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MAY/JUNE 2010

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Valuing social and environmental contexts while adhering to LEED standards

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BOLD BEGINNINGS BEAR SYSTEMIC
SYNERGIES FOR ECO-FRIENDLY
RESIDENTIAL-DESIGN FIRM





This stylish home on a sprawling Okanagan horse ranch demanded a bold and unique waterscape design that would proudly complement the setting, rather than get swallowed up by the vast spaces around it. The design includes a 65-foot vanishing edge and 15-seat bar at the water's edge.

VALLEY POOL & SPA

One of the world's most influential pool designers combines watershapes and architecture to expertly craft backyard experiences

BY FRANKLIN CONRAD

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
KELOWNA, BC

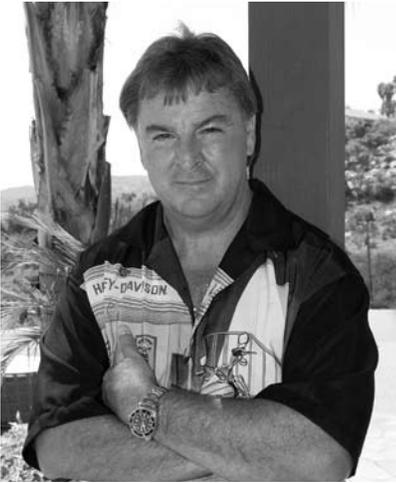
FOUNDED:
1972

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
DESIGN-BUILD OF
POOLS, SPAS, AND
WATERSHAPES

SOMEWHERE NEAR A LAKE SHORE IN THE Okanagan Valley, a master builder and designer of watershapes is putting the finishing touches on yet another project for Canada's elite. Most pool builders would love to show off a half-million-dollar pool project like this on their Web sites. But neither the name of this homeowner nor the photos of the project may be shared with the public. Such are the rules when dealing with this special class of people. But that's all right with Gene Brown, the

owner of Kelowna, British Columbia-based Valley Pool and Spa. It comes with the territory.

In business since 1972, Valley Pool and Spa has served the needs of the area's hotels, condominiums, casinos, municipalities, and water parks as well as hundreds of British Columbia's homeowners. And when Brown and world-renowned design partner Skip Phillips visit a site for a new pool, they pay close attention to line of sight,



“

I find that Canadians are more likely to embrace the ‘outdoor living destinations’ of fire, food, and water. It’s an important area of focus in all our residential designs.

—Skip Phillips, Design Partner

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with emphasis on how the pool will look from the house. Then they look for opportunities to incorporate existing or planned materials or shapes in the design of the vessel.

“The home’s design and architecture is the best starting point for the backyard environment,” Brown says. “We want to make the home and the water vessel look like a single concept that was planned together from the start.”

One increasingly popular way to blur the distinction between the vessel and its surroundings is with the “vanishing-edge” or “perimeter-overflow” design. Also known as “water in transit,” the design has become a marker of style, taste, and affluence. In fact, it’s a challenge to find a high-profile property that doesn’t have a water-in-transit detail of some kind.

The first vanishing-edge pools were designed and built in France in the late 1800s. In North America, the first vanishing-edge pools were built in the late 1950s in Los Angeles, designed by world-renowned architect John Lautner. Movie fans may recall their first glimpse of a Lautner pool design in the 1971 film *Diamonds Are Forever*.

Though they are stunning to behold, the pools that Valley Pool and Spa build demand special expertise to construct. Brown, who owns and operates the company, holds that expertise as a second-generation pool builder. He is a certified and accredited member of the Society of Watershape Designers, and his projects have won numerous honours, including The Art of Water award from *Pool, Spa and Patio* magazine. He also is a Platinum Level graduate of the Genesis 3 Design Group, an international educational organization that is committed to raising the standards of the pool-construction industry worldwide. Only 23

builders in the world have achieved this designation, and Brown is the only such builder in Canada.

Brown works throughout Canada in partnership with Phillips, specializing in challenging, high-end projects for commercial and residential clients. In addition to the vanishing-edge and perimeter-overflow designs, some projects even include windows in the vessel walls, as the “unusual” is not unusual for Valley Pool and Spa. In fact, the company continues to be the preferred builder that homeowners, builders, and architects turn to for challenging projects.

Besides being Gene’s design partner, Phillips also is a co-founder of the aforementioned Genesis 3 Design Group and the owner of Questar Pools, a design-build firm in Escondido, California. He has been named multiple times as “the most influential pool designer in the world,” including by *IQ* magazine of Hamburg, Germany, and he has been profiled on HGTV and in a multitude of consumer publications. Phillips has taught vanishing-edge design and hydraulics to the pool and spa industry for nearly 20 years.

With this kind of experience backing them, Brown and Phillips understand that the combination of a main pool, a catch basin, a surge tank, and several areas of water in transit all require a thorough understanding of the design and construction of complex hydraulics.

