm's reach of each feature. This allows the user to turn the feature off should something go wrong.

Some say to place the valve within 4 feet of the feature, but we prefer them closer for the quickest access — arm's reach is optimal.

### CHOOSE MEDIA CAREFULLY

Your choice of media will affect not only the appearance of your fire features, but their safety as well.

Be sure to choose materials labeled safe for fire. Ideally it should be clean from bag to placement, and should provide plenty of ventilation above and below. Avoid the pumice-style lava found in many big-box stores, which often contains too many small fines. Once the fines get wet, they almost take on the characteristics of concrete and will clog burners and pilots.

We also advise against using glass with propane. In fact, we don't offer our propane burners with glass. It burns much hotter and retains the heat much longer. Also, because propane is heavier than air, it can potentially settle in the glass, building up in the nooks and crannies, posing a hazard if it should ignite. This also applies to dual media — a combination of lava with glass.

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## THINK TWICE BEFORE INSTALLING YOUR OWN FIRE FEATURES

The vast majority of pool builders rely on subcontractors for the installation of fire features.

However, some builders are equipped to take this work on. Make

sure you have a solid understanding of electrical and wiring, in order to install the automation and electronics that accompany many of these products. You should be able to easily wire a transformer properly, and then wire that to a pool control panel. You'd need the same level of compe-

tence with gas lines.

Crews also should have a general mechanical aptitude to follow a schematic. Some automated burners can get a little more complicated, with multiple gas lines going to and from different locations.

## DO A FINAL CHECK OF EACH FEATURE BEFORE HANDING IT OVER TO THE CUSTOMER — WHETHER OR NOT YOU INSTALLED IT

It's true that most pool and spa builders turn much of the fire-feature installation over to specialized subcontractors to handle the gas or propane lines, plumbing, electrical and maybe even the construction of the fire feature itself.

However, any builder who sells them should perform a couple simple tests after they have been installed to prevent problems down the line.

It's easy to walk away and say, "Yep, I sized the gas line, and I see a flame. We're good." But will a little wind cause the whole thing to blow out because the gas pressure was just on the cusp of correct, but on the low side? Testing enables the builder to know for sure, instead of just guessing and crossing your fingers.

Start by investing in a manometer, which measures the pressure of the gas or propane. With this instrument, take readings on the static pressure, or pressure of the gas going to the component before it's fired. Then check the dynamic pressure, or pressure while the unit is running.

Take these readings for each fire feature. Pressure will vary from unit to unit, depending on factors such as how far away it is from the source.

The pressure should fall within the range specified by the manufacturer in the instruction manual. If the pressure is too low — or even on the cusp of too low — you likely will have performance problems. The burner may light up fine and last a

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a high-pitch, whistling, squealing noise, or an obnoxious buzz that would make it impossible to sit there for more than a few minutes.

Automated systems will sense when the pressure is too low or high. If it's the latter, it may blow the pilot assembly out.

Also perform a leak test on the gas line. This is a very simple process: Take a water bottle and add a little bit of soap to the water. Pour the soapy water over the gas line components. If there's a leak, that soapy water will cause a little bubble, and you can see there's an issue.

*Scott Richardson is Fire & Water Warranty Manager for Pebble Technology International. Matt Sharp is Western Regional Sales Manager for Pebble Technology. Before joining the company, he had more than 20 years experience in pool/spa design, construction and repair.*

few minutes, but an hour down the road, it could lose enough pressure that it starts to cycle on and off. Even if it does continue to function, soot could accumulate on the media or, worse, in the burner orifices, where

it can cause clogging.

Low pressure also could indicate undersized gas lines.

If the pressure is too high, you may know even before you gauge it. This often manifests itself with



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# Home Prices Increase in Second Quarter

Ninety percent of metros saw the rise. And nearly half of studied areas require a qualifying income of at least \$100,000 to afford a 10% down payment.

BY VINCENT SALANDRO



In the second quarter, 199 out of 223 metro markets — or 90% — recorded home price gains on an annual basis, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

Of the 223 analyzed markets, 13% experienced double-digit price gains over the same period, down from 30% in the first quarter. The national median single-family existing-home price rose 4.9% from a year ago to \$422,100 in the second quarter.

“The record-high home prices in most metro markets bring good and bad news,” says NAR chief economist Lawrence Yun. “It’s terrific news for homeowners who are moving ahead in wealth gains. However, it’s difficult for those wanting to buy a home as the required income to qualify has roughly doubled from just years ago.”

Among the major census regions, the South registered the largest share of single-family existing-home sales (45.5%) in the second quarter, with a year-over-year price appreciation

of 2.3%. Prices increased 9.8% in the Northeast, 5.5% in the Midwest, and 5.4% in the West.

The top 10 metro areas with the largest year-over-year median price increases all posted gains of at least 14.1%, led by Racine, Wis. (+19.8%); Glens Falls, N.Y. (+19.8%); and El Paso, Texas (+19.2%). Five of the 10 metros with the largest median price gains were in the Northeast.

Seven of the top 10 most expensive markets in the nation were in California: San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara (\$2,008,000); San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward (\$1,449,000); Anaheim-Santa Ana-Irvine (\$1,437,500); San Diego-Carlsbad (\$1,050,000); Salinas (\$1,035,700); Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura (\$927,900); and San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles (\$895,300). The price in the San Jose metro marks the first time since the NAR began tracking single-family home prices in 1979 that a metro area’s median price exceeded \$2 million.

Just 10% of markets experienced home price declines in the second quarter, up from 7% in the first quarter.

“Previously fast-gaining markets took a breather in the past quarter, including Nashville; Durham, N.C.; Austin, Texas; and several Florida metro areas,” Yun says. “Conversely, some markets that experienced declines last year have roared back, such as San Francisco, Anaheim, Calif. and New York.”

The increase of mortgage rates in the second quarter had a negative impact on housing affordability. The monthly mortgage payment on a typical existing single-family home with a 20% down payment was \$2,262, up 11.1% from the first quarter and up 10.3% from the second quarter of 2023. For a typical starter home valued at \$358,800 with a 10% down payment loan, the monthly mortgage payment jumped to \$2,218, up 10.3% from a year ago.

Families typically spent 26.5% of their income on mortgage payments in the second quarter, up from 24.2% in the previous quarter and 25.3% a year ago. First-time buyers typically spent 40% of their family income on mortgage payments in the second quarter, up from 36.5% in the prior quarter.

A family needed a qualifying income of at least \$100,000 to afford a 10% down payment mortgage in 48% of markets, up from 40.7% in the first quarter.

“Housing affordability will improve in upcoming months,” says Yun. “Mortgage rates have fallen measurably, and more supply is reaching the market. Therefore, the income required to buy a home will decrease.”

PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK



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# Economic Forecast

The Fed is projecting just one rate cut in 2024 after indicating three cuts would be likely as recently as March.

BY ZONDA STAFF



The Federal Reserve Open Market Committee (FOMC) once again held rates steady. As a result, the Fed's benchmark federal funds target rate will remain between 5.25% and 5.5%, as it has since July 2023. The Fed has held rates steady for seven straight meetings.

In a dot-plot released with the rate decision, the Fed signaled just one rate cut is likely in 2024, as opposed to the three it predicted in March and late in 2023. "At the beginning of the year, we told our National Outlook clients that we saw a 75% probability of two rate cuts this year," says Zonda chief economist Ali Wolf. "We've dropped that probability down 60% as new information came in. Our base case, however, is that we will see one cut by the end of the year, with an anticipated date of September or December."

In its announcement, the FOMC noted economic activity has continued to expand at a "solid pace." The Fed not-

ed jobs gains have remained strong and the unemployment rate has stayed low, while inflation has eased "but remains elevated." In recent months, there has been "modest further progress" toward the FOMC's goal of 2% annual inflation.

"The Committee judges that the risks to achieving its employment and inflation goals have moved toward better balance over the year," the FOMC said in its news release. "The economic outlook is uncertain, and the Committee remains highly attentive to inflation risks."

While inflation has cooled from annual increases of 9% in 2022, the FOMC "does not expect it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2%."

Adds Wolf: "At the end of last year, the Fed felt fairly comfortable that they'd be on track to do a couple rate cuts this year. Inflation was cooling,

and the labor market was growing but slowing. At the beginning of the year, we had three inflation reads that showed inflation picking up versus slowing further. That delayed any plans of a cut."

In data released Wednesday, the Consumer Price Index for all items, less food and energy, was up 0.2% on a month-over-month basis in May and 3.4% on a year-over-year basis. Inflation has stabilized at a rate between 3% and 4% dating back to 2023.

