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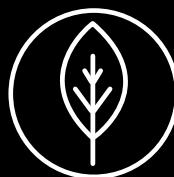
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Sustainability is reshaping the pool and spa industry—from smarter design and efficient equipment to better installation, education, and collaboration. Responsible choices across the value chain are becoming essential to long-term performance and business resilience.

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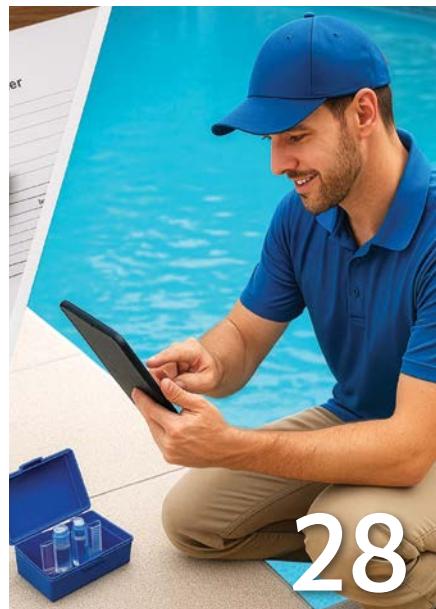
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The Business Behind the Water

February has long been a hinge month for the Canadian pool and spa industry. The flurry of planning in January begins to settle, but the season itself hasn't yet started. It's the moment when quiet decisions—about systems, staffing, training, and processes—will shape how well businesses perform once demand picks up.

Across Canada, pool and spa professionals are navigating a familiar yet increasingly complex landscape. Labour remains tight, operating costs continue to rise, and customers are more informed, demanding, and less patient with inefficiency. Simultaneously, the industry is being pushed—sometimes reluctantly—toward greater digital adoption, deeper technical knowledge, and more strategic business practices.

This issue speaks directly to that reality.

On the technology front, *The Cost of Staying Manual* (page 28) challenges one of the most persistent assumptions in the trade—that manual systems are “good enough.” As author Rachael Pritz writes, “The fear of change often costs more than the software itself.” In a seasonal industry where the majority of revenue is generated in a compressed window, inefficiencies quickly compound. Digital tools are no longer just about convenience; they are about capacity, accuracy, and survival.

Labour pressures resurface in *Building Your Dream Team* (page 40), which examines hiring, training, and retention at a time when skilled staff are in high demand across various industries. Lindsey Antonopoulos reminds readers that “Hiring and training staff is not an expense; it is an investment in the brand, the customer experience, and the company’s future growth.” In a climate where talent poaching and burnout are genuine threats, businesses that fail to invest in their people risk an industry heist of their own making.

Technical fundamentals also take centre stage in *Not Just Water* (page 16), a reminder that even the most advanced systems can fail when the basics are misunderstood. Terry Arko puts it plainly: “Water is the most vital chemical in a pool.” His deep dive into source water, chemistry, and start-up conditions reveals a form of hidden corrosion damage that begins long before issues become visible.

Also in this issue, sustainability, wellness, and long-term value emerge as interconnected themes rather than isolated trends. From responsible design choices to pools that support rehabilitation and everyday health, the industry’s role is broadening beyond installation and service to encompass stewardship and outcomes.

This moment also marks a milestone for *Pool & Spa Marketing*. Now in its 50th year, the publication continues its long-standing role in documenting the evolution of the Canadian pool and spa industry.

February is not about selling summer; it is about preparation. The businesses that will thrive this season are the ones asking tough questions now—about systems, people, training, and fundamentals—before the water begins to move.

Making waves, together. 

Jason Cramp
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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Sustainability is a System

How the Pool & Spa Industry Can Lead by Design

By Crystal Lengua-Rowell

PHOTO BY JASON CRAMP

For years, sustainability and "being green" have hovered on the periphery of the pool and spa industry. It was something people mentioned at trade shows, added to brochures, or brought up when a customer asked about energy use and savings. It existed as a good idea, but not always a shared priority... but that has changed.

Across North America (and beyond), sustainability has moved from a marketing message to a design philosophy. The companies making the biggest strides are those that treat being green as a system, not a trend. These businesses have come to understand that being green is not a trend. It is a responsibility. The health of the planet depends on

the choices people make, and the industry has a real opportunity to contribute to that solution.

Changing consumer expectations

Homeowners have helped accelerate this shift as well. They are more informed, more aware of how products are made, and more conscious of the costs involved in maintaining a backyard throughout the year. Today's customers still seek comfort, performance, and a space that feels like an escape, but they also prioritize efficiency and durability. They want equipment that does not increase their utility bills. They prefer materials that are both durable and long-lasting. They look for water-care systems that simplify



routines. They desire fewer surprises while feeling that they are making a difference.

When customers opt for greener choices, they are not just purchasing a product. They are buying the feeling of contributing to something larger than their own backyard. People like knowing their decisions matter. When a spa uses less energy or a pool system reduces water waste, homeowners take pride in their choices. It provides them with a sense of control and purpose. Psychologically, that is important. When individuals believe their actions have a positive effect, even on a small scale, it deepens their connection to the product and the brand from which they purchased it. It becomes more than just equipment. It becomes a choice they feel good about every time they use it.

Industry practices are evolving

Manufacturers across North America are also responding by rethinking how products are built from the earliest stages. Some have shifted to spa cabinetry made from recycled or reclaimed materials. Others are cutting emissions related to moulding and shell production by revisiting older methods and investing in new ones. Companies are also examining how smarter insulation packages, variable-speed pumps (VSPs), and more intuitive automation systems can improve energy profiles without sacrificing the homeowner's experience. These design choices matter. They influence how a product performs not only on day one but also over the next decade.

This idea of "designing for responsibility" is carried through the production process. Manufacturers are reviewing their packaging, warehouse logistics, and

freight operations to optimize efficiency. Using lighter, recyclable packaging materials reduces waste and lowers shipping emissions. Improved pallet design enhances distribution efficiency. Modular components simplify repairs and extend product lifespan. These small choices become significant when implemented across an entire product range. This is where sustainability transforms from a concept to a practical reality.

Efficiency extends to the field. Builders and installers influence sustainability in more ways than homeowners often realize. Their choices, such as plumbing runs, equipment placement, circulation rates, cover recommendations, and sanitation methods, all affect long-term energy consumption. A well-designed system has fewer inefficiencies. Shorter plumbing runs require less effort from pumps. Thoughtful equipment placement protects components and improves airflow. Using a cover lifter that keeps the cover aligned and secure enhances heat retention, reduces heater demand, and supports more stable water temperatures. Sustainability is not always driven by new technology; it often comes from better decisions made at every step of the process.

Retailers and service professionals also play a significant role. Sustainability strengthens when paired with education. When retailers understand the difference between a standard pump and a high-efficiency model, or between basic insulation and a performance insulation package, they can guide customers toward choices that support long-term performance. When service technicians have access to detailed documentation, updated manuals, compatible components, and clear troubleshooting paths, they

Left: Manufacturers are reviewing their packaging, warehouse logistics, and freight operations to optimize efficiency.

PHOTO ©DOLGACHOV/BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

Right: Using lighter, recyclable packaging materials reduces waste and lowers shipping emissions.

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Top: Builders and installers influence sustainability in more ways than homeowners often realize. Their choices, such as plumbing runs, equipment placement, circulation rates, cover recommendations, and sanitation methods, all affect long-term energy consumption.

PHOTOS BY JASON CRAMP

Right: When a spa uses less energy or a pool system reduces water waste, homeowners take pride in their choices.

minimize unnecessary part replacements. A technician who diagnoses correctly saves the homeowner money, reduces waste, and extends the product's lifespan. Information is a key sustainability tool. Training is also essential. Both are often overlooked.

Distributors: The backbone of sustainable progress

Across both Canada and the United States, distributors have become the quiet backbone of this movement. They influence sustainability at multiple levels, often in ways that homeowners never see but the industry relies on.

Distributors promote sustainability by:

- Improving inventory flow by managing how products move through the supply chain, reducing delays and unnecessary handling.
- Sharing real-world insights with manufacturers when parts show early failure trends, preventing waste and enhancing design.
- Identifying installation challenges reported by dealers so training and resources can be updated before problems escalate.
- Consolidating freight into larger, strategic shipments that reduce the number of trucks on the road and lower emissions.
- Reducing transportation impact by switching from frequent partial loads to well-planned pallets that cut repeated travel cycles.
- Supporting dealer education by providing accurate product information, sustainability messaging, and updated technical materials.

- Strengthening supply-chain efficiency through coordinated ordering, improved forecasting, and better communication across regions.

These actions generate a quieter, behind-the-scenes sustainability impact that accumulates quickly. A single consolidated shipment can have a significantly reduced carbon footprint compared to multiple partial loads. When distributors operate with efficiency and communication at the forefront, the entire value chain becomes cleaner, smoother, and more sustainable.

Collaboration maximizes sustainability

The industry is built on partnerships. Original equipment manufacturers (OEM) relationships, dealer networks, service providers, supply-chain operations, and retail connections all play a role. When each part of the chain operates independently, progress slows down. When the chain is aligned, progress speeds up. Compatibility exemplifies this well. Manufacturers who design products that integrate seamlessly with existing equipment footprints, bracket placements, or plumbing standards make installation more efficient. This results in fewer modifications and less wasted materials. Additionally, better compatibility decreases shipping frequency because fewer incorrect parts need to be returned or exchanged. Although it may seem straightforward, proper alignment during the design phase has a significant impact on the entire industry.



