

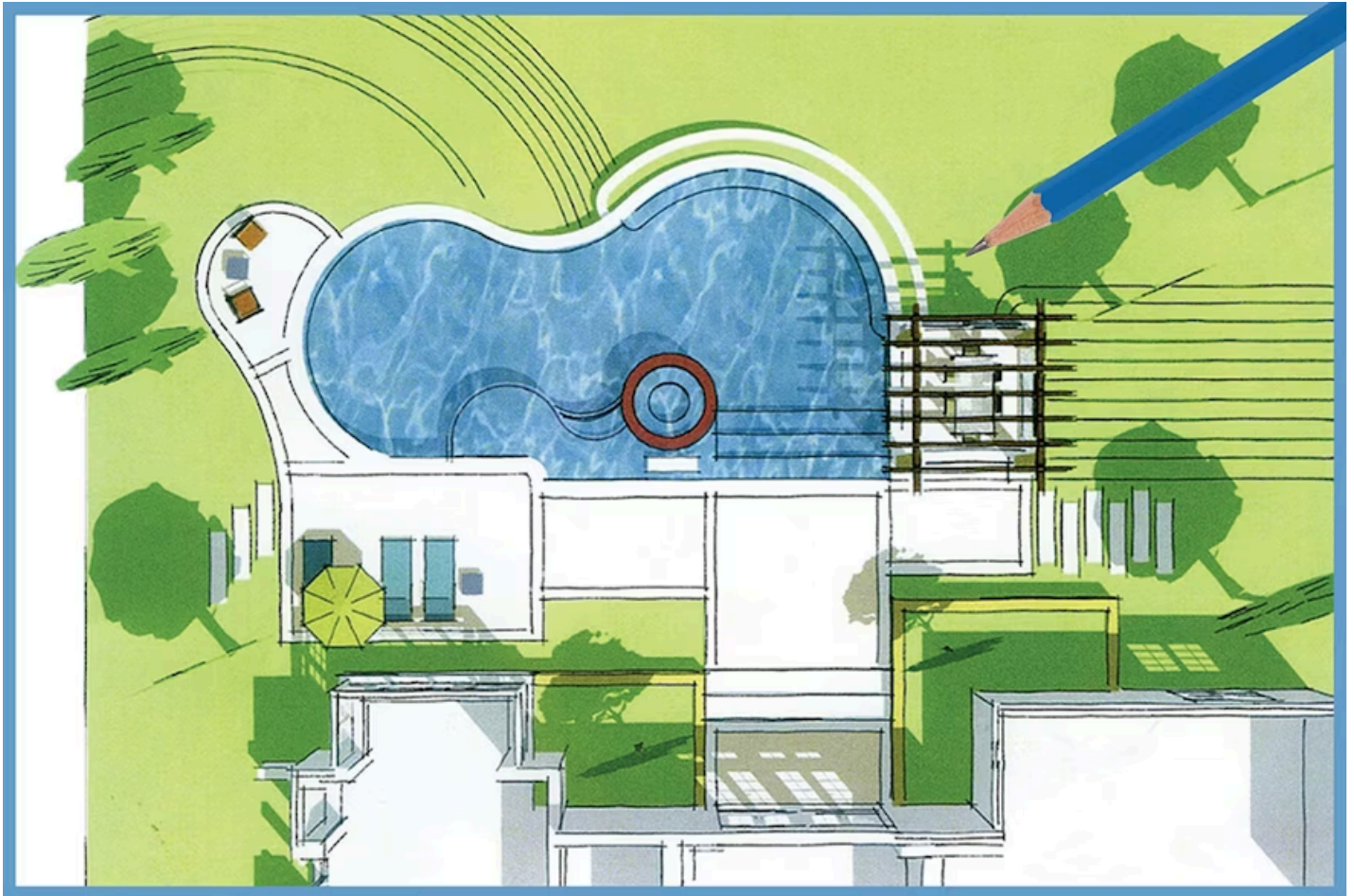


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Genesis: A Creation Story



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Source: All photos courtesy Genesis

Twenty-five years ago, Genesis began with a simple idea: that like-minded people could band together and reach for greater achievement. They could seek higher learning, share ideas, and push each other to get better. There were surely others at the time who idly considered such a notion, but three builders — Skip Phillips, Brian Van Bower and David Tisherman — were ready to throw down. people could jump into them — some builders were hungry to improve. Some people are just like that. They want to build the best pools around.