"We've now had two months — May and June — where the inflation data looks back on track," Wolf says. "We know that policymakers want to be able to track a trend in the data versus react on just one or two months of data, but so far the data looks promising of a cut coming later this year."

In the labor market, employment increased by 272,000 in May, while the unemployment rate was 4%. The May jobs report also included downward revisions for March and April growth to 310,000 and 165,000 from 315,000 and 175,000, respectively.

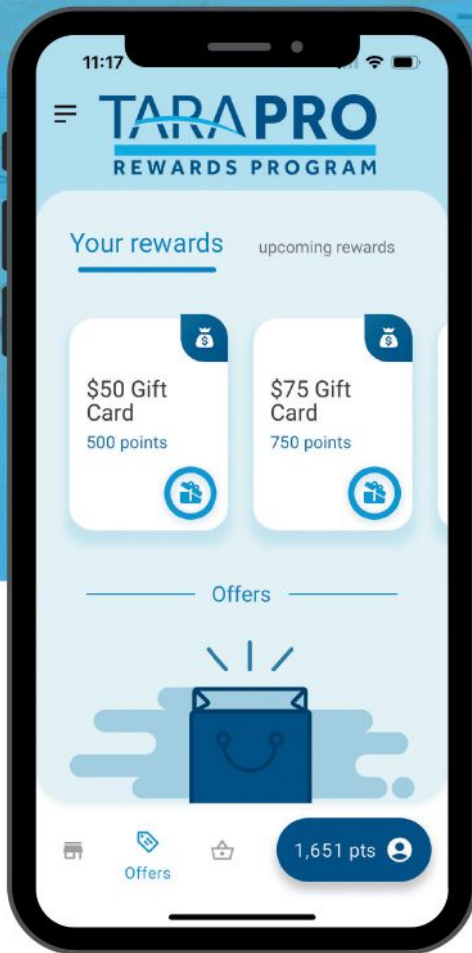
In the housing market, mortgage rates move in real-time in response to announcements from the Fed. Wolf says rates dropped lower on the latest inflation reading and "stay below where they started the day on the new information from the Fed showing one rate cut is still likely this year."

"For the home building industry, builders should celebrate that some housing affordability could be on the way, but one cut in 2024 doesn't tell us low interest rates are returning to the market anytime soon," says Wolf.

PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK

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# A MINIMALIST'S COLORED

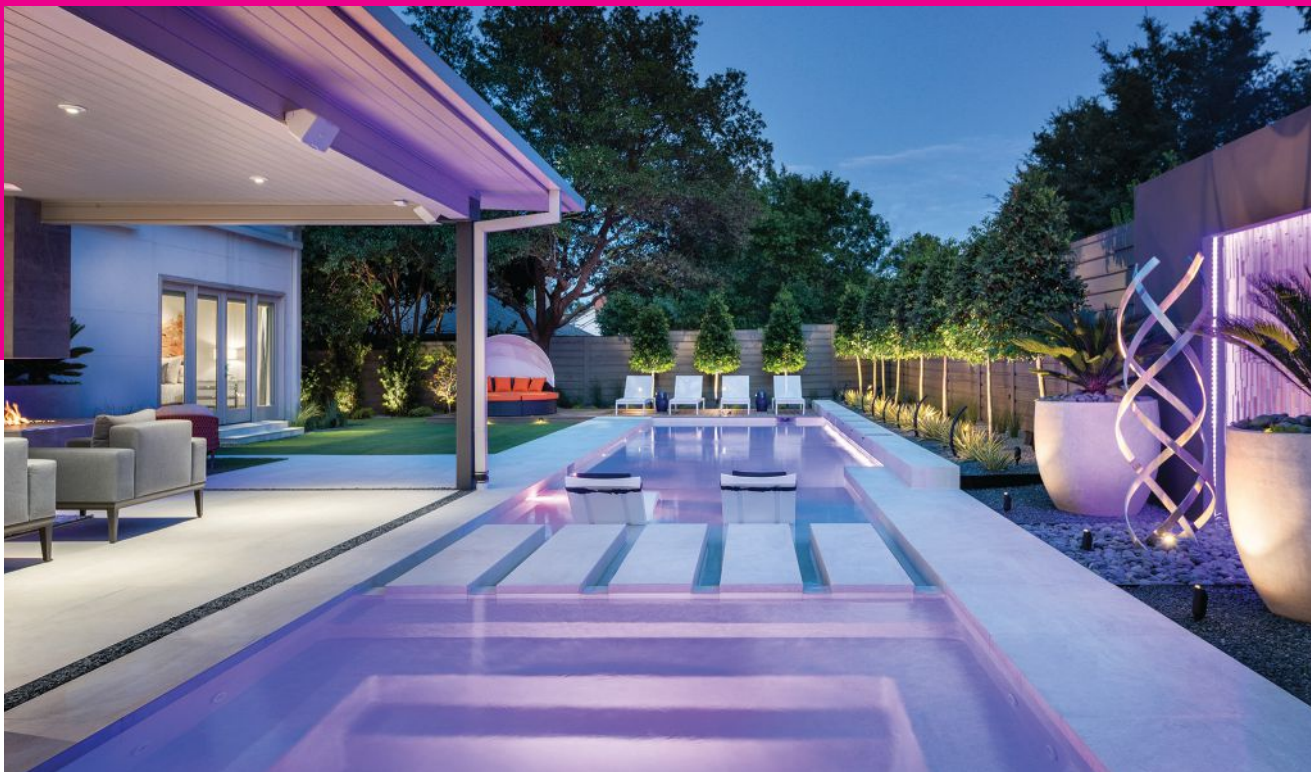
Colored lighting has come a long way in just a few years, drawing Here, designers explain how they use this product in their

# GUIDE TO LIGHTING



JIM SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY RANDY ANGELL DESIGN

some designers who used to avoid the product category.  
backyards and maintain a minimalist look. BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



**Earlier in his career**, designer Randy Angell didn't use colored light much. But he's changed his position, thanks to technological developments of the past few years.

"That is mainly because we have the opportunity to make sure all the lights are the same color," says the CEO of Randy Angell Designs, Plano, Texas. "Before, your lights inside the water came from one manufacturer, and then you had your lights outside the water from a different manufacturer." This made it difficult to match up tones.

If he used colored lighting, he'd restrict it to the water, applying white light to the landscape and hardscape.

Now, you can buy colored lighting for wet and dry applications from the same manufacturer. Some lights can even be tuned to existing systems, making them easier for renovations. In addition, some newer LED systems provide hundreds of color choices so designers and homeowners can find just the right hue.

Between that and the fact that colored LED lights now are controlled by smartphone, designers like the ability for homeowners to change their light with their moods.

"It gives us the best of both worlds," Angell says. "If the client is throwing a big party and they want a little more excitement and panache, they can use color to bring the whole backyard to life. But for normal everyday ... you can introduce something that is a little bit more soothing and have a completely different mood."

Tal Thevenot also came to colored lights later in the game.

"I used to be kind of a lighting purist," says the CEO of AquaTerra Outdoors in Carrollton, Texas. "I like a lot of warm, white light, keeping things clean, minimalist and simple. My natural design is more of a cohesive environment, where I don't like to overpower one piece, and certainly color lighting is very, very dramatic. There's no way getting around that."

But clients are becoming more exposed to color lighting — and more likely to ask for it. They see photos online of backyards with immaculately coordinated colored lighting. Or they enjoy it in more commercial and resort settings, hoping to create these effects in their backyards.

"Lighting advancements are the most visible advancement for our clients," Angell reports. "It seems every consult I go on, when they start listing out their priorities for the design, lighting is always in the top five priorities."

And Thevenot has found that he likes to play with this feature in his own backyard, especially for holidays.

Here, designers offer tips for using colored lighting in the wet and dry settings in your backyards.

#### FORWARD THINKING

While colored lights have come a long way, they still carry the risk of getting carried away.

