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contents

August 17, 2026 | Vol. 65 | No. 9

FEATURES

- 12 2026 Masters of Design**
- 14 The Heart of Intention**
A painstakingly deliberate design process yields this low-slung, expansive backyard that perfectly frames the bayside
- 18 Sweeping Beauty**
A striking swing and sweeping arc define this modern backyard resort
- 22 Desert Reflections**
A black-finish infinity pool/spa combo reflects the stunning hardscape and surrounding greenery
- 26 Modernist Puzzle**
Expert design and precision create a seamless connection between home and pool
- 30 Showstopping Efficiency**
Turning site limitations into a striking, innovative, and efficient backyard masterpiece
- 34 Burning Bridge**
A spectacle in fire and water visually links all the outdoor rooms of a sprawling backyard
- 38 Natural Beauty**
This custom vinyl-liner pool, complete with a grotto, offers an at-home organic retreat
- 42 Vision in Blue**
A unique glass-tile treatment seamlessly unifies two separate fiberglass shells into one cohesive pool/spa combination
- 46 Balancing Act**
A stunning fiberglass pool with a dramatic waterfall defines this multifaceted outdoor oasis
- 50 Emotional Mastery**
Inspired by the lot's shape and nearby mountain, this designer sculpted an emotional space



12

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ABOVE: PHOTO BY JOSHUA JONES/COURTESY HARDSCAPE MEDIA CREATIONS

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DEPARTMENTS

- 6 What the Masters of Design Taught Me This Year**
- 10 News**

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What the Masters of Design Taught Me This Year



"This year's Masters of Design projects serve as map and compass, showing where we are and where we're headed.... See how these talented designers are shaping the future of outdoor living and elevating our industry."

It's awards season at Pool and Spa News. In June, we announced our Top 50 Builders; in October, we'll unveil the Top 50 Service firms. Now, in this issue, we celebrate the best in design.

We present our 24th annual Masters of Design issue, honoring an elite group of 10 design teams across all categories—concrete, vinyl, fiberglass, spas, and water features. Though rare, stainless steel and hybrid pools have also earned this honor for their designers.

As always, this year's group served as a bellwether for design trends and the industry's progress. I learned some interesting things about the state of design for pools, spas, water features, and backyards:

New ways to use synthetic turf—which isn't going anywhere

Eight of our honorees incorporated synthetic turf into their designs to some extent, most commonly as a high-contrast backdrop for light-colored step pads.

The designer of our first featured project, Brian Mulvehill of Redwood Outdoor Living & Design in Hudson, Mass., put it to use in ways that served practical, aesthetic, and sensory purposes. He used a grid system to divide the backyard into separate rooms. But he needed a way to delineate each room without blocking the bay view. To do this, each space had a block on the grid. Most of these squares featured a combination of synthetic turf and stone. For each space, the proportion of turf to stone and the patterning changed. See this masterpiece beginning on page 12.

Everyone needs swinging chairs over their pools

Our second honoree, Wes Gohlke of Gohlke Pools in Denton, Texas, designed a pool with such a long, sweeping radius that it nearly forms a semicircle. Gohlke repeated the circular theme throughout the project, even in a set of swinging chairs that dangle above a sunshelf and sit adjacent to a spa. That area of the pool seems like a spot where you'd likely want to stay put for a while, and the treatment Gohlke gave it took the idea to the next level. You can see the whole backyard starting on page 18.

Seeming liabilities can become inspiration

Casey Risdon, a designer and project manager with California Pools & Landscape in Chandler, Ariz., attended a first meeting with a client whose property abutted a mountain. Prime real estate, certainly, but the mountain's footprint left the yard in an unusual shape. It was also a looming presence that would likely affect how one feels in the space. Risdon used both idiosyncrasies to his advantage, with one influencing how he designed the spa's focal point and the other presenting him the opportunity to sculpt the space in an exhilarating way. Acquaint yourself with this project on page 50.

An elegant way to frame your flush spa with glass mosaic tile

A client of Latham, N.Y.-based Concord Pools & Spas wanted a spa in addition to the fiberglass pool she was purchasing. But she preferred it flush with the ground, rather than elevated the standard 18 inches. They also wanted the separate spa to look like part of the pool's footprint. To conceal the space between the narrower spa and the deck to align with the pool, they set a wide frame of mixed blue glass mosaic tile on the horizontal surface surrounding the spa. This added the trademark sparkle and glow while maintaining a low profile. See it for yourself on page 42.

Through innovation, the future is always now

This year's Masters of Design projects serve as map and compass, showing where we are and where we're headed. The product of painstakingly intentional design, along with the newest in features, products, and creative approaches, these projects reflect the inspiring evolution of design in pools and outdoor spaces. Each team showcases its unique vision, contributing to the ongoing conversation about form, function, and aesthetics.

We invite you to explore all 10 projects. See how these talented designers are shaping the future of outdoor living and elevating our industry. **PSN**

Rebecca Robledo
Deputy Editor, PSN • rrobledo@kenilworth.com



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Fluidra Acquires Platform to Expand Commercial Operations

Pool equipment and technology manufacturer Fluidra has acquired Datapool, a digital twin platform, from Ecotropy.

The Big 3 company began collaborating with Ecotropy in 2024 through an investment. Now, Datapool is fully integrated into Fluidra's digital operations for commercial pools. The platform incorporates analytics capabilities, IoT solutions, and real-time data. Fluidra said the products align with its strategy to offer connected solutions and to move toward smarter management models.

"This acquisition marks a milestone in our digitalization strategy," said Thorsten Muck, Fluidra's commercial pool director. "Datapool allows us to accelerate the transition towards an intelligent pool management model, improving efficiency, reducing environmental impact, and offering our customers data-driven tools to make better decisions." **PSN**

Easton Select Makes New Acquisitions

Easton Select Group has expanded into coastal Rhode Island, southeastern Connecticut, and Boston's North Shore through the acquisitions of JPS Pool Service and J. Gallant Pool.

Both companies will continue operating under their existing brands, with former owners Joshua Matthey and Jay Gallant remaining in charge of day-to-day operations.

Founded in 2009 and based in Pomfret, Conn., JPS Pool Service strengthens Easton's presence in coastal Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. J. Gallant Pool, based in Newbury, Mass., adds pool construction, repair, and service operations while expanding the company's footprint across Boston's North Shore.

"This partnership represents an important step in our expansion into coastal Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut," said David Hobaica, executive chairman of Easton Select of the JPS acquisition.

Founded in 2024, Easton Select Group is a pool service consolidator that now includes 15 brands. **PSN**

Azureon Adds On to Its Brands

Azureon has expanded into the Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia markets with the acquisition of Pooltek Services, based in Rockville, Md.

The acquisition is Azureon's 12th since the pool service and maintenance platform was founded in 2024, further expanding its regional footprint.

According to the company, Pooltek will retain a significant ownership stake in Azureon following the transaction. **PSN**



Andres Rojas

Loop-Loc Names New National Sales Manager

Loop-Loc has promoted Andres Rojas to national sales manager, where he will lead the company's sales organization and support dealer and distribution partners across North America.

In his new role, Rojas will focus on strengthening customer relationships, supporting continued territory growth, and further advancing the company's sales and training initiatives.

Rojas joined Loop-Loc in 2008 as territory manager for North Carolina and South Carolina. According to the company, he expanded the territory while also contributing to its international business operations, dealer training programs, ongoing product education, various special projects, and process improvements companywide.

"Over the years, Andres has earned the trust and respect of our customers and team members alike," said Loop-Loc's president and CEO, LeeAnn Donaton. "His extensive industry knowledge, dedication to customer success, and passion for helping others make him an outstanding choice to lead our national sales efforts." **PSN**

PHTA Creates Aboveground Pool Ladder Safety Task Force

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) is forming a task force to investigate the safety of aboveground swimming pool ladders.

