



ROSES FOR 2000

All-America Rose Selections picks three winners for a new century.

THE ROSE MAN, H-36

NARROW OPTIONS

Use your imagination to make the most of an awkward, skinny room.

DECOR SCORE, H-26

SNEAK PREVIEW

Tour the upcoming ASID show house, before designers work it

HOME ALMA

HOMESCAPE

UNION-TRIBUNE ■ JULY 11, 1999

Over the edge

By Miriam Raffery

What Armani is to clothes and Cartier is to jewels, Escondido designer Harold "Skip" Phillips is to pools.

"Water is art," says Phillips, whose "Zero Edg" vanity plates on his Mercedes tout his mastery of dramatic vanishing-edge swimming pools and other trendy waterscapes.

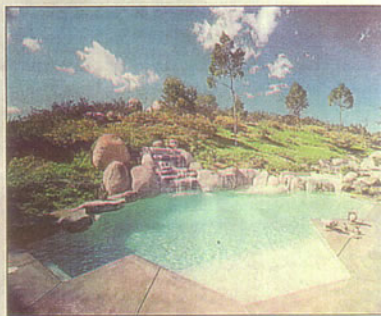
His moneyed clientele often send their private jets to whisk him to exotic locales around the world. His innovative creations, some costing more than \$250,000, have won more than 100 international, national and local awards from his industry peers.

"We're as likely to get a call from Kuwait as from San Diego," Phillips said as he sat in the living room of his home/office atop a boulder-strewn mountaintop in North County.

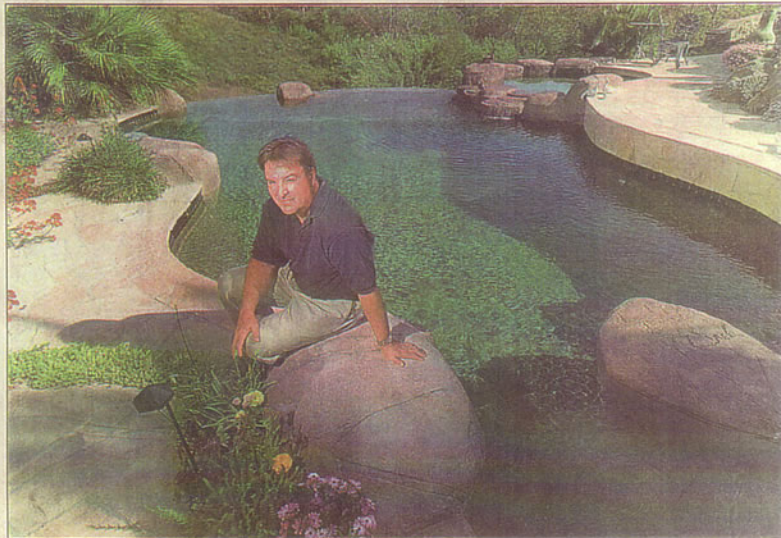
The president of Questar Pools in Escondido, Phillips is also co-founder of the Genesis 3. A Design School, and past president of the National Spa & Pool Institute. His current workload includes projects in England, Mexico and St. Lucia, and proposals for prospective clients in Italy, Spain and Bermuda.

In business since 1981, Phillips is consistently rated at the top of his profession. Two years ago, Germany's *IQ* magazine, a hip catalog of luxury

'Skip' Phillips of Escondido takes pool design to the extreme



QUESTAR P



See **DESIGNER** on Page H-29

Making a splash: Escondido pool designer "Skip" Phillips has earned commissions and accolades around the world for his vanishing-edge pools and other spectacular waterscapes like these in Escondido (right) and Poway (top).

Designer

His pools have won praise around the world

Continued from H-23

goods, named him the most influential pool designer in the world. Three years earlier, the *Robb Report*, which chronicles the lifestyles of the rich and famous, inducted him into its "Club 21" of influential people in luxury businesses worldwide, in the company of such prestigious style-setters as Armani, Cartier and Ferrarri, among others.

His most spectacular creation to date?

A pool remodel for the owner of a 35,000-square-foot mega-mansion, with a 7,000-square-foot cabana, situated at the convergence of two rivers in Texas.

"The cabana looked like the Supreme Court building," recalled Phillips, who was flown into Dallas and asked to draw up plans on the spot to improve on "the most beautiful renderings I'd ever seen."

