

# HOUSE & HOME

North Jersey

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Volume 23, Issue 5

# CLC Design & The Pool Boss:

## Two companies … one vision

*page 11*

## *Swimming in Style*

*Everything you need to know to have the perfect pool this season*

**INSIDE: OUR ANNUAL LANDSCAPE, POOL, PATIO AND DECK DIRECTORY**

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# Swim-Mor Pools and Spas

## Custom designs that help elevate your backyard

page 27

## *Swimming in Style*

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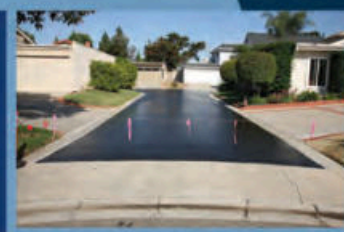
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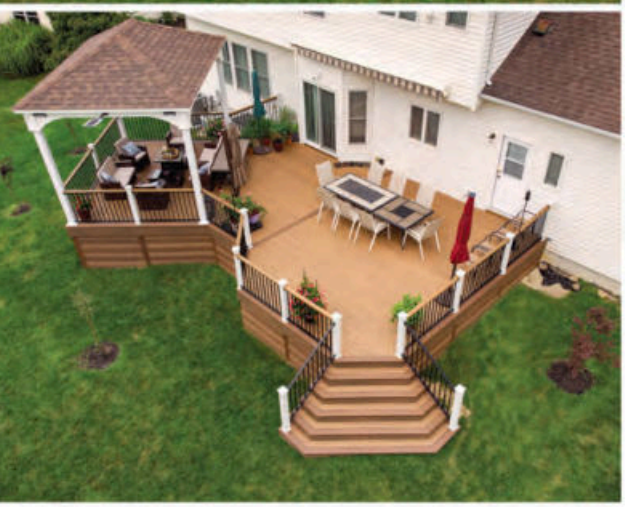
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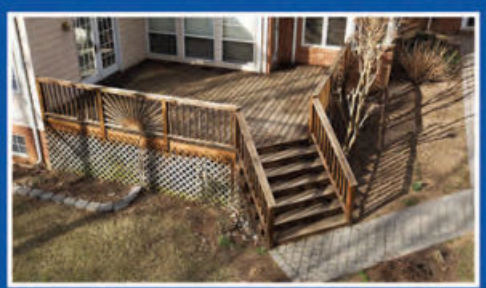


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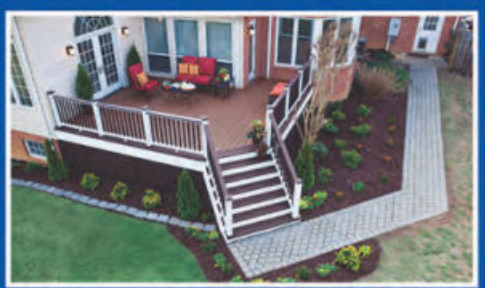
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BEFORE



IN PROGRESS



AFTER



# Two Companies, One Vision

**CLC** and **The Pool Boss** are proving to homeowners across New Jersey that two is better than one!

*by* **Madeleine Maccar**

**RICHARD CORDING SR. DOESN'T WANT TO TOOT HIS OWN HORN, SO THE OWNER OF CLC LANDSCAPE DESIGN CAREFULLY CONCEDES THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ORDINARY COMPANY AND AN EXTRAORDINARY ONE STARTS AT THE TOP.** A stellar operation, he says, is shaped by leadership's passion, high standards, a willingness to try others' great ideas, and trusting and empowering employees to do what's best for their clients.

"One of our core values is service," Cording says. "Everything revolves around service, and service means we're here to help people. Most people who call our company call us for a backyard design with a swimming pool, and most people don't just want a swimming pool: They may also want a pergola, an updated deck and/or new plants, etc. Our specialty is the design portion because our niche is designing beauty—and we have a saying at our company that 'Great landscapes start with great design ideas.'"



Master Pool Builder Chris Argenziano (left) and Rich Cording Jr., Master of Landscape Design, Columbia University

The Pool Boss' Christopher and Terry Argenziano, who Cording describes as an invaluable extension of the CLC family since 2011, specialize in building deluxe vinyl pools and are considered among the premier pool builders in all of New Jersey. The same great service that Chris has provided to many of the state's most famous clients, such as members of the New York Giants and TV celebrities, is what he gives to each and every client!

"Every job we do has a project manager assigned to it, and the reason Chris loves working with us is because our project managers work hand in hand with their project managers, and everything runs so smoothly," says Cording. "We work together in harmony so the client is getting not only impeccable service but getting it as timely as possible.

"That's why I like to deal with specialists like The Pool Boss: He has his own processes to make sure that the pool is built to the highest standards, and we have our processes in place for both the design and build portions of our company," he continues. "Form follows function: You have to place a pool where it's going to be able to be integrated into the entire landscape, which means designing for things like traffic flow, different amenities, sun and shade, and privacy."

