

# VINYL POOL RENOVATION

GOING BEYOND BASIC REPAIRS TO CREATE A BACKYARD VISION



When a homeowner receives several 'cookie-cutter' bids and just one 'backyard-renovation vision,' most of the time they choose the project design with vision.

Photos courtesy All Seasons Pools & Spas Inc.

**Y**ears ago pool service technicians replaced vinyl liners when they failed and that was it. However, in today's economy, when jobs are not as prevalent and consumer finances are tighter, complete vinyl-liner pool renovation is being used as a way to distinguish pool companies from the competition.

In this context, vinyl-liner pool renovation refers to repairs made to everything from the deck to installing new lighting, planters, coping, returns, and ultimately the vinyl liner itself. And it doesn't stop there—often the size and shape of the pool is changed in addition to the entire backyard design.

## DETERMINE THE LIFESTYLE

When taking on a renovation project, the most important thing to do is to visit the backyard or site, look around, and keep an open mind. Take the time to find out if the pool meets the client's needs. What does the homeowner use the pool for? Are the owners of the pool grandparents with young grandchildren, or parents of teenagers? Do they need a shallower pool for small kids, or a slide for larger children? Are steps required for children or older adults to enter and exit the pool easily?

**Decks and liners.** Most pool owners calling about pool renovation are looking to update the deck or replace the liner. They rarely think about updating the coping, returns, main drains,

jets and lighting, so this is an invitation to do a complete pool renovation job.

Explain to the customer how renovating their cracked, outdated, cement deck will let the builder inspect the pool to see what else is going on. Educate consumers on how a higher quality, longer lasting vinyl liner will look better over time than a traditional liner. Show them the possibilities and explain how a renovation will create an efficient pool that is virtually maintenance-free.

**Renovating the structure.** Sometimes a structural failing is obvious and sometimes it is not. It is important to be up front with customers and explain the possibility of hidden structural issues that will not be found until the deck has been removed or the liner has been pulled out. In areas where most of the pools are steel wall structures, water and moisture will often cause corrosion and structural failure, eventually requiring the panels to be replaced. A pool service company can simply replace them, or completely change the shape of the pool as well.

**Changing the shape.** This has been done many times—turning ‘Grecians’ into ‘Lazy L’ shapes,



or kidney shapes into lagoons. One homeowner, for example, had a Grecian-shaped pool with a liner that had separated, exposing rusted-wall panels, which had failed structurally and buckled back. After a brief conversation, the owner expressed their desire to have a larger pool. So the rusted section of panels was removed and the pool was converted into a

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## ■ TECHNICAL DESIGN

### TYPICAL RENOVATION JOB/TIMELINE

**Demolition:** 2-4 people/2-4 days

**Panel Replacement/additions such as stairs:** 2-3 people/2-3 days

**Underground piping:** 2-3 people/2-3 days

**Lighting, gas, electric:** 2-3 people/2-3 days

**Pool flooring (entire floor replacement):** 4-5 people/1 day (or 20 man-hours)

**Coping:** 2 people/2 hours (if standard aluminum coping or 2-3 days if mortared brick or stone)

**Decking:** 2-3 people/half-day to frame, then 5-6 people/half day to pour

**Liner:** 2 people/2 hours to set (plus time to fill, cut etc.)

**Cover:** 2 people/half day



Show the consumer the possibilities (concept drawings) and explain how a renovation will create an efficient pool that is virtually maintenance-free.



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Lazy-L shape, thus increasing its size.

When adding or replacing panels on existing pools, it is important to make sure the height of the new panels will work with the existing panels. Look to the long term when determining where to stop in removing panels. After demolition has taken place, meet on site with the homeowner to discuss any questionable structural issue that could prevent the pool from giving them another 25 to 30 years of service.

**Plumbing and lighting.** Whenever a deck is removed, talk to the homeowner about replacing all of the underground plumbing and updating the pool lighting. With plumbing, many builders are still using polyethylene tubing to cut costs, but flexible PVC piping is recommended. It may cost a bit more, but it ensures the pool won't experience problems for a longer period of time.

When it comes to lighting, it is surprising how many pool owners don't realize colour-changing LED or fibre-optic lighting can be added to their pool. Do not get caught simply replacing the old, standard, single-white pool light with one single colour-changing light. This will almost always result in an unhappy

customer because coloured light is never as bright as white light. Instead, compensate by adding additional fixtures. This is also a great time to also look at the lighting aspects of the yard surrounding the pool.