Those builders aiming higher were not organized. Beyond reputation and incidental friendship, they were not even aware of each other as a group of people that might one day come together, lock hands, bench knees and lift each other up to new heights — or set a standard for the entire industry. But the seed of an idea was there. Getting it to sprout took a challenge — a glove slap to the face, if you will, from the president of the industry association at the time, PHTA's forebear, NSPI.

"When Skip and David and I first got together and decided to form Genesis," Brian says, "we weren't sure what it was going to be, but we thought we'd form it. And so Skip went to a meeting of the educational committee of NSPI at the time, and got up and told the committee that he'd like to see some new level education.

"And NPSI President Roger Galvin said there was no market for it, and they weren't interested."

According to industry legend, to this flat refusal, Skip said, "Are you sayingt his is as good as it gets? That we can't bring in professionals to actually teach us? We're just going to continue this current trajectory? What if I want to know about surge tank turbulence or something like that?"

And Roger said, "Nobody cares what you want to know."

"I think some people do."

"I'll give you a hundred bucks for every person over 20 that goes to a school like that."

"You're on," Skip shot back. And he went home and the three founders started calling people, setting up the first school at Morro Bay.



A Genesis class assembles on the steps of the Hearst Castle pool for a lecture on one of the most iconic pools ever built. Some familiar faces are in the crowd.

MORRO TODAY, BUT WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW?

And so the first set of classes were organized, and the first group of Genesis builders descended on a tiny inlet on the Central Coast. Especially in those heady first days of Genesis, instruction was accompanied by plenty of networking opportunities in the evenings. "Networking" in this case meant great meals with top builders in beautiful locations over good wine. This attractive format encouraged plenty of easy interplay between builders as they discussed force distribution and aquatic architecture long into the night. (The Genesis founders never made any apologies for living well. In a sense, it became part of the brand.)

"We did that first school," Brian says, "and taught a lot of pool construction, had a grand time in the evenings on the coast of California. And then on the last day, about 30 of us were sitting there congratulating ourselves, and people were stopping by to say goodbye, and they all said the same thing, 'When's the next one?'"

"And we just looked at each other. We hadn't thought that far ahead. We just thought we were doing one class. And that's really the moment Genesis started.

"There were a lot of times like that along the way, where we were surprised to find ourselves moving forward. A lot of things just kind of fell into place, but the thing that made it grow was the fact that everyone who came to Genesis ended up doing better. They got better at building pools. They made more money for doing less work, which for us means doing better work."

AND IT GREW

It wasn't magic. The education wasn't that complicated when they broke it down to the basics. There are only three elements to pool building, they said: design, mechanical systems and structures, and the educational system would address all three. But the driving force would always be the success of the students. If they were profiting from Genesis, it would grow. And they were.

Chrisie Dahl-Blanco, in Huntersville, N.C., was a Genesis student that would see her career trajectory rise as a direct result. She tells a number of stories about the Genesis effect on her career. This is just one, about a time when she was a single mom in a down economy, a bit uncertain about herself, and Genesis helped get her life back on track:

"Back in the 2000s, when Genesis was relatively new, I saw an ad in the back of a magazine for their classes, so I went to the people I was working for and said, "I want to take these classes, let me take these classes." And they're like, 'Nah, those Genesis people, they're just a bunch of blowhards. It ain't worth it. Too expensive, yada yada...'

"And I kept trying, kept pounding them, but they would not send me to even one of those classes. And then the big crash came in 2008, and I got laid off. I had my baby, and I was home for a period of time, but after a while I started thinking, 'Okay, what am I going to do with the rest of my life? Am I going to quit the pool industry altogether and do something else? I didn't know where to start...

"The first thing that I did was sign up for a Genesis class. I took the first one. And then I took another one, and then I took another one, and then I took 'em all. That's literally what I did. I took every single Genesis class, and I really got into design and got my life going again.

"And I never looked back. I built a great career in an industry I love. And they helped me find my confidence when I had lost it for a while.

"So I brought this up just a couple of weeks ago to that guy who said that about Genesis (We still speak from time to time, even though they laid me off. I finally forgave them.)

"And I'm like, 'Hey, remember when you said Genesis were a bunch of blowhards? Well, guess what?... They made my career, and after 25 years, they're better than ever!'

Instructor Feras Irikat, Director of Design & Marketing for Lunada Bay Tile, is legendary for his passion and subject knowledge. Shown here in the midst of his color theory class.