And both Cording and Chris agree: "Our joy comes from helping our clients. We install high-end residential projects in beautiful settings, so our clients get their money's worth with the best design and the best results—and the process is always going to be fun and easy!" H&H

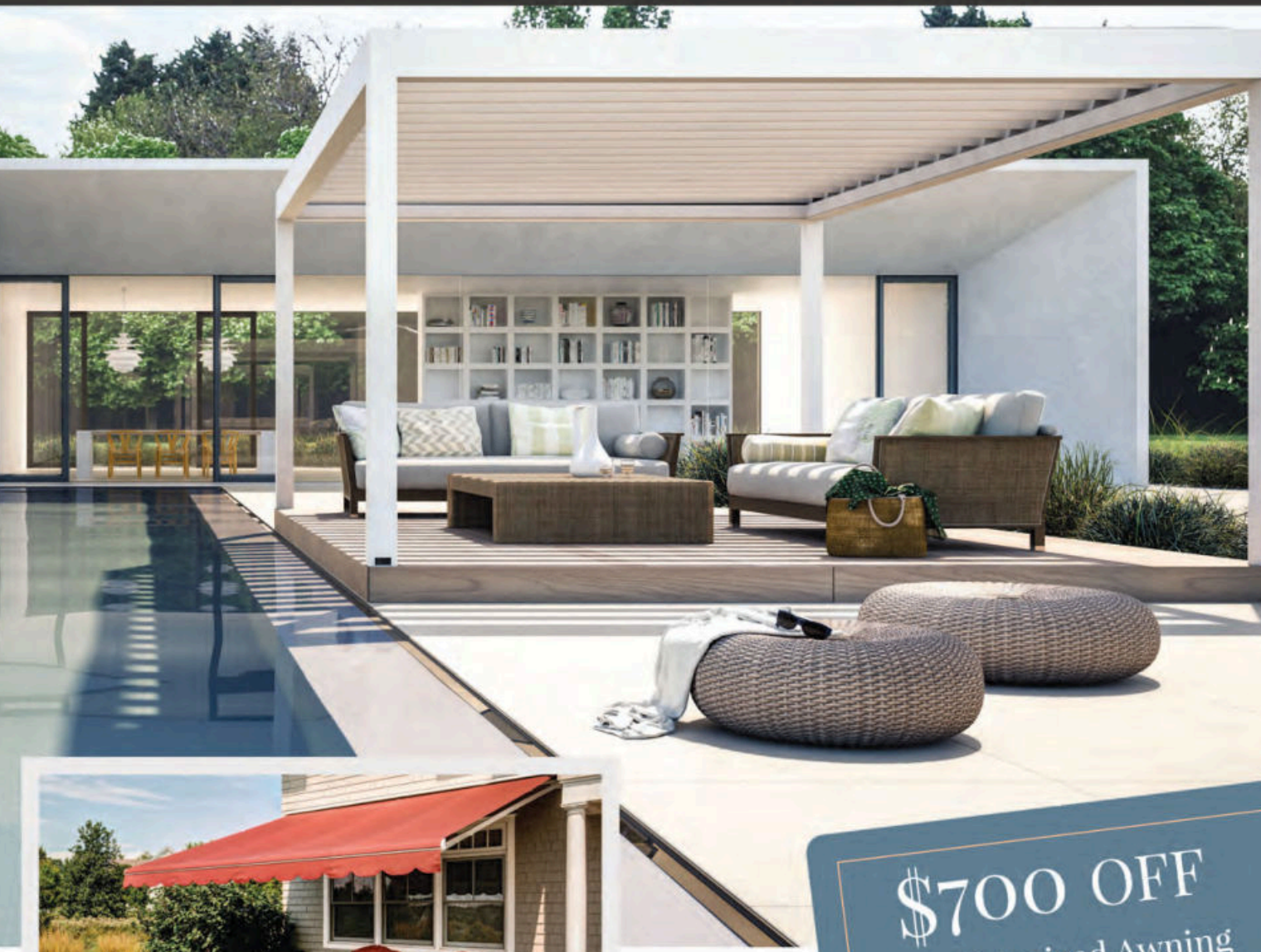
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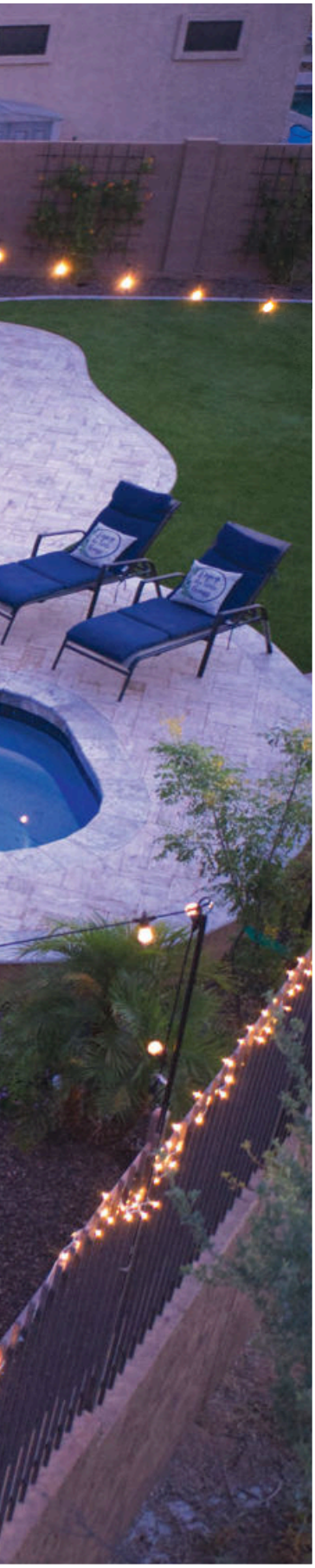
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# SWIMMING IN STYLE