This move comes in response to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) approval of Petition CP 25-2, to make changes for child-resistant pool ladders that are used with aboveground pools and portable spas. The agency now plans to work with organizations such as the PHTA, as well as medical experts, consumer advocates, and industry stakeholders, to develop performance requirements for this product category, define what makes a ladder child-resistant, and strengthen consumer warnings to improve safety awareness.

According to PHTA, its task force will evaluate the safety risks associated with ladders for aboveground and on-ground pools. The evaluation will examine how children under five can access swimming pools unattended by climbing pool ladders. It will explore developing child-resistant performance requirements and consider enhancements to consumer warnings that encourage proper use of existing ladder safety features. In doing so, it will review applicable existing standards.

Interested parties may contact Greg Ceton, PHTA senior director of standards and codes, at gceton@phta.org. **PSN**



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2026

by Rebecca Robledo

A beautiful backyard starts with a concept, but it takes intent to carry it through. Here, we present 10 designers or design teams that illustrate the many rewards of intent in a design outcome. Every material choice, every elevation, and even the placement of every line work in service of the concept. The result is a collection of projects in which every decision reinforces the original vision, proving that thoughtful design is as much about discipline and restraint as it is about creativity.

We have a sprawling multi-room backyard that must overlook the bay without obstructing the view from the historic home, pictured here. There's the water-and-fire feature that must tie together a backyard whose scale rivals that of a resort pool area. And we have a pool whose placement required such precision that it

MASTERS OF DESIGN



PHOTO COURTESY JOSHUA JONES/HARDSCAPE MEDIA CREATIONS

needed triangulation, lest the tight fit and bold parallel lines in the adjacent walls betray anything less than perfectly level and plumb. Elsewhere, designers responded to difficult grades, challenging lot lines, and demanding sightlines with solutions that feel effortless because every detail serves a larger purpose.

When any challenge stood in the way of the concept, these designers responded with creative solutions: a rain curtain here, a glowing water orb there. Yet they all worked to reinforce the concept. Each project demonstrates that successful design is rarely the result of a single bold idea but of countless deliberate choices working together in harmony.

Turn the page to see what happens when creativity meets that kind of discipline within the vision. **PSN**



CONCRETE

The Heart of Intention

A painstakingly deliberate design process yields this low-slung, expansive backyard that perfectly frames the bayside

Brian Mulvehill
Founder/lead designer
Redwood Outdoor Living & Design
Hudson, Mass.

Corey Everleigh
President
Environmental Pools
Bolton, Mass.

Breselow Design & Build
Springfield, N.J.

A. Bonadio & Sons
Waltham, Mass.

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The flat-roofed pergola not only complements the home's architecture, but also features an automated louver system on the roof, allowing users to control the amount of shade or protection from the elements.

Set atop a hill that rolls directly down to Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, this gorgeous site was the gift that would keep on giving—but not without some work and a tight balancing act.

"The setting and context of the property are tough to beat in New England," says Brian Mulvehill, founder and lead designer with Redwood Outdoor Living & Design, based in Hudson, Mass. "It's perfectly situated facing due west over the Narragansett Bay, so you have sunrise, mid-day sun, and sunset views all day. Besides tying it into the home's architecture, we had to really make sure we captured that, all while maintaining the same view for the house itself."

He wanted to set the outdoor-living area a fair distance back from the house, providing the homeowners with their own on-site getaway that would not block views from the house to the bay.

To properly serve the natural beauty surrounding the lot, Mulvehill opened it up as much as possible—not to compete with or imitate the natural scenery. Fortunately, the architecture of the historical home provided a clear path. Its Bauhaus styling took a minimalist approach, marked by prominent, clean

horizontal lines, with the trim near the roofline and the window awnings, all in a dark color set against the white home. The emphasis on horizontal lines supplied the dominant strategy for creating an outdoor space that seemed integral to the hillside and did justice to the gorgeous view and lush hillside, without obstructing the view corridors that placed the property at such a premium.

Like the home itself, the yard needed to be plotted and designed with the utmost intent.

"We were able to come up with a grid system that essentially created and defined rooms within the larger space," Mulvehill explains. "Our program was very function-designed."

Considering the clear, crisp borders articulated by synthetic-turf joints, there is no question which space functions as the kitchen and which the outdoor living room.

The almost modular design includes a dedicated lawn area for games, an open, expansive dining area, a lounging room, and a sunken fire pit area. Each module in the grid features a slightly different flooring composition, with some dominated by granite pavers and others by turf. Transitional spaces feature stepping stones, not only to facilitate traffic but also to soften the grid. The fire pit is sunken, adding depth to the grid and shielding the flame from the brisk winds that can pick up.

"We wanted to make sure those spaces were comfortable and didn't feel like you're playing hopscotch on stepping stones," Mulvehill explains.

From overhead shots, one can see just how much is going on in the space. But from ground level, thanks largely to the lack of tall vertical elements, the space feels open.

The synthetic turf was an easy choice. Consider how it affected the game space. "They're a big coin toss family, big corn hole family," he explains. "With it being synthetic turf, form follows function: If it were regular grass, they'd have a really difficult time maintaining that."

It also allowed turf flooring in the covered living area—no sun required. "With the theme of midcentury modern, we felt the living room should feel more cozy, almost like an outdoor apartment," Mulvehill explains. "So you can go out barefoot and feel like you're in the comfort of the interior."

The metallic pergola adds comfort with a louvered roof that adjusts for sunlight or closes to keep out rain. Automated UV screens block damaging sunlight while keeping bugs out. **PSN**

Maintaining lower elevations gave the property a very open feel, even with so many outdoor-living spaces concentrated in one area.





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Sweeping Beauty

A striking swing and sweeping arc define this modern backyard resort

The pool wall along the house forms an almost perfect arc, which carries through the lawn strip to the right. Steps and a sunken fire pit accommodate the grade change.

Wes Gohlke
Lead designer/salesman
Matt Watson
Project manager
Nathan Caldwell
Project superintendent
Gohlke Pools
Denton, Texas

PHOTOS BY JIMI SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY





This set of swings dangles over a shallow sunshelf, creating an irresistible gathering spot in combination with the adjacent spa.

This pool and backyard stand as an answer to those who say math—and, in particular, geometry—has no relevance in real life.

The home's architecture featured a strong emphasis on geometric lines, further accentuated by the monochromatic palette, which included painted white brick with black and other dark tones used for the roof, trim and window systems.

The homeowners wanted to carry that bold geometry into their backyard to make a big statement while integrating with the architecture.

The designers also had to manage a dramatic elevation change, with the property sloping down 7 feet from the back foundation of the house to the existing backyard.

The home's bold geometry provided the primary inspiration for the pool, whose sweeping arc forms a nearly perfect radius. For continuity, a patch of lawn on the backside of the pool extends the arc's outline. The lowered fire pit was placed on a semi-circular patio, referencing the pool's sweeping arc.

To align with the architecture, the design favors large-format porcelain tile, darker mosaic tile, sleek coping profiles, modern steel elements, and monochromatic stone veneers to avoid a busy look. The team made one highly textural choice—the dark gray hexagonal tile used to veneer the dry raised wall around the pool. This choice fits the homeowners' request for bold geometry. The vanishing-edge wall was finished in a dark-blue glass tile mix.

While the luxury-resort vibe permeated the entire project, one feature in particular cemented it—a trio of swinging seats dangling over a sunshelf. Inspired directly by resorts, this innovative feature was placed next to the submerged monochromatic spa to create the ultimate gathering spot. The team needed to ensure the steel pergola could support the extra weight of people hanging from it, so they had it engineered. The circular form of the custom-fabricated seats, combined with the bold circle of the spa, further reinforced the geometric approach.

