



The Latest Vacation Destination

BY MICHELE PIAZZONI

Outdoor living is life at its best. With all the beautiful outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and smartly designed gathering areas that are gaining popularity among homeowners these days, it's clear that the backyard is the place to be. And few would disagree that the center point to the most beautiful backyards is always the pool.

All it takes is a quick look around at the many new styles and features available on swimming pools to understand why they make such an impact. No longer just for summertime enjoyment, today's luxury pools are a year-round source for relaxation, entertainment, fun, and beauty. Appearance is as important as function, and the most popular pools in the neighborhood combine plenty of both.

If you want to build a pool that will become the focal point of your landscape and outdoor entertaining, where do you start? We asked Bill Ehler, owner of Natural Design Swimming Holes, an award-winning area



builder specializing in uniquely designed pools. Here are a few of his suggestions for creating a pool that will rival those at the hottest resorts and help create a backyard destination that you're sure to enjoy.

Work with it

A good pool design takes cues from the existing landscape. "One of the things we're open to is letting the terrain dictate the design," explains Ehler. "If we have a hillside, we work with it. If we have boulder outcroppings, we work with it."

In fact, Ehler says that often it's these types of terrain that provide the best backdrop for beautiful pools. But when a natural backdrop isn't at hand, creative builders can create realistic rock formations and more. The end result is a pool that looks like it was formed by nature herself, a showstopper in any setting.

Let it flow

When it comes to designing a pool, it's all about the water, but not just the water inside the pool. Dramatic waterfalls, single or multi-tiered, and meandering streambeds are all important elements, says Ehler. (His designers try to incorporate



a minimum of two water features in each pool. And since many of his projects are built into hillsides and otherwise challenging terrain, it's not unusual for a waterfall to drop at least 20 feet, making it all the more eye catching.)

Heat things up

If you're one of those people who isn't satisfied admiring a waterfall from afar, you might be interested in a new trend that makes waterfalls much more enjoyable up close - heated waterfalls. Perfect for falls that cantilever into spas, these new heated options are much like a hot shower in the great outdoors. They are especially enjoyable when the temperatures start to drop, and give the homeowner more opportunities to enjoy their pool throughout the year.

Don't forget the drinks

Which is more refreshing on a hot day: a dip in the pool or an ice cold drink? You don't have to decide when you have a swim-up bar built into your pool design. A long time staple in top resorts around the world, this practical feature is available for backyard pools too. And it's a great way

Continued on 40



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Continued from 39

for those who want to be in the water and those who don't, to hang out together. Underwater seating, an above-water serving area and space outside of the pool specially designed so that everyone sees eye to eye, creates an all inclusive atmosphere that everyone can enjoy.

Think shallow

Shallow water areas are another popular feature that increase a pool's usage. Beach entries are great for children, providing ample room to play without any steps getting in the way. However, Ehler believes that shallow areas provide a great entertainment area for adults too, so he often recommends including more than one in a pool's design. He also installs multiple umbrella sleeves in shallow areas, so they can be used throughout the day while loungers remain protected from the sun. Finally, shallow water areas aren't only for enjoyment, they provide passive solar heat collection which help keep the overall temperature of the pool warmer.



Lighten up

The right lighting provides a whole new dimension to a pool's atmosphere, especially at night. New fiber optic lighting is a great way to showcase waterfalls and other features where hidden light sources actually illuminate the water and make it appear that the water has become the light itself.



Another popular option is a computerized rotating color wheel that creates continuously changing colors in the pool. The parade of pink, blue, green, and other colors is as enjoyable from outside the water as it is from within.

Keep it all within reach

Finally, to get the most enjoyment out of your pool you want to take advantage of convenient remote controls. From your car, cell phone, inside your home or at pool-side, new technology enables

homeowners to adjust water temperature, turn on lights, waterfalls, or start the bubbles in the spa with the touch of a remote control. It's a great way to make sure your pool is always ready when you are.

Natural Design Swimming Holes has been designing and building unique swimming pools in the Sacramento area for nearly 25 years. Their award-winning pools have been showcased in area home tours, featured in magazines and on television. If you're looking to create a unique backyard resort with a one-of-a-kind pool call them at (530) 823-5164 for more information. ❖