The company’s pools also require incredibly tight construction tolerances. For example, a half-inch variation across a 50-foot run may seem small to the average pool builder, but it’s a travesty with a vanishing edge. To get a smooth flow over a weir wall, an excessive amount of

water would be required. That means more noise, more turbulence, a bigger pump, and more electricity. When constructed properly by an experienced builder, these pools can produce a stunning effect with as little as one half-gallon per minute, per linear foot.

To achieve such tight tolerances, Valley Pool and Spa uses the unique “cast-in-place” method of pool construction. Based on the technology used to build modern skyscrapers, the cast-in-place method requires on-site fabrication of custom multi-sided forms. The forms are filled with concrete and then agitated to remove all voids. It’s a more labour-intensive process, but it produces tolerances within a few hundredths of an inch across a 50-foot run. “Most architects know that cast-in-place is the only way to get truly exact results with concrete,” Brown says. “Traditional ‘shotcrete’ or ‘gunite’ methods may be okay for a simple pool in a flat backyard. But vanishing-edge and perimeter-overflow vessels require exact results down to one-eighth of an inch or less. We always use cast-in-place for this type of precision work.”

Valley Pool and Spa considers the fact that a pool owner typically looks at the pool 90 percent of the time and uses it only 10 percent of the time. Therefore, a primary

function of the pool is to reflect the surroundings, a concept that’s been known and used for more than 3,000 years.

The stunning vistas of Canada make an ideal backdrop for a reflecting pool. Vessels with flush or elevated-perimeter overflows create highly reflective bodies of water. This heightens the experience for everyone, even those who don’t like to swim at all.

The colour of the pool interior also is an important consideration for Valley Pool and Spa. For example, many people think that they want a blue pool, but in a backyard environment, a hint of green typically blends in much better with the surrounding landscape.

Darker colors reflect more than lighter colors, but dark isn’t always appropriate. In fact, in some applications, a bright white is desirable, picking up blue casts only by depth perception. However, if you put that same pool indoors, it could look anemic. In that case, the designer will introduce an appropriate color, keeping in mind the gradations that will occur based on water depth.

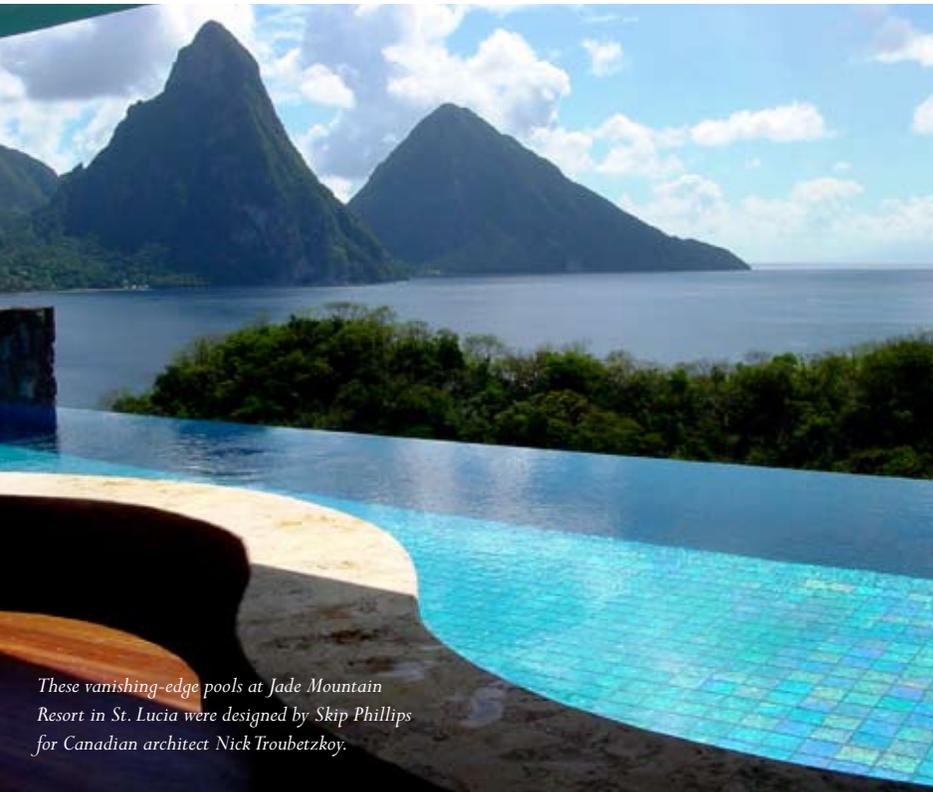
On the same note, sound control is important. Raising one’s voice to speak above the sound of the water feature is uncomfortable, and it disrupts the desired sense of tranquility. Valley Pool and Spa controls volume with properly designed hydraulics and the use of variable-frequency pumps. “I use a decibel metre to be sure that the sound is in the desired range,” Brown says.