"As with any features that you bring

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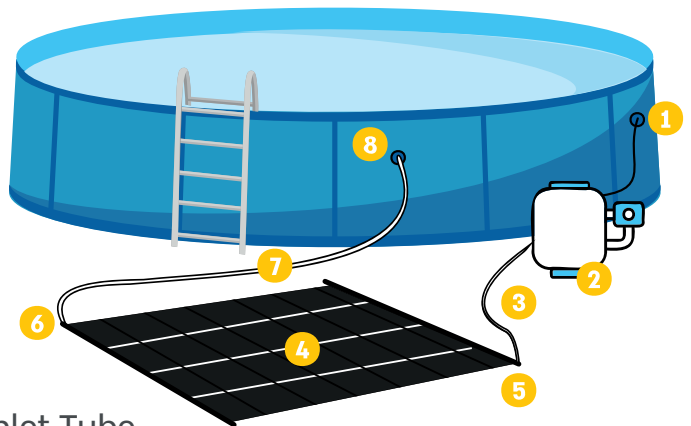
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into an outdoor design, if you don't do it with a light touch and really be careful with how you're using elements, it can very quickly go from a beautiful backyard to Las Vegas and just be kind of over the top," Angell says.

While that is more than appropriate for some applications, he says, it isn't always. To prevent it from happening when it's not wanted, Andy Kaner likes to use restraint with color.

"We're not just doing color for color's sake, but actually looking at the entire space to see in which areas you want an accent piece to stand out" says the president of Aquatic Consultants in Palmetto Bay, Fla.

This particularly pertains to the landscape. Another benefit to today's colored lighting systems is their ability to control and coordinate the pool lights with the landscape lights. But some designers still like to use a light hand when using colored light on the landscape — or avoid it altogether.

Outside the pool, Angell prefers

to use colored lighting for individual features — not plants — rather than washing color over the whole area.

"Maybe spotlights that light up a sculpture or art piece, or a decorative panel," he explains. "I don't design in LED strip lighting every place I could. There are always 100 opportunities to light things up and add that bit of drama. But I like to pare it back, so I'll use the LED strip lights in places that are important within the design.... I don't want to just throw it everywhere."

To combine beauty with safety, Angell also may use colored strip lighting to outline steps, offering a glow that can be white or present in any color.

These designers tend to avoid throwing color onto plants. Instead, they'll use warm white to bring out their natural coloring.

Kaner finds that dark pool finishes tend to absorb colored light. Because most of his pools are finished in black, or dark grays and blues, he generally avoids colored illumination in the pool

interior. However, he will light water elements outside the pool — a laminar arc sprouting from the deck, a vertical foam jet spraying up, rain cascades or sheet falls. "That way it stands out like an accent piece," he says.

Scott Cohen, president of The Green Scene in Chatsworth, Calif., likes to go even more subtle when incorporating color, basically restricting it to the water and trying to stay in the blue family. The lighter blues that are now available provide the ability to add a soft glow around stepping pads or islands, as well as in catch basins.

### FREESTANDING FEATURE

Even when taking this more subtle approach, Thevenot finds that the lighting has become a more important feature in designs. Now, it requires more upfront consideration than before, when lighting was placed more in reaction to the other elements in the yard.

"Fifteen or 20 years ago, I was using



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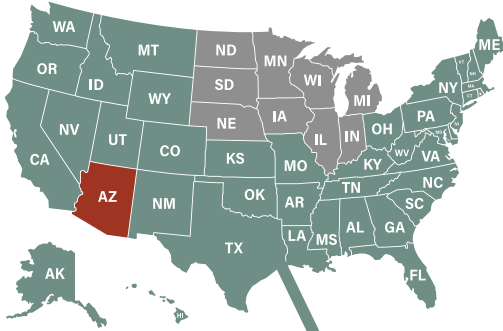
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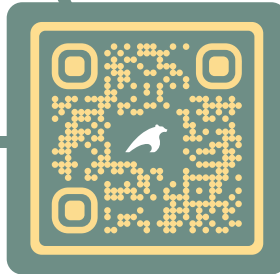
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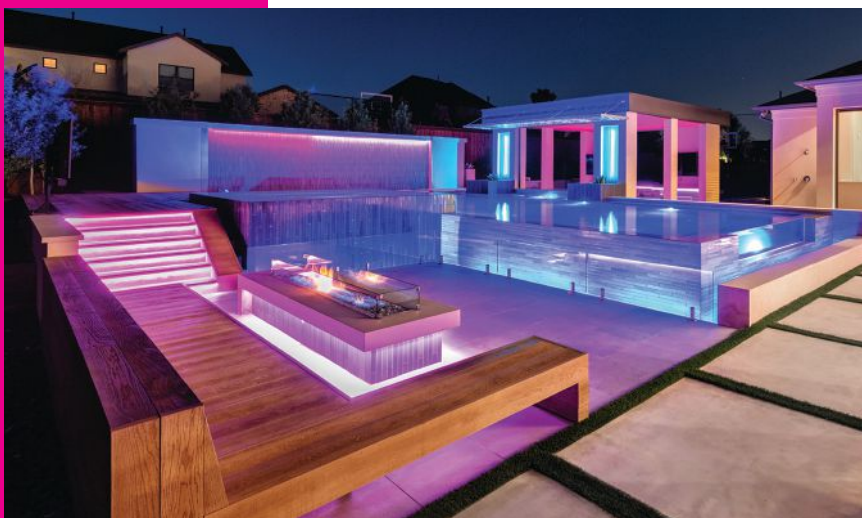
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basic lighting for ambiance, and a lot for safety,” he says. “Now it’s becoming a feature of its own.”

In some instances, he’ll choose a material or feature because of how it will look when illuminated. This means the lighting needs to be considered from the very beginning of the design process.

Angell also factors colored lighting in his designs from the beginning phases. In some projects, he’ll use decorative panels that have interesting textures or patterns laser cut into them, chosen specifically for how they’ll reflect the colored lighting. He may finish them in white so they can show the colored light in its purest tones.

But in highlighting certain features or surfaces, designers should maintain the environment’s cohesiveness. Don’t make them too bright or distracting. “You don’t want to create so much drama in one spot that you’re taking away from everything else,” Tevenot says.

Nor should designers just use colored lighting in one spot, which would throw things out of balance, he suggests. You can use colored lighting on a less glamorous feature, such as a wall, to help balance the weight given to a feature that’s innately more attention-getting.

## WHITE LIGHT

The most recent developments in colored lights provide dozens of choices, not only giving designers and their clients the opportunity to introduce vibrant lighting into backyards, but also to choose what kind of white they want.

“Before, you really couldn’t get a good white or off-white — or cool white versus warm white,” says Randy Angell, CEO of Randy Angell Designs, in Plano, Texas.

Most of these designers make good use of this capability by lighting plants in a warm white, which sits around 2,000 or 2,700 kelvin, as opposed to a cool white, which sits around 5,000 kelvin.

“Warmer light just matches better, especially in a natural environment or outdoor setting, where you’re dealing with earth tones,” says Tal Tevenot, CEO of AquaTerra Outdoors in Carrollton, Texas. “Ultimately, what we’re trying to do often is recreate moonlighting. So it’s

more in keeping with natural light tones.”

If choosing an older colored-lighting technology, consider the kind of white it offers. Some only provide one white, on the cooler side, which doesn’t appeal to designers such as Andy Kaner.

He prefers a warm white on both the pool and landscape.

“It integrates with the surrounding environment, and we feel like the integration gives a more cohesive look and feel ...” says the president of Aquatic Consultants in Palmetto Bay, Fla.

This stands in opposition to using warm landscape lighting, then placing a cool white in the pool. “Then all of a sudden the pool is this completely different, cool white, like a Mercedes Benz headlight. It kind of just stands out and jumps out, instead of just seamlessly integrating.

“Also, we like the way [warm whites] look as underwater lighting. It just has a warmer feel to it.”