## WITH THE RIGHT GUIDANCE, YOU COULD BE ENJOYING LIFE POOLSIDE FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

BY PETER PROKO

**Though it may be hard to recognize after the extremely mild winter we experienced here in the Northeast, spring is in the air. With the flowers in full bloom and the temperatures getting warmer and warmer by the day, we are all looking forward to spending increased time outdoors as we gear ourselves up for the sun-drenched days of summer that won't be far behind.**

And while countless folks will enjoy tending to their landscaping or perhaps spending time enjoying a glass of wine on the back deck while watching the sun go down, many others will be eagerly awaiting the return of swim season and the chance to cool off by taking a dip in the pool.

It's no secret that pool ownership skyrocketed during the onset of the pandemic, with homeowners opting to create their own backyard resorts rather than travel on vacation. While the industry has seen that intense demand lessen somewhat, the fact is with each passing year, more and more people are looking to transform their outdoor living space into a staycation destination, and in many cases it all starts with the pool.

But there's a lot to consider and know about pool ownership, and if you're not fully prepared you could find yourself treading water as you desperately search for answers. Luckily, this region is full of skillful pool builders who can guide you through each step of the process, and in turn help make your visions of an outdoor oasis a reality.

We spoke to several industry experts to get some tips and advice on what you need to know to make a real splash this summer, no matter if you're considering a new pool for your yard or are simply looking for ways to enhance your current swimming experience.

### SETTLING ON A STYLE

When it comes time to picking out a pool, the first place to start is deciding on what style is right for you between vinyl, fiberglass or concrete. Each one has their pros and cons—and price point for that matter—and what may be appealing to some may not necessarily be so for others.

Vinyl liners, which come in a variety of colors and styles, are by far the least expensive avenue to becoming a pool owner. As a result, vinyl pools remain popular and the advancements made in recent years have only increased their favorability in the marketplace.

But while the cost may be initially lower, depending on several contributing factors, the lifespan of a vinyl liner can vary dramatically and thus may need to be replaced more frequently. That could mean shelling out another $5,000-$6,000 periodically throughout the course of owning the pool.

"The cons of a vinyl pool is the liner is temporary. It could last 15 years or maybe five years," says Scott Payne, dubbed as the chief backyard fun specialist with Scott Payne Custom Pools. "At some point, what happens here in the Northeast with the freeze and thaw is that the liner is going to shift a little bit. And it's going to deteriorate [over time]. The sun's UV rays are going to degredate it and at some point

# SWIMMING IN STYLE



you are going to have to replace it."

Meanwhile, fiberglass pools come in preformed shells allowing for a quicker installation process than other styles, with many pools being able to be completed in a just a day's time as opposed to the much lengthier process to install a vinyl or concrete pool.

Derek Blasker, president of (Fiberglass) Pool Designs, says the lifetime structural warranties and relatively low upkeep make fiberglass pools an attractive option for many.

"With a vinyl liner pool, you will always have the concern that you could tear the liner or the liner rots within five to 10 years. With concrete, you need to acid wash, paint, patch and resurface the masonry work. This usually runs at least $15,000 over a 10-year span. With the Latham fiberglass pools we install, you do not touch the surface," he says.

Blasker adds that fiberglass pools are a natural insulator, reducing the energy costs to heat and maintain the pool.

Jon Wilson, director of operations at Ordini's Best Fiberglass Pools, also touts the benefits. "Fiberglass pools are installed in one day, while vinyl and concrete pools can take weeks or months to build. The smooth gelcoat finish of our fiberglass pools are much easier to clean than the rough, porous surface of concrete pools."

With regard to concrete or gunite pools, while they are the most expensive choice for pool owners, they also offer the most customizable options in terms of freeform shapes and added amenities.

"With concrete pools, you can really go from mild to wild in terms of shape. And you could add sundecks, spas, loveseats; it's really only limited to your imagination," says Payne.

Speaking of shapes, the rumors of the death of rectangular pools have been greatly exaggerated, according to Andrew McFarlane, president and owner of California Pools Philadelphia.

"I thought [rectangular pools] were kind of a dead thing, but a lot of our higher-end customers are bringing them back," McFarlane says.

Payne has also seen an uptick in rectangular pools making a strong comeback, saying it's a matter of history repeating itself.

"Twenty-five years ago, people were tired of seeing rectangles and you saw the kidney bean and other freeform shapes, but I'd says we are close to 50-50 between installing rectangular and freeform pools now," he says.

Ultimately, the right shape should be dictated by each individual client's desire. Are they looking for a pool to swim in or is it more of a social gathering place? Do they want a diving pool? What will create a more seamless transition with the rest of the backyard?

"If clients want a clean look, they go with rectangles. And if they want more of the natural resort-type feel, then you see the freeform pools with the rock grottos and waterslides and that sort of stuff," says McFarlane.

## A TOUCH OF SALT

Think back to your childhood days spent at the pool and you're likely to invoke memories of the smell of chlorine on your skin and irritated red eyes. And so it's no wonder that the industry has evolved over the years and in doing so has seen salt-generated chlorinator systems become the prevalent choice for pool owners. With benefits ranging from making the water gentler on the skin to reduced maintenance costs, salt systems have become the standard in the industry today.

