

Ten Steps to the

Perfect Pool

FREE REPORT
For Homeowners

Use these "insider secrets"
to get exactly the pool you've dreamed of.
(Without any hassles from the pool builder!)

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Charlottesville Aquatics
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Ten Steps to the *Perfect* Pool

If you want to be sure that your next swimming pool purchase is “the perfect experience,” then you're going to love this handy little guide. This was written **not** to sell a particular type of pool, nor to promote a particular pool builder. Instead, this was written specifically for you the homeowner, to help you make sure you get exactly what you want, no matter how experienced or inexperienced you may be, and no matter how “slick” or persuasive your swimming pool designer/salesperson may be.

The secret to getting The Perfect Swimming Pool is to follow these ten simple steps:

Choose your POOL...

1. Why do you want a pool?
2. What's your style?
3. Oooh, I like that...
4. What's most important to you?

Choose your BUILDER...

5. What do your friends and neighbors say?
6. What does Google have to say about this?
7. What do the builders say?
8. What do previous clients say?

Take the plunge!

9. Preparing for your face-to-face meeting.
10. Signing the deal.

Glossary

Check out our [Glossary of Pool Features](#) at the end of this report for a simple, easy-to-follow, pictorial description of all the latest custom water features and “backyard living” features that are popular today.

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“Why do you want a new pool?”

Step 1

To help you really get what you want, let's start by identifying **WHY** you want this in the first place. (Knowing your motivation up front makes all the other questions a LOT easier to answer!)

Most people dream about getting a swimming pool for one or more of the following reasons:

- “It would **make our backyard and our home look SO much better!**”
- “It would be **a great place to entertain family and friends.**”
- “It would **keep the kids at home, and keep them out of trouble.**”
- “It will **get the kids outside, doing something healthy** (instead of playing video games!)”
- “It would **give us an easy way to exercise and stay healthy.**”
- “It would be **an outstanding way to relax** after work every day.”
- “It's a great excuse to **bring the grandkids over.**”
- “It would **let me work on my tan.**”
- “I've just always wanted a pool. **This is my gift to me.**”

For example, if your primary motivation is to entertain your children or grandchildren, then a “lap pool” may not be the ideal choice. If “exercise” is a big deal for you, then you'll want to pay extra attention to the overall length, and perhaps make sure you've got a fairly large shallow area. If “relaxation” and “spoiling yourself” is important, then a tanning ledge and perhaps a waterfall or grotto might be perfect for you.

Once you're clear on why you want the pool in the first place, we can then take a deeper look at “pool styles.”



Choose your pool...

“What’s your style?”

Step 2



This is probably the first real “fork in the road” on the path to your Perfect Pool. In the simplest terms, pool styles can be separated into two major categories known as “**formal/traditional**” and “**free-form/natural**.” Of course, there are exceptions and nuances to this, but let’s start with the definition of the basics.

FORMAL/TRADITIONAL POOLS: Bringing Elegance to Your Backyard

A “**formal**” pool provides a neat and classy look. This is usually accomplished with some combination of the following design styles and features:

- Clean, straight lines
- A basic or combination of geometric shape (rectangles, circles, etc.)
- Brick or tile deck (or stamped concrete with a linear pattern)
- Brick or “paving tiles” as a coping around the perimeter
- Clean, simple, modern water features, such as deck jets or a straight edge waterfall
- Ceramic tiles at the water line

A “**Zero Edge**” or “**Perimeter Overflow**” design will also tend to add a formal, sophisticated look to any pool design. (A “zero edge” occurs when the pool water and the deck are at the same height, with a nearly invisible overflow slot to catch any spillover.) A **lighter pool interior** will tend to give any swimming pool a more traditional look. And a formal/traditional pool will tend to look more appropriate if your landscaping choices stay with a relatively clean and formal style.

FREE-FORM/NATURAL POOLS: Creating “The Natural Look”

A “**natural**” or “**free-form**” pool provides a much more relaxed and natural look. This is usually accomplished with some combination of:

- Smooth flowing curves and natural shapes
- Flagstone/natural stone deck (or stamped concrete with a natural, free-form pattern)
- Extensive use of natural (or natural-looking) boulders and rocks
- Natural-looking waterfalls, grottos, water slides and other features
- Natural stone coping, and/or natural rock around the waterline

A natural or free-form look is further achieved with **abundant landscaping** near the water’s edge, especially with palms, ferns, and/or extensive ground cover. **Darker-colored interior** finishes also tend to promote a “natural lagoon” look. A **beach entry** is another feature that adds a certain casual look to any pool design.

“Oooh, I like that...”

Step 3

This is probably the easiest and most fun you'll have until the day you finally step into your new swimming pool. For this “homework assignment,” all you have to do is **start collecting photographs of any and all swimming pools that you like**. Whenever you see a pool, spa or water feature that you like, just cut it out, and toss it into a folder called “my pool ideas.”