Transparency aids collaboration

The industry advances further when companies share their learnings and support collective progress. If a business has no intention of competing in a specific category, there is real value in opening up

the opportunity for collaboration. Manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and service teams can exchange ideas, speak openly about what is working, and even plan future improvements together. When information is shared freely without the threat of competition, innovation becomes easier, which in turn strengthens the industry and leads to increased sales and revenue.

Circular design naturally integrates into this kind of partnership. More Canadian companies are beginning to think beyond the initial sale and focus on the entire lifecycle of a product. They are developing spas and components that can be repaired, replaced, or repurposed rather than discarded. Some are implementing take-back programs, while others are adding modular panels and internal parts that prolong the system's lifespan. This encourages a shift away from a "build it and discard it" approach toward a loop where materials are reused for a longer period.

Collaborating promotes this shift. When manufacturers share information, service teams can repair more and replace less. When retailers provide

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A technician who diagnoses correctly saves the homeowner money, reduces waste, and extends the product's lifespan.



feedback on what homeowners value, companies can design products that last longer and perform better. This demonstrates how partnerships support both the environment and customers simultaneously. It truly is a team effort.

From a marketing (and public relations) perspective, this kind of alignment matters more than most people realize. When the entire value chain is united around responsible design, the message becomes consistent, believable, and easy for customers to trust. Brands do not have to "sell" sustainability; they demonstrate it through every touchpoint, from product performance to service support. That kind of clarity builds stronger storytelling, greater loyalty, and a reputation that grows (leading to more sales).

Operational sustainability: Moving beyond products

Beyond the products themselves, sustainability encompasses how a business operates. Companies are re-evaluating freight strategies, dealer support models, and warehouse operations. Some are transitioning to paperless workflows, while others are reconfiguring trade show materials to reduce waste. Some are implementing training programs that teach service teams how to communicate the value of sustainability in a way that resonates with real homeowner concerns without sounding insincere, because they genuinely believe in it. It is also advisable

for organizations to produce a year-end sustainability report to highlight their efforts and set clear benchmarks and accountability for future progress.

Currently, there are many ways companies can be more environmentally friendly without altering any products, such as:

1. Optimizing logistics by consolidating shipments, reducing partial loads, and planning efficient routes.
2. Moving manuals, onboarding, and education tools into digital formats.
3. Reusing displays and promotional materials for events.
4. Implementing energy-smart warehouse practices, such as LED lighting and climate-conscious layouts.
5. Offering virtual or hybrid training to minimize unnecessary travel (transportation is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions).

These operational choices may seem minor, but they add up quickly when they become part of a company's daily routines. This is where the conversation naturally shifts from action to leadership. Sustainability has reached a point where merely meeting the minimum requirements is no longer sufficient. Compliance keeps an organization within legal boundaries, but genuine leadership requires going beyond compliance to set higher standards and inspire progress. Regulations move slowly, and the organizations that stand out are those that take the initiative well before being

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The industry is built on partnerships. Original equipment manufacturers (OEM) relationships, dealer networks, service providers, supply-chain operations, and retail connections all play a role.

mandated to do so. Leadership in any category comes from understanding the current position and having a clear plan for the desired future.

Starting the journey: Practical steps to leadership

So, where does one begin? A simple starting point is conducting an internal sustainability audit. Companies can make significant advances by:

1. Reviewing internal operations such as freight patterns, office practices, warehouse routines, trade show materials, and training programs to identify quick wins.
2. Using tools like carbon footprint calculators, energy-use assessments, and freight-impact reviews to uncover opportunities that are not immediately obvious.
3. Sending out an anonymous staff survey to gather green ideas directly from those closest to the daily work. Frontline teams often see practical improvements long before leadership does.
4. Hosting a sustainability roundtable where operations, sales, marketing, distribution, and service teams brainstorm realistic next steps together. Even brief sessions can lead to meaningful change.
5. Creating a simple three- to five-year “future impact map” that outlines where the company is now and where it aims to be. The goal is not perfection but rather direction, consistency, and a genuine intent to improve.

Every step forward counts. The key is to start with clarity and commit to steady, attainable progress.

A sustainability mindset encourages smarter planning, more consistent performance, and stronger long-term results. It boosts homeowners' confidence, cuts costs across the value chain, and positions the industry as one that thinks ahead rather than reacts under pressure.

In a market where customers are more informed than ever, being intentional about sustainability is not only beneficial for the environment but also good for business. It helps the industry remain relevant, resilient, and respected.

As Jane Goodall stated, “What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.” 



Crystal Lengua-Rowell is the vice-president of Canadian operations at Cover Valet, bringing 25 years of experience in the pool and spa industry. Widely recognized as a “Power Woman” in her field, she is known for her leadership and many career achievements. Outside the office, Lengua-Rowell shares her expertise through seminars, trade show presentations, and contributions to publications such as *Pool & Spa Marketing*. A York University graduate and advocate for female empowerment, her education includes marketing management, public relations, and corporate communications, along with professional experience in sales, social media marketing, and event management. She also holds a certification in mindfulness meditation from the University of Toronto.

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Not Just Water

Understanding the Main Ingredient of Pools

By Terry Arko

PHOTO BY JASON CRAMP

One thing that swimming pools throughout

the entire world have in common is their main ingredient: water. It might seem like a trite opening for this article. While water's presence in a pool is obvious, it is surprising how often it is taken for granted among many service technicians and operators. Water is the most vital chemical in a pool. Yes, water is a chemical. Like any other chemical used for treatment, it reacts based on its local composition and environment. Does the industry fully understand the makeup of the

essential chemical introduced when a pool is initially filled and each time it is topped up? Most damage to pool surfaces during start-up or maintenance results from a lack of knowledge about the water's chemical balance.

Characteristics of water

Water is regarded as an inorganic substance. However, it can sometimes behave quite like a living entity in the way it reacts, responds, and changes. Three traits of water make it special. First, water is

A proper pool start-up begins by knowing the source water before turning on the hose.

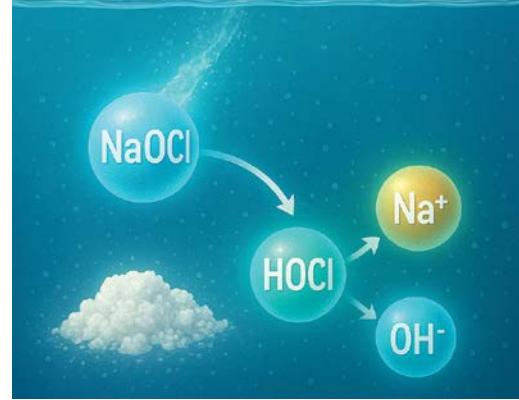


Quick reference: Treat water as a chemical

- Water is the most vital chemical in a pool.
- It reacts based on source makeup and environment.
- Most start-up damage occurs due to a poor understanding of water balance.
- Water must not be treated as a passive filler.
- Always assess source water before filling any pool.
- Unexamined water can cause plaster etching, scaling, and surface degradation. 



amphoteric, meaning it has the ability to seek its own balance. Pure water, for instance, has a pH of 7.0, which is considered neutral on the scientific scale. In this case, water remains neutral because it can gain a proton to form a hydronium ion (H_3O^+), and donate a proton to form a hydroxide ion (OH^-). Water does this in equilibrium through a process known as auto-ionization. Two H_2O molecules in pure water react to produce equal amounts of acid and base. When water reacts with certain bases, it produces acids, and when it reacts with acids, it produces

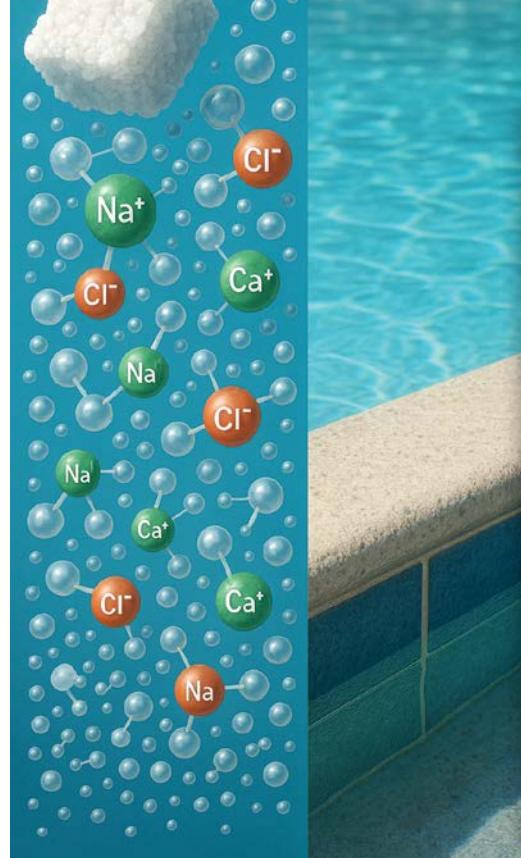


The hydrolysis of water produces free chlorine from a chlorine compound.

AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION COURTESY CHATGPT (DALL-E)

This split visual shows salt crystals separating into ions and blending into pool water, highlighting the scientific process behind dissolved minerals.

AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION COURTESY CHATGPT (DALL-E)



bases. Unless chemically altered, water left on its own will react based on the environment it is in.