Behind the swings and spa, a raised wall adds sensory input while serving as a transition into the trees beyond. Sheet waterfalls set between the swinging chairs provide sound for the area. With their own pump and valve system, they can be custom-throttled to the optimal water volume to avoid getting too loud. A viewing window is cut into the wall to guide the eye to the view beyond the backyard. A dark, textured stone veneer covers the wall, as it does the raised fire pit and stair risers on the other side of the yard. It introduces a subtle, natural texture and ties in with the home's dark accents without stealing focus from the minimalist composition.

This was part of a substantial strategy on the site: Use lighter coping and deck materials contrasted against darker vertical surfaces. The dark tones and high contrast more clearly defined the project's intended horizontal geometry, while the light tones also helped soften the scale of the structural elements and optimally reflected nighttime illumination. **PSN**

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Desert Reflections

A black-finish infinity pool/spa combo reflects the stunning hardscape and surrounding greenery

Vinny Biancamano
Pool builder/pool
salesman
**HotShot Hardscape
and Pools**
Peoria, Ariz.

Kirk Bianchi
Owner
Bianchi Design
Phoenix

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The team veneered the elevated perimeter-overflow spa with large-format black tile to minimize grout joints and maximize contrast. Its horizontally oriented, textured ridges create a subtle whitewater effect as the spa spills over.



A study in contrasts, this backyard pairs the sleekest glass surfaces with fine textures and sculptural forms to perfectly encapsulate the home's architecture and frame the Arizona sky.

The home boasts warm contemporary architecture, marked by clean lines, geometric forms, contrasting materials, modern roofing elements, expansive glass openings, and a neutral color palette. The use of natural stone throughout the home's exterior adds texture and warmth while forming a connection to the desert landscape.

The homeowners wanted to retain the mature vegetation already on the site, including established trees and lush perimeter landscaping that provided a sense of privacy.

Drawing inspiration from local resorts in Scottsdale, Ariz., the team struck the right blend of contemporary styling and desert elements. Neutral-toned materials, such as natural stone, complement sculptural specimen trees. A large, dark-bottomed pool reflects the expansive desert sky, while the raised perimeter-overflow spa mirrors the nearby specimen trees.

The 42-by-20-foot pool/spa combination commands center stage, with dramatic black interiors that

maximize reflection. Six deck jets introduce laminar arcs into the slot-overflow pool. The face of the 7-by-8-foot raised spa is veneered with a very dark, highly textured, ridged black porcelain tile, creating a mild whitewater effect when the tub overflows. Capping off the tableau is a trio of oversized concrete pots holding sculptural specimen trees that cast striking reflections on the spa when lit at night.

The pool was carefully positioned to fit precisely within the view corridors from the home and the outdoor pavilion.

Next to the pool, a pavilion provides another destination area. It features a peaked roof with dark detailing against a beige structure, all influenced by the home's architecture and mirroring the detailing on a patio directly outside the home. The full kitchen includes a grill, refrigerator, sink, and bar, with a large-screen television in the background.

Spaces closer to the home incorporate more of the neutral tones and mild texturing found on the abode. The resort feel is reinforced by a balance of active and passive spaces. A 7-foot tanning shelf with in-water loungers and the spa provide places to relax, while the outdoor kitchen, entertainment pavilion, and fire lounge area serve as gathering spots.

All is stitched together with off-white large-format porcelain tiles on the deck and pool coping. Artificial turf and loose pebbles were used generously throughout the site, no doubt reducing water consumption.

Architectural stone walls and decorative screens introduce new textures and forms to the yard, enhancing the sense of intimacy within the rooms they create.

A buried overflow tank and a shallow gutter system collect the spillover and water in transit from the pool and spa. **PSN**

Walls and decorative screens were used throughout the backyard to create more intimate spaces.



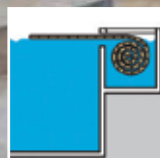
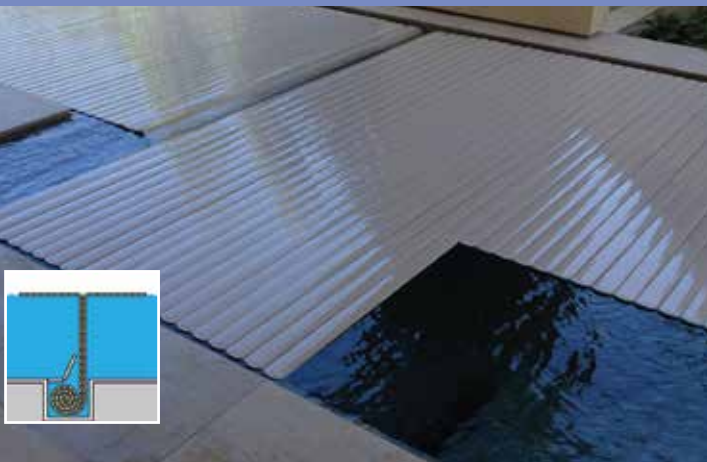


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Modernist Puzzle

Expert design and precision create a seamless connection between home and pool



A warm-toned deck with black and gray accents bridged the wood-clad home's warmth and the black pool. The pool had to align perfectly with the home's horizontal lines and bold roofline to avoid looking askew.

A U-shaped home's unique footprint naturally facilitates pool placement—just position the water feature within the U to create a seamless link to the house and offer beautiful views from all nearby rooms.

But as this project shows, simple does not mean easy. Maintaining and perfecting that simple form takes work.

"In our industry, contemporary design is the most challenging to deliver, because minimalist aesthetics leave no room to hide flaws—there are no heavy textures or organic curves to mask a misalignment," says Amanda Miller, a designer with J&M Pool Company in Senoia, Ga.

This pool was designed and built as the home was still under construction, and it became very clear what would drive the waterscape's design. "You don't really see houses like that where we're at very much," Miller says. "The client gave us free rein, so we went and did something a little different to match the difference of the house."

A long, rectangular pool set within the U was perfectly suited to the property. Not only did it plot well in the space, but the prominent lines of the pool run perfectly parallel to the wood paneling on the home, with well-defined horizontal lines seeming to trace the pool's outline.

Amanda Miller
Designer
J&M Pool Company
Senoia, Ga.

PHOTOS BY AUBREY ALEXANDER



To manage the elevation change, the designer created a raised vanishing edge, whose wall both serves as a weir and retains earth.

To perfectly match the home's modernist sensibilities, Miller wanted something minimalist and completely symmetric. A simple color palette was chosen: an off-white large-format tile would cover the deck, providing a neutral canvas whose warm undertones suit the wood cladding. Dark grays and blacks were used to outline the pool, spa, and planters, somewhat mimicking the dark-gray roofline of the flat-topped home.

"We knew the house was going to be that warm wood color, but it's such a modern-looking house that we didn't want to go too warm with it," Miller explains. "We knew she was going to use black trim on all the windows and doors, so we tried to match the black trim with the coping of the pool, and then did the much lighter decking to give it that same outline that the house itself has."

Inside the pool, a black pebble finish was used, with a 10 percent glass blend to add more shimmer.

The pool's outline not only needed to reflect the home's architecture but also had to sit equidistant from the home at every point.

"In [the clients'] city, we have to be 10 feet from water's edge to any permanent structures," Miller says. "We just took a 10-foot measurement from both sides and the back of the house, and we positioned it right in the center."

Given the minimalist layout and color palette, the team believed the pool had to be perfectly centered, with equal spacing between the pool and the house on all sides. The pool also needed to run perfectly parallel with the home, Miller says. Otherwise, given the strong lines of both the home and pool, any deviations would make things feel off, even if on a subconscious level.

"To build a pool within a three-sided glass courtyard, where each coping line sits perfectly parallel to the home's architecture, and the obsidian-black water perfectly reflects the rooflines without a fraction of an inch of skew, required an elite level of care from our design and field teams," Miller says.

To achieve this level of precision, the crews employed geometric triangulation, similar to the method used to size covers and vinyl liners. Fixed reference points were established along the home's foundation, and they were cross-measured against the pool formwork to make sure it was perfectly square.