Where do you find these photos? Well, **librarians tend to frown if they see you walking in with a pair of scissors**, so magazines are probably going to be a better place to find this sort of thing. If your local magazines aren't providing you with sufficient inspiration, you should consider picking up a copy of **Luxury Pools Magazine** (www.luxurypools.com). It's loaded with a wide variety of outstanding pools, spas and water features from all over the United States and beyond.

The Internet, of course, is an outstanding source of swimming pool photos, and “saving” them is easy if you have a Pinterest or Houzz.com account. But even if you don't have one of these accounts, it's still possible for you to “cut and save” photographs that you find them like. **Here are three different ways you capture these photos:**

- **You can “right-click” on a photo.** It will usually give you the option to “copy image” or “save image.”
- If the “right-click” function doesn't work for you, you might **try the “Snipping Tool”** that is found on most newer PCs. It will allow you to “cut and paste” any image you see on your screen.
- Another option is to simply **press “print screen” on your keyboard**. This too will create an image of whatever is on your screen.

One of the easiest ways to store these “borrowed” online photos would be to simply “paste” them into a Microsoft Word document. Alternatively, **you may just want to print each of these photos individually**, and place them in your “ideas” folder.

By the way—it may be helpful, in some cases, to save photos of things you **don't** like. That way, when you meet with a professional, you can say, **“I like this, this, this and this, but I definitely do NOT like THAT.”**



choose your pool...



Step 4

“What’s most important to you?”

Now, things are going to get just a little bit tougher. While you (and I and everyone else) might want to say “everything” is most important, we’re going to have to prioritize a little. For example, if “Advanced Technology” and “Low Price” are your top two priorities, then you may have a problem.

Here’s a list of possible items that might be important to you. **Which of these would be your top three?**

- Advanced Technology
- Beauty/Design/Style
- Builder’s Reputation
- Ease of Maintenance
- Energy-Efficiency
- Financing Options
- Low Price
- Quality of Workmanship
- Safety
- Warranty

If more than one person (such as a husband and wife) is making this overall swimming pool decision, then you’ll probably need to compare notes here. Your lists don’t have to match exactly, but if your lists are in conflict, such as described above, then you probably need to resolve that before you consider meeting with a pool designer.

“What do your friends and neighbors say?”

Step 5

If you haven't done so already, then **it's time to find out what your friends and neighbors have learned through their pool-buying experiences.**

Whether they had a good experience or a bad one, you're bound to learn something from them.

Just in case you're hesitant to talk to your neighbors, please allow me to point out one valuable bit of advice you may not have considered. The “ins and outs” of pool construction can vary dramatically, depending on the part of the country you live in. In fact, soil conditions can vary so dramatically that **what might be perfectly fine on one side of your city could be a terrible mistake on the other side of town.** Also, you may have certain restrictions in your neighborhood or community that don't apply to homes and yards a half a mile away.

Thus, it can be extremely helpful to talk to any neighbors who have gone through the experience of building a swimming pool in your neighborhood. Regardless of whether they recommend the builder they used or not, they're bound to provide some valuable insights that will help you get your Perfect Pool.



Choose your builder...

“What does Google say?”

Step 6

By the way—there are several other places where you can get opinions and comments about a particular company:

- The BBB (www.bbb.org)
- Yelp (www.yelp.com)
- Complaints.com (www.complaints.com)
- Citysearch (www.citysearch.com)
- Angie's List (www.angieslist.com)

Note—out of all of the above, Angie's List tends to provide the most reliable and trustworthy comments about a particular business. Unlike the others, Angie's List requires a subscription for you to access their comments and ratings. However, considering the size of the investment we're talking about, the small expense to obtain recommendations from Angie's List is probably well worthwhile.

If you're a savvy Internet searcher, then you won't need help finding a pool builder online. Nonetheless, there are some subtleties here you should be aware of. Plus, I'll share with you a little “secret trick” that will give you phenomenal insight into any particular builder. It could make all the difference between “a disaster” and “the perfect pool experience.”

First, let's start with the basics. By entering “pool builder” and the name of your nearest major city, you should easily find at least 20 pool builders who could potentially build your pool. But keep this in mind:

- **A high ranking in Google (such as page 1, #1) doesn't necessarily mean they're the best pool builder.** It just means that Google thinks they best fit the description of your search.
- **If they show up in the “paid search”/“sponsored ads” section, it doesn't necessarily mean they're the best pool builder.** It just means that they've spent money to buy advertising to show up in that space.
- **If they don't show up at all, that doesn't mean they're a bad pool builder.** Some of the best pool builders in the world don't have a website at all. (That's also true of Yellow Pages ads, by the way!)