The second characteristic of water is its ability to break down compounds through a process known as hydrolysis. Think of this term as a water knife. Meaning that water reacts with various chemical compounds, it cuts the compounds into differing parts. An example of hydrolysis is the reaction between water and chlorine sanitizer. All forms of chlorine used in pools are compounds. One example is liquid chlorine, also known as sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl). The hydrolysis reaction begins as soon as liquid chlorine comes into contact with water. Immediately, the water reacts and breaks down the sodium hypochlorite into hypochlorous acid (HOCl), sodium (Na⁺), and OH⁻. HOCl is the killing agent of chlorine with a 99 per cent power. Hydrolysis goes further as the HOCl dissociates into a hydrogen ion, H⁺, and a hypochlorite ion, OCl⁻. This is a simple example illustrating that the hydrolysis of water produces free chlorine (FC) from a chlorine compound.

This leads to the third characteristic of water, which is its role as a universal solvent. Essentially, this means water can dissolve solid materials such as cement or salt. When dissolving salt (NaCl), water, a polar molecule, interacts with the salt, another polar molecule. Adding salt to water triggers a hydrolysis reaction that begins to

Quick reference: Water behaviour essentials

Amphoteric (seeks balance)

- Can behave as both an acid and a base.
- Neutral pH of pure water: 7.0
- Forms hydronium ion (H₃O⁺) and hydroxide ion (OH⁻) through auto-ionization.

Hydrolysis (water knife)

- Breaks compounds into parts
- Sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl) breaks into:
 - Hypochlorous acid (HOCl)
 - Sodium ions (Na⁺)
 - Hydroxide ions (OH⁻)
- Produces free chlorine (FC)

Universal solvent

- Dissolves salt, cement, minerals
- Separates Na⁺ and Cl⁻ ions
- Contributes to long-term erosion of cementitious surfaces

separate the positively charged sodium ions (Na⁺) from the negatively charged chloride ions (Cl⁻). As the ions break apart, the polarity of water molecules comes into play, with the positive hydrogen atoms orienting toward the negative chloride ions and the negative oxygen atoms toward the positive sodium ions. Consequently, water molecules surround the salt ions, keeping them dissolved and separated. Notably, many chemicals used in pools are derived from salt. For example, chlorine is produced from salt, and chemicals such as sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate are used to balance the water's pH level. A prime example of water as a universal solvent is the Grand Canyon, where over several million years, between 416,800 and 1,250,500 km³ (100,000 and 300,000 mi³) of rock and debris were eroded by the Colorado River and its tributaries. In a pool, the combination of water's properties and gentle circulation can, over time, erode cementitious aggregate.

Regional differences and start-up

Understanding that water is a chemical and that it reacts differently depending on regional locations is essential for pool startup. Some parts of the world have more surface water, such as rivers and lakes. This water is relatively new and has not eroded or accumulated many minerals. In these areas, the source water used to fill pools will be soft. As a



A proper pool start-up begins by knowing the source water before turning on the hose.

AI-GENERATED IMAGE
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chemical, soft water can be harmful to pool surfaces and metallic equipment. It acts as an acid seeking a base, because it is low in mineral calcium (Ca). The water will try to extract calcium from the plaster to

balance itself, causing etching and serious damage to the surface. Vinyl liners and fibreglass surfaces can also degrade and be damaged by the force of soft water.

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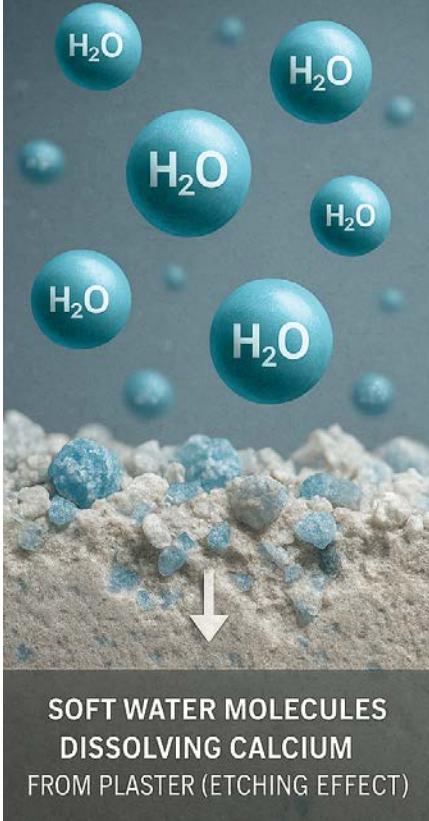
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Soft water can be harmful to pool surfaces as it acts as an acid seeking a base, causing etching and serious damage to the surface.

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COURTESY CHATGPT (DALL-E)

Hard water is water that has been underground for either hundreds of years or just a few weeks. During that time, it absorbs minerals from the earth, including calcium and magnesium (Mg). This causes the water to become oversaturated, leading to the formation of scale on pool surfaces and equipment. Water with high calcium levels in warmer areas can be particularly challenging because it promotes the formation of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) scale.

The lesson here again is to understand that the essential chemical water will vary in consistency depending on its source. When filling a new pool, it is not the time to test or adjust the water after it is filled. A proper pool start-up begins by knowing the source water before turning on the hose, that is, before the pool is filled. Source water should be tested for pH, alkalinity, calcium, total dissolved solids (TDS), chlorine level, source metals, nitrates (NO₃⁻), phosphates, and temperature. Based on these results, treatment can be applied as the pool fills to reduce the risk of finish damage. The temperature of the fill water is a concern as colder water is more corrosive, and warmer water is more reactive. Cold water tends to dissolve calcium, while warmer water causes calcium to precipitate as a solid. Temperature also affects the Langmuir Saturation Index (LSI) test. Another important factor is TDS. Higher TDS levels create a more corrosive environment in the pool. Conversely, low TDS might also be problematic, as it indicates a lack of minerals, which could cause the



**ETCHED POOL
PLASTER SURFACE**

Quick reference: Pre-fill source water testing

Test "before" filling:

- pH
- Alkalinity
- Calcium
- Total dissolved solids (TDS)
- Metals
- Nitrates (NO₃⁻)
- Phosphates
- Chlorine level
- Temperature

Soft water indicators and risks

- Low calcium
- Extracts calcium from plaster
- Causes etching and surface damage
- Can degrade vinyl and fibreglass

Hard water indicators and risks

- High calcium and magnesium
- Promotes scale formation
- Warm conditions increase calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) deposits

Temperature impacts

- Cold water dissolves calcium (more corrosive)
- Warm water precipitates calcium (solid formation)
- Affects Langmuir Saturation Index (LSI) ↗

water to seek minerals from pool materials if it is not chemically balanced.

Tame the beast

Water is a highly unpredictable, reactive, and mysterious element. Before it enters the pool, it needs to be examined, defined, and understood. Taking water for granted and failing to treat it like any other chemical can lead to many damaging situations, from plaster etching to metal stains. The best advice is to tame the beast before it is set free. That means testing and understanding the source water before it goes into the pool.

Bringing it all together

In summary, the significance of water as the core chemical in every swimming pool cannot be overstated. Its unique characteristics, being



SEVERE CALCIUM CARBONATE SCALE BUILDUP ON POOL TILE

amphoteric, acting as a universal solvent, and breaking down compounds through hydrolysis, make it both essential and somewhat unpredictable. Regional differences in water composition can significantly impact pool surfaces and equipment, underscoring the importance of a thorough

understanding before filling the pool. By respecting water's reactive nature and testing source water for key parameters, pool operators can prevent costly damage and maintain a safe, balanced environment. Ultimately, treating water as the dynamic chemical it is remains vital for successful pool maintenance and longevity. 

Hard water becomes oversaturated, leading to the formation of scale on pool surfaces and equipment.

AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION COURTESY CHATGPT (DALL-E)



Terry Arko is a product training and content manager for HASA Pool Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of pool and spa water treatment products in Saugus, Calif. He has more than 40 years of experience in the pool and spa/hot tub industry, working in service, repair, retail sales, chemical manufacturing, technical service, commercial sales, and product development. He has written over 100 published articles on water chemistry and has been an instructor of water chemistry courses for more than 25 years. Arko serves as a voting member on the Recreational Water & Air Quality Committee (RWAQC) board. He is a Commercial Pool Operator (CPO) course instructor, a Pool Chemistry Certified Residential course teacher for the Pool Chemistry Training Institute (PCTI), and a *Pool & Spa Marketing* Editorial Advisory Committee member. Arko can be reached at terryarko@hasapool.com.

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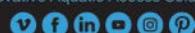
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Backyard Rehab

By Mike Fox

PHOTOS COURTESY
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How One Fibreglass Pool Helped Change a Life

Most people think of swimming pools as places to spend time with family or to take a break from the heat. For many homeowners, though, a backyard pool is much more than that. It becomes a place where people can move their bodies, work on their health, and recover from injuries or stress. Pools can support real rehab goals, not just recreation.

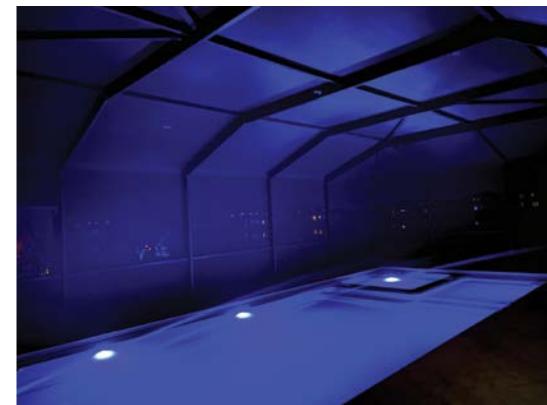
This is what happened to one Latham employee, James Votraw. His fibreglass pool supported daily rehabilitation, long-term weight loss, and improved well-being. His experience highlights how backyard pools can become an integral part of a customer's

everyday routine, helping them meet their health and wellness needs.