"Just about every pool I install is saltwater; I haven't probably put in a chlorination pool in five years," says Walter Beyer, owner of Stardust Pools. "There's a lot less upkeep and the temperature doesn't affect it. It could be 105 degrees or 65 degrees; it could be sunny or it could be rainy; your pool is always going to have the same level of chlorine. … As long as the pool is running, it will be crystal clear all the time."

"Salt will also reduce your ownership costs dramatically. Instead of spending $500-$600 a year on chlorine, you might spend $40 a year on salt and achieve the same benefits," says Payne.

But while the salt systems make pools easier to balance and maintain, there can also be some negatives associated. "The upside is that you do not need to play with tablets and powders, the salt will be gentle on your skin, you can open your eyes underwater without the burn, the salt will not bleach anything, and blonde hair will not turn green," says Blasker. "The downside is that the salt will produce an alkaline effect that raises your pH and salt will have an adverse effect on steel railings, ladders, etc."

Also something to take into consideration is that "homeowners like the 'set it and forget it' aspect of a saltwater system, but it is an added expense, and the salt cell requires maintenance and eventually will need to be replaced every handful of years," says Wilson.

And no matter if you have a salt or chlorine pool, maintaining proper water chemistry is crucial. While some DIY-ers may attempt to handle balancing things on their own, it is truly best to get your water tested by a professional to assure you don't cause damage to your pool.

Tracy Bond is the president and owner of Great Valley Pool Service and says at the very least, weekly water testing is recommended. Sometimes even more frequent tests are needed if the pool is heavily used or has been recently built or refinished.

"There are many different things that can impact your water chemistry from the weather to the number of people using the pool to things like pets, pollen, fertilizer drift, grass clippings, etc.," says Bond. "It is important that your water is regularly tested and adjusted to avoid damage that can occur to your pool's finish, to your pool equipment and to ensure that your water is properly sanitized for your bathers to prevent illness. Proper balancing also prevents problems from occurring like algae and cloudy water as well."

And for those who don't have the time to wait in line at the shop, Bond's crew will come to you. "We offer a recurring service where we clean and chemically balance the pool each week. This includes testing and balancing your water; emptying all skimmer and pump baskets; backwashing and cleaning the filter as needed; as well as skimming, brushing and vacuuming the pool," she says.

## ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE

While seeing the kids do cannonballs into the deep end or waking up early each day to swim laps may be a welcomed aspect of owning a pool, these days owners are looking to up the ante with plenty of bells and whistles.

"Maybe someone doesn't have kids and they want their backyard to be a place to gather with other adults for happy hour or dinner, and so they want a sitting area. And perhaps they don't want to have giant waterfalls, but would like to hear the sound of water, so we'll add a couple deck jets so they can hear the water trickle,"

Image courtesy of Scott Payne Custom Pools

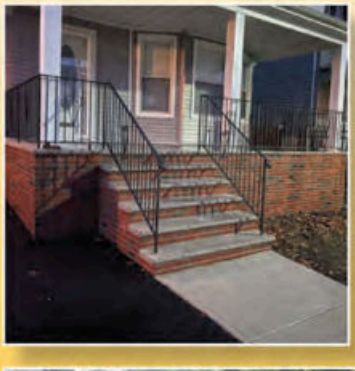
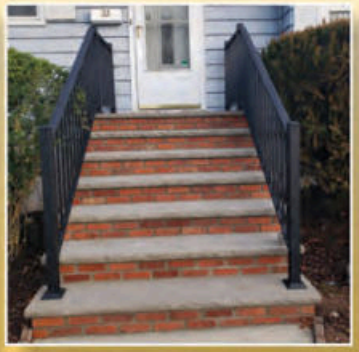
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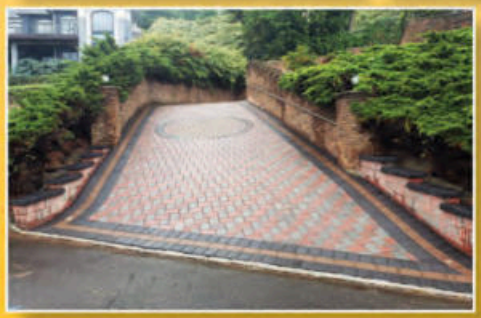
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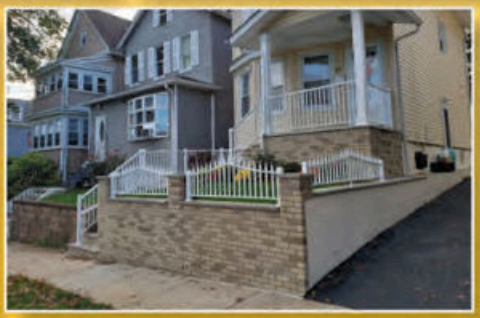
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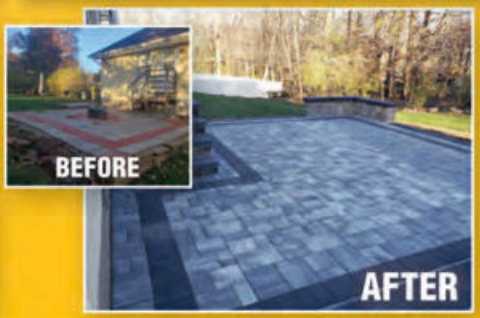
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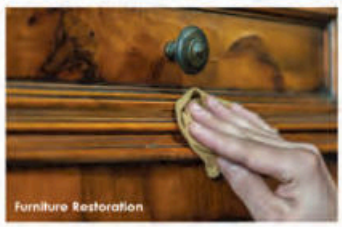

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# SWIMMING IN STYLE

McFarlane says. "And then you have other people who say they want to have a water slide and a jumping rock for the kids."