Now let's talk about that “secret trick” I promised, that will give you 100 times more insight about any particular pool builder. Let's say you're interested in a company called “123 Pools.” If you'd like to find out a little bit more about them, the secret is to “Google” the phrase “123 Pools” and the word “complaint” at the same time.

If 123 Pools has a lot of complaints against it, you're likely to see multiple Google listings showing the complaints. Click each link for more details about each complaint.

Now just because someone posted a negative comment about a company, that doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't use them. Some complaints are posted by competitors, and sometimes they're posted by people who won't be happy no matter who builds the pool. Fortunately, by reading the actual complaint and (ideally) reading the pool builder's rebuttal, you can often discern whether this is a valid concern, or just a rogue complaint.

“What do the builders say about themselves?”

Step 7

It only makes sense to review the websites of various pool builders, and see what they have to say about themselves. The “about us” page, in fact, should provide a tremendous amount of insight about the company you’re considering hiring. But let’s also keep in mind that **“just because someone says something online, doesn’t make it true.”**

Here’s a great little trick to help determine whether someone is giving you honest, factual information, or just saying what they think you want to hear. **If you can “scratch out” the name of the company, and insert the name of one of their competitors, and the statements still sound true, then you probably haven’t learned much about the company in question.**

So rather than look for words such as “honesty” and “integrity” or this lame classic line from some pool builders: **“If you dream it, we can build it!”** look instead for something real and substantial such as:

- Certified Building Professional©
- Member of the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals©
- Winner of design awards or other accolades
- And so on...



Choose your builder...



“What do their past clients say?”

Step 8

Testimonials, of course, can be a wonderful source of information about any business. However, once again, it can sometimes be difficult to determine whether the testimonials are honest and true. So here are some “tricks” to help you assess whether the testimonials you are seeing and hearing are believable or not.

- **How many testimonials are there?** If there are only five or six, that’s not terribly impressive. If there are 30 or more, that’s pretty hard to fake.
- **How do the testimonials sound?** Do they sound like an honest and sincere letter from a friend? Or do they sound more like a stuffy “commercial” from a company spokesperson?
- **Do they show copies of the actual letter?** Or are they just words typed onto the page? (It’s hard to dispute an actual signed letter from a homeowner.)
- **If the testimonials are audio or video, those tend to be the most believable of all.** (Unless you’re a professional actor, it’s pretty tough to fake a good testimonial on film.)

Beyond the written and video testimonials, the “ultimate testimonial” will come from a live conversation with other homeowners who have bought from this pool builder. And you needn’t feel guilty about calling these people. **Most pool buyers are happy to talk to you about their pool-buying experience.** After all, they know exactly what you’re going through!

A good pool builder won’t hesitate to give you the names of at least a dozen or more homeowners whom you can contact for their honest opinions. (Anything less than a dozen would make me suspicious.) The bigger the list of names, the more likely you can trust the builder.

Preparing for a face-to-face meeting

Step 9 Now that you've got some idea of what kind of a pool you want, and which pool builders you might consider, it's time to schedule your face-to-face meeting. There are several things you can do to prepare for this:

- If there are two people making this decision (such as husband and wife) then **make sure that both of you are going to be there.**
- Make sure you **set aside enough time for the meeting.** One hour is an absolute minimum; two hours is better.
- **Make sure you've got your "pool ideas" folder,** so you can show the designer what you like, and what you're looking for.
- **Grab a copy of the plot of your property,** if you have it. It can be extremely helpful with answering questions such as "easements" and other issues.
- **If your neighborhood has a Homeowners Association,** it may be helpful to provide that information to the designer also.
- **If you have a budget in mind,** that may be helpful. But keep in mind that (1) most homeowners have no idea how much it will cost to build your dream pool, and (2) not even an EXPERT pool designer can tell you how much your pool is going to cost until they've explored all the different options and possibilities, including some you may not have considered yet.

Bottom line—it's better to approach this meeting with an open mind, and focus more on "what you want," rather than "what you're willing to spend."

(If you focus too much on the price up front, the designer might be reluctant to show you certain features that you would really prefer to have, if you only know about them up front. Solar heating and automatic pool covers are two examples of highly valuable and beneficial features that a pool designer may avoid discussing, for fear of exceeding your budget.)



Take the plunge!