A health wake-up call

Before his pool became a catalyst for change, Votraw was living a busy and stressful life. He worked long hours. He had a young daughter at home. Like many adults, he often put his own needs to the side. He was not eating well or sleeping enough, and he rarely exercised.

Votraw did not realize how much this was affecting him until a strange and painful health problem sent



More homeowners want ways to feel better, recover from injuries, manage weight, and reduce stress without leaving home. A fibreglass pool supports all of these goals.

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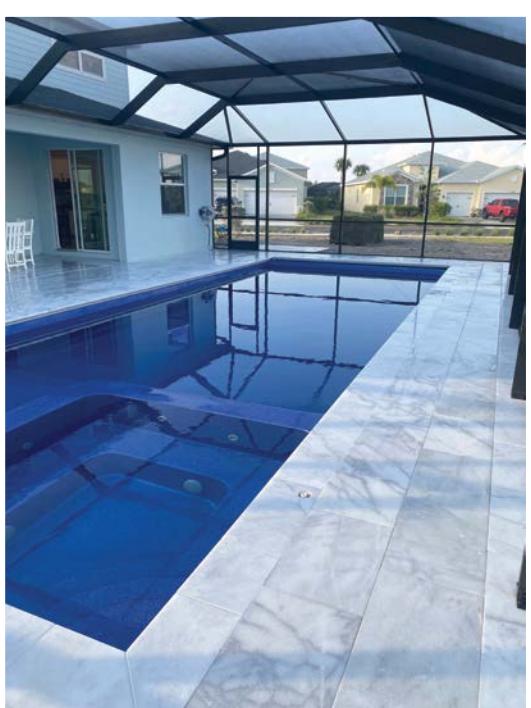
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Wellness-focused buyers often invest more over time. They may purchase heaters, covers, swim-current systems, or other upgrades to support their routine. This creates opportunities for long-term service and customer loyalty.



him to the hospital. He developed chronic hiccups that would not stop. For days, he struggled to eat, drink, or sleep. Doctors told him the hiccups were connected to stress and other health problems he needed to address.

This was the moment that made everything real. Doctors warned that if he did not slow down and take care of himself, things could get worse. Votraw wanted to be present for his daughter; he wanted to be active, and ultimately, he wanted to feel better.

When he left the hospital, he made a promise to change his habits. He adjusted his diet and made healthier lifestyle choices. He tried to add simple movement back into his daily routine. But what he really needed was something he could do every day that did not feel overwhelming or painful.

This is where his backyard fibreglass pool became the answer.



A pool becomes a daily rehab setting

Not long after his hospital stay, Votraw had a fibreglass pool installed in his backyard. His original plan was to spend more time with his family and find relief from the heat. However, once he started using the pool, he realized it could support his recovery in a deeper way.

He began very small, swimming laps for only 10 minutes at a time. He did not track speed or distance; his only goal was to show up in the pool each day and move his body, which quickly became

part of his routine. It was low stress, low impact, and easy to keep up with because the pool was only steps away from his back door—no special equipment or gym membership necessary.

The pool gave him privacy, comfort, and a way to stay consistent, which is the most important part of rehab or lifestyle change.

Over the next 400 days, Votraw used his fibreglass pool almost every single day. The results were major. He lost more than 45 kg (100 lb), his strength improved, and his confidence grew. He slept better and had more energy for work and for his family.

For Votraw, the pool was not just a nice feature in his yard. It became a simple, effective space that helped him rebuild his health one day at a time.

Why fibreglass pools work well for rehab and wellness

Votraw's experience shows how fibreglass pools support both physical and emotional well-being—a context that can help trade professionals frame the tips in the next section.

Low-impact movement

Swimming and water exercise are gentle on the body. Water takes pressure off joints and muscles, which is particularly beneficial for individuals dealing with injuries, weight concerns, arthritis, or mobility issues. They can move without pain or strain.

Easy, everyday access

Customers who have a pool just steps away from their home are more likely to use it. There are no gym fees, long drives, or crowded facilities, and most importantly, no discomfort. This makes consistency possible, which is the most crucial aspect of rehabilitation.

Supports daily habits

Since the pool was easily accessible and simple to use, Votraw swam almost every

day for over a year. This steady routine is what helped him make real changes.

Smooth and comfortable surface

With a smooth, gentle surface, fibreglass pools are easy on the skin and need fewer chemicals. A pool that feels good to use makes people want to get in the water more regularly.

Supports stress relief

Rehab is not only physical. It also involves mental well-being. Swimming helps reduce stress and clear the mind. In this instance, Votraw noticed he felt calmer, happier, and more focused after regular swims.

Lessons for builders, retailers, and service pros

For builders, dealers, service pros, and retailers, Votraw's story provides a real example of how a fibreglass pool can be more than a recreational purchase. It can become a wellness tool and a daily part of a customer's health routine.

Here are ways the industry can use rehab-focused messaging to add value:

Position pools as wellness tools

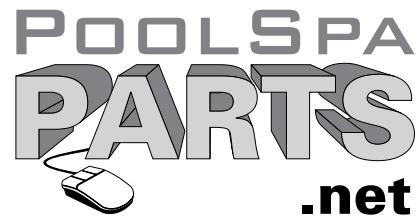
More homeowners want ways to feel better, recover from injuries, manage weight, and reduce stress without leaving home. A fibreglass pool supports all of these goals. Pros can highlight:

- Low-impact exercise
- Swimming laps
- Stretching and mobility work
- Stress reduction
- Easily maintaining daily habits

Recommend rehab-friendly design features

If customers mention wellness goals, pros can suggest features such as:

- Wide steps for daily stretching and balance exercises
- Bench seating for water therapy
- Tanning ledges for gentle movement
- Long, open swim lanes for laps
- Railings or handholds for stability



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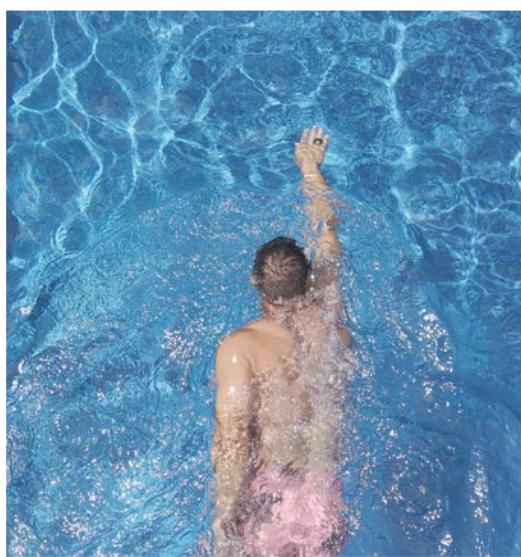
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Customers who have a pool just steps away from their home are more likely to use it. This makes consistency possible, which is the most crucial aspect of rehabilitation.



Across the country, more people are turning to at-home options for fitness, therapy, and daily movement. Pools fit naturally into these trends.



These details help homeowners feel safe and supported when owning a pool.

Emphasize ease of use and ownership

Fibreglass pools are easy to maintain and last a long time. For customers dealing with injuries or health issues, simple upkeep is important. A pool that requires less work is a pool they will actually use.

Share real customer stories

People trust real experiences. Stories like Votraw's can help customers picture how a pool might fit into their own health routines. It shifts the conversation from recreational to long-term personal value.

Build long-term customer relationships

Wellness-focused buyers often invest more overtime. They may purchase heaters, covers, swim-current systems, or other upgrades to support their routine. This creates opportunities for long-term service and customer loyalty.

Pools and the growth of at-home wellness

Across the country, more people are turning to at-home options for fitness, therapy, and daily movement. Pools fit naturally into these trends because they can support:



- Injury recovery
- Chronic pain management
- Heart health
- Stress relief
- Weight loss
- Balance and mobility work
- Confidence through steady movement

This presents the pool industry with a significant opportunity to address genuine, year-round needs, rather than just seasonal fun.

A story that makes an impact

Votraw's transformation took time, effort, and daily commitment. His fibreglass pool gave him support, access, and comfort every step of the way. His experience reminds us that pools can change more than the look of a backyard—they can change a person's life.

For the industry, the message is clear: building a backyard pool can also support an individual's journey toward healing, physical strength, improved mobility, and long-term wellness beyond recreation alone. 



Mike Fox is vice-president of product for Latham Pool Products fibreglass business unit. With more than 20 years of experience in the pool industry, Fox has been a catalyst in driving awareness, adoption, resulting in the overall growth of the fibreglass pool sector. Prior to his focus in fibreglass, Fox served as director of FP&A, product director, and U.S. sales director over his tenure at Latham Pool Products inc. Prior to joining Latham, Fox served as director of finance at General Electric (GE) (energy business) and consulting manager with Arthur Anderson Boston.