And technology is playing a big part as well. Robotic cleaners, variable speed pumps and LED lighting have become the norm and growing automation capabilities are allowing folks to control many aspects of their pool's upkeep right in the palm of their hand.

"Automation is probably the most popular added element today. [These] systems allow the homeowner to control pumps, lights, heaters, deck jets and other pool accessories from their smart phone," Wilson says.

## COVERING THE BASICS

Another area not to be overlooked is whether a mesh or solid safety cover is the right choice for you. Mesh covers—the less expensive of the two options—are lighter, easier to maneuver, but do allow some light and small debris into the pool, although recent advancements have increased their effectiveness in combatting these issues. On the flipside, solid covers do not allow any water, debris or UV light into the pool. This eliminates all algae growth during the winter, so you need less winterizing chemicals and the spring cleanup is easier.

Ultimately, it comes down to the preference of the homeowner on the level of maintenance they wish to take on.

"Solid covers are a little more expensive and there's also a little bit more maintenance involved. You have to manage the water on top of that cover because it's not going to go through it, so you have to maintain a surface pump on there and through the winter you have to make sure the pump is working," says McFarlane.

"The solid covers have a lot of benefits in that the way you close the pool is typically the way you open the pool," says Beyer. "When you have a mesh cover, when the leaves fall off onto the cover and they disintegrate and it rains, that filters through the cover and so the pools don't open up as clear."

Bond cautions that owners of solid covers remain vigilant on keeping an eye on their pumping system to make sure that all of the excess water is being funneled off of the cover.

"Excessive weight will cause the cover to sag," she says. "A saggy safety cover is more likely to fail over time."

No matter what kind of pool you purchase or what extra elements you consider, the key is to do your homework before you put pen to paper on a pricey contract so you feel confident you are hiring the right contractor instead of finding yourself with a money pit in the backyard for years to come.

"No company is perfect, but the difference in contractors is made when an issue arises, and how that contractor handles that issue," says Blasker. "You want a contractor who is going to take your call, present you with a plan and execute upon that plan in a timely manner." H&H

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**WITH SPRING IN BLOOM,** homeowners across the country are preparing to spend the coming months in their own backyards, and chances are they would like to invest in some updates. Our annual landscape directory connects our readers with local resources to consult on any project related to the outdoors. This comprehensive list includes companies that can create an oasis with a pool, patio or deck, not to mention hardscaping, water features and shade elements; or professionals who maintain landscaping, provide furniture or install fences and much more. No matter what you need, your outdoor space is in good hands.

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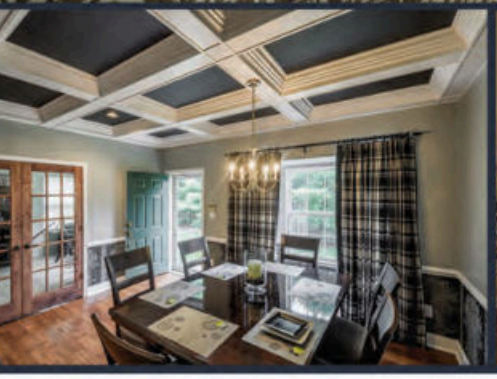
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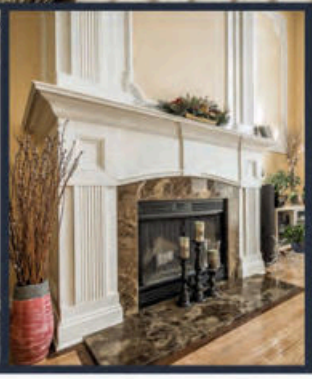
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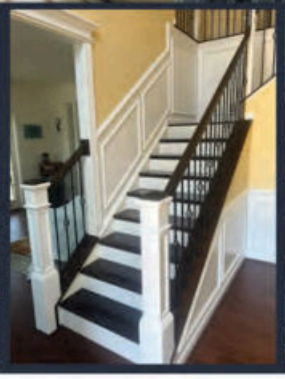
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# More Than a Pool

## Swim-Mor Pools & Spas elevates backyard atmospheres with quality custom designs

*by* **Kristen Dowd**

**Swim-Mor Pools & Spas partner and general manager Mike McCool recognizes that there is a lot more that goes into a new pool than there used to be.**

"The backyard has transformed over the last 10 years or so away from being just 'your yard' and into another room of your home with the same care and detail put into it," McCool says. "Because of this the design of your pool has become more than just a pool but the focus of the outdoor living room. There is a lot of coordination with creating what a customer's backyard haven is going to be."