Step 10

Signing the deal

When it comes to signing the deal, you should follow the same common sense you would with the signing of any other contract. However, in the swimming pool industry, there are a few specifics which deserve special focus. **When the designer presents a contract to you, you should pay special attention to each of the following items:**

- **“What exactly is this pool going to look like?”** Your contract should include a drawing that shows the exact dimensions of your swimming pool, and the exact location of this pool in your yard. **If the drawing doesn’t reflect exactly what you think you’re paying for, don’t sign the contract!**
- **“What exactly is included in this contract?”** This detail may get boring, but it’s critically important to ensure that you get exactly what you think the sales rep/pool designer promised you. In addition to referencing the drawing, the contract should itemize any and all specific features that were promised to you, such as:
 - Interior finish—type and color
 - Equipment choices, brands, and model numbers
 - Number of skimmers
 - Size of plumbing
 - Size and quantity of special features (waterfalls, deck jets, etc.)
 - Any special options, such as in-floor cleaning, salt-based chlorination, etc.

If you don’t see a specific feature that was promised to you, don’t sign the contract!

- **“What’s NOT included in the contract?”** It’s not unusual for a swimming pool contractor to exclude certain items. (In fact, in some localities, pool builders are forbidden by law to perform certain steps, such as running gas lines.) The important thing to uncover here is whether or not you have financed or budgeted enough money to pay the builder, plus to pay any other contractors that may be required to complete the work. For example, be sure to find out whether or not your contract includes or excludes:
 - Electrical connections/electrical service
 - Running of natural gas or propane lines
 - Deck work
 - Dealing with unexpected rock or water

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Signing the deal, continued

- Landscaping
 - Replacement of fence or other access
 - The cost of permits
 - Service after start up
- **“What’s the payment schedule?”** Like most construction work, swimming pool builders are usually paid on a “draw” schedule, requiring you to pay a certain amount at each stage, to keep the work progressing. **It’s smart to make sure that the amount of money you give to the builder is reasonably proportional to the amount of work they’ve done and are about to do.** (While rare, there are occasions when a fly-by-night pool builder may get too much money up front, and then disappear without ever completing your pool.) **Bottom line—make sure the payment schedule looks fair and reasonable to you.**
 - **“What happens if you fall behind schedule?”** Many factors can prevent a pool builder from staying on a predicted or promised schedule (factors such as weather, material shortages, manpower shortages, subcontractor delays, etc.). Thus, like any construction project, you’ll enjoy this activity more if you approach it with a certain amount of “leniency and forgiveness.” However, if delays are excessive, and specifically as a result of the builder you hired, you will be thankful you discussed your options and recourse BEFORE you signed the contract.

Bottom line—by establishing a clear understanding up front, you and your builder can both avoid the pain and aggravation of a disappointing or frustrating pool-building experience. Whether you end this “pool construction” process as enemies or friends will be determined largely by your own personal diligence in this final step.



Take the plunge!

In closing...

Before we wrap up these **Ten Steps to the Perfect Pool**, I have two more bits of advice to share with you regarding “swimming pool builders” and the overall pool construction industry.

1. **Deep down, the vast majority of pool builders want you to be delighted with your new swimming pool.** In fact, one of their greatest joys is to satisfy not only you, but to also satisfy all the friends and neighbors you refer to them for many years to come. So in the course of your “Perfect Pool” project, try to be reasonable with your builder, and they will usually bend over backwards to satisfy you.
2. **A common mistake for homeowners is to believe that a particular pool of a particular size with particular features should cost exactly the same, no matter who builds it.** But if that were true, then a four-door Mercedes-Benz and a four-door Hyundai Sonata, both of which have a GPS, electric windows and a CD player, would cost exactly the same.

In fact, the Mercedes may cost four times as much as the Hyundai. Yet people happily pay the difference every day. Why? Because most people understand and appreciate the differences between these two vehicles. It’s not the options, and it’s not the size. It’s the quality of workmanship, and ultimately the enjoyment they get with the use of the superior product.

So keep this in mind when you look at competing proposals for your pool project. If one project costs \$25,000 more than another project, it’s not because the builder is trying to make an extra \$25,000 off of you. It’s because one builder has chosen to use materials and processes that he or she believes will produce a superior product, compared to the alternatives. **Like most things, the famous old adage is true: “You Get What You Pay For.”**



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Glossary of pool features

Unlike pools of old, there are dozens of beautiful “custom features” that can be added to any pool or the pool area, making a dramatic difference in the beauty and enjoyment of the pool and the entire yard.

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION



Aerator

Provides a spray of water into the pool, typically in a “fan” pattern, as opposed to a straight line of water. In hot climates, aerators will help to cool the water a little. Children love to play in and around aerators.



Aggregate Interior

A new, longer-lasting interior finish that is comprised of pebbles (or other carefully selected aggregates) that are partially exposed in the process of installation, producing a super-hard and beautiful finish. The manufacturers of aggregate interiors are able to provide a stunning array of colors, due to the many different variables they can work with, such as the:

- Pebble color(s) (almost always a blend of multiple colors)
- Pebble size
- Mortar color/pigment
- Degree of “polishing” of the exposed surface

Note that it’s almost impossible to determine the color of your pool water by looking at a dry aggregate sample. Be sure to look at “underwater samples” before making your final decision.