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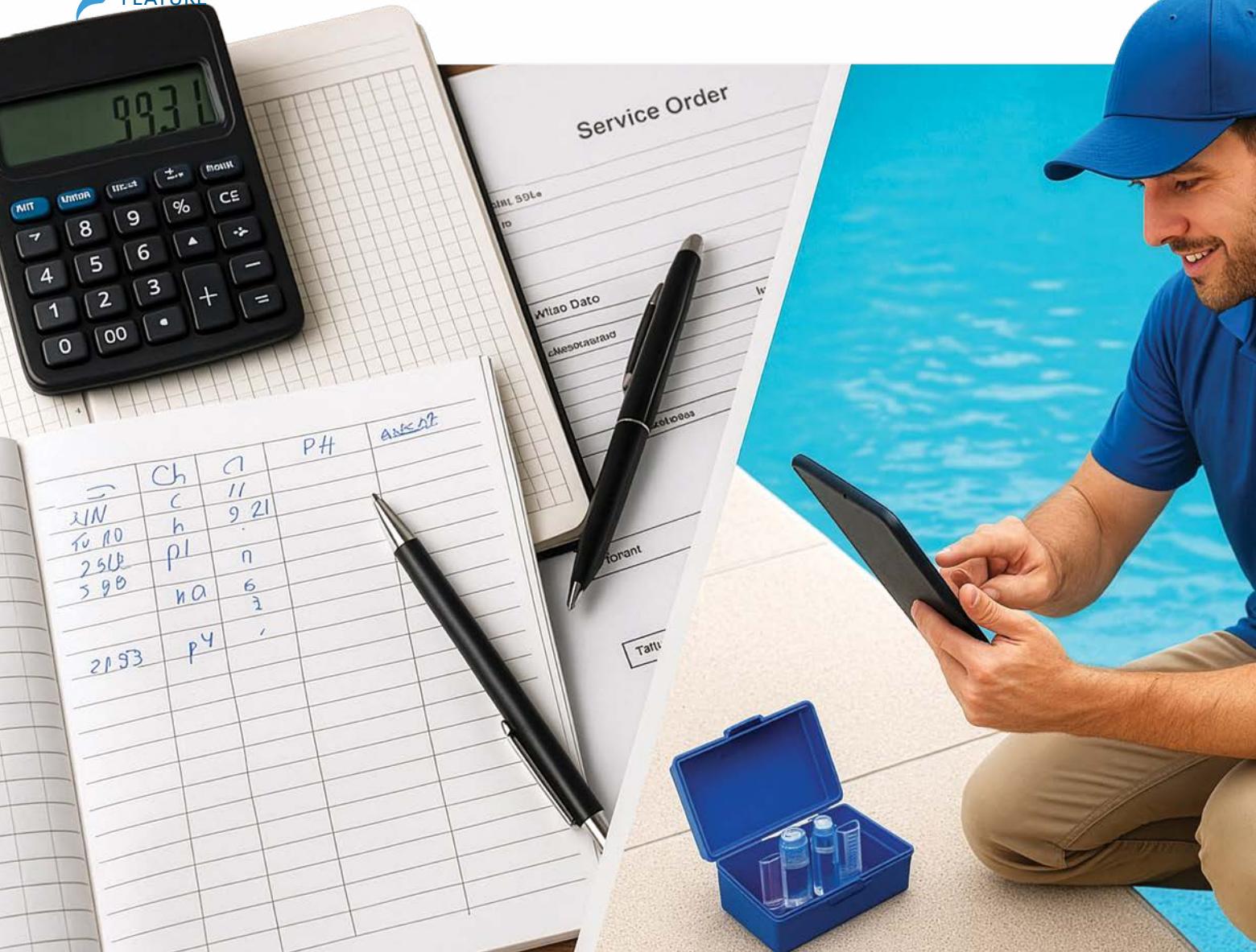
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The Cost of Staying Manual

Outdated Systems Quietly Cut Into Profits

By Rachael Pritz

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After attending several pool and spa industry

trade shows and events, it is surprising to see how many business owners still rely on pen-and-paper methods or basic spreadsheets to manage scheduling, inventory, and customer service. The hesitation often comes from common misconceptions that business software is too expensive, too complex, or unnecessary. However, in today's competitive market, those assumptions can

quietly erode profits and hinder growth. Modern business management tools designed for pool and spa professionals are now easier to use and more affordable than ever—and choosing not to adopt them can ultimately be the costliest decision of all.

In one industry trends study, it was noted that in 2025, only eight per cent of businesses' budgets (on average) are being allocated for "software," down from approximately 12 per cent. This implies that



Manual, paper-based workflows create hidden inefficiencies that slow operations, increase errors, and limit business growth.



Relying on pen-and-paper processes leads to wasted time, misplaced information, and administrative burdens that impact profitability.

although digitization is on the radar, the actual investment level remains modest.¹

Many pool and spa businesses are beginning to adopt digital tools, including mobile apps, cloud scheduling, and customer management platforms; however, a sizable portion still relies on manual processes. The budget data (eight per cent) underscores that, for many, digital adoption remains in its early stages rather than representing full-scale integration.

Myth 1: "It is too expensive"

At first glance, investing in business software may seem like a considerable expense. However, when you consider the ongoing costs associated with manual processes, the situation looks quite different.

Businesses often waste countless hours sorting through paperwork, resolving scheduling conflicts, or searching for misplaced invoices. Each of these inefficiencies results in tangible financial losses for the company.

When pool and spa businesses move from manual processes to digital systems, the strongest return on investment (ROI) typically comes from gains in labour efficiency, billing accuracy, technician productivity, inventory control, and payment collection. By eliminating double entry, automating scheduling and invoicing, tracking inventory in real-time, and using tools such as online bill payments and digital work orders, many businesses reduce their administrative workload, increase service revenue through fewer missed charges, and decrease

Digital invoicing helps eliminate missed charges, improve accuracy, and accelerate payment collection.



Digital tools enable technicians to capture service details, chemical readings, and updates directly from the field.



inventory shrinkage. Taken together, these improvements often generate a rapid and measurable return, with the software investment commonly recovered within the first year.

Modern business management software often pays for itself quickly through labour savings and

improved accuracy. Automated scheduling reduces missed appointments, digital invoicing accelerates payment collection, and integrated inventory tracking minimizes unnecessary purchases. Rather than functioning as an added expense, the right software becomes a profit-generating tool.

For example, a 10-employee company investing approximately \$5,000 per year in software tools could save eight hours of administrative time each week (about \$9,000 per year in labour), recover a single missed chemical or parts charge per day (about \$12,000 per year), and reduce inventory shrinkage by 15 per cent (about \$5,000 per year). In a scenario like this, the business typically recovers its entire investment within two to three months, with the remaining savings contributing directly to profit.

Myth 2: "It is too complicated"

Many business owners worry that learning new technology will take too much time or that their team will struggle to adapt to it. That concern may have been valid a decade ago, but today's pool and spa management software is built with simplicity in mind. User-friendly dashboards, mobile applications for retail staff and in-field technicians, and cloud-based, integrated systems allow businesses to manage operations from virtually anywhere with minimal training.

Modern pool and spa business systems are far easier to use because they are built around automation,

intuitive workflows, and mobile accessibility. Automated scheduling, billing, and inventory updates eliminate repetitive tasks and minimize errors. Guided interfaces guide staff through processes step-by-step, such as creating a work order, checking out a customer, or completing a service stop. Mobile applications enable technicians to update jobs, capture photos, record chemical readings, and collect payments directly from the field, thereby eliminating paperwork and reducing after-hours data entry. Additionally, smart prompts, templates, and built-in best-practice recommendations help new employees quickly ramp up without extensive training. Together, these features reduce complexity, improve accuracy, and make digital systems more approachable for teams at any skill level.

The best software providers also offer dedicated onboarding and ongoing support, guiding teams through setup and providing assistance whenever needed. Modern platforms designed specifically for pool and spa workflows, rather than generic retail systems, reflect the way these businesses actually operate, making daily tasks more intuitive. Many

pool and spa professionals are surprised to discover that what once felt intimidating is ultimately far easier than keeping up with manual paperwork.

Industry-specific solutions simplify onboarding because they are built around the exact workflows pool and spa businesses use every day—service routes, water testing, retail checkout, inventory management, and repeat customer programs. Rather than forcing staff to adapt to generic software, these systems mirror real-world processes, which shortens the learning curve considerably and helps teams become productive more quickly.

Myth 3: "We do not need it"

Some business owners believe their current processes "work fine," particularly if they have been operating in the same way for many years. However, manual systems cannot keep pace with the rising expectations of customers. Clients increasingly expect faster responses, digital payment options, and real-time service updates. Without software to streamline communication, scheduling, and follow-



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Modern business systems mirror real-world pool and spa workflows, making it easier for teams to learn, adapt, and stay productive.

up, it becomes easy to fall behind competitors who provide these modern conveniences.

Customer expectations in the pool and spa industry have evolved rapidly, and many digital conveniences are now considered standard. Homeowners increasingly expect real-time communication, including text alerts when a technician is *en route*, digital service summaries with photos, and instant access to billing information or water-test results. Online scheduling, automated reminders, and simple digital payment options, such as text-to-pay or online bill pay, have become baseline expectations rather than premium features.

Relying on memory or handwritten notes also creates opportunities for costly errors, including missed appointments, incorrect billing, or overlooked follow-ups. Over time, these small mistakes can lead to lost revenue and diminished customer trust.

For example, a mid-sized service company recently discovered that one technician had been recording chemical readings and parts used on paperwork orders. Still, the information was often smudged or incomplete by the time it reached the office. Over the course of a single month, the team identified more than a dozen unbilled items, primarily small parts and added chemicals, that should have amounted to nearly \$1,800 in revenue. A few customers also questioned their invoices because the handwritten notes were difficult to read,

resulting in time-consuming follow-up calls and even a couple of negative reviews.