**Hydraulics.** Completely re-designing the hydraulics is a given on most pool renovation projects. When pool builders were building pools 25 to 30 years ago, they were not designing pools for today's busy consumer. Renovating the hydraulics simply makes the pool easier to maintain. Look at how the pool water circulates to determine if more jets should be installed. Look for possible dead areas and install more jets to eliminate them. Depending on the shape of the pool, consider installing in-floor-cleaning heads into some or all of the pool to improve both circulation and filtration.

Go beyond the accepted standards for the number of skimmers and returns

■ TECHNICAL DESIGN



Putting planting areas right next to the pool with arching deck jets emitting water into the pool makes a big difference in the backyard and makes a proposal more desirable to the homeowner.

to help alleviate dead areas and make the pool more self-sufficient. Most builders use the accepted standard of one skimmer per 74 m<sup>2</sup> (800 sf) of surface area and one return per 56 m<sup>2</sup> (600 sf) of surface area. We recommended pools have one skimmer per 47 m<sup>2</sup> (500 sf) of surface area and one return per 28 m<sup>2</sup> (300 sf) of surface area. Always place the skimmers where the



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natural air currents aid in pushing surface debris towards the skimmers. For example, in areas where the winds prevail from the southwest during summer months, skimmers are usually installed on the north and east walls of the pool.

**Equipment.** Connecting a newly designed pool hydraulic system to old, undersized or inefficient equipment is just wasting hard work. Instead, always try to upgrade a customer's pump, filter and heater to be more current and more efficient. Making these enhancements is a benefit to the service company as revenue generation as well as the customer by creating a pool that is much easier and more economical to operate.

Also benefiting the customer, as well as the service company, is the addition of a digital control system, as some allow a service company to access the client's system remotely via the Internet. If there is a problem, the service company can either correct the issue from their office, which saves time and money, or it allows the



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technician to prepare before making the onsite service call.

For the customer, digital control systems allow a simple press of a button to turn on the spa, set mood lighting so the pool is blue, the fountain is red and the laminar streams of water are green, start the water flowing from a fountain and even automatically ignite a fire pit.

**Water features & landscaping.** What we find really helps a renovation project is changing the backyard by bringing Mother Nature closer to the pool. Putting planting areas right next to the pool with arching deck jets emitting water into the pool makes a big difference in the backyard and makes a proposal more desirable to the homeowner. More people are willing to spend \$2,000 to \$4,000 on this type of renovation than \$12,000 to \$15,000 on an elaborate fountain or waterfall. Since many of today's properties are also smaller and they often don't have extra building room for an elaborate water feature, a small feature like this can really gain the customer's interest.

**Having vision is also very important.** Get away from the cookie-cutter, rectangle pool with a 1-1.2-m (3-4-ft) deck around the pool. When a homeowner receives several 'cookie-cutter' bids and just one 'backyard-renovation vision,' most of the time they choose the project design with vision.

**Having the right vendors.** After all the work has been completed, including the structure, plumbing and lighting, it all comes back down to what the customer made the call for originally—the deck and the vinyl

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liner. And the right vendors are needed for both these elements.

Nothing is worse than a pool liner that doesn't fit. The liner should look like it has been painted on and should fit perfectly every time, without being overstretched (to keep the liner as long as possible), and without a single wrinkle, no matter what shape is created during the renovation.

Another important finishing touch the homeowner will see is the deck. Only the best concrete subcontractors should be used for deck renovation—those who have



proven themselves around pools. Pouring concrete for a large deck around a pool is truly a work of art and these specialists know how to design control joints in order to force the concrete to crack the way they want it to. No one wants a concrete subcontractor who only has experience with driveways and sidewalks.

**RENOVATIONS BECOMING INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT**

As a homeowner's lifestyle changes, talk to them about their pool and how it can change with them. If the kids have grown and moved out, maybe the backyard can be transformed into a more relaxed, resort-type atmosphere. Take out the slide or diving board and add a water feature with a fire pit and lighting effects. Transform it into more of an adult area as opposed the child's playground.



Dan Lenz got his start in the industry in 1987 with All Seasons Pools & Spas Inc., a retail store and residential and commercial pool construction and renovation company in Orland Park, Ill., which has been in business since 1954. He began managing the service/repair department in 1990 and added overseeing construction in 1997 with a focus on design and renovation. He is also an APSP-certified building professional. He can be reached at [www.aspools.com](http://www.aspools.com).

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