



By Nancy King

Lush

Today's Pool Designs Achieve
Perfect Backyard Bliss

POOLS

Photos by Stephanie Davis / KWD Group



et long ago, our South Florida backyards could be considered inviting yet uninspired neighborhood clones, replete with Chamissoecheer decks, vanilla white marcite, and geometrically simplistic rectangular shaped swimming pools. Nowadays, our tropical outdoor living spaces exemplify diverse combinations that blend paradise with playground. Complete outdoor kitchens and entertaining environments not only enhance the beauty of our home, but also create a relaxing retreat that transforms our family abodes to backyard vacation holidays.

A glimpse at some of the new pool designs that are emerging will aptly show a trend toward a resort style setting. "People are looking more and more to their outdoor living area as an escape," evaluates Kent Wieland, President of KWD Group and an award winning landscape and hardscape architect. "Also, a great deal of attention is being given to the addition of exotic elements and to the creation of a Zen-like setting." Inspirations such as quaint Koi ponds and gravity fed fountains exemplify elements of the Asian themed ambience readily sought after by his clients.

Typifying this resort feel is the enticing beach entry pool. Conjuring up childhood seaside memories of our tootsies meeting the gentle invitation of that first step into the ocean, this pool's shallow end is nearly even with the deck and becomes gradually deeper with every step. Another benefit is the expanse of shallow area that creates a perfect play spot for the tot set or a cool oasis for bronzing bikini'd sun bathers. If, perhaps, you don't have quite the space that is needed for this coastal inspired design, but yearn for a generous shallow expanse, a sun shelf



should satiate your desire. Typically six to eighteen inches deep, these areas can easily showcase stunning mosaics, and when teamed with concrete tables, swim-up bars and oversized sunbeds, they offer the ideal grown up gathering spot to drink and dine. Surly, grilled shrimp skewers and frosty margaritas taste their most scrumptious to the lucky pool dweller ankle deep in refreshing crystal water. Little ones, too, love to frolic in this shallow expanse and a bubbler fountain placed in this area adds a bonus element of fun, the soothing sounds of flowing water.

Although Europeans have used the infinity edge (also known as horizon or negative edge) pools for centuries, this beautiful illusion now enchants our own locale. By lacking a definable edge, the frame of the pool seems to disappear with the gentle flow of pool water. The magic of this visual trick is accomplished by placing a water collection reservoir below the pool and away from sight. Any water collected is filtered back into the pool with the regular pool filtration system. The effect of this optical alignment is heightened when a lake or ocean are close by to enhance the enduring flow of aqua. Parents should keep in mind that this may not be the best pool choice



for families with young children. Fencing disrupts the seamless imagery and an eight-year-old's prize winning cannonballs will definitely not be appreciated by this stunning design choice.

After our intense sun has exhausted its solar self and the pace of our hectic work day is over, the benefit of tranquility and beauty is being achieved through our outdoor havens. Bobby Van Kirk, President of Van Kirk and Sons, Inc., is a premier South Florida pool builder and one of the first in



Photo by Mark Acosta / Van Kirk and Sons

our area to bring light, color, and pizzazz to poolside waterfalls. "With so many people working outside the home during the day, today's pools are being designed for the utmost in nighttime enjoyment," remarks Van Kirk. When the blanket of evening struggles in, the subtle and soothing light show makes its debut, transforming waterfalls into kaleidoscopic showcases, displaying shades of turquoise, amethyst, jade and cobalt. Not only used in waterfalls, prismatic arches of color can be found spouting from pool edges, creating graceful miniature rainbows or bursting as vibrant waterworks from centered fountains.