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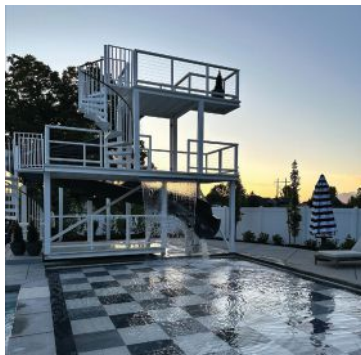
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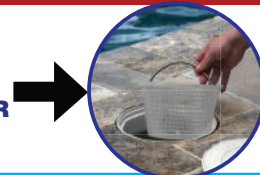
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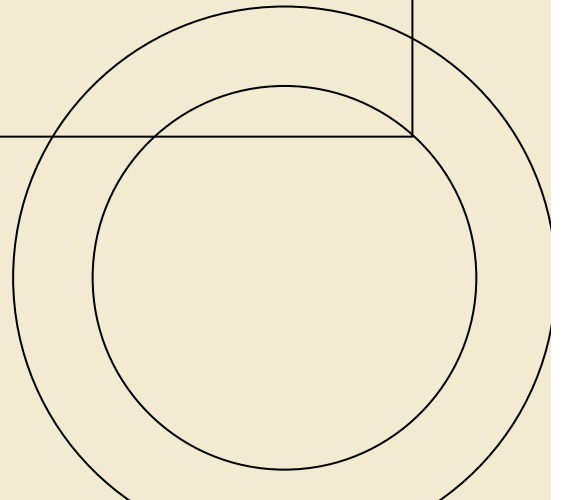
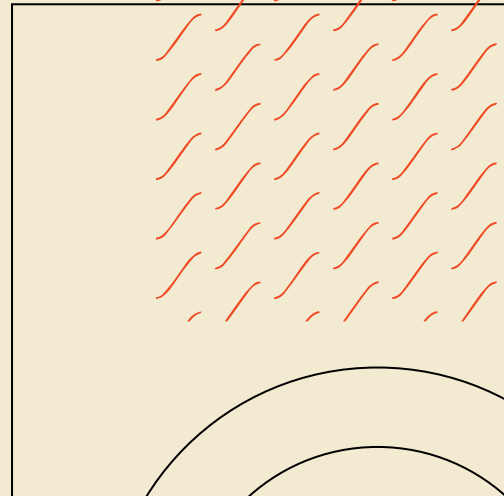
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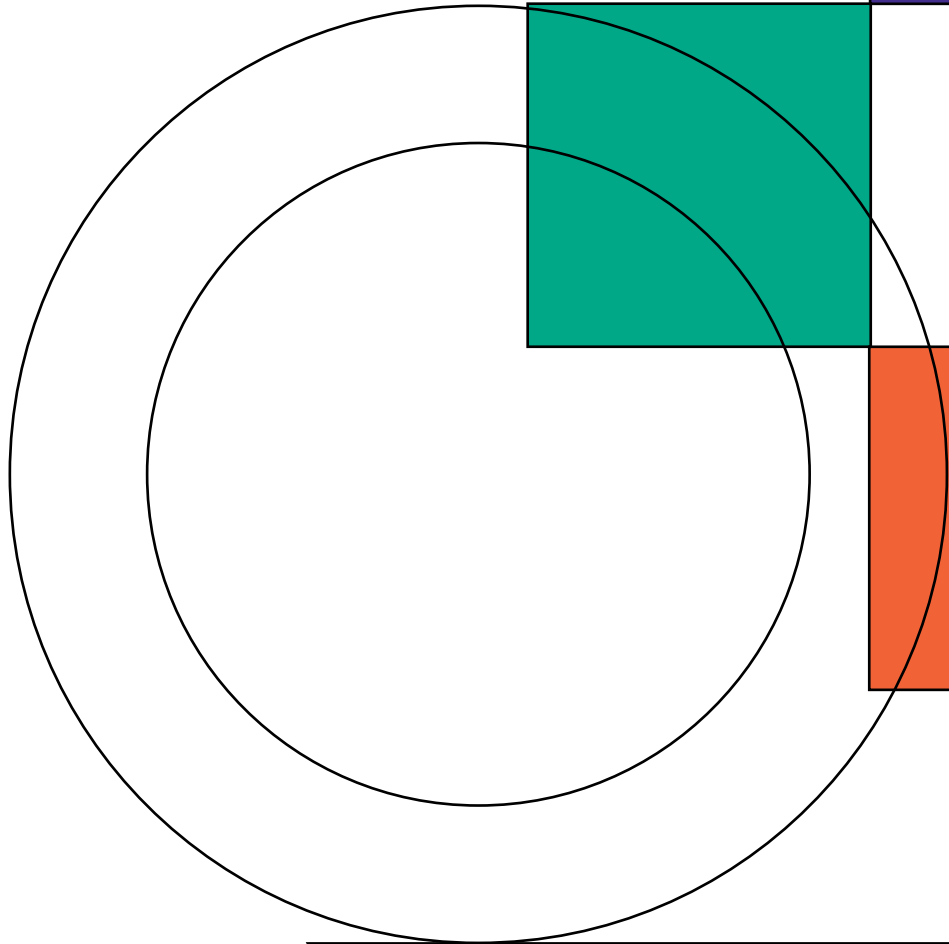
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# REHABBING

## *a Problematic Pool*



# How one company stepped in with a transformative solution to the issues plaguing an existing project

BY DAVE SETTLEMYER

**As a designer and builder of outdoor living spaces**, my responsibility transcends aesthetics; it extends to foreseeing potential issues and crafting solutions that resonate with both form and function. One particular project that exemplifies this approach stands out — a new construction build less than a year old, teeming with issues that threatened to overshadow its potential. The original contractor who built the pool and pool deck abandoned the project at its conclusion and at the onset of apparent problems. My company was contacted to see if we could fix them.



A new curved deck that steps down to water level is the centerpiece of this pool rehabilitation project, located in Longmont, Colo. The deck is framed with 1½-inch-by-5½-inch pressure-treated Pacific Woodtech LVL joists 12 inches on-center, while the bottom step that cantilevers out over the pool is framed with Trex Elevations steel joists.

During our initial consultation, it was clear that this project was fraught with problems, from elevation discrepancies to improper watershed drainage. Standing water plagued the lawn, fostering mold and causing unsightly dying areas, while the flawed pitch of the poured concrete flat work surrounding the pool directed water runoff into the pool, bringing along debris and soil during heavy rains.

To me, however, the most alarming problem was the compromised transition from the back porch to the concrete walkway leading to the pool deck. Here, an in-ground hot tub was located, and while it was convenient to the house, the spa interrupted drainage, causing a puddle of water to form over a large area. Even worse, in colder months, any standing water would freeze into ice, creating a safety risk for our retired client.

While the client contemplated a complete overhaul, the notion of discarding a newly constructed pool seemed impractical and economically unfeasible. Armed with a back-

ground in landscape architecture, I was confident that we could come up with a transformative solution that would address the project's challenges without resorting to drastic measures.

The property's constraints, including setback requirements and unalterable travel paths, necessitated a strategic approach. Instead of starting from scratch, we leveraged the existing layout, maximizing its impact while minimizing excavation and removal efforts. The result was a design that integrated a deck shaped like a half-moon nestled amidst a grove of aspens and Bosnian pines, offering a serene oasis that defied the property's limitations.

### SITE WORK

To correct the drainage issues, we did some grading work in the yard. We also installed additional drainage lines, using water catch basins and underground corrugated piping.

To divert water away from the pool, we added a stone overlay with

the proper pitch to the pool deck. By locating thicker stones in the lower areas and thinner stones in the higher areas of the original flat work, we were able to resolve the patio grade without having to rely on an extra-thick mortar bed under the stones.

We also expanded the existing footprint of the pool deck by adding flat work to accommodate curved lines and seamless transitions across the project. This required excavating all the top soil to an 8-inch subgrade, adding 4 inches of compacted ¾-inch road base, and pouring new, 4-inch-thick slabs doweled into the existing patio.

The stone overlay expands on the existing concrete and bridges these additions, hiding them from view with the pattern of the random ashlar layout of the stone.

### CURVED POOL DECK

The new curved pool deck is the central element in our redesign. Supported by strategically located deck piers, the curved deck features a cantilevered step transition

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**BEFORE:** The existing spa interrupted travel between the house and the pool, and water tended to pool around its base, freezing in winter and creating a safety issue.



**AFTER:** To provide better access and solve drainage problems around the spa, the author expanded the patio and porch deck and corrected the pitch when installing the stone overlay.



**BEFORE:** Though it was recently built, the pool was plagued with drainage problems, including storm run-off during heavy rain events.



**AFTER:** The author addressed the drainage problems with new drain lines and re-grading, and with a new stone overlay pitched away from the pool.

down into the pool and required an engineered design.

To execute the plan, we needed to core-drill through the existing concrete patio and carefully excavate to avoid damaging the buried pool utility lines when we were installing new piers. In a couple of cases, we had to adjust the pier locations to avoid those utilities, and we ended up adding a pier to the original plans.

**Framing.** We used Pacific Woodtech treated LVL engineered lumber to frame the flowing curves of the deck itself, but providing a 30-inch cantilever over the pool edge required the use of steel. Here, we used Trex Elevations steel joists, which were the right dimension to provide the 2-inch drop down below the pool's coping edge (just above the elevation of the automatic pool cover) to provide a proper step down into the pool. Although Elevations has been discontinued by Trex, we were able to source the material through our supplier's discontinued material pile.

