



Taking the Plunge

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Modern pools are making a comeback



On a hot summer day, just about anyone would want to jump in a cool, clear pool. Some would swim lap after lap to stay in shape. Others prefer to float atop an inner tube, drifting, soaking up the sun, reading a good book. Indeed, the backyard pool has regained some of its landscape luster of 50 years ago and the good news is it just might be more affordable than you think. Craig Kircher, owner of Tri-Valley Pool and Spa answers some basic questions just in case you're thinking about taking the plunge.

How does modern day construction compare with pool construction of 25 years ago? 50 years?

We're finding major defects with many of the pools we remodel today that were built in the seventies and eighties. It seems that our industry took a turn for the worse during this era. I believe that this can be attributed to many factors, the most important of which would be the lack of oversight. Standards and practices throughout the building industry have always continued to change but only within the last 10 years are swimming pools being held to the same scrutiny that other trades have been held to for many years. Today, pool builders are required to provide more detailed plans to the building departments in order to obtain building permits, providing an environment for more questions to be asked and more data to be verified. During the building process, in addition to the requisite inspections by city inspectors, builders are required to obtain inspections from third party inspectors such as soils engineers to evaluate the integrity of pool excavations and private deputy inspectors to verify placement reinforcement steel, gunite and shotcrete. Like anything else, these inspections along with the entire pool building process relies on individuals whom have become experts in each of their own trades working together without compromise to produce a lasting valuable product for the client.

Conversely, I have had the privilege to renovate watershape projects that were built between fifty and one hundred years ago. It's been my experience, that not withstanding technical advancements, the projects I have worked on from this era have employed solid structural, hydraulic and design principles.

How have the pumps and filters improved?

Without a doubt the biggest advancement in pumps has been the advent of the variable speed and variable flow pumps. Variable speed pumps are pumps that can be programmed to run at a prescribed speed to accomplish different functions that a pool might require...using only the amount of energy required to accomplish each task. Take for instance the average backyard swimming pool. Until recently, the water in most pools is circulated by a single speed pool pump, usually between ¾ hp and 1 ½ hp, running between six and ten hours each day. With a variable speed pump, it's possible to have the pump run at a higher speed to skim and vacuum the pool for an hour or two each day and then automatically decrease in

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speed to a much lower setting to just circulate and filter the water...what we call “turn over”.

To illustrate the benefits, take just a ¾ hp pump running an average of eight hours a day during peak season. At 220 volts a ¾ hp pump will consume about 12,000 watts of power over eight hours. On the other hand a variable speed pump set to a medium or “vacuum” setting for an hour in the morning and again for an hour in the afternoon with eight hours in between running at a lower or “filter” setting will use only about 3,200 watts of power.

While this is just one example, and not all pools will fit into this scenario, it does illustrate how powerful and flexible these pumps are. In addition to the power savings, variable speed pumps running at lower speeds produce significantly less noise and wear and tear.

What is the most economical way(s) of heating today’s pool?

The sun. Almost without exception potential clients are requesting that cost information and documentation for solar heating and pool covers be included in their bids. In many cases these two items go hand in hand... solar, to heat the pool and a cover to retain the heat. Of course there is much more to both of these systems than just energy savings. By combining a variable speed pump with a solar heating system the pump can be set at a specific setting to optimize flow, and thus the heat sink, from the water running through the solar panels throughout the day. These settings can range from just a few hours a day beginning in early spring and fall, to most of the day during the summer time, again...maximizing energy savings. A solar heating system will not only provide months of affordable heating for your pool and increase spontaneity of use, but will also extend your swim season well beyond a conventionally heated pool.

What does a pool add to property value in today’s market?

This is a difficult question to answer even in favorable market conditions. I’ve always advised my clients that a well thought and well executed design will always add more to the value of a property than an ill conceived project. An experienced Realtor once told me that the perceived value of a potential buyer will always dictate price. If a

buyer finds flaws with the swimming pool, whether it be with the design or quality of the pool, they will perceive it as a liability that the seller is passing on to them. On the other hand, if a buyer falls in love with a swimming pool that is well conceived it could, not only be the thing that pushes them to buy, but may actually bring a higher offer to the table.

How deep should the pool be? ie, can you save money by making a shallow pool?

This is really a personal decision. Shallow pools will of course cost a little less to construct and will save money over the long haul in water, energy and chemical costs. Additionally, shallower pools heat more quickly, and because of this, reduce the amount of time one will have to wait to enjoy their pool if they are relying on a heater.

What is the average construction time?

Depending on the different design elements employed, every pool follows a different time line. On average though, most pools can usually be excavated and gunited within the first 10 to 14 days. Once gunite is in place about 80% of the pool is complete and the project falls to the hardscape company to install coping and decking. After that, providing tile and plaster selections have been made, we are usually able to install the tile, plaster and pool equipment over another 10 day period. Remember, even though a project may sometimes move along very quickly it is important to observe curing times for gunite, mortar beds and grout to avoid problems down the road

Can you custom build for any theme or shape?

Yes, all of the pools we build are custom...each one designed for a particular client. In many cases the client has already retained the services of an architect or landscape architect to design a pool as part of a larger project. Other times we are asked to implement a design already conceived by the client, giving them guidance and advice on the different features available to them.

For more information or answers to other questions on building a modern pool or spa contact Tri-Valley Pool and Spa at 805-432-4731, or visit their website at www.trivalleypools.com