Raised walls on the original plans gave the pool a claustrophobic feeling. Phillips quickly decided. His solution: to build a pool within a pool.

"The inner pool is 18 inches higher," he explained. "It opened the view and created a vanishing edge into an ornamental pool below."

His greatest engineering feat?

A steep site in La Jolla where two pools installed by other companies had failed.

"The old pool had to be ferried out through a conveyor belt," said Phillips, who says he has never designed a pool that failed. "The new pool is supported by piers and grade beams."

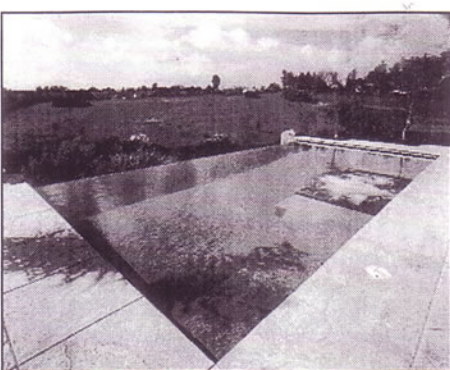
His favorite?

That's a hard choice. Among his spectacular creations are vanishing-edge pools that appear to cascade over the horizon into canyons beyond; others gently overflow pool boundaries on level lots for a mirror-like pond effect. Still others include rockscapes, lagoons, fountains and other water features.

After some thought, Phillips recalled a perimeter overflow pool on a level lot in Rancho Mirage complete with an Italian black Bisazza glass mosaic, black granite vanishing edge and a classical-style sculpture.

His biggest splash?

"I had somebody throw me into his pool once," he recalled with a grin. "The homeowner told me he wanted his pool to be the first one I built that I actually went swimming in."



Small splash: A vanishing-edge pool can fit on a small lot, as this "Skip" Phillips-designed pool in Rancho Santa Fe shows.

'Skip's' design tips

Make it artistic

If you want a pool to increase your property value, opt for high design.

Use eye-catching materials

Aggregate stone finishes, limestone or stamped concrete decking, granite and other rich materials add visual appeal.

Invest in details

Consider a statue in your pool or decorative tile trim.

Rethink access

Expanded access ... a shelf or zero-depth access, instead of the standard three-step entry ... adds an architectural element.

Complement your home

A high-tech home conflicts with a free-form pool; an ultra-contemporary pool conflicts with a traditional-style home.

Expand your horizons

Vanishing-edge pools aren't limited to hillside lots. On a level lot, the effect of water flowing beyond the pool's edges is like a shimmering pond.

Upgrade lighting

Consider new improved fiberoptic lighting capable of providing special effects.

Invest in good hydraulics

The heart of the pool is the transfer of water. The pump, filter and plumbing must be sized to meet or exceed National Spa and Pool Institute standards.

Reported by Miriam Rafferty

His father's idea

Tan, blond and lean, Phillips, who is 46, looks like a former lifeguard, surfer or swim team member — though he isn't.

He has always liked pools, but he didn't grow up with a pool in his back yard. And he didn't get his nickname from skipping rocks across a pond.

"My dad used to be in the Navy," he recalls. "He used to take me skeet shooting. His friends called me 'Little Skipper' and the name stuck."

Phillips' father worked on the Atlas missile program for years, before founding Harold Phillips Tool Corp., a San Diego company that manufactured precision measuring instruments for the aerospace industry.

"I grew up everywhere there was an aerospace company," said Phillips, who worked at his father's company from 1968 to 1975. "We were at bases from Spokane to Cheyenne, in Sacramento — everywhere. We were doing business with all the major airline and turbine manufacturers in the world."

"I grew up listening to technical talk, and you develop a different thought process."

It was Phillips' father who suggested the pool business. "He said, 'You like people, and your brother is a mechanical genius. Why don't you go clean Grandma's pool?'"

The young man quickly showed an aptitude for the task, and when, in the mid-1970s, his father purchased two of the largest pool repair and service companies in San Diego

Designer

Phillips is sharing his expertise

Continued from H-29

County, Phillips got the opportunity to learn the pool business "from the inside out."

Service pools gave him a close-up view of improperly designed or constructed pools. "I said, 'There's room in this industry for people who know how to build these things,'" he recalled.

In 1981, with a contractor's license in hand, he established Questar Pools and Spas. His second pool design won a local award, launching his fast-track career.

