



# WaterWORKS

*Top water-feature designers share  
their expertise on integrating  
water into the home landscape.*

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**T**HE GREAT MODERNIST ARCHITECT Philip Johnson, when asked about using water as a design element, said, "The best thing to do with water is to use a lot of it."

Integrating water into a residential landscape speaks to our desire to lay claim to nature; by controlling its flow, we feel as though we are in control of our world. The rhythmic presence of moving water can mean the difference between an inviting backyard and a lifeless outdoor space. Enter any Japanese garden—the benchmark of harmonious landscape design—and you will undoubtedly encounter water features. And the dominion over water has long been associated with the advancement of the world's great civilizations: One need look no further than the great Roman aqueducts.

The design of water features has evolved considerably since the days of the overwrought Renaissance-style courtyard fountains found in almost every Southern California tract home. Gone are the tacky cement cherubs and busy spouting mermaids; modern water features are bigger, more technologically advanced and more visually striking than their predecessors. Ponds stocked with fat game fish, fire-spewing jets, computer-controlled fiber-optic lighting systems and undulating lagoons are just some of the many elements that distinguish contemporary water features.

Following are conversations with four of the world's top water-feature designers:

#### SKIP PHILLIPS, QUESTAR POOLS AND SPAS

**Skip Phillips** is widely recognized as one of the greats in the industry. Having started the world's only school for pool and spa designers, Genesis 3, he is passionate about passing innovative water design on to a new generation. Though he is often touted as the finest infinity-edge pool designer in the world, **Phillips'** other water creations are equally spectacular.

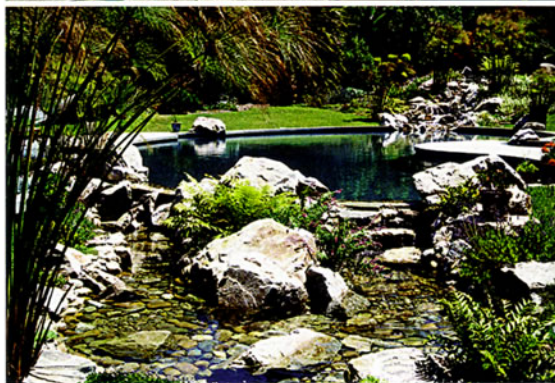
#### What are some of your favorite projects?

A fun one that we did was a retrofit in Palm Springs where there was a granite ball on top of a column that floats and rotates on an axis and also oscillates—completely balanced on water. Even though this ball weighs 3,000 pounds, you can put your hands on it and stop it from spinning. Imagine a stone ball balanced on a film of water . . . amazing.

#### What makes a water feature successful?

It shouldn't overpower you.

#### What are some of the challenges in creating water features?



The challenge is the intellect of the people who put these designs together. There is often an intellectual gap between the designer and the construction team. Of course, there is a whole host of concerns regarding design and construction. For example, if you are creating an indoor feature, you must consider the problems of controlling splash, water loss and temperature changes.

#### What trends do you see happening in residential water-feature design?

Fiber optics, fire effects and homes that appear to float on water. Though we try to focus on the tranquility of water, we just did a project in which the water projects 16 feet and is lit by fiber-optic light tracers. We project these plumes of water through a gel that picks up fiber-optic light. We are also just beginning construction on a vacation home in San Jose del Cabo where there will be the illusion that the home floats—it appears to be completely surrounded by water. It's a top-down world. People with the economic wherewithal have the means to bring in the experts to create the outrageous effects that you see in commercial buildings. For example, the laminars—the devices that create the plumes of water for the Bellagio—were once \$40,000 apiece, but you can get one now for under \$2,000.

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**Front:** Designer Skip Phillips added a poured-concrete spa and pool with a boxed-out vanishing edge to maximize the views from a residential patio in Torrey Pines, Calif. **Top:** Granite tile was used for a spa and pool installation in Fallbrook, Calif.

**Above:** Phillips says he looks for proportion and texture when choosing rock and boulders for organic-style water features.