To bridge the home's sharp structural lines with the natural environment at the back of the lot, Miller placed an 18-foot-tall infinity edge and capped it with black tile so it would seemingly disappear into the horizon while, seen from the other side, it matched the roof line.

While step treads are finished in the same light material as the deck, the risers are veneered with a darker material that recalls the home's roofline. **PSN**

The team closely measured to make sure the pool sat the exact same distance from the house on all sides. They even went so far as to employ triangulation.





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Visually connecting the home and pavilion was a key design objective. A series of stepping pads links the two, while fire pots provide visual cues that draw visitors across.

PHOTO COURTESY GOHLKE POOLS

This design came about when the homeowners' lofty expectations met with nearly stifling restrictions imposed by a septic system.

The clients sought a resort-like feel that blended with the home's modern styling. They planned to entertain, so they requested multiple destination spots throughout their yard.

Designer Wes Gohlke took his cues largely from the home, which paired light-colored painted masonry with dark trim accents, warm wood ceiling details, and large windows to foster a strong connection between indoors and outdoors. In response, Gohlke designed this clean, geometric pool with layered elevations, strong horizontal lines, and entertainment spaces that could well have been natural extensions of the home.

For the latter, the project incorporated a detached pavilion with lounge seating, suspended swings, a fireplace, a television, an outdoor kitchen, expansive tanning ledges, fire bowls, and several conversation areas.

As one of his primary objectives, Gohlke sought to enhance the relationship between the home and the detached outdoor pavilion. To do this while maintaining open sight lines and balanced circulation, he placed an elongated pool between the two structures, added a raised spa to draw visitors

toward the pavilion, and installed floating stepping pads to make the journey easier.

"Every major feature was organized around enhancing this visual relationship and creating a seamless flow between indoor and outdoor living," says Gohlke, of Gohlke Pools in Denton, Texas.

While the architecture provided inspiration, one specific site condition imposed a constraint: Components of a septic system spanned much of the yard and had to remain functional and accessible. Concentrating traffic toward the center of the yard by placing both the pool and pavilion there helped mitigate this issue while enabling free traffic flow.

The white marble step pads make a bold impression set against the pool's dark bottom and the synthetic turf used around the site. One path spans the yard's width, reinforcing the home's strong horizontal lines.

A negative edge flows toward the home, drawing individuals into the yard. The weir wall was positioned to virtually disappear when viewed through the large windows at key viewing spots inside.

White fire bowls against the dark pool double the contrast and contradiction, with black against white, fire against water. Gohlke placed a second vanishing edge behind the fire bowls to enjoy from the pavilion.

The pool's entry steps span the width of the vessel, with the extended first tread serving as a sunshelf, complete with vertical bubblers.

Continuing the minimalist thread, the team used simple profiles for the coping and step-overhangs.

The flat-topped pavilion included a full outdoor kitchen, a living room, a fireplace, and suspended swings, offering a unique way to interact with the covered space and elements outside.

Aside from the pavilion, elements in the backyard were restricted to a low profile, giving the yard an expansive feel. **PSN**

White fire bowls against the dark pool reinforce the design's bold contrast. The vanishing edge behind them enhances views from the pavilion.

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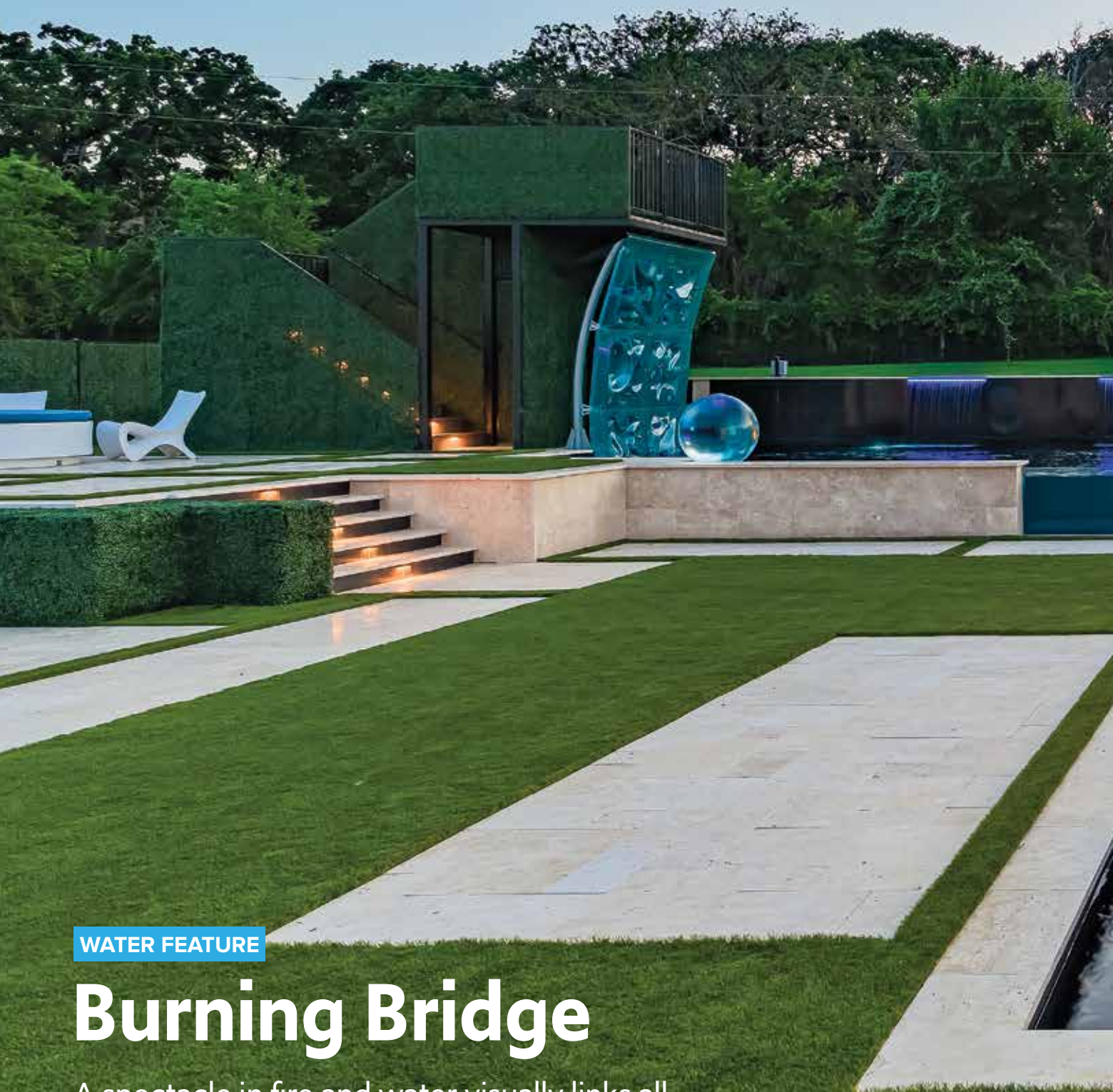