When your poolside space pleads for a makeover, there is a profusion of options available waiting to be tailored to your whims, budget and needs. "The simplest solution which guarantees a dramatic change involves modifying or adding walls around the pool and altering a rectangular shape with curves," comments Shelby Bruus, owner of Exotic Pools and Spas. Waterfalls add drama, stature and the bonus of a steady soothing arctic spring melody. "A basic three by seven foot waterfall can start at around thirty four hundred dollars," adds Bobby Van Kirk, who has built or added an astounding number of waterfalls since his business began in 1972. "Elaborate waterfall additions, which can be as wide as nine and half feet and incorporate one or more slides, might run between thirty and sixty thousand dollars." Another trend, mingling artistry with function, is to elevate the swimming pool. By raising the pool about twenty four to thirty two inches, not only does the pool transform into a sensational showpiece, this ledge around the periphery of the pool now creates the perfect seating and gathering spot for family and friends.





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Plain white granite, once the gold standard of pool finishes, is flitting with becoming a page in pool history books. Currently, a host of finishes are abound, allowing a pool owner's creativity and personality to flourish. Gloriously toned aggregate or pebble-like finishes can imbue the water's hue to an oceanic brilliance. Although more expensive than standard finishes, aggregates have cost benefits when taking into account that these specialty finishes have a much greater ability to withstand the abuse of pool chemicals and weather influences. Also, they are much less susceptible to staining since there is very little cement in aggregates to become discolored. But the true selling point of these surfaces is the stupendous visual effect they have on the water, infusing it from turquoise to black and everything in between. Another cutting edge look is created with Mexican beach pebble. Using the swimming pool as a canvas, this product can be artfully placed to create the suggestion of a river gently flowing within the pool. "Think of it as functional art," proposes Kent Wieland, whose pool designs have been showcased in the stunning new coffee table book *Leading Residential Landscape Professionals*.

Always striving to stay at least one step ahead of the current trends, Bobby Van Kirk, is excited to

be utilizing European coping, an earthy yet elegant alternative to standard pool tiles. In addition to the simple grandeur of this streamlined look, Van Kirk touts the bonus advantage of being able to keep the water level much higher, which in itself creates a pleasing effect. "Whether you are talking about a bathtub or a swimming pool," observes Van Kirk, "people seem to find water at its most relaxing when it is filled as high as it can possibly be." Another change of direction Van Kirk is seeing is in the placement of the decking area. Especially attractive and practical when a pool's location is close to the house, positioning the bulk of the deck behind the pool rather than between the pool and the home, provides an interesting and intimate setting for entertaining and unwinding.

For the kids (and the forever kid in our adult selves), one cannot overlook the playful plethora of alternatives ready to transform our backyards into aquatic playgrounds. Selection of pool depth can dictate the options available for some sporty selections. To be sure, a frisky game of pool volleyball is markedly more fun and spirited when, rather than having a distinctive deep or shallow end, pool depth remains rather consistent. This type of pool choice is also appropriately referred to as a 'play pool'. With three feet of depth complementing both ends and a mid-pool depth of only five feet, volleyball aficionados can effortlessly serve and spike the ball. Since backyard pool diving is generally not a safe practice anyway, opting for a pool where no dog paddling is required makes practical sense. "You really get more usable pool for your buck with a pool that has a more generalized depth," evaluates Shelby Bruns of Exotic Pools and Spas.

An exhilarating swimmer's workout can be accomplished without the expanse of an Olympic size pool, thanks to a designated lap lane in your backyard pool. With swim jets creating resistance, a lengthy expanse of pool is unnecessary as the pressure from the jets defies the determined swimmer's ability to ever reach the edge, creating a continuous challenging and stress relieving activity. Few workouts are better than this and the addition of the lap lane and swim jets do not detract from the elegance of the pool's design.

Tropical waterfalls, serene light shows, exquisite mosaics, and pool finishes that flatter the water's most colorful luminosity reflect the ability for our outdoor living spaces to reign as our personal streams. Goodbye Charraboochie ... welcome to paradise! Today's backyard wonderlands have truly become the center stage for the South Florida lifestyle we are so lucky to call our own! ☺

