FROM THE COVER

This pool features a waterfall — "People like the sound of rolling and crashing water," says Guy Larsen — and a slide for the kids.

POOLS | Waterfalls, vanishing edges popular pool choices

lar among homeowners with wee children who can play in a few inches of water without floats in the shallow end.

Also popular is the so-called "vanishing edge" on pools, which highlights the scenery behind it, especially if the lot is on a hill. The far edge of the pool is invisible because the water pours over the edge into a capture device. The pool water looks like it's running off into oblivion.

Other water features like waterfalls, spitting flowerpots or splashing rock arrangements continue to be popular in and around pools.

"People like the sound of rolling and crashing water," Larsen said.

Homeowners also want their pool areas to be an extension of their homes, bringing inside amenities to the outside. Gone are the days of simple plastic chairs, a table with an umbrella and a charcoal grill.

"People are making their backyards so you go out in the patio deck and everything is out there: a kitchen, a television, a stereo system," Larsen said. "All the things you have inside, you have outside."

Akins recently built a poolside kitchen for a homeowner in Salado, Texas, with a beer tap, an infrared grill, a regular grill, a double sink, a garbage disposal, a refrigerator and a separate icemaker. The area also featured a 12-person seating area and a swim-up bar.

Beside the outside kitchen, homeowners are also creating outside living rooms complete with high-end patio furniture, flat-screen televisions, surround-sound stereo systems, and fireplaces or fire pits.

There also are more options now for homeowners who are interested in being green and saving some green.

"Our industry has made huge leaps in that regard," Akins said, noting that pumps come in variable and multiple speeds which run more effectively. "All these major manufacturers have them now. The pumps help reduce energy costs to operate the pools."

To cut down on toxins, pool owners can buy a number of alternative sanitizers that don't require much chlorine. Also, recycled glass tiles or natural local stone can be used for patios and pool surfaces.

Whatever a homeowner's taste, it can probably be done, Akins said, at a price, which varies by region. His most basic pools start at $35,000, but can easily run higher.

Gerald Drews of Temple, Texas, is days away from enjoying his new backyard. With help from Akins, Drews installed a stone patio, an outdoor kitchen and a pool with waterfalls overlooking his sloping backyard with a river running below.

"I look forward to getting up early in the morning, listening to the waterfalls and having breakfast outside," said the 61-year-old. "Now I've got a reason to be outside. It really adds character to the backyard."

AP

TRENDS | 'Wet decks' good for kids, seniors

harmful materials, and bromine is touted as a less harsh chemical additive. Ozonators, which have been widely used in European pools for years, are finding favor in North America now as an alternative for those sensitive to chemicals. Ozone is an effective remover of sunscreen and body oil, and also destroys cryptosporidium, which can cause intestinal upset.

Alternative energy

Solar heating systems help reduce heating costs, although their effectiveness depends on the pool's location. Hammacher Schlemmer's floating solar heating rings can raise the water temperature 3-4 degrees in a week when covering 70 percent of the water's surface.

Wet decks

Wet decks are another new trend; basically wide, submerged steps, wet decks make it easy for young children, seniors, and even pets to safely enjoy the pool without swimming. They're popular as gathering spots as well, and can be built with umbrella housings and non-slip surfaces.

Modern shapes

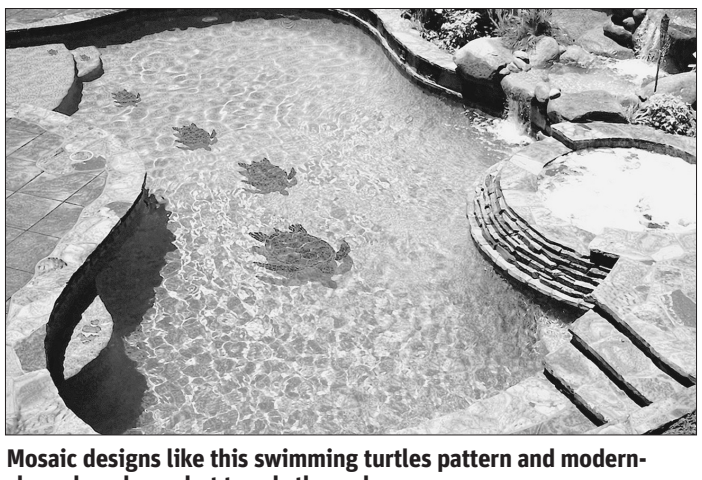
Naturalistic, freeform pools have been popular in recent years, but Joe Vassallo of Paragon Pools in Las Vegas says another trend among his clientele is pool aesthetics.