After transitioning to a digital system with required fields, photo documentation, and automatic invoicing, missed charges were eliminated, and customer confidence improved. The example underscores a larger point: manual errors not only cost money but can also gradually erode credibility.

The real cost of clinging to the old way

Manual management systems may feel familiar, but they carry significant hidden costs, wasted time, miscommunication, and missed opportunities. The pool and spa businesses that succeed today are those embracing technology to streamline operations, enhance service, and strengthen profitability.

When businesses modernize their operations, four core areas typically see the most immediate improvement: scheduling, invoicing, customer communication, and inventory management. Digital scheduling eliminates handwritten calendars and fragmented spreadsheets, enabling staff to assign routes, adjust workloads, and respond to last-minute changes in real time. Invoicing becomes far more accurate because service details, parts used, and photos flow directly into billing, reducing missed charges and accelerating payment collection. Customer communication also improves through automated reminders, on-the-way text alerts, digital

service reports, and convenient payment links, all of which build trust and reduce inbound calls. Inventory management gains accuracy through the use of barcoding, real-time stock tracking, and automated reordering, which helps prevent stockouts, reduce shrinkage, and avoid end-of-season surprises. Together, these improvements streamline daily operations, reduce labour inefficiencies, and create a more seamless experience for both staff and customers.

The opportunity cost of maintaining manual or semi-manual systems is especially significant in a seasonal industry where roughly 80 per cent of annual revenue is generated in less than six months. Time spent on manual inventory tracking represents lost selling time. Instead of spending 30 minutes of every hour on administrative tasks, employees could use that time to assist customers, increase sales, and strengthen loyalty. During peak season, labour hours are too valuable to be wasted on outdated processes. Investing in digital tools enables staff to focus on revenue-generating activities rather than routine tasks that slow down the business.

For example, imagine a company where each technician completes 10 service stops per day during the peak summer season. If manual processes add 30 minutes to each stop and a digital system cuts that time by 15 minutes, the result is five additional stops per technician per day. At an average net profit of \$80 per stop, those five additional visits generate approximately \$400 in extra profit per technician per day. Over a 20-day peak month, that equates to roughly \$8,000 per technician, achieved solely by eliminating manual inefficiencies.

Modern pool and spa software enables this level of productivity by automating core workflows. Maintenance routes can be scheduled automatically, invoices sent immediately after service, and chemical inventory tracked in real-time—all within a single, integrated system. Customers can also be updated with text alerts about upcoming appointments.

The bottom line

Industry-specific business software is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for

sustainable growth. The fear of change often costs more than the software itself. By adopting the right tools, pool and spa businesses can reduce waste, increase revenue, and deliver a more seamless experience for both staff and customers.

Digital platforms provide the foundation necessary to integrate emerging tools, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-based analytics, predictive maintenance alerts, automated water-care recommendations, and personalized customer marketing. As these innovations become standard, businesses already operating with connected, cloud-based systems will be able to add new capabilities with minimal disruption. Those still relying on spreadsheets or paper, however, will face costly and time-consuming transitions. In this way, technology does more than solve today's inefficiencies; it prepares businesses to grow, adapt, and remain competitive as the industry shifts toward smarter, data-driven service models.

Instead of concentrating solely on the price of software, it is worth considering the value of

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Digital tools strengthen customer service through faster responses, clearer communication, and real-time service updates.

allocating an additional 20 hours each week to employees to follow up on sales leads, complete more service calls, or assist customers during peak seasonal demand.

A single employee redirecting two hours per day from manual tasks to customer or service work can generate an additional \$15,000 to \$20,000 in seasonal revenue. A team of five to 10 employees can easily drive \$50,000 to more than \$150,000 in added revenue simply by eliminating manual inefficiencies.

Modern business software makes this possible. The technology is accessible, easy to use, and more affordable than ever. Purpose-built solutions now provide pool and spa businesses with the tools to work more efficiently, scale their operations, and deliver a higher level of service. The real question becomes: can a business afford not to modernize?

For companies seeking to strengthen their operations for 2026 and beyond, exploring an industry-specific management platform is an important first step. A software demonstration can help determine how digital tools can support long-term success and enhance the customer experience.

Across the pool and spa industry, there is a clear and accelerating shift toward adopting modern technology, a shift driven by tighter labour markets, higher customer expectations, and the need to operate more efficiently within a short seasonal window. Increasingly, businesses recognize that digital tools

are not simply conveniences; they are becoming essential to building scalable and resilient operations.

From mobile service apps and automated scheduling to integrated point-of-sale systems and cloud-based updates, these technologies are reshaping how companies manage workflows, communicate with customers, and make informed decisions. As the industry continues to move in this direction, businesses that modernize now will be better positioned to adopt future innovations, deliver a more consistent customer experience, and maintain a competitive edge in the years ahead. 

Notes

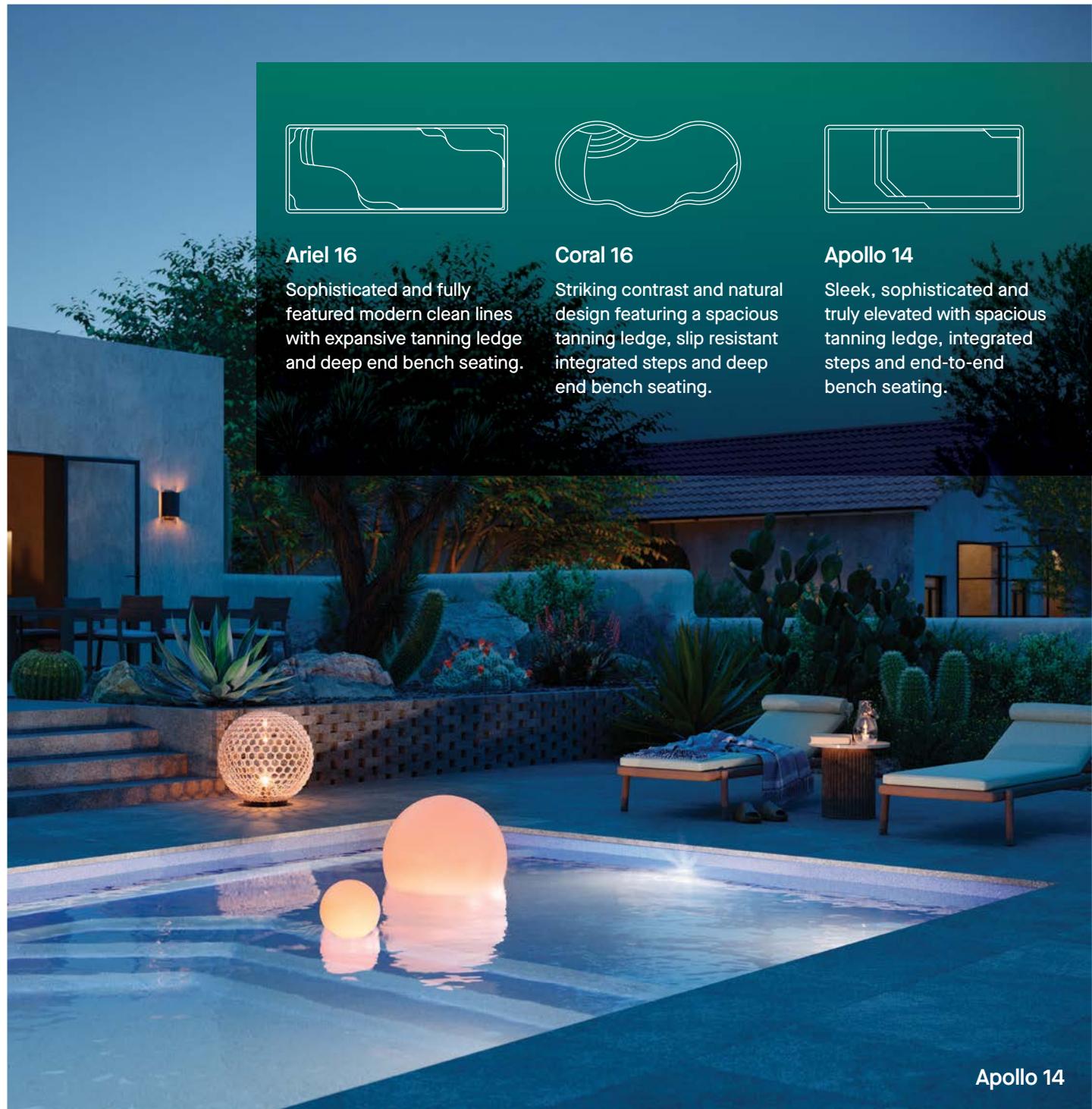
¹ To read more on these industry trends, visit accio.com/business/pool_industry_trends. (Accessed Sunday, November 16, 2025).



Rachael Pritz has been active in the pool industry for more than 20 years, which has provided her with all-encompassing expertise in the trade. She worked at a local pool store while pursuing a master's degree at the University of Pittsburgh, Pa. With her technical skills and industry knowledge, she joined the launch of RB Retail & Service Solutions in Pittsburgh in 2003. She can be reached at rachael@rbcontrolsystems.com.

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Winterizing Outdoor Kitchens

Cold-weather Care for Luxury Spaces

By Amy Bortz
and Daniel Lewis

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FIRE MAGIC

With winter firmly set in, outdoor entertaining

has largely given way to indoor gatherings for luxury homeowners. While pools and spas are typically winterized by this time of year, luxury outdoor kitchens also require thoughtful off-season care and consideration.