All-Tile

Refers to the interior of a swimming pool that is 100% glass or ceramic tile, as opposed to the more popular plaster finishes or aggregate finishes.

Arbor

See *Pergola*.



Bathhouse

Typically a fully enclosed, standalone structure located somewhere near a swimming pool, to offer a restroom and a changing area as a minimum. A bathhouse can also have its own kitchen, living area, game room, and more. (See also *Cabana*.)

Baja Bench

See *Tanning Ledge*.

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Beach Entry



A gently sloping transition from your deck into the water, very similar to a real beach. Materials vary, but it is usually either the same as the decking/coping material, or the same as the interior finish of the pool. A beach entry is great for toddlers, and also makes a great tanning ledge.

Bubble Jet



This is essentially a fountain (normally a few inches below the surface of the water) that provides a soft, “bubbly” stream of water, typically 6 to 24 inches tall. An excellent feature for very young children to play with.

Built-In Spa



A spa (sometimes also referred to as a “hot tub”) can be added to any style of in-ground pool, adding yet another level of beauty and excitement to the backyard. On a fiberglass or vinyl-liner pool, a “spillover” spa is the most likely option. (The spa is placed at the edge of the pool, with essentially a “waterfall” that allows any excess water to “spillover” directly into the swimming pool.)

With concrete pools, on the other hand, you’re not limited to a “spillover” configuration. Your spot can be above the pool, below the pool, inside the pool, completely separate and outside of the pool, etc. It can be simple and basic, or built with a vanishing edge or perimeter overflow. With concrete, the options and styles for a spa are as limitless as the styles and options for the pool.

Bull-Nosed Coping



This somewhat unflattering name refers to the “quarter-rounding” or “half-rounding” of the edge of the coping, so that it provides a smooth, soft, and safe edge for swimmers. The “bull nose” concept is also sometimes applied to steps, ledges, and other “Hardscapes” surfaces.

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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Bull-Nosed Coping,
continued

Most precast coping (such as brick or cement) is manufactured with the “bull-nose” feature built-in. With natural stone, the installer has to hand carve the bull-nose on site; thus the phrase “hand-carved bull nose.”



Cabana

This word is a Spanish translation of “cabin” or “hut.” It originally referred to a small, lightweight living structure that was frequently set up on the beach, typically with one side open to the ocean.

Nowadays, when you build a cabana near your pool, it’s typically more of a “**relaxing/party area**” than a “living structure.” Ideally, your cabana would include a bar that looks out to the pool area, perhaps a table with chairs or a couch, plus a sink, a refrigerator, etc. More or less, a cabana could be considered a small cozy combination of an **outdoor kitchen** and **outdoor living area**, designed with a little bit more of a “bar theme” overall.



Coping

The material that surrounds the perimeter of your swimming pool and/or spa. On a “Gunite” or cement pool, the coping is typically about 12 inches wide, and usually made out of brick, paving stones, natural stone, or a pre-cast cement material. On a vinyl-liner pool, the coping may be only one or two inches wide, and made of plastic, vinyl, or aluminum. Coping can be made completely obsolete with the construction technique known as “cantilevered deck,” in which the decking material extends over the edge of the pool and becomes a substitute for actual coping material.



Deck

Refers to the hard surface around the swimming pool. Decks can be built from a variety of materials, including:

- Wood (and wood alternatives such as Trex)
- Broom-finished concrete
- Stained and/or stamped/patterned concrete
- Acrylic-finish spray deck (sometimes referred to by their brand names such as Kool-Deck or Sundek)
- Exposed aggregate
- Bricks or pavers
- Tiles (stone, ceramic, etc.)
- Flagstone or other natural stone



Your choice of deck material will probably have the single greatest impact on the overall look of your swimming area, because it covers so much surface area.

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Deck Jet/ Laminar/Water Arch



An attractive feature that can be hidden almost anywhere, such as in the pool deck or in the landscaping. Arranged in a row, they will give you a formal, elegant look. If you're thinking about this feature, then be sure to take a look at the LED/fiber optics lighting options to go with your laminar jet/deck jet.

Faux Rock



Several manufacturers have found ways to create realistic-looking rock out of man-made materials. Typically made from a special formulation of cement, faux rocks may be molded after actual rock formations found in nature, or they may be hand-sculpted by a faux rock expert onsite.

While faux rock may not fool everyone, it has advantages, including (usually) lower cost. It also tends to be more chemical-resistant (especially when compared to sandstone or limestone), and can produce more predictable results, as compared to the use of natural stone.

