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The hottest trends in swimming pools

WRITTEN BY AMY BURGER

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It's been a long, rainy spring, but summer is nearly here; and in St. Louis, that means heat. On the dog days of summer, the very best way to cool off is taking a dip in a pool. Most public pools opened last weekend, but having one in your backyard is even better. According to the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals, there are nearly 5 million in-ground pools and 3.7 million above-ground pools in the United States.



Today's custom-designed in-ground swimming pools can run up to \$100,000 (though you can get a very basic version for \$7,000) with their many unique features and landscape design. Many homeowners are creating full outdoor living spaces and pool areas that make the backyard the center of the home in the warm summer months. Kevin Dixon, owner of Outdoor Concepts, a Chesterfield-based swimming pool construction company, says that 40-50 percent of his clients want the "outdoor living room" look as they build their pools.

To help achieve this look, one popular local trend is having fire features such as full stone fireplaces, fire pits or torches constructed next to the pool, creating a conversation area around it complete with comfortable yet durable outdoor furniture. Outdoor poolside fireplaces add warmth and ambience to evening parties or gatherings in the early summer or fall, when the nights are cooler.

Here are some other trends in swimming pools:

Safety comes first

It is always important to obey safety rules in a public or private pool. The American Red Cross offers the following tips, as well as CPR classes, which all parents should attend. Visit www.redcrossstl.org for more information or to register.

- The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim — this includes adults and children.
- Never leave a child unobserved around water. Your eyes must be on the child at all times.
- Install a phone by the pool or keep a cordless phone nearby so you can call 911 in an emergency.
- Learn Red Cross CPR and insist that babysitters, grandparents and others who care for your child know CPR.
- Post CPR instructions and emergency numbers in the pool area.
- Enclose the pool completely with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars. Openings in the fence should be no more than 4 inches wide. The gate should be self-latching and self-closing.

A natural environment



Swim through the grotto or climb to the top and slide down into this Ladue pool by Outdoor Concepts. PHOTO BY BRENT KUHLMANN PHOTOGRAPHY

Creating a more natural-looking pool environment with boulders or rock formations is another big trend. Dixon says homeowners are incorporating slides into the boulders with a waterfall and stone steps going up to the slide. The cost is about \$8,000 for the boulders and slide set-up. Rock slides don't stand out like the old metal slides and are safer, too. Fountains are also a popular feature that can be incorporated and actually help keep the pool clean.

Automation

- Always keep basic lifesaving equipment by the pool and know how to use it. Pole, rope and personal flotation devices are recommended.
- Keep toys away from the pool when they are not in use, as they can attract young children into the pool.
- Pool covers should be completely removed before pool use.
- If a child is missing, check the pool first. Go to the edge of the pool and scan the entire pool, bottom and surface, as well as the surrounding pool area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SWIMMING POOL CONSTRUCTION, TRENDS AND SAFETY, VISIT THE ASSOCIATION OF POOL AND SPA PROFESSIONALS WEBSITE AT WWW.APSP.ORG.

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Fountains at a Ladue home. PHOTO BY BRENT KUHLMANN PHOTOGRAPHY

Pool owners are taking advantage of today’s technology to automate pool features such as colored lights and fountains, putting them on timers or turning them on and off with the touch of a remote control button.

Saltwater pools



A saltwater pool in St. Charles. PHOTO BY BLUE HAVEN POOLS & SPAS

With the increasing focus on all things “green” and environmentally friendly, saltwater pools are gaining in popularity. In fact, Dixon says, 80 percent of his new customers ask for saltwater. Don’t be deceived by the term however; this doesn’t turn your pool into the briny ocean, it uses just enough salinity to keep the pool clean and prevent algae from growing.

Sun shelves

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A University City pool with a sun shelf (at right). PHOTO BY BAKER POOL & SPA

Sun shelves, first popular at resorts, are also called tanning ledges, Shamu shelves and benches. Their shallow area provides a place to play, an area to sit without getting submerged and a spot for sun worshippers to stay cool and turn golden. They range from the size of a large step to an area that holds lounges and fountains.

Infinity edges



A Chesterfield infinity pool. PHOTO COURTESY OF OUTDOOR CONCEPTS

An infinity edge is constructed so water flows over one or more sides of the pool into a catch basin and is then recirculated back into the pool. The edge of the pool seems to literally disappear on the horizon, creating a dramatic effect, particularly in backyards with scenic views.

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