To provide solid support for the deck's cantilever, we bolted a 2-by pressure-treated resting plate to the pool apron using  $\frac{1}{2}$ -by-7-inch wedge anchors. The distance of the cantilever support required us to bolt to the existing concrete patio surround. The step depth needed to be 5 feet overall to have a 20-inch cantilever, per engineering. Cutting, welding, and shaping the hard material allowed us to make sure the pool's auto cover would still be able to operate under the stair edge.

The pool deck's design focal point is a symmetrical arrangement of fire features. The linear fire pit, centrally positioned, serves as an inviting gathering spot. A pair of flickering stone fire bowls flank either side of the deck on top of raised stone columns and contrast with the lush backdrop to create a visually striking yet harmonious

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The author widened the existing concrete patio around the pool to make room for this curved planter, then installed a natural stone overlay in a random ashlar pattern, using a combination of different thicknesses of stone set in a mortar bed to correct the pitch so that water now drains away from the pool instead of into it.



Access to the spa was improved by extending the porch with new TimberTech decking installed over sleepers fastened to the concrete and adding wider curved steps on either side of the spa.

structure. Together, the fire features extend the space's usability into the cooler evening hours.

Similar stone columns and carefully selected black-stained 8x8 western red cedar posts support the 20-foot-dead-span pergola. We used 5 1/2-by-

16-inch Alaskan yellow cedar for the beams and red cedar for the rafters.

**Material selections.** We used TimberTech decking in the company's coastline hue, harmonizing its warm undertones with the TimberTech dark hickory accents to cre-

ate a cohesive transition between the deck and adjacent pool area.

For the pool deck's stone overlay, we used three colors of a natural stone imported from India and supplied by Stone Universe. The main colors are ebony (the swirled-color stone) and grey mist (the light gray stone), while the dark gray border stone is called dark slate. To correct the pitch in the existing pool deck (as described earlier), the stone ranged from 1 inch to 2 inches in thickness. In addition to correcting the pitch as we installed the stone, we tried to blend appealing tones in a random pattern encompassed by a solid-color border to mimic the appearance showcased in the deck.

## PORCH AND SPA

At the house, we bridged the existing raised concrete patio to the spa with the same TimberTech decking used on the pool deck. We fastened the decking to Deckorators sleepers screwed to the concrete with 1/4-by-4-inch Tapcons. We also built an elegant curved staircase using heat-bent deck boards. This improved accessibility to the built-in spa and echoes the flowing curves of the pool deck.

As day transitions into evening, the space undergoes a subtle transformation, revealing new layers of ambiance and functionality. The meticulously crafted stonework, flickering fire bowls, and black-stained cedar pergola columns enhance the space's aesthetic appeal, fostering unity and harmony. By addressing complex challenges with creativity and expertise, we transformed a problematic space into a harmonious oasis that resonates with beauty, functionality, and enduring appeal.

*Dave Settlemeyer owns LS Underground in Longmont, Colo. This article previously appeared in sister publication Professional Deck Builder.*

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# BOOST YOUR BOTTOM LINE USING CLIENT FEEDBACK



When properly gathered and used, customer input can shape your company — and provide the key to its success. Here's how we accomplish this.

BY BRIAN ALTMANN



PHOTO BY ANDALEE POWERS, DBS REMODEL

**We are constantly challenged** to close the gap between the number that we must sell a project for and the number our clients want to pay — particularly now as costs continue to rise, and it becomes more and more expensive to be in the construction business.

Over the years, my company has managed to close that “price gap” largely by obtaining client feedback, then integrating the resulting data into every facet of our operations. Simply put, properly incorporating feedback from our clients has led to improvements in our customer service. Better customer service has led to greater value, and greater value has increased our bottom line.

In this article, I’ll explain in more detail how to obtain feedback, how to process it, and how to use it to boost your bottom line.

## RULES FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK

I’ve been in the remodeling business for 37 years. I own and operate a design-build company with 23 full-time employees, running seven to 10 jobs at one time. We mostly do kitchen and bathroom remodels, finished basements, and additions.

Our work volume affords us an ample database of responses to draw from (particularly over the past 10 to 15 years, as we have increasingly incorporated client feedback into our operations).

We have a few basic rules we follow when soliciting feedback from clients:

- Share why you want feedback.
- Be sincere when asking for it.
- Write all their comments down.
- Clarify with follow-up questions.
- Don’t “yeah, but” the clients when they are giving their responses.

Let me explain further.

We’ve trained ourselves to remember that the quality and accuracy of feedback from a client is only as good as the delivery of the question. If you want clients to be honest with you, then you have to share why you want their feedback. You have to tell them what you’re going to do with the information, because that’ll influence what they tell you.

For instance, I’d ask: “I’d love to get some feedback from you because I’m trying to build a better company. I’ve been doing this for 37 years, but I don’t have all the answers and I’m trying to get better.”

So, who better to ask than those we serve, right?

Then I’d explain further the value of the information and how we’ll use it: “I just want to thank you again for allowing us to work with you. Are you willing to share with us three or four things that you’d change if you were running this job? Are you willing to be my coach right now? I’d appreciate that. And, I promise to bring your comments up in our team meetings so we can learn from them.”

If you ask your clients like that, you’ll likely get the truth from them.

By doing this, you’re also setting the table for repeat customers. Repeat clients account for 46% of our business, roughly translating to \$3 million dollars per year coming in from doing a great job for past clients. People like to work with those who care, who are truthful. Having soft skills and exhibiting emotional intelligence when dealing with clients matters.

When asking clients for their feedback, be sincere — show you care. You have to know from your heart what you’re looking for and not be perceived as just going through the motions.

Be thoughtful, take notes, and thank them for their responses.

Don’t be afraid to ask follow-up questions for clarity. “You said the

**We've trained ourselves to remember that the quality and accuracy of feedback from a client is only as good as the delivery of the question. So, we need to ask great questions.**

site wasn't neat and clean. Can I ask you, did you mean the whole job or was it just the subs? Was there dust in some other rooms? Could you elaborate? I just want to know a little bit more."

And again, no "yeah, but" — "Yeah, I remember the 'Fluffy' incident, but do you see those cabinets? They're dead-level, right?" Are you willing to go to the mat for the quality of your workmanship, while you let their declawed house cat out that one time, and you frequently parked your truck on their lawn? Some homeowners care way more about their pets and lawn than dead-level cabinets.

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO OBTAIN FEEDBACK**

We try to attain feedback from clients at every stage of a project — during lead qualifying, intro appointments, contract signing, weekly visits and calls, exit interviews, online reviews, and paper surveys (though I prefer attaining feedback via face-to-face meetings with clients rather than with mail-in surveys). Here's how we approach each stage:

**Intro appointments.** When visiting somebody's home for the first time, we can get a lot of information. For example, when visiting a homeowner who wants a kitchen remodel, we don't necessarily care about what kind of kitchen they want. First, we want to see if they're a good fit for our company; and, second, we want to know what qualities they're looking for in a remodeler.

We don't ask, "Hey, what do you want, maple cabinets? Do you want crown molding?" Instead, we say, "You're planning to invest \$100,000 in your kitchen. Let's talk about this whole project. What kind of qualities are you looking for in a contractor?"

More likely than not, they're going to think, "That's a weird question. Why would a contractor ask me that? That's not typical language from a contractor." But, it's going to be impressive, and they may think, "Maybe there is something here? They asked some pretty thoughtful questions. I could see them working on our home." This would be a great start for us.

Then we dig a little deeper. We ask, "Have you remodeled before? If so, please describe that experience for us." If they have, the

answer may, unfortunately be something along the lines of, "Thank you for asking. Our last remodeler made a mess and didn't show up on site consistently. We felt abandoned."

A pithy response like this is loaded with good intel. It tells us how to take care of them if we get the privilege to work in their home. But it also helps coach us on how to build a better business. For instance, we learned that cleanliness and fear of abandonment are top concerns with homeowners. So, when we're writing our job scope, we'll insert a pamphlet on the air scrubber-HEPA filter we use to point out that we care about cleanliness. We also help alleviate their fear of abandonment: We tell them that we have a process, a lead carpenter system, which will ensure that won't happen. The lead carpenter, we explain, is dedicated to their project and will provide great communication, oversee all trade partners, and keep the schedule on track, and be someone they can contact at any time if they have any questions or problems.

We also ask about their concerns upfront: "What's giving you the most anxiety while looking for a remodeler? You said you talked to five or six remodelers and you haven't pulled the trigger yet. What's holding you back? I know we have some scars in our industry, but don't lose faith, there are some great companies out there."