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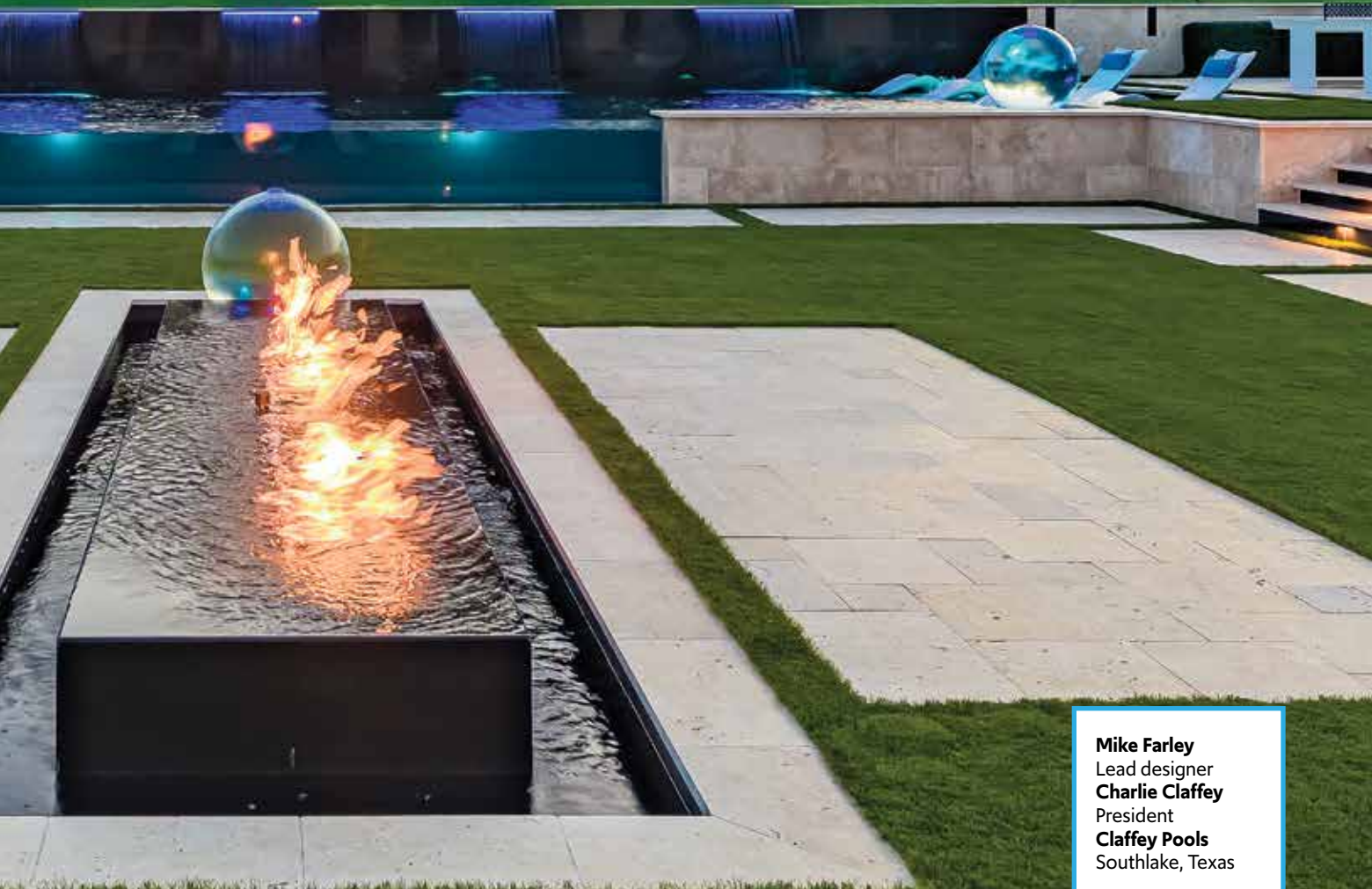
WATER FEATURE

Burning Bridge

A spectacle in fire and water visually links all the outdoor rooms of a sprawling backyard



The fire-and-water feature extends the visual axis established by the lower pool, which sits perpendicular to the home. Deck pads transform the feature into a gathering space.



Mike Farley
Lead designer
Charlie Claffey
President
Claffey Pools
Southlake, Texas

PHOTOS COURTESY FARLEY
POOL DESIGNS



At night, the fire and the orb's otherworldly glow create a dramatic scene. By day, the sphere mesmerizes differently, taking on a more tranquil feel.

This water feature carries a great deal of weight and responsibility. Not literal weight, but still...

The homeowners approached Claffey Pools for a repeat performance. Having recently purchased the property, where the contractor had already constructed a pool, the clients wanted to update the backyard. Several years earlier, Claffey had built a pool running perpendicular to the home, from the back door toward the back of the lot.

"They said, 'This was great for a retired couple, but we've got kids, so we need another pool,'" says Claffey Pools' lead designer Mike Farley. "So we built the second pool up the hill."

The property had an 8-foot elevation change, starting from the back door of the house. It began with a 2-foot terrace, followed by a 3-foot section, then a 3-foot retaining wall, reaching a total of 8 feet. Farley chose to address this by creating a terraced system, culminating in a new activity pool at the highest point before the retaining wall, which is 5 feet higher than the front door.

Farley's plan kept the original pool in place, with only a resurfacing. It would function as a fitness pool and, with its perpendicular orientation, as a reflection pool leading the eye toward the back. At the top, the 60-foot-long activity pool would run parallel to the home across the yard.

This is where the water feature comes in. On the first terrace from the house, something was needed

to serve as a visual and physical bridge to the back pool—leading the eye upward, drawing people to the new pool, and providing a dedicated space for congregating when the clients host large parties. To accomplish this, some spectacle was required.

The water feature would not only help soften the elevation change and extend the view from the home, but it would also serve as the focal point of the yard, stitching together the built-in trampoline on one side and the stepping stones and gathering spots on the other.

To accomplish all this, Farley crafted a 15-by-5-foot fire-and-water feature. An elevated basin overflows to a lower level, creating a glass-like effect that is further enhanced by the black tile lining. The flame actually sits on the water, creating a literal juxtaposition of elements that previously could only be found at resorts and other commercial properties. The long submerged burner emits gas bubbles, which float to the top and are lit by a pilot positioned immediately above the water.

Adding another mesmerizing layer, a 32-inch transparent orb oozes water and takes on an otherworldly glow at night and a tranquil look during the day. Its height helps make it more visible from lower elevations. From certain vantage points, it even appears to float on the dark basin.

The whole thing is centered on the lower pool and on the acrylic window of the pool above it. **PSN**



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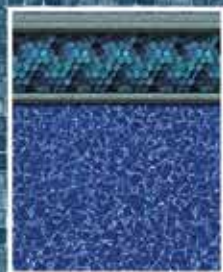
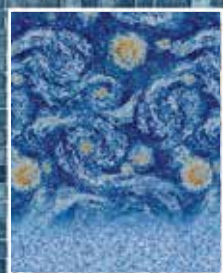
Kevin Cohen
Project manager
Nejame & Sons
Danbury, Conn.

Fran Pentino
Owner
Billy Greene
Project manager
Mancini Pool Decks
Wolcott, Conn.

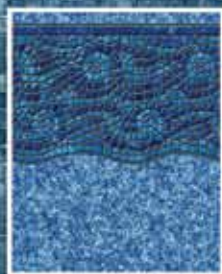
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The elevated patio behind the pool responds to the site's grade change. The rock waterfall creates a grotto where swimmers can enjoy the falling water from a different vantage point.

A simple granite pattern on the stamped-concrete deck keeps the focus on the waterfall. The generous step/sunshelf was poured in concrete before the liner was applied.

In his career, Kevin Cohen has seen plenty of others get pools. So when it came time to build his own, he knew exactly what he had in mind.

"I wanted to have a water feature that would be a focal point of the pool project and a pretty large patio for entertainment space," says Cohen, project manager with Nejame & Sons, based in Danbury, Conn. "But the most important thing was making it look like it fit naturally into the landscape without changing the contours of the yard too much."

The team accomplished just that, with this freeform vinyl-lined pool featuring a sheet-type waterfall and poured-and-formed steps and shelves.

Cohen started with the pool's shape, which was custom-designed for this project. "I based that on a lagoon and made some adjustments," he explains.

"Then I sent it to the manufacturer, and we went back and forth, I think, about six or seven times before we nailed down the exact shape."