Fortunately, the family-owned South Jersey business is more than up to the challenge of bringing a customer's backyard pool vision to life. In its 55 years of business, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas has helped to create thousands of backyard paradises throughout the region.

And what's more, they make the process as easy as possible for their customers.

"We're a start-to-finish gunite custom pool company—the design, the build and the service afterward," McCool says. "We have our own crews that handle the work which helps us control quality and makes the process go smoother."

There are six designers at Swim-Mor Pools & Spas who can help guide customers on a new pool design. The company's countless photos and 3D drawings can provide inspiration, and the final design is what best suits the backyard, according to McCool.

"Size, setbacks, elevations. We're here to help you work through that," he says.

### Finding the right pool

"The first step is to give us a call. From there we'll set up an appointment to come out to your home," McCool says. "That way we can see all the aspects of the property. What the contours of the yard are. What the access is like. Even the best location based on where the sun rises and sets."

The timeline to get started is largely based on the homeowner and how decisive they are, McCool adds. Once everything is confirmed, things move to contract and Swim-Mor Pools & Spas starts working on permits.

"Time is of the essence. Permits can take from two weeks to several months, all depending on the municipality," McCool says.

### Pool popularity

Prior to March 2020, business was strong for Swim-Mor Pools & Spa. That was only boosted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region.

"The pool business was never busier than it was in COVID," McCool says. "The lockdowns forced people to stay at home and they immediately focused on the backyard."

Although that business boom has settled down a bit, things are still busy. But pool trends, according to McCool, have held fairly steady.

Hampton-style pools have long been a customer favorite, but equally popular are the freeform designs, which can be customized to fit into any backyard environment.

"Through COVID there have not been many significant changes in the industry," McCool says, "other than the increased popularity of adding more bells and whistles to the pool."

Natural stone is popular for the coping along the pool's edge, McCool says, as well as darker finishes in the pool. A majority of Swim-Mor Pools & Spa customers are using a salt sanitation system and automated controls in their new pools, as well as choosing to add water features—waterfalls, fountains, deck jets and plenty more. The company also offers many in-pool fixtures for lounging—bar stools and benches that can tie into your outdoor kitchen or can run inside the pool, along with table areas, sundecks for your lounge chairs and custom fire features. Color LED lighting packages come with every pool, too.

The majority of customers also choose elements to lengthen their pool-enjoying season, such as heaters and spas. "It will extend your pool season by a few months," McCool says.

### Why Swim-Mor Pools & Spas?

Being a local family-owned independent business makes Swim-Mor Pools & Spas a smart choice for customers, according to McCool.

"We're not national. We're not a franchise. And we do not try to sell everything. Our expertise has been building custom gunite pools for 55 years and that's what we focus on," he says.

Save for a few aspects that are legally required to be outsourced to independent licensed contractors, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas uses all of their own crews for the pool construction, which McCool says is unique for the pool business.

In addition to building new pools, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas also specializes in renovating gunite pools. The experienced team can handle everything from your standard renovation of replacing your coping, tile and plaster finish, to adding features such as raised water features, sun decks, and even spas that were not originally built with the pool. McCool says, "Even though your pool may not have originally been built with the more current popular features doesn't mean that Swim-Mor cannot add them now."

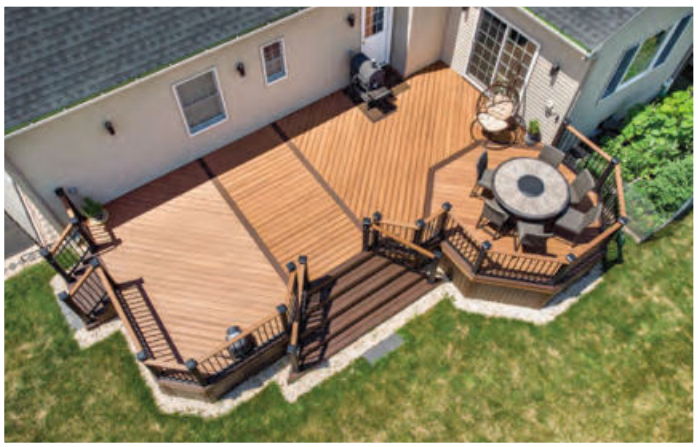
The 2023 pool season is already underway for the business, which thanks to the mild winter meant they were able to start construction early. Pool openings and service will ramp up from mid-April to Memorial Day.

But, for those looking to add a pool to their backyard this summer, it's not too late. "We're still building for this year. We're still selling for this summer," McCool says. "But don't waste time. Get in!" **H&H**

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# STACKING THE DECK



Creating the perfect backyard space takes careful planning and research into the best materials, the trends that will have staying power and the amenities that will truly enhance the outdoor experience. *by* **Matt Cosentino**

Spring's arrival and the promise of warmer weather means that deck season is right around the corner. Soon enough, friends and relatives will be catching up in the backyard over an adult beverage or two and outdoor kitchens will be fired up to feed the guests at a summer barbecue, and although visitors may marvel at the craftsmanship and special features of the space during these gatherings, rarely will they think about the attention to detail that went into the finished product they are enjoying.

The truth is that designing and constructing a deck that will give the homeowners an outdoor area to cherish for years to come takes extensive planning and serious consideration about a number of questions. From materials to colors, unique shapes to multiple levels, and must-have amenities to those that are probably an unnecessary luxury, sometimes all of the concerns that must be addressed can be overwhelming.