FIVE MASTERS

When asked to quantify the Genesis effect, different builders come up with different answers, but they all say it's about getting better. Ed Gibbs has five Genesis masters at his Toronto pool and spa company, Gib-San Pools, and he believes the Genesis education has elevated his company's perspective on the art of pool building.

"Anyone can cut a hole in the ground," he says, "fill in some concrete or a vinyl liner, and there you go. You got a pool.

"And that's as far as some people want to go with it, but Genesis helped our team to think, plan and react in a very different way to the challenges of pool building. Challenges like a terrible slope or geotechnical issues, or really, all kinds of problems you run into at the beginning of the design, problems you need to transform into solutions and success for your client."

"Genesis just gave us a better toolbox to do that. So we could have trained staff that can go in the backyard and say, 'Let's look at ergonomic flow, let's look at textures and colors, let's think about this in the context of art history. Let's bring all of this together into an exciting space for families, and help them grow healthier and happier together.' To put it all very simply, through Genesis we became so much better at what we do."

THE SLEEPING WATER WHEEL

Bringing it down to an individual level, Mike Farley, a designer at Claffey Pools in Denton, Texas, says that you just pick up things in the Genesis environment, and one day they show up in your designs. "One time, this was back in the 2000s, Tisherman was up there showing a slide of a project he's done, and it's got a water wheel in the yard with a spa on the second floor, and gosh, it was really cool.

"Fast forward probably 15 years later, and I have a project I'm working on and I'm like, "Dang, this would be a perfect job for Tisherman's water wheel. And so I ended up installing a 10-foot-tall, wooden water wheel that helped with the drainage and served as a water feature, and it won all kinds of awards and got a lot of attention. And people would ask me, "Where in the world did you get that idea from? And I was like, 'From David Tisherman 15 years ago. I saw that idea in a class, and it sat in my mind for 15 years, and then I used it in the perfect spot.'"

A careful study of details in aquatic architecture is a cornerstone of Genesis education.

"That's one thing I learned from Genesis, you're only as good as what's in your head. So to be good at this, you need creative new ideas. And that's what Genesis does, it exposes you

to different things, new ideas. Stuff that you wouldn't normally see or hear if you're just doing your regular job day to day."

QUARTER CENTURY PERSPECTIVE

And now, as the original elite pool and spa educator prepares to celebrate a quarter century, students and instructors alike remember the beginning.

Chrisie says this about the founding of Genesis 25 years ago. "I think they started with the idea that they were going to revolutionize the pool industry. But what happened was, they found that there were already like-minded people in the industry. So they just attracted them, and brought them together in a group where they could learn from great educators and each other.

"These were people that wanted to be the best. And working together, they tried to learn how to be the best. I'm talking about people who — we may walk away from a pool when we're done, but we don't ever really leave it. It's always a part of us. We leave a part of ourselves in every one. I think Genesis brought all those people together, and that's who Genesis is.

The Genesis founders getting ready for takeoff: Brian Van Bower (left), David Tisherman (center) and Skip Phillips (right).

SEPARATION AND UNIFICATION

In a moment of reflection, Brian says, "We had ups and downs over the years, and we separated with David Tisherman, that was a difficult time, but the classes kept improving and our instructors kept improving. And I think it's ironic that, during most of our history, we were in tremendous conflict with the pool association, whatever iteration was there at that time, NSPI, APSP, what have you. And now we're a part of it," he says with a smile.

Skip adds, "That has turned out to be a big plus because now we have their resources behind us. Currently, in year 25, we have as good or better instructors as we've ever had, and more classes and students. We've never had as many people going through certification, and we've never had as many venues, and we're going to keep having more.

"We have our Mastermind event this fall in Fort Lauderdale (co-located with the AQUA Live Leadership Retreat) where we're inviting all the master status people and all of our instructors to a celebration in honor of the 25th anniversary.

"The difference, all along, was passion. We had a passion for what we were doing that was contagious no matter where we went, whether it was here in the United States or Germany, France, Italy or Australia. We all shared a similar passion, which connected us. And that, to me, was and is, Genesis."

Skip had to take off at that point. He's busy these days, he's moving into a house around the bay from Brian in Redington Beach, Fla.

"We'll see how that works out," Brian laughs. "I can get there by golf cart or by boat in five minutes. I can just hear [Skip's wife] Carrie saying when the doorbell rings, "Good God, he's back!"

"Instead of waiting for industry events, it will seriously be great to be able to get together more easily with my old friend."