"They are leaning toward a more contemporary casual style; more geometric than lagoon, and incorporating materials like travertine and flagstone. Glass tiles are re-emerging with more colors, and mosaics and pavers are replacing concrete decking."

Lighter liners

A pool bottom designed to look like a ballpark may be unusual, but industry experts say more consumers are turning to liners decorated with sea creatures or some version of a Roman bath — whether it is on a printed vinyl liner, or crafted of mosaic tiles directly onto the bottom and sides of the pool. Bob Rogers of Ceramic Pool Art, an online retailer, says new frostproof mosaics are a boon for pool owners in cooler climates. "Designs are becoming more sophisticated," Rogers says. "Mosaics are now being used on pool decks and stools, too."

AP



Mosaic designs like this swimming turtles pattern and modern-shaped pools are hot trends these days.

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DIGEST | FROM PAGE 1

wastebasket in every room for recycling biodegradable items and another for non-biodegradable matter.

"The baskets can either be uniform or different in style," she said. The key is to focus on getting creative with everyday household items, while helping to save the environment.

Sole of discretion: Establish an area near the front entry where people can take their shoes off.

"About 85 percent of dust, allergens and chemicals in the home are from shoe traffic," she said. "For a clean entry look, place the shoes in a low woven square basket with a lid."

Maintaining a shoe-free space will prolong the flooring and also control the pollutants in the home.

Rolling in bamboo sheets: Using bamboo bedroom sheets in lieu of synthetic ones.

"Bamboo is one of the softest fabrics in the world, with a drape-like silk look," Shoemaker said. It comes from a rapidly renewable resource that does not require pesticides to grow.

Green thumb: Adding house plants to the home naturally cleanses the air of indoor toxins, while providing a green aesthetic look.

House plants, such as Lady Palm, Peace Lily, and English Ivy, are known for their ease of growth and maintenance, removal of vapors and resistance to insect manifestation.

Frame of reference

These days, many homes have a flat-screen television hanging on a wall. What can you do about that blank wall behind the TV?

"How about highlighting that new flat-screen television by 'framing' it with paint?" said Debbie Zimmer, paint and color expert with the Rohm and Haas Paint Quality Institute. "Before hanging it on the wall, paint a rectangle large enough so a six-inch, colorful 'frame' is exposed once the TV is in place.

"Nothing creates more immediate impact than a fresh coat of paint. In these challenging times, paint is overwhelmingly one of the best low-cost options when infusing style in a living space," she said. "By simply changing your wall, ceiling or trim color, rooms can go from boring to bright in just a matter of hours."

Here are a few more ideas from Zimmer:

◆ Large polka dots or other geometric patterns add instant impact to a child's bedroom or play area.

◆ Not ready for a whole room redo? Change the trim or door color and the entire space will feel new.

◆ Create interest in a dining room by painting the ceiling with a glossy finish. Light from the chandelier will have extra sparkle.

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15 yr fixed	6.32%	$1,421.05
30 yr fixed	6.77%	$1,072.38
$435,000 loan amount		
30 yr jumbo	7.69%	$3,095.38

Source: Bankrate.com

	30 yr fixed	15 yr fixed	5 yr ARM
This week	6.77	6.32	6.48
Last week	6.42	5.95	6.05
Last year	6.75	6.42	6.41

Source: Bankrate.com, for more information visit www.bankrate.com. Bankrate national averages are based on 100 largest institutions in the top 10 markets in the United States.

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