Fire Bowl/ Fire Wok



Offers a stunning flame effect, which is nice in the daytime, but even more impressive at night. Fire bowls are typically 2 feet or larger in diameter, and can be made from any number of materials, including stone, metal, concrete, ceramic, and more. The fire bowl is normally filled with crushed glass, lava rock, or some other fireproof material, to hide the gas fixture inside the bowl. The ideal fire bowl is automated, and can be lit instantly with a touch of a remote control.

A fire wok is essentially a fire bowl built on top of a water wok. (See *Water Wok*.)

Fire Pit



A great option to consider adding to the area near your swimming pool. Not only will a fire pit take the chill out of the evening air, but it will also create a wonderful place to congregate and chat after a busy day of work or fun. A fire

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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Fire Pit,
continued

pit may be wood-fired or plumbed with natural gas or propane. (And much like a fire wok, you may have the option of adding a remote-control starter to your fire pit.)



Formal Pool

Sometimes referred to as “classic” or “traditional” pool, this refers to a design style that usually includes one or more of the following elements:

- Clean, straight lines (usually a rectangle) and/or geometric shapes
- Brick coping or “paving tiles” around the perimeter
- Brick or tiled decking, or stamped concrete with a brick or paver pattern

The more of the above features you use, the more formal your swimming pool will look. (See also **Grecian/Roman Pool.**)



Fountain Jet

A simple yet pleasing feature that can be placed almost anywhere, including in the pool, in the spa, on steps, ledges or a beach entry, or in a pond or catch basin next to the pool. Fountains can also be hidden in the deck or other areas. Fountains can be small or large, playful or elegant.



Free-Form Pool

Sometimes referred to as a “lagoon-style” or “natural” pool, this refers to a design style that avoids straight lines, using sweeping curves and nontraditional shapes instead. If you want a natural-looking swimming pool, then you will want to combine a free-form shape with any or all of the following elements:

- Natural rock or stone built-in at various places around the pool
- A natural rock or flagstone perimeter/coping
- A rock or flagstone deck, or stamped concrete with a “natural rock” pattern.
- Extensive use of plants around the pool.

Grottos and **jump-rocks** are natural additions to a natural/free-form pool.



Gazebo

Typically a standalone structure made of wood, designed to provide a shady sitting area. Similar to pergolas and arbors, a gazebo is uniquely recognizable because of its domed or turreted roof. (See also **Pergola.**)

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION



Grecian/Roman Pool

This type of pool could be considered the “original classic/formal/traditional pool.” It’s a rectangle-shaped pool with a semicircle at each end. (A rectangular pool with the corners cut is also sometimes referred to as a Grecian pool.)



Grotto

This is essentially a cave (or something similar to a cave) built into or connected to the pool, typically with a sitting area. It is common to build waterfalls or weeping walls on the outside of the grotto, and/or a rain wall at the entrance. Youngsters love it when a slide is built in to (on top of or to the side of) the grotto. If you build it large enough, you can actually put your spa inside the grotto, to offer extra privacy, and a more romantic mood.

Grottos can be quite striking and beautiful, but frankly speaking, they can also be rather ugly if done by an amateur. A trained professional will design and build the grotto to fit in with the style of the rest of the pool and the yard. Like most any complicated feature, it’s smart to take a look at a builder’s previous work before making a final purchase decision.



In-Water Tables and Chairs

These features provide a wonderful resting spot for reading, snacking, enjoying beverages, or even playing “land” games. The table may be removable, and/or have a fitting that allows the homeowner to add or remove a desirable umbrella over the table.

It’s also popular to build the table into the perimeter of the pool, with a “sunken bar” on the other side. Perfect if you really want to show off to your guests with “poolside service.”



Jump Rock

Considered safer than a diving board, this is a large, natural-looking rock placed at the edge of the pool, allowing many hours of entertainment for the kids.



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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION



Lap Pool

Typically a long, narrow pool designed primarily for swimming laps. A standalone lap pool tends to have a somewhat formal, elegant look. However, a “lap pool” feature can be incorporated into other pool designs as well. You can also add a built-in spa to a lap pool, so that you always have a choice between “exercising” and “relaxing.”



LED Lighting/ Fiber-Optic Lighting

This feature has replaced most of the old halogen and incandescent light fixtures, both in the water and around your swimming pool, for two reasons: First, they are much more energy-efficient, using only a tiny fraction of the electricity of the old-style lights. Second, they last significantly longer than simple incandescent bulbs.

An especially popular use of LED lights (sometimes using fiber optics also) is to incorporate the lights with your deck jets or water arches, thus creating the illusion of a stream of colored water. With most advanced lighting systems, the colors can be changed automatically, in an ongoing sequence, giving you an entertaining light show at night.



Love Seat/ Swim Out

Also referred to as a “swim out,” this feature serves multiple purposes. It can be a great place to relax while watching others in the pool. It might also be considered something of a safety feature, as it’s an extremely convenient exit point or resting point, especially for anyone swimming in the deep end.