The moving water he wanted took the form of a boulder waterfall with a slab that ultimately drops the water in a sheet-like effect. The rocks form a grotto, in which Cohen placed a bench so the waterfall can be viewed from the back. Most of the rocks were extracted from the yard during excavation. However, Cohen sought the ideal rock for the drop, sourcing a 9½-by-6-foot limestone slab.

A slight grade change occurred where the back of the pool would be, so he placed a raised deck there. Stacked New England field-stone veneer covers the face of the raised deck and planters, adding a natural texture that also suits the home.

Footings were formed to support the waterfall and raised patio. To ensure the pool panels did not bear any of the weight from the heavier features, the team used a special bracing system in which concrete was poured.

The decking is made of stamped concrete with a simple granite texture. Anything more ornate might detract from the waterfall, Cohen thought. He based the deck's outlines largely on the pool's freeform shape. He wanted a generous—and balanced—deck, so he made sure it was at least 9 feet wide all the way around, widening to 14 feet near the entry steps to facilitate flow in and out as well as to accommodate chaise lounges. **PSN**





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Vice president of sales
Brent Hanson
Construction manager
Bill Daub
Director of service
Concord Pools & Spas
Latham, N.Y.

John Wells
President
**WL Contracting
and Design**
Niskayuna, N.Y.

Michael Buzzo
Owner
**Absolute Tile
Company**
Schenectady, N.Y.

PHOTOS BY CASTLE PHOTOGRAPHY



The fiberglass pool and fiberglass spa were installed separately. The glass tile in a blue mix proved a close match to the fiberglass shell, which is a bright Caribbean blue with colorful specks.



The client had an unusual request. The former competitive diver wanted her fiberglass pool to accommodate her sport. This would require at least an 8-foot depth, narrowing the builder's options for shells. They found a 40-by-16-foot rectangle with enough depth for a diving board.

The plan also called for a pool/spa combination, with a flush spa integrated into the pool's footprint.

Clean lines were called for, both by the home's architecture and the client's taste. She also wanted a cover. To keep things low profile and accommodate an automatic cover over both the pool and the spa, the team wanted to incorporate the hot-water vessel into the pool's footprint, rather than go the usual route of installing a raised, spillover spa.

They could not find a spa with the exact width as the pool, so to join the two while masking the

The long pool/spa combination required precise construction to accommodate an automatic cover. A powder-coated aluminum vault lid simplifies removal.



The team created a diving pool that complements a separate fiberglass spa. Bluestone coping frames the pool, while pre-cast concrete pavers cover the deck.

dimensional difference, they decided to install the spa with an apron of glass mosaic tile. This would add the shimmer often found in raised spas, but position it horizontally so people could step into the vessel. A blue glass mosaic tile mix was found that almost exactly matches the fiberglass shells—a Caribbean blue with flecks of various colors.

The 40-foot-long pool, an 8-foot-long spa, and 3 feet in between proved to be a long stretch. So, of course, an automatic cover was needed, adding yet another layer of complexity.

"What makes it challenging is that you have no room for error when it comes to setting that elevation," says Gregg Pidgeon, vice president of sales for Concord Pools & Spas in Latham, N.Y. "They wanted a common walkway between the spa and the pool. Precise alignment at the same

elevation ensured seamless tilework and smooth operation of the automatic cover spanning both the pool and spa."

The pool is framed by bluestone coping, while the deck is covered in pre-cast poured pavers that continue the cool tones.

A powder-coated aluminum cover-box lid was chosen for its easy removal. The team decided that heavy stone or masonry lids would have made access to and maintenance of the cover vault too difficult.

To ensure the vessels remain in place, level, and even over time, the company modified its standard installation methods. The pool was installed in a bed of gravel, as usual. However, a solid concrete pad was poured beneath the spa. This was intended to prevent the two vessels from moving independently and falling askew. **PSN**

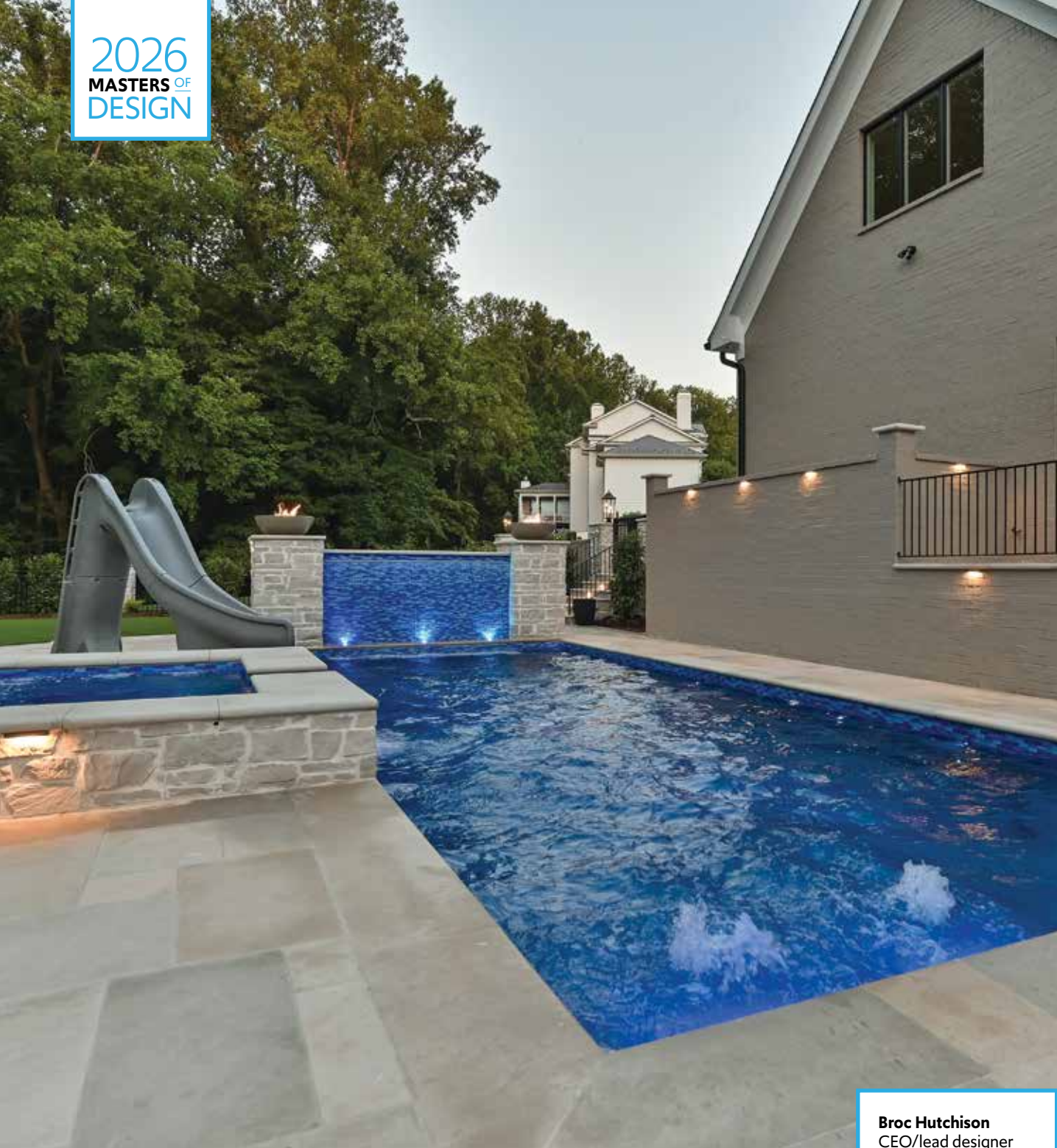


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Balancing Act

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Broc Hutchison
CEO/lead designer
Sunset Fiberglass Pools
La Grange, Ky.

David Dornick
Consultant
**Frank Otte Landscape
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PHOTOGRAPHY

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A rain curtain system added texture while preventing the tapering and breakup common in tall sheet falls.

