In THE GREAT OUTDOORS
NEW RULES FOR POOLS

Five Tips For Building Swanky Swimming Holes

BY JAY SOMERSET
When was the last time you saw a classic concrete pool in a backyard?

Most likely, the pools most of us encounter are those curvy, blue-vinyl lined swimming holes overflowing with kids and puffy toys. But there was a time when backyard pools were simple: straight lines, minimal design, small, and concrete.

And while vinyl is still the most popular and least expensive option, representing as much as 95 percent of all new pools installed in Ontario, pool builders such as John Petrocelli, president of Backyard Getaways Inc., in Brampton, Ont., is noticing a new trend develop: a return to simple, minimal design. And concrete.

“People are investing more in their homes, renovating rather than moving, and creating outdoor spaces to match,” says Petrocelli, whose family has been in the pool business since 1973.

Here, then, are the top five new rules for pools.
1. CONCRETE’S RETURN
While vinyl remains the most popular, least expensive option, concrete is beginning to gain traction among homeowners looking for a higher-end look.

“The pool should match the property, so if you’ve got a pricey home in a pricey neighbourhood, concrete just looks best,” says Petrocelli. Add to this concrete’s longer lifespan and classic, hard-surfaced aesthetic—a fine match beside natural stone, a hugely popular element in landscaping—and you’ve got something that will age well and complement the home.

2. KEEP IT MINIMAL
By the time vinyl took over residential pool construction, in the early 1980s, pools were becoming more cottage-like, with colourful slides, diving boards, and other campy fixtures (cheap patio lanterns, garish colours). Today, pool design is shifting back to smaller, more linear shapes. “We’re seeing a return to minimal design,” says Meaghan Kennedy, senior landscape designer at Neil Pike Landscape Architects & Contractors in Richmond Hill, Ont. “They want something modern, not so fussy; they’re also staying away from oasis-shaped pools.”
“In the ‘90s, it was all about gimmicks,” adds Petrocelli. “People wanted rope lighting; they wanted to recreate Las Vegas, whereas now they want something much more modest.” And it’s not just inside the pool; minimalism has spread to all water features including waterfalls. “They still want these features, but the lines should be sharp with a negative edge, not jagged and cottage-y.”

3. LIGHT IT UP
Just as homeowners have embraced multi-level LED lighting and dimmers inside the house, the same is true of pools and patios. Besides making nighttime swimming more pleasant, well-placed lights can transform the entire backyard into an outdoor space resembling a slick Miami hotel – with lights in the pool deck, around

Groundbreaking Tools
Yardwork requires a specialized set of equipment. Here are some of the latest landscaping tools to add to your collection.

**MANTIS NO-SPILL GAS CAN**
**$20**
Try filling a gas-powered mower or trimmer without spilling. It’s nearly impossible. That’s why this little, 10.4-litre no-spill can is so handy. It features a large, single opening for filling or pouring, an auto-stop nozzle, thumb-button lock, and dust cover. Say goodbye to gassy hands. Mantis.com

**RYOBI EXPAND-IT LAWN-CARE SYSTEM**
**$100 (plus $70–$80 per attachment)**
Customize your lawn-care system to fit your needs without having to lug around a bunch of heavy tools. Quickly and easily switch between a hedge trimmer, edger, tiller, brush cutter, and chainsaw while holding onto the same 26cc, two-cycle power head. It’s like an exchangeable screwdriver, but for landscapers. RyobiTools.com

**BAHCO JS PROFESSIONAL PRUNING SAW**
**$35–$45**
Like a woodworker, a landscaper is only as good as his tools, and none are more important than handsaws. Bahco is tops in this category, with blades custom-designed specifically for cutting through green wood. Choose from various lengths and get cutting. Rittenhouse.ca

**OVERLAND MOTORIZED WHEELBARROW**
**$1,798–$1,989**
These DC-powered carts/wheelbarrows are ideal for landscapers working with heavy loads. The large-capacity (nine to ten cubic feet) bin can tilt, and sits right on a heavy-duty chassis. Comes with a rechargeable 24-volt battery. OverlandCarts.com
NUMBER CRUNCHER
There were 10,803 building permits for pools issued across Canada in 2011, a 14 percent increase over 2010, and the first time since 2007 that the figure surpassed 10,000. Montreal lead the way with 3,656 permits issued, one-third of the national total.
Statistics compiled by Pool & Spa Marketing magazine.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

HONDA HRC2163HXC LAWNMOWER
$1,339
Variable speeds and self-propelled movement up to 6.4 km/h make this commercial-use mower a worthwhile investment. Add in the Roto-Stop blade stop system, eight cutting heights (from golf-green short to 10 cm), nine-inch wheels, and a reinforced handle and you’ll wonder how you ever got by without this machine. PowerEquipment.Honda.ca

OX PROFESSIONAL SERIES CYCLONE MASONRY BLADES
$50–$150
Cut through anything – concrete curbs and slabs, pavers, brick, stone – with these versatile, reinforced-steel blades. Cooling holes reduce blade temperature while cutting and prevent warping for cleaner, more-exact cuts. Sizes range from four to 14 inches. HomeDepot.ca

REALTIME LANDSCAPING PRO SOFTWARE
$100
Visualize, show clients, and amend your designs with this intuitive, comprehensive, and accurate 3D design software for PC. Features every aspect of landscape architecture, from water features to sprinkler systems and more than 5,000 ultra-realistic trees and plants. Design decks, place pavers, and get a realistic sense of size, scope, and cost, all from your computer. IdeaSpectrum.com

GARDEN TRACKER APP
$0.99 for iPhone; $3.99 for iPad
Design gardens up to 2,500 sq. ft. on a grid, with each box representing one square foot. Click inside each box and choose what you plan to plant from 65 common kitchen plants including herbs and vegetables. The app tells you how much growing space you need, ideal soil, water, and sun conditions, planting depth, and more. Ideal for quick, on-the-job referencing. iTunes.ca —JS

the patio furniture, under waterfalls and, of course, in the pool itself. And don’t forget fire, adds Kennedy, pointing to built-in fireplace mantels, stone ovens, and other illuminating elements.

4. CABANA TIME
The worst thing about a pool? The ugly shed housing the pump, heater, and filter – unless you turn it into a cabana bar, changing area, storage room, and washroom, says Petrocelli. Make it inviting with matching finishes and other top-end features rather than an afterthought. Adding an outdoor kitchen? Incorporate it into the cabana-hut design. “It’s the whole idea of making a backyard getaway, a place to relax that looks good year-round and doesn’t entail...
driving through traffic to get to,” says Kennedy. Last year, Kennedy worked on a major project for a client who wanted her backyard to resemble her house in Florida, including a negative-edge waterfall running along the entire back end of the yard, a walk-in, beach-style pool, and other spa-like features.

5. AUTOMATE IT
Press a button and your pool’s solar cover retracts itself out of site, below the concrete deck, eliminating the need to manually open and close the pool each time you want to use it, and removing those ugly wheeled cover spools. “They’re great for older people and also help prevent evaporation,” says Petrocelli, who positions the cost of such an upgrade between $15,000 and $20,000. Pricy, yes, but it also means less heating costs, as you’re only opening the pool when you want to use it. “You could do it 100 times a day.”

Jay Somerset splashes around in a Mr. Turtle pool at his west-end Toronto home. He claims he got it for his son, Henry.