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HIGH-END
POOL TRENDS



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high-end pool trends By Jennifer Schaefer

Not so long ago, swimming pools were a status symbol of the super-rich. But in the past few decades, a pool in the backyard has become downright ordinary. Today, homeowners in a range of economic classes—more than 8 million worldwide, according to the National Pool & Spa Institute—have a place to take a dip. This mass-market approach to pools has inspired many luxury homeowners to take their pool to the next level with the latest innovations in technology and design. On the following pages, two top pool designers—Paul Benedetti, president of Aquatic Technology Pool & Spa in Morgan Hill, California, and Brian Van Bower, president of Aquatic Consultants in Miami—reveal the trends that are making waves among upscale pool owners.

specialty finishes

The white plaster finish once found in nearly every pool has become almost obsolete, at least among luxury homeowners. It has been replaced by a spate of specialty interiors, such as glass tile and exposed aggregate.

Glass tile is currently the hottest—and the most expensive—finish in the high-end pool market. “Glass-tile pools used to be less common on the West Coast than in Florida and other places on the East Coast, but I’m designing them much more often,” says Paul. Glass tiles come in a rainbow of colors, some with unique swirls, bubbles and shading, and are often used to create custom mosaics. As an added bonus, some tiles (such as those made by Carlsbad, California-based Oceanside Glasstile) are made from recycled glass.

Exposed aggregate is a decorative style of concrete that incorporates differently shaped and colored pebbles and stones. “Exposed aggregate is highly versatile. It is one of my favorite materials,” says Brian. In the future, watch for the appearance of aggregates with glow-in-the-dark and iridescent materials.

innovative edges

In the past five years, the infinity edge has become *de rigueur* for high-end pools (although it has been popular in Europe for decades). An infinity edge is constructed so that water flows over one or more sides into a catch basin and is then re-circulated back into the pool. Since the edge of the pool seems to disappear, this type of edge is ideal for backyards with city, ocean or other scenic views. An infinity edge also adds an exciting visual element to level lots by providing a reflection of the surrounding landscape in the surface of the pool.

Recently, pool designers have taken the infinity edge a step further with perimeter overflow, where the water level in the pool is the same as the top of the decking. “Perimeter overflow pools are one of my biggest requests,” says Brian. “The pool looks like a big mirror lying on the ground. It’s a drop-dead gorgeous look.”

beach entries & shallow lounging areas

Many homeowners use their pool more for soaking up the sun and entertaining than for swimming laps. This is reflected in two design features that put a new spin on the shallow end: beach entries and shallow lounging areas.

A beach entry gradually slopes from the deck into the water, becoming deeper with each step. “Swimmers stroll into the water as they would at the beach,” says Paul. Because there are no stairs or ladders to navigate, a beach entry is ideal for families with young children.

A shallow lounging area, a large shelf submerged in four to eight inches of water, provides homeowners with a new way to use the pool. “People usually set up a couple of chaise lounges or chairs in the water, and because the water is so shallow, it heats up quickly,” says Brian. “We include mountings for umbrellas, so you can sit for a couple of hours without worrying about being exposed to the sun.”



water features

Moving water adds visual stimulation as well as a sound shield to the pool area. Two of the most requested water features are fountains and waterfalls.

Fountains are an effective way to set the mood around the pool. Not only do fountains come in an endless variety of shapes and sizes, from playful mermaids to classic Grecian urns, there are also several fountain effects to choose from. Currently, one of the hottest varieties is the laminar nozzle, which "creates a tube of pure water so thin it looks like plexiglass and can carry the glow of fiber optic lighting," says Paul. Other popular picks include foaming fountains, which mix water and air for a frothy effect, and animated fountains, which add a fun, interactive element. "An animated fountain might have a motion sensor so it shoots into the air whenever someone walks by, or be connected to the sound system so it 'dances' to music," says Paul.

Like fountains, waterfalls run the gamut, ranging from a gentle trickle to a veritable cascade. "Waterfalls can be loosely grouped into two categories: natural and contemporary," says Paul. Natural waterfalls incorporate rocks, boulders and other elements found in nature (either real or manmade), while contemporary waterfalls often consist of an elegant plane of water streaming down a decorative wall. "Some waterfalls let you alter the rate of flow to achieve just the right sound effect," says Paul.

fire features

It's no coincidence that as hotel pools have become more elaborate, residential pools have followed suit. "It's not uncommon for a client to get his or her inspiration from something they saw in Las Vegas," says Paul. Often the client's vision involves the dramatic beauty of fire.

Fire features take a variety of forms, from a solitary flame sitting on top of the water, to a traditional fire pit, to a basin or planter filled with a mini-inferno. "Fire looks fantastic reflecting off the water," says Brian. "It is also functional, providing light, heat and entertainment." Fire features are designed to look attractive on or off, and most have automatic ignition that allows homeowners to easily time and control the flames. "People mainly use fire features while entertaining at night for that 'wow' effect," says Paul. "Fire excites people and gets them energized."

Paul Benedetti and Brian Van Bower are both platinum members of Genesis 3 Design Group, an education-based association for cutting-edge designers and builders of watershapes. For information, visit www.luxuryrealestate.com/homedesign.html.

To view more luxury pools, visit
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Pictured: 1. A rugged stone, stair-stepped water cascade and outdoor hot spa fire pit (Courtesy of www.aquaticconsultants.com) 2. Tiled shallow lounging area with an umbrella for shade and non-curtain patio chairs (Courtesy of www.aquaticconsultants.com) 3. A unique water feature with custom fiber optics (Courtesy of www.aquatictechnology.com) 4. An elevated perimeter overflow, all-side spa and infinity edge pool (Courtesy of www.aquaticconsultants.com)