And we show that we understand: "It's tough to buy a remodel. You can't see it. You can't test drive it. It's a leap of faith. It's probably the most money you're going to spend in your entire life, besides the purchase of your home. It's going to give you anxiety."

If you could learn from everybody in your area what gives them anxiety about having you as a guest in their home and develop protocols to avoid these pitfalls, would that not make you a premiere remodeler?

"What criteria will you be using to make your decision on a remodeler?" Imagine if you asked that, and you already knew the criteria that are most important to people. They're giving you the keys to success. For some people it may be price, but we've always found there are few things above price. Cleanliness, fear of abandonment, and communication to name a few. If they select us, that's going to be the value they'll be getting — we have a reputation

of keeping our jobsites impeccably clean and sticking with a project from start to finish. We've been taught well!

**Contract signing.** The contract signing is an excellent time to attain feedback. You need to know what attracts people to your company; you can't assume it.

At that time, we say, "Mr. and Mrs. Jones, I want to thank you so much for taking this leap of faith with our company. You chose to have our company come and be a guest in your home, and thank you so much again for that trust. I know you talked to five other companies, and we were a little bit more expensive. Would you be willing to share with me maybe three reasons why we're being awarded the privilege to remodel your home? What was the motivating factor? Why DBS Remodel?"

They might say, "I've heard great things from my neighbor, who said you guys were so clean, friendly, so trustworthy."

At contract signings, don't lose out on the opportunity to learn what clients think about your company. You need the truth — why do clients hire you? I have at least three responses from everybody who has ever signed a contract with us over the last 15 years. I know why they hired us. I'm not guessing. We've used this feedback to morph into the company my clients wanted it to be rather than the company that I initially thought it would be.

And imagine how that would make the client feel, being asked why they chose your company. Wouldn't that make them feel good about you, and about their choice — somebody who is being sincere and just wants to learn and make their company better.

**Weekly visits.** During weekly site visits, the first thing we do is thank clients for giving us their business and allowing us to be a guest in their home.

Then we ask, "How is the remodeling going at your residence so far? Are we meeting your expectations? Is there anything that you feel needs attention? Are you finding our team friendly?"

We want to get a gauge on things and right the ship, if necessary. We don't assume everything is going great; that's why we're asking the questions.

It's not going to help us at all if they say, "Yeah, everything's good." We're not looking

for praise, we're looking for their disappointment because that's where the money is — small incremental changes for the good.

"Is the cleanliness up to par? Is there any area that needs improvement? Are you happy with the workmanship?"

Incidentally, you'd think workmanship is the most important thing, but I know from looking at 15 years of surveys that it is not. It's important and it can get you in trouble if it's not good, but it's not the most important thing to them. Homeowners care about friendliness. They care about trust.

So, don't sell that you're the best kitchen installer and that your workmanship is better than everyone else's. If you want to build value and get them coming your way in terms of closing the "price gap," emphasize other company traits and learn what those are by asking great questions.

**Exit interviews.** For us, the exit interview is the most important stage of the project to attain feedback.

We get together with the homeowners one last time on site and bring them a gift. (We would never show up empty-handed.) We consider gifts part of our marketing.) We thank them and lay it out to them again, why we want their feedback, why we want them to be our business coach.

We ask them, "Can you please share three things you appreciated most regarding your remodeling experience? What was it that you enjoyed most about DBS Remodel? I promise you, I will share this with everyone involved with our team. We're going to try to make our company better using your remarks."

They reply, "Honey, do you want to go first? Okay, um, you guys were so clean and you didn't leave us hanging. We felt like we were in good hands."

We just let them go through their experience and draw out more detail for clarity as needed: "When you said, 'You guys were so clean', what do you mean? Do you have specifics?"

Then comes the hard part: We ask, "Can you please share three things that you appreciated least about this remodeling experience? What are some things that we could've done better? If you were running this company, what's the first thing you would change?"

**You need to know what attracts people to your company. You can't assume it. You need the truth — why do clients hire you? I have at least three responses from everybody who has ever signed a contract with us over the last 15 years. I know why they hired us. I'm not guessing.**

**“When cleanliness, politeness & trust matter” is our brand ... We looked at more than 2,000 surveys and said, “What’s the common theme? How are we different? Everybody cares about these qualities. That’s who we are. That’s our brand.”**

That’s the way we ask, and the clients may be reticent at first: “I don’t know. Honey, do you have anything?”

So you may have to work hard to get their feedback: “Please, we won’t be offended, we know we’re not perfect.”

We make it comfortable for them because we want to learn. So they may open up and say something like, “Okay. You know one thing: We didn’t know when your guys were coming one day, and the doors were locked. It was a pain because my cousin had to leave work to let somebody in.”

We write that down and bring their responses, positive and negative, back to the office and evaluate them in our lead meetings. We then develop procedures to safeguard against these “least appreciated” items from recurring.

Last, we want to know how they feel about the money they’ve just spent. We ask, “Could you please share how you feel about the value you received for your investment in this project? I know on the front end, you thought this was a lot. Our budget was \$85,000 and you were getting bids for \$60,000. You took that leap of faith with us, but now that the project’s done, and you’ve been living in it for a couple of weeks, how do you feel?”

I want to always gauge this, learn how they feel about the project cost, and why they feel that way, so I can continue learning. I can’t think of a finer response at the end of the job than for them to say it was worth investing more money because of our cleanliness, our politeness, and their trust in us.

### **WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS FEEDBACK?**

So we’ve collected all this feedback from clients, what do we do with it?

We compile a feedback data sheet in Excel that lists all of our clients; the job type (kitchen, bath, deck, etc.); the lead carpenter in charge of the job; the sales consultant; the contract date; the exit interview date; the “why hired” responses by client; the “most appreciated” responses; and the “least appreciated” responses.

We’ve accumulated all this intel on how to build a better company over the past 10 to 15 years. It’s living proof, and it’s a front-and-center topic in our meetings. We’ve

made (and continue to make) changes to every facet of our business operations based on everything we learned. So, if you’re asking the right questions, your clients should be telling you how you’re different.

For us, this was pivotal; it taught us to name our difference. “When cleanliness, politeness & trust matter” is our brand. It’s on all of our trucks, our website, our conference room wall — everywhere.

Where did we come up with this? We looked at more than 2,000 surveys and asked, “What’s the common theme? How are we different?”

We didn’t come up with it as a slogan because we thought it would be cool. We looked at all these surveys and said, “Look, everybody cares about these qualities. That’s who we are. That’s our brand.” We coined the phrase from client feedback; you can as well.

We use the information in other ways. We share positive feedback with our team to inspire them. For example, if we learn great things about a carpenter on a client’s project, we immediately share the news about what a wonderful job they did. If you want to keep your employees, that’s what you have to do. We celebrate all of these victories.

But, sometimes it’s the other way around — when an employee dropped the ball and we must have a difficult conversation to teach them the error of their ways. Again, we develop procedures to safeguard against these “least appreciated” items from recurring. We don’t let the negatives fester; we quickly address them and move on.

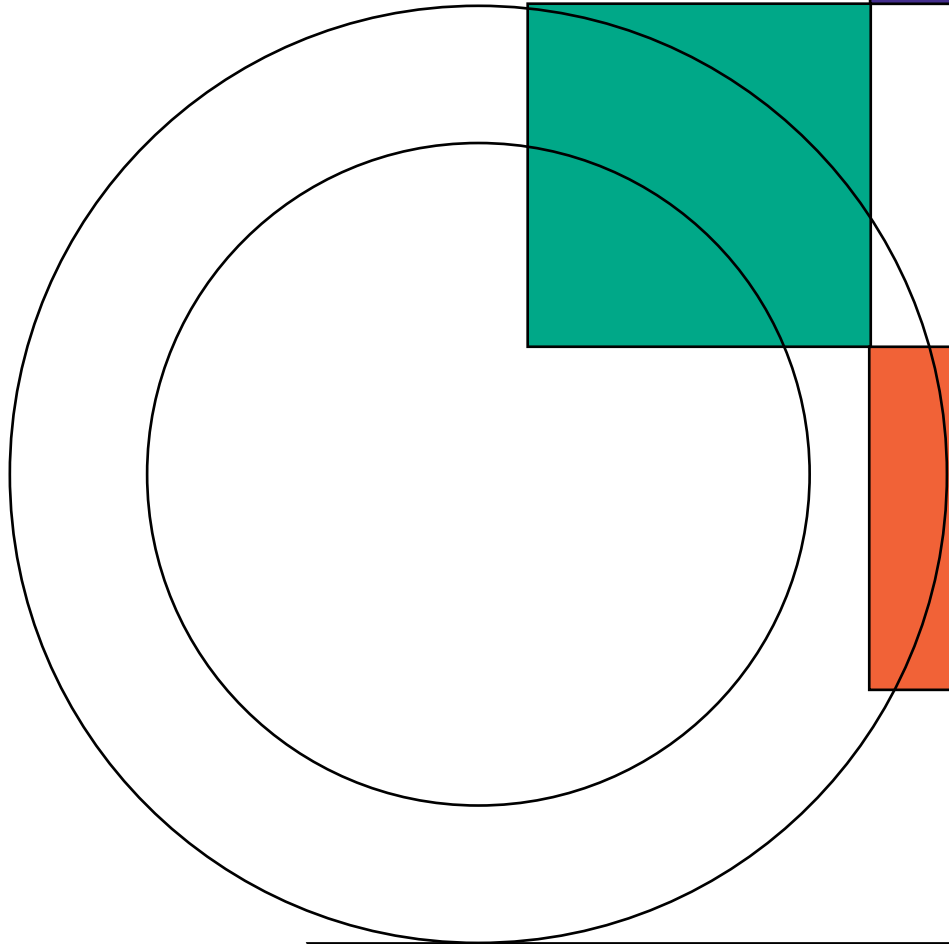
We use the feedback (both positive and negative) in our in-house training sessions and to strengthen our culture and reinforce our company’s core values. It has allowed us to build tremendous value in our company.