That's where an experienced deck contractor—who has likely run into every kind of situation under the sun—can step in and be of major assistance. *House & Home* spoke to several local experts to get their insight into the process and their tips for creating a backyard oasis.

## COMPOSITE VS. WOOD

There was a time when most backyard decks were built with pressure-treated wood, and even as composite materials skyrocketed in popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were still sentimental homeowners who went with wood because of the lower cost associated with it or just because they preferred the look to the still-developing synthetic market.

Recently, however, the low

maintenance, along with the improved aesthetics and more affordable pricing now being offered by the leading composite manufacturers, have just about made wood decks obsolete.

"In the past three or four years, I would say 99% of the decks being built are using synthetic products," says Jack Cameron, a designer at Deck Guardian. "There is a lot of variety as far as the brands and the qualities and properties the materials have, but everybody is doing synthetic materials, no wood. Some people are looking for entry-level and some are looking for the best out there, and there are boards that will do the job for everybody. People just need to educate themselves on what, how and when."

Ray Ebersol of Decks R Us adds that the most recent surge for wood decks eventually declined because the materials became too costly.

"Five, six, seven years ago, it was kind of a cool thing to do exotic hardwoods—ipe was a big one, which is Brazilian walnut," he says. "But that's kind of faded out because it got so expensive with shipping and everything. It's priced out of the market for most people."

Randall Yoder, a designer with Keystone Custom Decks, has some clients who ask about vinyl, but in general the company steers them toward composite decks, which account for 95% of their projects.

"There are a lot of different levels [of composites]," he says. "The higher-end option is a lot more durable over time and prone to less fading. Sometimes with the lower-end composites, if it's poorly made there will be a lot of fading."

It's important for contractors to ascertain the lifestyle of the homeowners and then helping them determine the best materials for the job. Those who entertain often, for example, may want to go the extra mile.

"Obviously, some people can spend $50,000 on a deck and some people only have $10,000 to spend on a deck, and materials can make or break the deal in some cases," Cameron says. "We have boards that are entry-level, boards that are mid-range and boards that are high-end. It's all over the place when it comes to synthetic products these days.

"The biggest [advantages to higher-end boards] would be longevity, look and performance with high traffic. The entry-level board is not for somebody who's going to have 20 people on the deck every day, running up and down the stairs and all of that. It's for somebody who wants to sip a glass of wine over the weekend and not abuse the deck too much. For high-traffic areas you need a more durable board that won't get so much wear and tear over time."

As Ebersol points out, the higher-end composites will cost more now, but in the long run might actually save the customer money compared to less expensive vinyl-wrapped composites, which he notes come with a 25-year warranty and fewer color options.

"The higher-ends, the solid vinyl boards from an Azek or Wolf, they have a lifetime warranty and there's a lot more color selection," he says. "We like those materials because they're easier to install and they're nicer to work with. It's almost just a price point—do you want to spend the money for Azek and get a lifetime warranty so you'll probably never have to worry about it? Or do you want to save yourself some money now and go with something that's not going to look as nice? It's going to move a little bit more when you walk over it and you're going to be able to tell that it's not the same quality."

## COLORS AND OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As for the most popular colors, there has been a major shift since composite decking first broke into the mainstream.

"Everybody is looking for lighter colors that don't get as hot on your feet when you're outside," Cameron says. "Ten years ago, people were just looking for dark chocolate colors and dark grays, and then everybody realized that those get too hot in the sun. Now manufacturers and homeowners are all shifting gears to light, neutral colors that perform much better under the sun."

Ebersol still sees some demand for darker browns and grays, but one trend coming on strong is the two-toned deck, which will feature boards of varying colors.

"We do a lot of those," he says. "The main floor will be in one color and the border will typically be a darker color. Sometimes it's a darker floor and lighter border, but I would say probably 90% of the time it's the lighter color in the middle and the darker color on the border."

Some projects seamlessly work in multiple kinds of materials, especially the resort-style spaces that may include a composite deck with a roof overhead and a fireplace.

"For the interior of the roof, we use our own products and it's a cedar," Yoder says. "We do our own custom blends and stains and it works well for us. PVC is also very popular at the moment. Masonry on our projects is also very big, and I feel that's what sets us apart. The columns, fireplaces and outdoor kitchen areas stand out. Everyone wants to be at home right now, so more and more they want to bring indoor space to the outdoors."

## MAKING A STATEMENT

While a majority of decks remain rectangular or square, there are designs that stand out by bending boards and incorporating circles.

"It's mainly aesthetic and there are some pros to it as well," Yoder says. "Little bump-outs help out for bar areas, so you can still get some extra dining behind it. We have our own guys who bend the boards, so that kind of sets us apart because we can do it all in house."

"Our designs are unique," adds Bill Wilson, one of the owners of Amazing Decks. "We do a lot of curves—we have the equipment to curve boards, so a lot of our decks are free-flowing curves. We also integrate other materials, like paver patios or bluestone. Maybe the backyard doesn't just call for a deck; maybe it calls for a combination of the two. Even though we're a deck company, we have to be honest with the customer and tell them what will work best."

Ebersol still gets requests for round areas of the deck but it is starting to be few and far between.