This site did not provide much wiggle room. An elevation drop of approximately 30 feet meant the soil would need shoring with a retaining wall to create a pad large enough to accommodate a pool. But the engineers indicated exactly where the installation had to go and said the shoring would not support a concrete pool. Additionally, it had to sit just a couple feet away from the house, limiting the walking space between the two structures.

"We couldn't move the swimming pool more central to the house, because the earth dropped so fast, the retaining wall would have had to be another 10 feet tall," says Broc Hutchison, CEO of Sunset Fiberglass Pools in La Grange, Ky.

Despite the restrictions, Hutchison created this backyard living space featuring a pool/spa combination with a sizeable waterfall, along with a fire pit area accented by a fountain.

Scuppers set against a blue tile wall matching the pool create a quieter, more intimate water feature for the fire pit area. A custom fiberglass shell lines the fountain basin to match the pool.

A glass-tile water wall, with blue glass tile flanked by stone columns that support fire bowls, provides the most drama in the yard. A rain curtain falls from the wall, chosen for its ability to hold up over tall drops. As a bonus, the water has a special effect at night when surrounded by lights and fire.

"When those raindrops are coming down and hitting the lights, it makes those waterfalls look like dancing diamonds," Hutchison says.

In the smaller fountain by the fire pit, four stainless-steel scuppers project from the wall. The clients wanted visible hardware on the wall and chose stainless steel for its cooler tone rather than brass, copper, or bronze.

Hutchison prioritized close material integration. A tile line was installed on the fiberglass pool using the same 2-by-4-inch glass brick pattern that veneers the pool waterfall and the smaller fountain. All horizontal capping—on the water feature and fountain walls, the fire pit, for instance—is done with light limestone. Vertical surfaces, such as the outside of the fire pit, are finished in the same stacked, rough-cut limestone used on the front of the house.

A putting green, an inground trampoline, and synthetic turf round out the experience.

To ensure the heavy waterfall wouldn't put pressure on the fiberglass pool, the team installed a footer that included concrete-filled Sono tubes dipping 12 feet down in the earth. "It gives you the optical illusion that it's sitting on top of the shell when it's actually sitting on top of a footer," Hutchison says. **PSN**



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Inspired by the lot's shape and nearby mountain, the designer sculpted an emotional space

Casey Risdon
Designer/project
manager
**California Pools
& Landscape**
Chandler, Ariz.

PHOTOS BY ETHAN COOPER
PHOTOGRAPHY





Spanning only part of the spa's length, the water-feature wall creates openness. Its angled design echoes the shape of the yard.

When Casey Risdon entered the backyard, he felt an immediate spark of inspiration. His client, eager to impress friends, added to the energy of the space. Risdon quickly noticed an intriguing irregularity shaped by the property's proximity to a mountain.

"The property line was set at a pretty aggressive angle," Risdon, a designer and project manager at California Pools & Landscape in Chandler, Ariz., explains. "I thought 'That's awfully unique; let's play with that.'"

It brought to mind an approach by Frank Lloyd Wright called "compression and release." With this technique, people are led through contrasting spaces that create different impressions. In the compression stage, the individual finds themselves in a tight spot, perhaps marked by low ceilings or narrow clearances. But once they cross a threshold, they are treated to an

open, expansive space where they can release the tension caused by the tighter quarters. It is a visceral experience, and Risdon wanted to create it.

He figured he was halfway there without even trying, with the first half of the compression-and-release equation brooding to the side.

"There's a giant mountain to the left," he says. "Then as you turn to the right, the yard opens up."

In response, he increased the compression by a notch, placing the tallest structure, a pergola, on the side opposite the mountains. Between the mountain and the pergola would sit the spa, elevated 18 inches. A short back wall features three stainless-steel box scuppers, chosen in part for their gentle sound. But the wall does not span the whole width of the spa. Instead, it ends partway, leaving an opening that enhances the sense of spaciousness. The top of the wall has a slight slant to imitate the skewed property line. A wood-like porcelain tile covers the wall.

Most surfaces were finished in white and gray limestone, largely to maximize contrast against the synthetic turf. The simulated wood on the water-feature wall added warmth, helping transition the view from the property to the desert behind the lot.

Texture is reserved for vertical surfaces, such as the elevated spa walls, countertop base, and water-feature wall. Most of those same elements, including the fire pit, are capped with white limestone for a sense of continuity throughout the site. **PSN**

Tiles in randomized patterns finish the outer fire pit. They give the normally colorful Spanish tile a monochrome spin.



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The Heart of Intention

Brian Mulvehill/Corey Everleigh, p. 14

Pump: Pentair IntelliFlo3
Filter: Pentair Clean and Clear 420
Heater: Pentair Mastertemp 400K
Controller: Pentair IntelliCenter pool controls
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Pentair Intellichlor salt generator
Tile: CT VE 1261 Grotto-Rodio
Coping: Thermal Finish Stanstead
Deck finishes: Stanstead Granite Paving, New England Turf Solutions synthetic turf
Interior finish: PebbleTec Pebble Sheen Prism Blue
Fire features: Warming Trends Burner, Stanstead Granite 1 Piece Cap, Thompson Stone Newport Blend Veneer
Automatic cleaner: Polairs Alpha iQ
Lights: Pentair Mircobrites
Autofills: Jandy Levelor
Skimmers: Aqua Star Flow Star Skimmer
Pool or spa cover (automatic or safety): Coverstar Eclipse
Backyard living: Werover outdoor cabinets, Azenco automated louver pergola, Blaze kitchen appliances, FX Luminaire undercap lights, In-Lite recessed lights, Stanstead Granite lawn risers, Miami Beach Pebble trough covering



Sweeping Beauty

Wes Gohlke, p. 18

Pump: Pentair IntelliFlo 3 VSF
Filter: Pentair D.E. 60 sq. ft.
Heater: Pentair Mastertemp 400K BTU
Controller: Pentair IntelliCenter 8 p/s
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: CMP Ultra In-line Chlorine Tab Feeder/Hydrapure Ozone
Tile: Knox INAX Yohen Border Dark Blue Mix/QDI Dorset Black Hexagon 8 x 9.5 in.
Coping: Faber CNK Stone 3 cm Diamond Marble
Interior finish: PebbleTec PebbleSheen, French grey
Water features: CMP
Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: Grand Effects 7-foot automated firepit with DFW Coping 1/2 in. Reflective Vesper (black) glass media
Automatic cleaner: Polaris 280 black
Lights: Pentair Microbrite LED
Drain covers/Fittings: Aquastar Perfect Circle/Aquastar Linear
Others: Savway carton forms; Faber CNK Stone, Toros Black splitface ledger veneer; DFW Turf Solutions All-Play turf



Desert Reflections

Vinny Biancamano/ Kirk Bianchi, p. 22

Pump: Pentair IntelliFlo 3 VSF
Filter: Pentair Full Flow XFC620 Cartridge Filter
Heater: Pentair ETI 400 High efficiency natural gas heater
Controller: IntelliCenter iSPS with salt upgraded to i10
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Quick Peer 3 ozone oxidation system
Tile: Solstice for Pacific Honed Black and Pacific Black Chipped and Brushed
Coping: Pacific Black Basalt
Deck finishes: Pacific Black Basalt Honed
Interior finish: Ocean Blue with addition abalone
Water features: Deck Jets and Spill Over Spa
Automatic cleaner: Pentair A&A infloor system
Lights: Pentair multi colored microlights, Pentair GloBrite
Jets/Swim currents/Spa components: Aqua Arch Deck Jets
Drain covers/Fittings: Pentair AVSC pebble Top Drains
Autofills: Super Pro Water Leveler with Lid
Skimmers: Pentair venturi 3