Built-in grills, stone countertops, refrigeration units, custom cabinetry, and lighting systems can all be vulnerable to harsh winter conditions, which can compromise performance, appearance, and safety. As with pools and pool equipment, proper winter maintenance of the outdoor kitchen helps protect the overall backyard investment, ensuring the entire outdoor space is ready for use when warmer weather returns.

Here are several tips, along with potential service opportunities, that professionals can offer to their clients.

There is always time for a deep clean

With winter already underway, a thorough cleaning should be completed before outdoor kitchens remain covered for the season. All appliances and surfaces should be cleaned to prevent staining and corrosion and to identify any issues that can be addressed now or flagged for attention in the spring. After cleaning,

grills should be carefully wiped down and allowed to air dry completely before being covered, as any remaining moisture can lead to rust. Proper grill maintenance includes:

- Run the grill on high for 15 to 20 minutes to burn off grease and food residue before winter shutdown.
- Allow the grill to cool fully, then remove grates and burner components and clean them thoroughly using a non-abrasive pad and degreaser.
- Clean drip trays, burner ports, and rotisserie components where grease and debris commonly accumulate.
- Inspect the ignition system to ensure it remains in proper working order.

Winter preparation for adjoining kitchen elements:

- Wipe down countertops, cabinets, sinks, and backsplash surfaces with a non-abrasive cleaner to remove residue before extended winter coverage.
- Clear away all food residue and spills to prevent staining and pest attraction.
- Empty outdoor trash drawers and recycling compartments before closing the space for the season.

Industry professionals caution against the use of abrasive cleaning products, such as steel wool or metal



scouring pads, which can damage grill finishes and components. Service providers can educate clients that routine light cleaning can be handled with simple soap and water, while more intensive deep cleanings are best positioned as a professional service offering.

Protect high-end appliances and fixtures

For homeowners living in cold climates, moisture is the enemy of appliances. Luxury outdoor kitchens often feature premium appliances, including refrigerators, ice makers, sinks, wine coolers, and warming drawers. These items are particularly susceptible to freezing temperatures and moisture accumulation.

Refrigeration and beverage areas

- Power down and unplug all outdoor refrigeration units.
- Clean interior surfaces thoroughly to remove residue and moisture.
- Remove any remaining contents and clean drip trays and condenser coils to prevent odours and mechanical issues during the extended winter shutdown.

Sinks and plumbing fixtures

- Shut off the water supply to all outdoor plumbing lines.
- Drain faucets, sinks, and ice makers fully to prevent freezing and pipe damage during winter conditions.
- Where applicable, blow out water lines with compressed air to remove residual moisture.

Electric products

- Disconnect power to lighting, burners, and electrical outlets serving the outdoor kitchen.
- Remove batteries from any battery-powered

devices to prevent corrosion during the extended winter shutdown.

Gas line and fuel system shutdown

Whether the homeowner uses natural gas or propane, the fuel systems of outdoor kitchens that are not in use during the winter months should be safely shut down for the season.

- Turn off gas lines at the source.
- For propane systems, disconnect the tank and store it upright in a cool, well-ventilated area away from living spaces.
- Inspect gas hoses, regulators, and fittings for signs of wear, cracking, or damage before winter shutdown.

This is a good time to recommend a professional inspection of the fuel system, particularly for clients with complex setups or those who plan to upgrade in the spring.

Choose high-quality covers

An ill-fitting or low-quality cover can do more harm than good. Water pooling, trapped moisture, and even wind damage are common issues associated with poor-quality covers that can compromise outdoor kitchen appliances.

Key considerations when specifying or recommending a quality cover:

- Specify or recommend custom-fitted, breathable covers for built-in grills, cabinetry, and other outdoor kitchen components.
- Select UV-resistant, waterproof materials designed for exterior use, such as marine-grade vinyl or solution-dyed polyester.
- Avoid fully sealed covers that trap moisture; ensure adequate ventilation to reduce the risk of rust, mildew, and mould.

Left: A well-maintained grill makes cooking outdoors more delicious and more enjoyable.

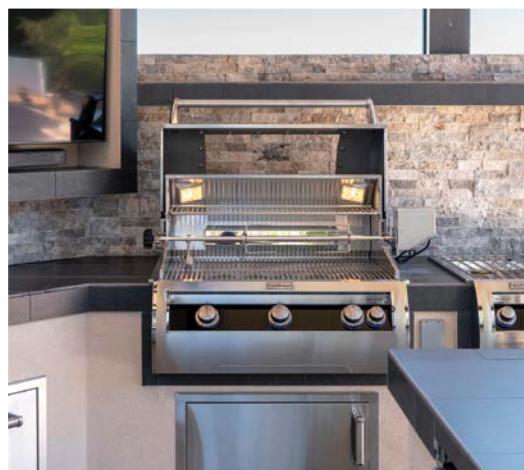
Above: Winter maintenance of the outdoor kitchen ensures its ready for entertaining when the weather warms.



Above: All outdoor kitchen appliances should also receive winter maintenance so they're in proper working order later in the year.

Above right: Winterizing storage areas helps keep pests away.

Right: Consider preparing a winter-care checklist or personalized report for clients, cataloging the maintenance procedures that have been performed.



For surfaces such as granite, concrete, or quartz installed in regions prone to freezing, applying a winter-grade sealant can offer added protection against freeze-thaw cycles and staining.

Secure cabinetry and storage components

Custom cabinetry, frequently constructed from stainless steel, teak, high-density polyethylene (HDPE), or marine-grade polymer, can degrade if exposed to snow, ice, and wind-borne debris.

Protecting cabinetry

- Empty all storage drawers and cabinets before the extended winter shutdown.
- Clean interior and exterior surfaces using cleaners appropriate to the material type.
- Lubricate hinges and drawer glides to maintain smooth operation and prevent corrosion.
- Lock or secure doors to minimize the risk of wind damage or animal intrusion.

It is essential to remember that cabinetry may appear weatherproof, but even marine-grade materials require preventive maintenance to extend their lifespan and preserve their appearance.

Pest prevention

When food and shelter are scarce, outdoor kitchens that are not used or are lightly used in winter can become inviting homes for rodents and insects. A few preventive steps can keep pests at bay:

- Seal any openings, gaps, or vent holes using mesh or weather-resistant sealant to deter pests.
- Place natural repellents or traps inside empty storage areas where appropriate.
- Ensure trash bins and recycling drawers are fully emptied and thoroughly cleaned before winter closure.

Professional pest-prevention services may be worthwhile for larger kitchen installations and properties located in wooded areas.

Invest in high-quality appliances

Outdoor kitchen appliances constructed from durable, exterior-rated materials tend to deliver longer service life, particularly when paired with consistent maintenance. Professionals should prioritize specifying appliances fabricated from corrosion-resistant materials, such as 304 stainless steel, that are better suited to withstand weather exposure and frequent use. High-quality construction, robust welding, and long-life internal components all contribute to maintaining both performance and appearance over time. Design features that promote even heat distribution and resist material fatigue can further enhance longevity and reduce long-term service issues.

This opt-for-quality approach extends beyond appliances to countertops, cabinetry, and other outdoor kitchen components. Specifying higher-quality, exterior-rated materials generally results in longer service life, particularly when paired with regular inspection and maintenance.

Offer seasonal maintenance service

High-end outdoor kitchens represent significant investments, and many clients value a concierge-style approach to care. Service professionals may consider offering seasonal maintenance packages or partnering with qualified specialty providers to deliver services such as:

- Full system checks
- Appliance tune-ups
- Winterization and spring de-winterization services
- Protective cover installation

Winterization services also provide a valuable opportunity to strengthen client relationships while identifying potential upgrades, repairs, or replacements ahead of the next season.

Document and educate

Provide clients with a winter-care checklist or a personalized report outlining the winterization procedures performed. This documentation helps reinforce confidence in the work completed and demonstrates professional expertise. Supplementing written reports with photographs can also create a clear visual record for future reference.

Conclusion

Luxury outdoor kitchens enhance comfort, convenience, and culinary experiences in outdoor living spaces, complementing poolside use and enjoyment. These investments—from built-in grills to refrigeration units and stone countertops—benefit from regular, well-planned off-season care. Professional cleaning and maintenance services help

preserve condition, extend service life, and ensure the space is ready for use when the next season begins.

Professional winter maintenance provides clients with peace of mind and supports a smoother transition to regular use in the spring. Expanding service offerings to include outdoor kitchen care can add value for homeowners while creating opportunities for increased revenue and stronger long-term relationships. 



Amy Bortz is the vice-president of marketing for Fire Magic, creating and implementing strategic marketing programs for the company. For more than 85 years, Fire Magic has set the bar for both high-performance outdoor cooking and exceptional design with its line of expertly engineered luxury grills and accessories.



Daniel Lewis is the founder and owner of Pro Grill, an outdoor kitchen sales, service, and maintenance company with a strong focus on barbecues. Pro Grill serves residential, homeowner association (HOA), and commercial clients, and is known for its focus on quality, safety, and customer satisfaction.



