



# Swimming Holes:

## A Natural Look with Natural Heat

BY NISSA HALLQUIST ON BEHALF OF NATURAL DESIGN SWIMMING HOLES

With towering stacks of rock, caves, waterfalls and grottos, a natural-looking swimming pool is a beautiful thing to behold. But look below the surface and you'll find that it's also the most energy efficient pool design you could have.

When a pool is designed to look like a natural swimming hole, it is actually able to heat itself without the assistance of any supplementary heating equipment. The pool itself becomes a kind of solar panel, collecting the sun's rays and using its warmth to naturally maintain a comfortable temperature.

According to Bill Ehler, owner of Natural Design Swimming Holes in Auburn, the basic element inherent in the construction of natural swimming holes is the same element that maximizes the passive collection of solar energy—rocks.

While made out of the same concrete material as a traditional pool, a swimming hole-style pool necessarily needs more of the material to create the naturalistic facets, cracks and crevices of natural stone. Even as a smooth surface, such concrete tends to absorb the sun's natural heat quite well. When molded into stones, the additional surface area and mass absorbs proportionately more heat. Any water that comes into contact with this surface is immediately warmed.



Beyond the mere presence of sculpted rocks, how they are arranged has a lot to do with how much heat is collected. Swimming hole designs typically include one or more shallow areas as an entrance, a children's play area, etc. Design-wise, a shallow beach area makes a great transition area between any hardscape and the deeper pool. In this shallow area, water is heated up rapidly by the surrounding rock and bottom beach surface and circulated throughout the pool. For added dimension and/or to work with any uneven terrain, a raised beach works to the same effect as a shallow beach. The shallow, slow-moving water gets heated up and spills over the side as a hot spring-like waterfall.

Which leads to the importance of waterfalls in a self-heated pool. The most popular design element of natural swimming holes, water-



falls do much more than just look and sound pretty. They help circulate the heat of the sun from the aforementioned collection areas throughout the pool, either bringing heated water down from a raised beach area or to simply mix together the warmer water nearer the rocks with the deeper water. Special "bubbler" waterfalls can also be designed to send water from the filter back into the pool across sun-warmed rocks.

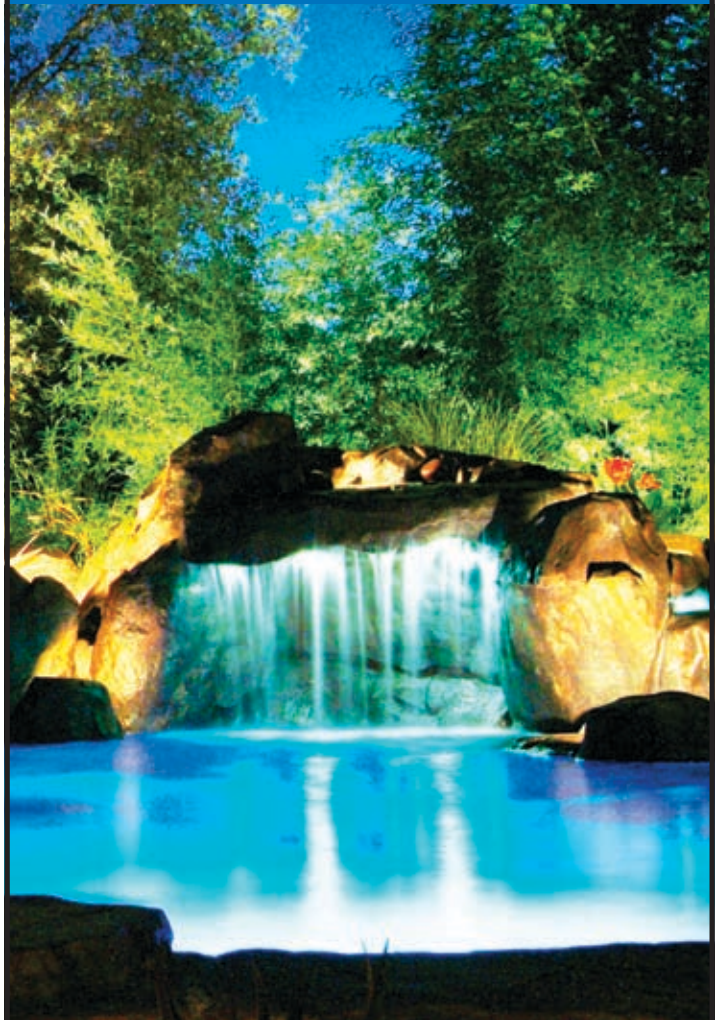
It is so successful a system that a separate heating source is rarely, if ever, needed. "I always recommend that clients wait a year after the pool is built before installing a heater or solar panels," Ehler says, because they just naturally stay warmer. Consequently, "Fewer than 5% of the clients we build for add solar panels or heaters."

With a design that is as functional and energy efficient as it is beautiful, a swimming hole takes "fun in the sun" to a whole new level. In other words, hot rocks make for one cool pool.

*Natural Design Swimming Holes has been designing—and winning awards for—naturalistic swimming holes and surrounding outdoor environments in and around the Sacramento area since 1978. For more information on the design of a natural-looking swimming hole and the solar advantages therein, contact the experts at Natural Design at (530) 823-5164. You can also contact them and/or view some of their finished projects online at [www.whyfly.net](http://www.whyfly.net).* ❖

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## Natural Design



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