Combined with outdoor kitchens and outdoor living areas, the backyard then becomes a true extension of the home. “I find that Canadians are more likely to embrace the ‘outdoor living destinations’ of fire, food, and water,” Phillips says. “It’s an important area of focus in all our residential designs.”

The cold-weather extremes of Canada also pose special challenges for pool construction. But that’s not a problem for Valley Pool and Spa. When finished with construction, the pool walls are often as much as two feet thick, with additional insulation for the plumbing, the equipment, and between the water vessel and the ground. Then, by tapping into the home’s geothermal heating system, the pool stays beautiful and operational through the winter.

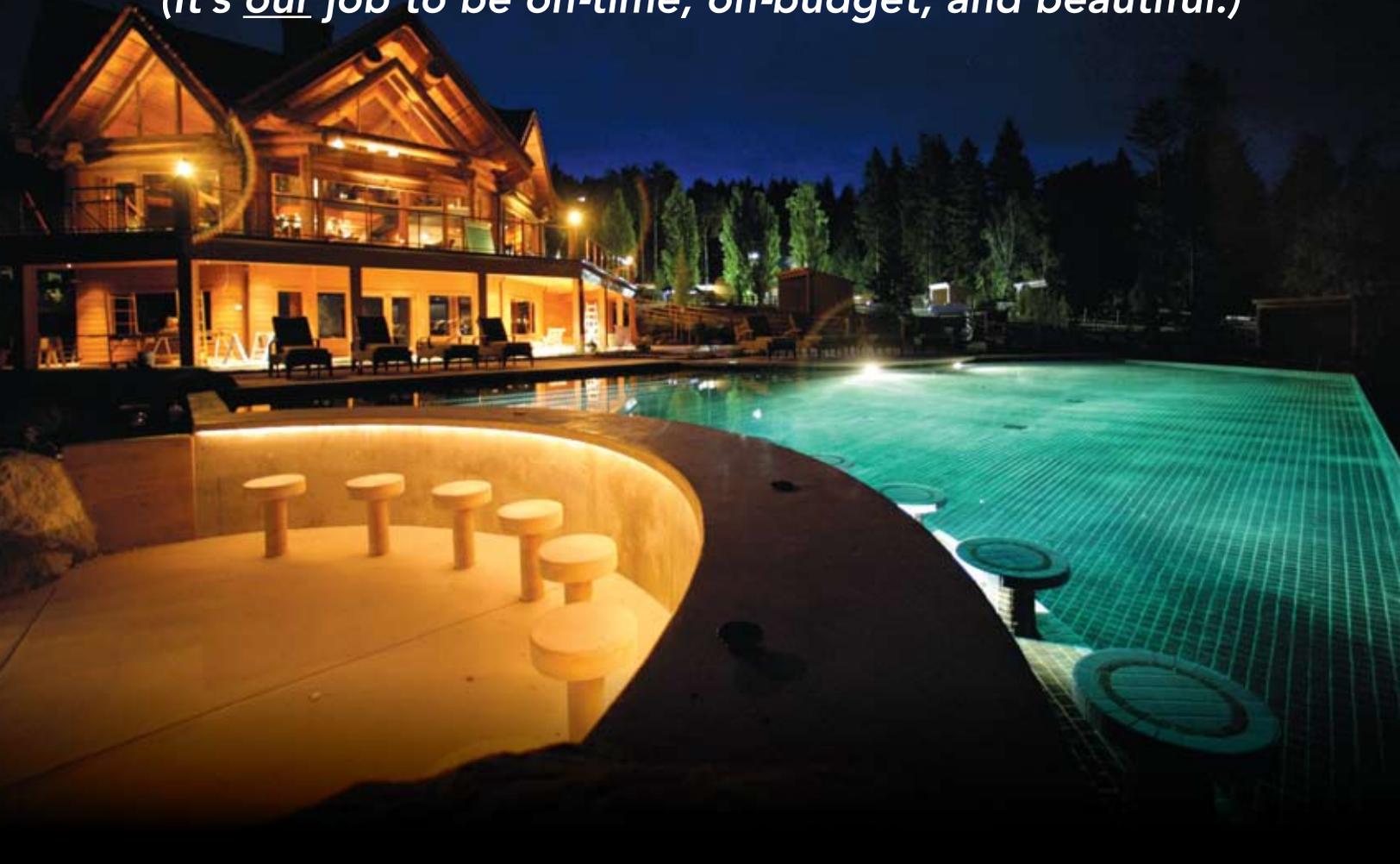
“If you close your pool for the winter,” Brown says, “you negate half the enjoyment of the pool. Why close it when you can enjoy it all year long?”

It is this innovative thinking that keeps Valley Pool and Spa at the top of its industry. **CBQ**



These vanishing-edge pools at Jade Mountain Resort in St. Lucia were designed by Skip Phillips for Canadian architect Nick Troubetzkoy.

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(It's our job to be on-time, on-budget, and beautiful.)



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"My promise to you... You won't get a better value or better result anywhere else."
Gene Brown, President

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