"That little fad kind of faded out," he says. "We just finished a pretty large project that had a circle front, but it's not as popular as it once was. We still do a handful a year, maybe even a dozen, but not like we used to."

Another trend that was hot for a few years but has cooled off is the multi-level deck. It may lead to "oohs" and "ahs" when guests first lay eyes on it, and it will certainly look spectacular on Instagram, but for practical, everyday use it can be a safety issue. As Cameron points out, that is especially true when parties are occurring and people are enjoying alcohol on the deck.

"Most people settle on a single level just because they have more flexibility when joining two or three tables together for a large gathering rather than having three corners where people are separated," he says. "Also, multi-level decks were popular back in the day but people realized that after you get a couple of drinks in, you're walking backwards and before you know it you're flipping upside down.

"So now people are more conscious of a single level being much safer. We still do some multi-level but not to the extent that it used to be, when we would do as many as four levels on a deck. The maximum someone would do now is two levels—the dining and lounging on one level and then the cooking and bar area on the other."

Another way to show off decorative flair is through the railings, which can have functional uses as well.

"The most popular railing requests we get are the flat-top drink railing options," says Mike Jerminski of Get Decked. "We take the same material used on the decking and place it on top of railing to provide a nice, flat, 6-inch surface perfect for drinks, bird feeders, etc. Also, the aluminum square balusters used vertically are a great architectural look that combines a sleek, see-through modern design that is still fully code compliant."

Finally, LED lights have become almost a must-have, and can be used in several areas of the deck to provide not only safety but ambiance.

"In the last few years, we have installed lights on almost every

Image top left courtesy of Keystone Custom Decks. Image below courtesy of Deck Guardian

H&H DECKS

single deck that we do," Cameron says. "It used to be a commodity, and now it's just part of it—when people get a deck, they automatically think about lights. In some states across the U.S., having lights on the stairs is actually code required. In New Jersey it is not, but people understand that having lights is really going to save people from tripping. At the same time, in the evening it creates a really nice resort-style, laidback atmosphere because the lights are not too bright in your face, but you can turn off the overhead lights and have the low-voltage ones while you're enjoying dinner or a glass of wine."

"The LED lighting has become way more affordable and lasts a lot longer than the old lights did," Ebersol adds. "Probably 80% of the decks we build have lights on them, maybe even more. Typically it's on the side of the posts, about 6 to 8 inches down from the top of the railing. That's almost like a triangle-shaped light and it will shine down toward the deck floor. And then we'll put them on the risers of the stairs pointing down so it shines on the tread where you're stepping as you're walking up the stairs. Those are the two most typical locations; we do post-top lights sometimes as well."

## SPECIAL FEATURES

Fully loaded decks featuring outdoor kitchens, bars and entertainment areas with televisions may not be quite as in demand as a few years ago as a result of concerns over the economy, but these amenities are still popular for those who can afford them.

"It's been affected a little bit, but for the most part, most people know what they're getting into," Yoder says. "As designers, the big thing is setting expectations ahead of time and making sure the clients are aware of the costs going into it. Just a couple of years ago, everybody wanted to add on, add on, add on. It has taken a step back a little bit, but we are still doing those extras if we set expectations correctly."

Some form of protection from the elements is also beneficial, although Cameron gives a word of caution.

"Pergolas are not going to do much other than decorate the deck," he says. "But people who are serious about using the space outside need a roof, because it's either too hot or it's drizzling, so you never get the perfect weather outside. A lot of people are using the roof so they can have shade or protection. Those things have really good ROI unlike a pergola, which only gives you the look. Having a roof over your deck is almost like an addition to your house and you get 85% return on it."

In the end, homeowner heeding the advice of experienced designers and builders when it comes to materials, colors, trends and amenities will usually be thrilled with the final results.

"It's great for both us and them to see a project come to life," Yoder says. "You see the pictures that get posted by the families and you create a relationship with them. It's a lot of fun and very rewarding." H&H

## RESOURCES

**Amazing Decks**
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(800) 220-3275
AnotherAmazingDeck.com

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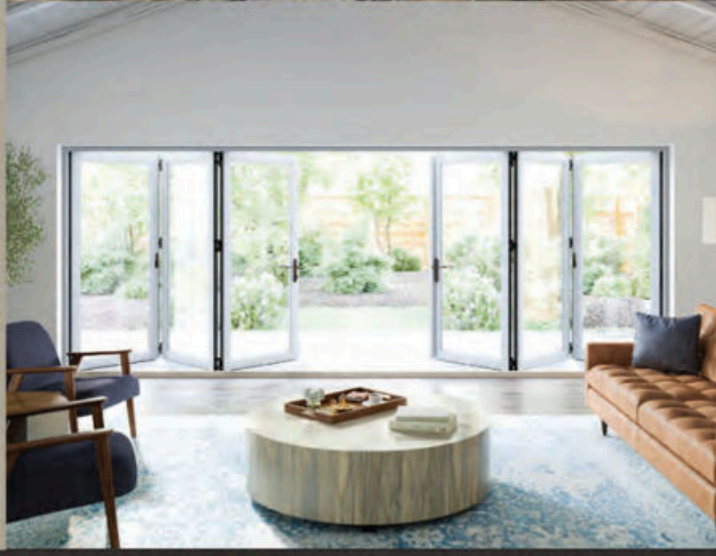



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