Since then, his fluid mind has conjured up designs for more than 500 sophisticated pools and perfected the art of vanishing (zero-edge) design, earning him a reputation as a master of illusion.

Phillips is one of two instructors on vanishing edges in the nation, has written numerous articles on hydraulics and zero-edge design, and has appeared as an expert witness in more than 200 court cases involving pool workmanship defects.

Now at the top of his field, Phillips believes that his "responsibility is to constantly advance. I was asked by the trade press what I plan to change in 1999 and I told them, 'My goal is to change everything.'"

Back to the future

To elevate pool design industry-wide, Phillips also feels a responsibility to share his expertise.

"Innovations have been driven by the client base, not by the pool industry," he said, pointing to high-end commercial projects in Indonesia, the Caribbean, Mexico and Hawaii.

Recently, Phillips and two other top pool designers co-founded Genesis 3, A Design Group, to teach advanced pool design concepts, including pool structure, hydraulics and art history, to industry pros. For the first "school" held in Morro Bay, "we had 80 people trying to get 25 seats," Phillips said.

"As an industry, in looking at the future, we should look to the past, to the foundation of architectural design," he added. "That's why I'm taking a group of pool builders to the world's first spa in Turkey." Of his ongoing work with his Genesis partners, he noted, "We're making a huge impact."

What if his students someday outdo their master? "I hope they all do," he said.

Jet-setting

Phillips' expertise isn't cheap. His pool designs average \$70,000 to \$125,000, twice the industry average. Some Questar creations cost more than \$250,000.

Most of Phillips' pools grace exclusive private residences, but at least two of his local projects can be viewed by the public.

One, a two-story free-falling waterfall, splashes in front of the former Johnny Rockets at Wall Street and Girard Avenue in La Jolla. The second, an interactive project also in downtown La Jolla, on Prospect Street across from La Valencia ho-

"This is a wonderful artistic outlet. It's not like work. People who have a passion are the ones who innovate."

tel, features a granite ball rotating on an axis; it appears to float, as though weightless.

"It's a hydraulic marvel," Phillips said.

When not jetting off to consult with clients, Phillips enjoys collecting autographed photos of vintage movie stars and old documents, including some signed by English and French kings.

Lately, however, he has been busy renovating the Mediterranean-style home he shares with his wife, Carrie, and children — Leah, 9, and Sarah, 20 months.

"Our children are our legacy," he said. "Leah swims like a fish and Sarah loves the water."

As he spoke, Phillips gazed at the extraordinary pool under construction in his own back yard. Plans call for water to flow down a ramp from an elevated, pyramid-like spa into a pool lined with exposed aggregate.

Water from the swimming pool will spill gently over a 53-foot-long curved vanishing edge, creating the illusion of water flowing over the horizon and off the edge of the mountaintop.

A shallow, zero-depth access area will be "like the beach without the sand," according to Phillips, who is installing gold quartzite stone decking, a swim-up bar and poolside barbecue.

Ultimately, his personal backyard paradise will include tiered patios, complete with everything from lounge chairs to an outdoor refrigerator.

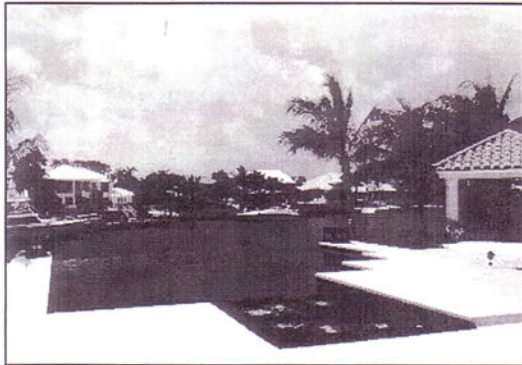
"This is a wonderful artistic outlet. It's not like work," Phillips said of his profession. "People who have a passion are the ones who innovate. To take a quote from Disney, we can innovate faster than anyone else can steal ideas."

What's left to accomplish when you're tops in your field? Designing the ultimate pool for a client with unlimited funds and a passion for indulgence, of course.

"I would like to build a pool for the sultan of Brunei," Phillips said with a smile.

Miriam Rafferty is a free-lance writer.

Water everywhere: In this "Skip" Phillips design for a Florida doctor, a spa and vanishing-edge pool seem part of the adjacent channel.



Overflow: This redo of an El Cajon pool features a new perimeter overflow edge rimmed in quartzite. The water laps over all of the pool's rims.