Mosaics

A **Tile Mosaic** will put a true “signature” design on your pool or spa. From artistic designs to playful creatures to company logos to names or clever sayings—the possibilities are endless.



Natural Pool

While “natural” sometimes refers to a “free-form” or lagoon-shape pool, the term “**natural pool**” now more commonly refers to a swimming vessel that uses no chemicals, but instead is filtered and sanitized naturally through a natural pond or bog. Natural filter media such as sphagnum moss has recently become popular as another way to create a “natural pool” with no chemicals.

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION



Outdoor Kitchen Nothing completes your outdoor area like the ability to cook without having to run in and out of the house all the time. To determine how much space you should devote to outdoor culinary endeavors, consider what is the maximum number of people you might want to entertain on any particular occasion.



Outdoor Living Area This can be something as simple as a small deck or patio with a couple of chairs in just the right spot. On the other hand, it can be a large “living room” with comfortable all-weather couches, a roof, ceiling fans, a large stone fireplace, and a large-screen television to watch your favorite events.

Of course, if you’re going to have that many people sitting around in an outdoor living area, you probably also want to consider the addition of an outdoor kitchen.



Palapa This feature is instantly recognizable as the classic “thatched hut.” Originating in Malaysia and now wildly popular throughout Central America, a Palapa will undoubtedly add a Caribbean feel to any backyard pool design.

Pavers

See *Deck*.

Pebble Finish

See *Aggregate Interior*.



Pergola

A shady area, built with vertical support posts and rafters running across the top. The roof of a pergola is usually semi-open and flat, allowing partial sunshine and daylight to shine through.



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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Pergola,
continued

Pergolas are often confused with arbors and gazebos, as they all usually offer some combination of open sides and/or a semi-open roof and/or plants growing on it. The unique differences are these:

- A **Pergola** normally has a flat but semi-open roof, designed to offer partial shade. It may or may not have plants growing on it.
- An **Arbor** is designed specifically to allow plants (typically vines and climbing flowers) to grow on it. It may or may not have a flat roof.
- A **Gazebo** is almost always characterized by a domed or turreted roof. It may or may not have plants growing on it.



Perimeter Overflow

When all sides of a pool or spa are “vanishing edge,” you have what is known as a “**perimeter overflow**,” (also sometimes referred to as a “wet edge” or “wet deck.”) In this case, there are no visible edges to the pool or spa. Water flows over the edges on all sides, into a hidden catch basin. The edge may be elevated to spill into a catch basin below, or it might be flush with the edge of the deck, which means the overflow will spill into a narrow, hidden catch basin underneath the deck.

A stunning visual effect, this is the most difficult of all vanishing-edge designs, and should not be entrusted to anyone but experienced professionals who specialize in vanishing edge and/or perimeter overflow design and construction.



Pizza Oven

If you want your outdoor kitchen to be unique and different from your neighbors, then you should consider the addition of a wood-fired pizza oven. Those who have them swear by the flavor and fun from cooking your own homemade pizza in a wood-fired pizza oven.

Pizza ovens may be built from brick, cement, or natural stone, and can be finished in a variety of materials so that it blends in subtly with the rest of your outdoor area.



**Rain Wall/
Rain Curtain**

Provides a wall of rain drops (as opposed to the full sheet of water that you would see with a **scupper** or “**sheer descent**” water curtain.) Makes a great visual separation between your pool and an arbor, a cabana, or a grotto.

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Raised Spa/ Spillover Spa



This is a great way to add beauty and function to any existing swimming pool. “Raised” simply means that the level of the spa water is higher than the level of the swimming pool. Thus, it’s a natural feature to allow the water from the spa to “spillover” into the swimming pool. Most swimming pool spas are custom built from concrete (shotcrete), but pre-manufactured fiberglass spillover spas are also available in many parts of the country.

Rock Waterline



While most typical swimming pools have a ceramic tile (or other tile) around the perimeter at the water line, you may want to consider the use of natural or “faux” rock at the water line instead.

If your goal is to perpetuate a “natural” or “lagoon style” look, then a rock waterline may be a perfect choice for you.

Sconce



This is a light fixture that is normally attached to a wall, to provide subdued, upward lighting. (The concept originated with torches many hundreds of years ago.) Around the swimming pool, sconces can be **especially attractive and effective around a cabana or pergola**. A series of small, low-profile sconces can also do an excellent job of lighting stair steps or other walkways at night.

Note: Some people refer to decorative scuppers (such as a lion’s head scupper) as a “sconce.” This is technically incorrect.

Scuppers



Originally (before swimming pools), this referred to a slot opening that would allow water to drain off a roof or a ship’s deck. Around the swimming pool, a scupper looks much the same, except the water is draining into the swimming pool itself. A scupper can be a simple opening, or it can be highly decorative, such as with a lion’s face or other ornate styling.