So, the gold-nugget takeaway here is that feedback leads to changes in customer service, improved customer service leads to greater value, and greater value is where you boost your bottom line. It’s worked for us.

*Brian Altmann, CAPS, is president of DBS Remodel, a design-build residential remodeling company based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He is also a private consultant for other remodeling companies related to business advice. This article originally appeared in sister publication JLC.*

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# Product Profiles: Aboveground Pools



## Aboveground Resin Pools

Carvin's state-of-the-art Resin Aboveground Pools combine a modern design, 3D wall effects and the latest technology, says Klaudia Parker, Carvin Pool Equipment's sales director

"All resin components have been optimized for better weight distribution and optimal sturdiness by using latest available software during the design process," Parker says. "These pools stand out for exemplary quality with easy and fast installation."

The pool's walls are heat treated with a multilayer protection process to provide sturdiness. Its high and stable wall rails keep the wall in place during ground shifts.

The pools are compatible with water features as add-on accessories, such as the StarJet or the StarFall, and outside lighting as well.

For technical support and marketing materials call 866-979-4501.

Made in Canada, the pools come with a 30-year warranty.

**Contact:** Carvin Pool Equipment | [carvinpool.com](http://carvinpool.com)

## Pegasus Products' Aboveground Liners

These aboveground pool liners provide a superior fit and the material is "thicker and more flexible than others available on the market," says Frank Patel, vice president of operations. He adds that the liners are made of virgin vinyl with algacide and mildew/mold inhibitors.

The firm offers five different beads plus a variety of patterns. Custom orders are accepted in season. Shown is the Westminster Tile, with a rich blue hue to make the water shimmer.

Customers are welcome to call and speak with customer service or engineering, or visit the firm's website, to ensure a great-fitting liner after they submit a drawing of the pool. Marketing materials, samples and brochures are available on request.

Noting that the company has made liners for 38 years, Patel says customer feedback has included comments on "the superior fit and quality of the liners."

**Contact:** Pegasus Pool Products | [pegasus-products.com](http://pegasus-products.com)

## REMORA PRO Kit

The REMORA PRO Kit includes a portable 21-inch vacuum head with a carry handle, Smart Switch to monitor power going to/from the motor, dual-speed motor, 25-foot floating power cord, wearable battery pack, a 10 amp battery charger, two 1.8Ah LiFePO4 lithium-ion batteries, and one standard and superfine vacuum bag.

**Contact:** Hammerhead Patented Performance | [hammerheadvac.com](http://hammerheadvac.com)



### Deck-Loc Anchoring

Loop-Loc's Deck-Loc Anchoring is the first no-drill system for composite decks, according to company officials.

Exclusively offered by Loop-Loc, it's designed for easy on and easy off.

**Contact:** Loop-Loc | [looploc.com](http://looploc.com)



### SPHERE Pro

The SunSmile is an above-ground pool solar heating system. It connects to any aboveground pool size and shape via an existing pool pump to perfectly warm a pool to the desired temperature efficiently.

The SunSmile was made to offer an environmentally friendly pool heating alternative so aboveground pool owners can reap in the economical and environmental rewards.

The system design uses the company's patented over-molded construction to ensure longevity and efficiency, and is simple to install.

"In four simple steps, you can take it out from the box, lay the collector flat so the sun can flatten it within the hour, connect the feeder line from the pool to the existing pump to the collector, and connect the return line from the collector to the pool," says Carlos Alvarado, marketing manager for Magen eco-Energy US. "The system will do the rest."

**Contact:** Magen eco-Energy US | [mageneco.com](http://mageneco.com)



### Above Ground Liners

Merlin's Above Ground Liners are created with only North American vinyl so pool owners can be confident that they have a high-quality product, says Rabia Danyaro, Merlin's marketing coordinator.

"With better quality materials, these liners are made to be long lasting and withstand the elements," Danyaro says.

Merlin liners are cut with computer-controlled accuracy which ensures a precise fit. Along with durable formulation, the Above Ground Liners add beautiful dimension and details to swimming pools.

These liners are currently available in seven vinyl patterns. "The selection of patterns that will add a sense of luxury to any above ground pool," says Danyaro.

This product comes with a 1.5 year limited pro-rated warranty.

**Contact:** Merlin Industries | [merlinindustries.com](http://merlinindustries.com)

# Product Profiles: Spas and Accessories



## Bullfrog Spas A Series

The enhanced A Series come with many improved features.

The headrests are better aligned to the neck and spine and offer an improved fit and look, blending seamlessly into the natural contours of the spa.

JetPaks now offer under-lighted headrests that enhance the mood of your spa relaxation. Inductive lighting technology means that headrest under lighting operates seamlessly with no need for wires or connectors. Snap in the JetPak and the lights come on.

All layouts, seats, and jet placements in A Series spas have been carefully re-evaluated to provide optimal therapy experiences for the largest variety of people and situations. This includes a thoughtful mix of seat depths in each model, improved seating ergonomics, better jet alignment, a focus on safe entry/exit, and enhanced premium seating in proximity to conveniences like auxiliary controls and cup holders.

**Contact:** Bullfrog Spas | [bullfrogspas.com](http://bullfrogspas.com)

## Spa Pure Salt Start

SpaPure Salt Start is a super-fast dissolving salt that uses an exclusive formula to keep spa water in balance longer, says Kevin Vlietstra, Haviland's technical director and regulatory specialist.

"Using technology to help buffer spa water, this product naturally reduces the common corrosion found when using traditional salt in spas," says Vlietstra. "As a result, the product keeps spa surfaces and equipment free from scale."

This product is formulated to make spa water maintenance simple, and is recommended for spas with salt-chlorine generators. The product includes natural water softeners so users have a more enjoyable soaking experience.

Spa Pure Salt Start is available in a 5-pound bucket, and is made in the USA.

**Contact:** Haviland USA/Spa Pure | [spapureusa.com](http://spapureusa.com)

## Swim Check Fix Phosphate Tablets

Swim Check Fix Phosphate Tablets are formulated to remove phosphates in swimming pool water. They are simple and easy to use.

"Add the tablet directly to the pool skimmer for efficient phosphate removal," says Mike McBride, marketing manager for Industrial Test Systems. "It's more affordable and longer lasting than liquid removers. One tablet lowers phosphates by over 500 ppb for 10,000 gallons."

The patent-pending, time-release tablets are individually wrapped.

Technical support is available by calling 803-329-9712, and marketing materials are available on request.

The product comes with a 1-year warranty.

**Contact:** Industrial Test Systems | [sensafe.com](http://sensafe.com)



### VibeProof Locking Union

Magic Plastics' VibeProof Locking Union technology can prevent and avoid costly service calls, says Mark Coito, Magic Plastics' vice president sales and marketing.

The patented design incorporates the use of a series of strategically placed scallops on the Pump Union nut and tailpiece; hand tightening the nut will engage the lock, preventing the union from loosening or backing out during vibration.

"This technology saves unnecessary service calls," says Coito.