Modernist Puzzle

Amanda Miller, p. 26

Pump: Hayward Tristar 900
Filter: Hayward SwimClear Cartridge
Heater: Hayward H400 Propane Heater
Controller: Hayward OmniLogic
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Hayward Hydrapure UV/Ozone
Tile: Crossville Retroactive 2.0 - Armor
Coping: Techobloc Raffinato
Deck finishes: Techobloc Para 500x750 Grayed Nickel
Waterproofing: Laticrete HYDRO
Interior finish: PebbleTec BlackPearl with 10% Jadeglass with Seashell
Automatic cleaner: Polaris Quattro
Lights: Hayward Color Logic
Drain covers/Fittings: Pour-a-Lid drain covers
Autofills: Hayward
Skimmers: Hayward
Others: Ledge Lounger chaise loungers



Showstopping Efficiency

Wes Gohlke, p. 30

Pump: Pentair IntelliFlo 3 VSF
Filter: Pentair D.E. 60 sq. ft., Pentair Clean & Clear 100
Heater: Pentair Mastertemp 400k BTU, Pentair UltraTemp heat pump/chiller
Controller: Pentair IntelliCenter 10 P/S
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: CMP Ultra In-line chlorinator/Hydrapure Ozone
Tile: Noble Jeweled Labyrinth 1 x 1 in./Crossville Bianco Venatino 6 x 24 in.
Coping: Faber CNK Stone Bianco Royal Marble
Deck finishes: Faber CNK Stone Bianco Royal Marble Paver
Waterproofing: Aquaron
Interior finish: Pebblesheen Ocean Blue (PebbleTec)
Water features: Negative edge features, bubblers, fire/water bowls from Stellar Sales (The Outdoor Plus)
Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: 36-in. Sedona 360-degree spillover water/fire bowls from Stellar Sales (The Outdoor Plus)
Automatic cleaner: Paramount in-floor cleaning system
Lights: Pentair MicroBrite LED
Drain covers/Fittings: Aquastar Perfect Circle/Aquastar Linear
Skimmers: Paramount
Others: Faber CNK Stone Toros Black carding, DFW Turf Solutions All-Play Turf, McNichols fiberglass grates for catch basin



Burning Bridge

Mike Farley/Charlie Claffey, p. 34

Pump: Jandy
Filter: Jandy
Controller: Jandy
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Del Ozone
Interior finish: Black Eclipse Pebblesheen
Water features: Pal Sphere
Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: Fire by Design line burner
Automatic cleaner: Pentair A&A infloor system
Lights: Jandy
Drain covers/Fittings: Pentair main drain, A&A infloor and CMP fittings
Autofills: Pentair A&A



Natural Beauty

Kevin Cohen, p. 38

Pump: Hayward 1.85 Tri Star Variable speed pump
Filter: Hayward 6020 D.E. Grid Filter

Heater: Hayward Summit 140 Heat Pump

Controller: Hayward Omni-Logic
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Hayward s-340 Sanitation system
Interior finish: Merlin Island Granite Vinyl Liner

Water features: Grotto/Boulder waterfall with Latham Swim-out

Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: Ledge Lounger Fire Pit

Automatic cleaner: Dolphin M600

Robotic Cleaner

Lights: Hayward 320

ColorLogic Lights

Skimmers: Hayward

Pool or spa cover (automatic or safety): Cover Star 5000m

Outdoor living: Sonance outdoor speaker system

Vinyl liner/Fiberglass pool: Latham Pool package, Merlin liner



Vision in Blue

Gregg Pidgeon, p. 42

Pump: Pentair IntelliFlo 3 Variable Speed & Flow 3.0THP and IntelliFlo 3 VSF 1.5 THP
Filter: Pentair - TA - 60D2 with Glass Media, Pentair Clean and Clear Cartridge Filter 100sq
Heater: Aqua Heatwave 160R, and Pentair MasterTemp 200
Controller: Pentair IntelliCenter I-10D Pool Control System
Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Hayward CL 200 In-Line Chlorinator
Tile: Tozen Antimony, .5x1 and Natural 1x1
Coping: Nicolock Natural full bullnose in Bluestone color

Deck finishes: Pavers, Nicolock Natural Cleft Flagstone in Bluestone color

Interior finish: Latham, Fiberglass - Sapphire Blue pool and spa

Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: ProVia Stone, Bluestone Rockface - Woodburning Fire Pit

Automatic cleaner: Maytronics - M600

Lights: Pentair - MicroBrite Color, Landscape - Tru-Scapes

Jets/Swim currents/Spa components: Hayward, SP1099s

Skimmer: Waterway and CMP return components

Drain covers/Fittings: Waterway and CMP covers and fittings

Skimmers: Waterway Plastics, Renegade series

Pool or spa cover (automatic or safety): Coverstar Automatic Pool Cover in Royal Blue

Handrails, slides, diving boards: S.R. Smith 6-ft Edge Diving System in Gray, S.R. Smith 44-in. Artisan Handrail, S.R. Smith 3 Step Ladder

Fencing: B&H Fencing - Black powder-coated aluminum, Staggered Spear Fencing

Outdoor living: Retaining wall, Versa-Lok in Shale Gray

Vinyl liner/Fiberglass pool: Latham Pool, Monaco series Fiberglass Pool

Spa: Latham Pool, Royal series spa



Balancing Act

Broc Hutchison/David Dornick, p. 46

Pump: Hayward 2.75 hp variable speed pumps

Filter: Hayward 4 cartridge filter

Heater: Hayward 250k BTU gas heater

Controller: Hayward OmniLogic

Chemical feeder/Sanitation system: Hayward salt system

Tile: Luv Tile Enterprises

Coping: St. Matthews limestone, Louisville, Ky.

Deck finishes: Limestone from St. Matthews limestone Louisville, Ky.

Water features: CMP stainless Nakano 12-in. waterfalls, CMP pool rain waterfall

Fire feature/Fire pit/Fireplace: Flame creations 36 in. high-capacity burner, cobalt blue reflective glass, ash concrete fire bowls from The Outdoor Plus

Automatic cleaner: Maytronics m-600

Lights: Hayward lights

Autofills: Pentair auto fill

Skimmers: CMP skimmer

Pool or spa cover (automatic or safety): Fountain and pool: Rayner solid vinyl safety cover; spa: Rayner custom cover

Handrails, slides, diving boards: Global stainless artisan handrail, Global slide

Fencing: Raatz fence

Vinyl liner/Fiberglass pool: Tallman Centennial pool and 9 x 7 rectangle spill spa

Others: Synlawn turf and putting green



Emotional Mastery

Casey Risdon, p. 50

Pump: Hayward TriStar VS950

Filter: Hayward 425 Cartridge Filter

Heater: Hayward (500K Nat. w/ electronic ignition)

Controller: Hayward Omni PL4W

Tile: Maioliche Grigio 6x6

Coping: Arctic White Tumbled

Deck finishes: Arctic White

Tumbled 3-piece Travertine

Interior finish: Mediterranean Sea

Glass Pebble interior

Automatic cleaner: Paramount PV3

Lights: Hayward Universal

ColorLogic spa light

Jets/Swim currents/Spa components: Hayward TriStar VS900

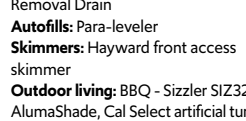
Therapy Booster Pump, spa jets

Drain covers/Fittings: MDX Debris Removal Drain

Autofills: Para-leveler

Skimmers: Hayward front access skimmer

Outdoor living: BBQ - Sizzler SIZ32; AlumaShade, Cal Select artificial turf





Webbing sewn on the top
and bottom of the cover making
it both strong and safe

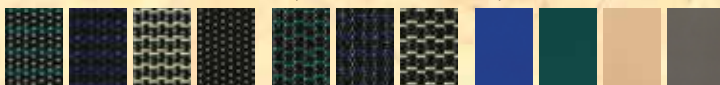
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Strong brass anchors

Several designer colors available

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