Also see **Water Wok** for an especially popular, stylized form of scupper.



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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Shamu Shelf

See Tanning Ledge.



Sheer Descent©

This is technically the brand name of a smooth, linear-flowing waterfall manufactured by the Jandy/Zodiac Corporation. However, much like the term “Kleenex,” a “sheer descent” now often simply refers to any straight, linear waterfall, regardless of the manufacturer.

Most popular as a simple arching waterfall that comes out of a raised sidewall of the swimming pool, a sheer descent might also be mounted overhead, to produce a “water wall” effect. (See also Rain Wall.)



Spa

Sometimes referred to as a “hot tub,” a **spa** is normally a permanent structure, either built into the swimming pool, or sometimes raised above the swimming pool, with a water spillover into the pool. (See also Raised Spa/Spillover Spa.)



Swim Spa

This is to swimmers what a treadmill is to joggers. Using a high-flow waterjet and/or a tethering system, a swim spa creates a sort of “endless swimming pool,” allowing you to swim in place for as long as you want. A swim spa can be a standalone unit (on ground or inground), or in many cases, it can be built directly into your swimming pool.



Swim-Up Bars

A swim-up bar is quite treat for people both in and out of the pool. It can connect to a real bar on the outside, or it can be a bar-type table that allows wet and dry people (in the water and out of the water) to sit together at the same table. (See also In-Water Tables.)



Tanning Ledge

Also known as a “Baja Bench” or “Shamu Shelf,” this feature provides a flat, shallow area for adults to relax and tan, and/or for children to play. Typically only about six inches deep, it’s somewhat similar to a beach entry, except that it’s not sloped, and it usually has a defined edge, such as the coping of the pool.

While most people are happy with just one tanning ledge, don’t be afraid to consider the possibility of multiple tanning ledges for your project. Not only can they look quite artistic, but the can also offer alternating sun and shade at different times of the day, depending on the placement in your yard.

Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Travertine Tile/ Tumbled Travertine



Travertine is a unique form of limestone that is increasingly popular as a coping and decking material around swimming pools. It resembles marble, but is a little softer, and has more unusual variations, including many small voids (holes) throughout the material.

As a decking material, travertine is normally cut into rectangular pavers. For a less formal look, you may want to consider “tumbled travertine.” These rectangular pavers have been literally tumbled in a bin to round off most of the sharp corners, and provide a somewhat “antiqued” look.

Umbrella



A removable umbrella (or set of umbrellas) can be a lifesaver on extra hot days, when you want to stay in the water, but you don't want to spend all day in the hot sun. An umbrella will look especially classy on tanning ledge.

Vanishing Edge



Also known as “**negative edge**” or “**infinity edge**,” this feature offers the illusion that the pool (or spa) water is pouring over the edge of the pool into another body of water, or perhaps down a hillside.

To achieve a uniform flow of water over the vanishing edge, it must be perfectly level. (Otherwise, an oversized pump and excessive electricity will be required produce the desired effect.) A vanishing-edge feature also requires careful design of the catch basin and surge tank (for excess water when people are jumping into the pool).

Therefore, this elegant water-feature design and construction should not be entrusted to anyone but an experienced professional. (See also *Perimeter Overflow.*)



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Glossary of pool features

FEATURE

DESCRIPTION

Water Arches

See [Deck Jets](#).



Water Bowls/
Water Wok

A water bowl or water wok is a special type of “scupper” that is built from a fairly large bowl, and designed to constantly pour out into another feature, or the pool itself. The bowl can be made from any number of materials, including cement, metal or ceramic. A series of cascading water woks can make for an especially elegant water feature.

(See also [Scupper](#) and [Fire Wok](#).)



Weir Wall

The “Weir Wall” is the technical name for the visible part of a “vanishing edge” feature. The Weir is what holds back the water, allowing just the desired amount of water to trickle over the edge.

A Weir wall is frequently finished in glass or ceramic tile, but may also be formed from concrete, natural rock, metal, or even Plexiglas.



Waterfall

With [waterfalls](#), the sky’s the limit. They can be small or large, fancy or natural-looking, gentle trickles or “Niagara Falls.” They can also be quite gaudy, unattractive and leaky if not done properly by a trained professional. Be sure to take a look at a builder’s handiwork of waterfalls before you make any final decisions.



Weeping Wall

This feature could be described as a “low-flow waterfall.” Rather than a large gushing flow of water, a weeping wall offers a more gentle “drip” of water over natural rocks, similar to something you might see around a natural grotto. Ideally, this feature would be built with an adjustable flow control, so that you can adjust from a slow silent flow up to a heavy “spring thaw” flow.

Wet Edge/
Wet Deck

See [Perimeter Overflow](#).



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