The VibeProof locking feature is available in a variety of Magic Plastics' products, including Pump Unions, Smart Check Valves, Uni-Body Valves, Unions and High Heat Union Assemblies.

Technical support is available by calling 800-369-0303.

Marketing materials are available upon request.

**Contact:** Magic Plastics | [magicplastics.com](http://magicplastics.com)



### DuraCore Spa Covers

Each component of a DuraCore cover is thoughtfully sourced and crafted for optimal performance and environmental responsibility, says Phil Saltzman, Meyco's director of sales.

"Standard vinyl and foam spa covers waste energy and end up in landfills in just a few years," Saltzman says. "DuraCore spa covers last far longer, are 90% recyclable, and can save literally tons of carbon over their lifetime."

Each DuraCore cover is crafted around a vapor resistant, polypropylene insulating core that doesn't gain weight or grow mold like the typical polystyrene. Each cover is structured on lightweight aluminum channels with a polycarbonate base.

Covers are available in 9 shades made with a material that is designed to be vapor wicking and will not crack or fade prematurely.

DuraCore covers come with a 5-year warranty that specifically covers water weight gain.

**Contact:** Meyco Pool Covers | [meycocovers.com/spa-covers/](http://meycocovers.com/spa-covers/)



### Aqua Comb

Aqua Combs come in two styles; Pool for deep pleated pool cartridges and Spa for shallow pleated spa cartridges that clean spas, hot tubs and swim spa cartridge filters.

The Aqua Comb combines 3-inch-wide powerful water sprays with a pick comb that opens the pleats and cleans the side walls, allowing the water to remove the debris.

The benefits are a fully clean cartridge that will reduce the electrical cost, increase the jet flow and extend the time between filter cleanings.

"Aqua Combs fully clean the cartridges in 3 to 5 minutes using less than 5 gallons of water," says Mark Schreiber, owner of Aqua Combs. "They are the only device that will remove desert dust and concrete dust from new or repaired pools."

Aqua Combs are 100% made in the USA.

**Contact:** Aqua Comb/Mi-Way | [aquacomb.com](http://aquacomb.com)



### Gray Mesh Safety Covers

Tara Pool and Outdoor Products has expanded its line of Regular and HD Mesh Safety Covers to include gray.

The Regular Mesh cover is designed for easy installation and efficient water drainage. The HD Mesh cover provides 99% shade, reducing algae growth and ensuring a cleaner pool opening in the spring.

Both covers are constructed with heavy-duty springs, stainless steel hardware, solid brass anchors, and double-layer webbing for increased durability.

In addition to pool covers, Tara offers custom safety covers that can be made to fit spas. These products are designed to provide long-lasting protection and functionality for outdoor spaces.

Tara now also offers training seminars for pool professionals, focusing on measurement and installation of safety covers.

Mesh safety covers come with a 15-year prorated warranty.

**Contact:** Tara Pool & Outdoor Products | tarapools.com



### Ultra Vinyl Privacy

Ultra's Vinyl Privacy utilizes a heavy-duty aluminum frame that accepts any standard 7/8" thick vinyl tongue and groove board.

The combination of four possible frame colors and countless options for vinyl boards results in virtually limitless color combinations. Unlike most fence products, Ultra's Vinyl Privacy offers homeowners the opportunity to customize their fence without paying the high prices normally associated with customization.

"Without a doubt, the overall aesthetics and flexibility of design is the best thing about this product," says Ben Jodoin, who handles sales for Ultra Aluminum. "The consensus amongst users of this product is that it has a unique combination of beauty, and performance, plus it can be used in varied applications."

Both of the materials used require little to no maintenance. The product is backed by a limited lifetime warranty.

**Contact:** Ultra Aluminum Mfg. Inc. | ultrafence.com



### Pump Shut-off System/ SVRS

Vacless' VGB-compliant SVRSs feature an electrical pump shut-off system with an alarm or siren, which instantly turns the pump off upon entrapment.

The SVRS is automatically resettable in 3 minutes, and features no nonsense programming, no false tripping, choice of air or no-air induction, and no by-passing for pool vacuum cleaning.

It installs in 5 minutes onto the pump in place of the suction side drain plug without the use of tools, and is designed for use with pumps of up to 25 horsepower.

"The best thing about this product is the easy installation, no nonsense programming and unquestioned reliability," says Hassan Hamza, Vacless' president.

Marketing materials and technical support are available.

The units are covered under a 3-year warranty.

**Contact:** Vacless Systems | vacless.com

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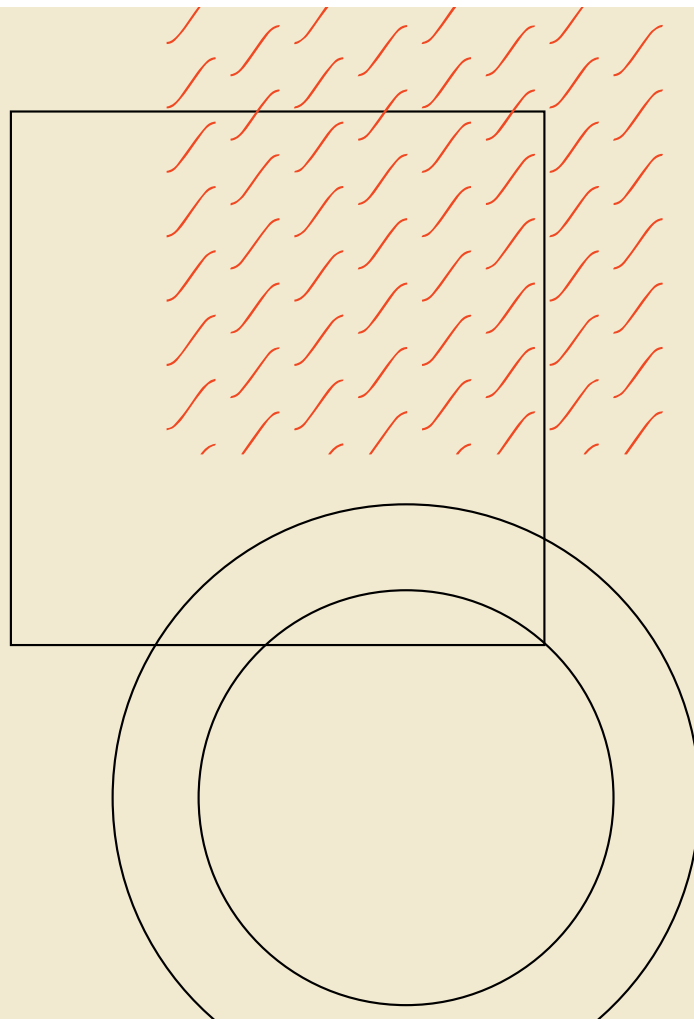
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is your hub to apply for our annual prestige programs, including Top 50 Builders and Service award programs, and Masters of Design.



# New Products

BY PSN STAFF



## CCEI Pool

CCEI Pool has new, online tutorials for users to operate CCEI's Vigipool automation system. The videos, available in English and Spanish, show users how to setup the Vigipool app on their smart phone and make adjustments to pool water temperature, lighting and water chemistry.

**Contact:** [ccei-pool.com/us/](http://ccei-pool.com/us/)



## ProTeam

Severest Algae is a new, unique copper blend algacide that kills all algae of any color and any type. This product's performance increases as the temperature in and around the pool water increases, working harder as the sun shines directly on the water. This product is triple chelated to prevent staining.

**Contact:** [proteampoolcare.com](http://proteampoolcare.com)



## RENOLIT

The VOGUE Collection comprises four reinforced membrane designs that are printed with a unique relief and texture. This interior finish for waterproofing pools is made of 80-mil thick, commercial grade, reinforced PVC with slip-resistant properties. It's ideal for new pools or to renovate deteriorated pools.

**Contact:** [renolit.com/swimmingpool](http://renolit.com/swimmingpool)



## Rico Rock

Rico Rock has a new, improved system for installing grottos and caves on pools using light-weight boulder columns with a sandwich-type 'grotto lid' that allows for custom design without extensive labor. Installers backfill prescribed areas with concrete on-site for maximum structural strength.

**Contact:** [ricorock.com](http://ricorock.com)



# Life's a beach and then you cover your pool



Brass Components



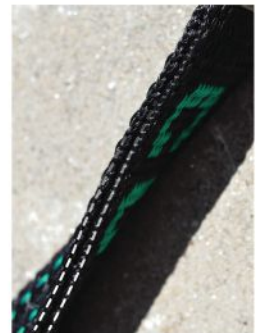
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