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Building Your Dream Team

Why Investing in People Drives Lasting Success

By Lindsey Antonopoulos

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The pool and hot tub industry is more than just sparkling water and backyard enjoyment; it helps craft lasting family memories for customers, goes the extra mile, and is a people-centred business where customers can feel like family. The heart of any successful store or service company lies in its team and the relationships it fosters. Hiring wisely, training thoroughly, and strengthening the brand are key competitive advantages, especially against big-box stores that do not offer new, better, and

different products and that cannot match the personalized service and expertise.

Hire for competence, train for excellence

Start strong by hiring individuals who possess the right balance of attitude and innate ability to learn. Look for people who are curious, adaptable, and outgoing. Industry-specific experience is a bonus but not always necessary, as skills can be taught; character, however, cannot.

Think creatively when recruiting. It does not have to be limited to job ads or waiting for resumes. Sometimes, the most promising potential employees are already showcasing their skills in everyday settings. Consider the friendly barista who remembers customers' names and coffee orders, greets them with a smile, and inquires about their recent holiday. This level of genuine customer engagement highlights excellent service.

Hiring managers and business owners can draw inspiration from these moments. Whether stopping for coffee, dining at a favourite restaurant, or browsing a local garden centre, it is crucial to notice exceptional service. When encountering someone who goes above and beyond, ask if they have ever thought about a career in the pool and spa industry. Offer a business card with a friendly message that recognizes their talent and expertise. Passion, personality, and people skills are highly transferable, and the next great team member could be found at a grocery store checkout.

Here is an example of a business card that can be used when recruiting potential employees in the community.

Front of card

Looking for a sign? THIS IS IT.
We're hiring fun, friendly people to join our Team!
Like hot tubs, sunshine, and good vibes?
No resume? No problem. Just bring your smile.

[Store Name – City/Town]

Apply now: [Short link or QR code]

[Phone number]

Flexible hours • Great team • Cool perks

Back of card

YOU + US = The Future

We're on the hunt for awesome humans:

- Part-time, full-time, and seasonal
- No experience needed
- Training and good times provided
- Text us, scan the code, or just stop by

Let's make great things happen!

Once hired, invest in their success. Proper training is not optional; it forms the foundation of the business's reputation. Ensure every new team member understands both the "why" and the "how" behind



the business's processes and products. Have a company mission statement outlining the company's purpose and how it operates, along with an internal guideline document that defines the business and its primary objectives.

Sometimes, the most promising potential employees are already showcasing their skills in everyday settings.

Train the way they learn

Not everyone learns the same way, so avoid using a one-size-fits-all training approach. Ask new staff members how they prefer to learn and what motivates them. The younger generation now learns from podcasts, artificial intelligence (AI), and TikTok. It is time for businesses to meet them where they are going to learn.

People generally absorb information in one or more of three primary ways:

1. Doing (kinesthetic learners)—These learners remember best through hands-on experience. Let them test water, stock products, or walk through a filter clean with a seasoned technician. Take them on-site to teach them how to backwash a filter and explain how a pool functions. Have them read labels, do the math, and add products with guidance. Show them the process for hot tub delivery and setup. Guide them to answer phone calls and help them understand how to respond, then let them try it themselves. The author used to be one of those impatient people who would take over the call and answer for them. However, that approach does not help a new employee learn or build confidence. Instead, it is more effective to guide new team members and support them as they work through challenging questions on their own.



A blended training approach guarantees that all employees are effectively reached, starting with asking the right questions during onboarding.

What makes an employee stay?

1. They feel valued—Recognition matters. When people are thanked, noticed, or celebrated for their work, they feel a sense of belonging.
2. They are growing—Learning equals loyalty. Employees who are growing their skills, being challenged in a good way, or offered training are more likely to stay.
3. They like who they work with—Relationships are the glue in one's company. A positive team, a supportive boss, and a sense of fun can make even tough days easier. Play an in-store game, host a friendly competition that incorporates work, or organize a company BBQ with survivor games.
4. They see a future—Career paths give people hope. When employees can see where they are headed and believe in the company they work for, as well as see the company helping and rooting for them to achieve their goals, they are more likely to stick around and continue to grow. Find a way to support each other and help each other succeed.
5. They are treated fairly—Trust is everything. Fair pay, clear communication, and consistent treatment build trust and respect. But it works both ways. The employee must also be trustworthy and fulfil their responsibilities as expected.
6. Work-life balance is real—Flexibility equals loyalty. When people can take time for family, rest when they are sick, and feel human, they are more likely to stay. A team that covers for each other so people can go to appointments or pick up their kids goes a long way.

2. Seeing/Hearing (auditory/visual learners)—These individuals benefit from videos and diagrams. Managers can use webinars, training presentations, and product demonstration videos to their advantage when onboarding new employees. Supervisors should ask team members which topics they would like to learn about first and provide options that start with the fundamentals.
3. Reading/Writing—Provide these learners with access to product manuals, guides, and policy documents they can refer to and study. Show them how to use a catalogue and give them practice tasks. Trainers should involve new employees in every stage of the learning process. Each time a new employee needs to search for a product or part, the trainer should bring them along and demonstrate the procedure. This hands-on approach helps reinforce learning and builds confidence through real experience.

A blended training approach guarantees that all employees are effectively reached, starting with asking the right questions during onboarding.

Make training mandatory and motivating

A customer walks into the store and asks about a product. The staff member responds with confidence, knowledge, and enthusiasm. Why? They have just completed their online training and scored 97 per cent on the post-training quiz. They know the answer.

Many experienced professionals can recall that same feeling from their early days in the industry. The excitement and confidence that come from understanding a customer's problem and knowing how to solve it. That sense of competence not only motivates employees but also builds customer trust. The more knowledgeable the staff, the more confident they become, which directly improves the customer experience.

However, it is equally important to train employees to be honest with customers. If they do not know the answer, they should feel comfortable admitting it. For example, they might say, "That is a great question. I am still learning, but let me find out for you." This honesty helps maintain credibility and reinforces trust between the customer and the business.

Manufacturers and sales representatives often provide valuable learning opportunities, including online courses, webinars, and in-person training

sessions, which offer valuable insights and practical knowledge. Managers should use these resources and seek support when needed. Pairing a new employee with an experienced team member can also establish mentorship and ensure they know who to approach with questions. Setting clear deadlines for completing training and even offering small rewards or certificates upon completion can further encourage participation.

When employees are knowledgeable, they sell more effectively, offer better service, and display confidence that customers immediately notice. Training is not an optional addition; it is the foundation for building a strong, successful business.

Reward the win, big or small

Imagine this: a team member goes above and beyond to help a challenging customer, handles the issue professionally, and leaves the customer with a smile. A simple "Great job, you handled that well" can mean a lot, but what if leadership knew exactly how that employee prefers to be recognized?



Some employees thrive on public recognition, while others quietly appreciate a handwritten note, a small gift card, or an unexpected early afternoon off. The key is understanding what makes each individual feel valued. Taking the time to ask team members how they prefer to be rewarded allows managers to celebrate achievements in meaningful ways, whether it is reaching a sales milestone,

When onboarding goes beyond simple orientation, it turns new hires into dedicated team members who take pride in being part of the business.

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Employees become more engaged and motivated when they are offered clear career pathways, leadership opportunities, and ongoing professional development.

completing a challenging service call, or maintaining a positive attitude during a busy day.

Recognition boosts confidence, morale, and loyalty. When people feel genuinely appreciated, they are much more likely to stay. Recognition not only lifts spirits but also helps develop long-term, dedicated employees.

Define roles and raise the bar

Clarity is one of the most valuable gifts a leader can give their team. Every employee should have a well-defined job description and a clear understanding of what success entails in their role. Vague expectations often lead to confusion, frustration, and missed opportunities. However, when roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined, it establishes a strong foundation for accountability, coaching, and development. Clear expectations enable leaders to provide meaningful feedback, monitor performance, and recognize potential, making it easier to promote from within and build a strong, motivated team. Without clearly defined roles, a business risks doing its staff a disservice.

Make the pool industry a career, not just a summer job

Too often, the pool and spa industry is viewed as a seasonal job rather than a long-term career. It is time to shift that perspective. Employees become more engaged and motivated when they are offered clear career pathways, leadership opportunities, and ongoing professional development, such as attending industry events and support groups. Employers should inspire staff to see the business as a place to grow and build a future. When employees can picture

themselves advancing within the organization, they are more likely to stay, contribute meaningfully, and develop their skills over the long term.

Onboard with purpose

The first 30 to 60 days influence how long an employee stays. In "The Power of Moments" by Chip and Dan Heath, the authors explain how defining experiences, or "peaks," can create lasting impressions. Onboarding offers an opportunity to craft those defining moments that set the tone for success. Instead of just handing over a manual, employers should design experiences that make new hires feel they are joining something meaningful and valuable.

Pair them with a mentor so they have a guide and role model. Give them clear, achievable goals so they can secure early wins and build momentum. Schedule regular check-ins to answer questions and celebrate progress. Small, intentional moments, such as a welcome lunch, a handwritten note from leadership, or a team photo on their first day, signal that they belong.

When onboarding goes beyond simple orientation, it turns new hires into dedicated team members who take pride in being part of the business.

Water is what we do; people are how we succeed

Hiring and training staff is not an expense; it is an investment in the brand, the customer experience, and the company's future growth. When a workplace culture values learning, celebrates achievement, and leads with integrity, it does more than retain employees; it creates a passionate team.

Leaders should stay alert for potential talent, whether on the sales floor or ordering a latte. Great people are everywhere; the key is being prepared to invite them into this incredible industry. 



Lindsey Antonopoulos has over 25 years of experience in the pool and spa industry, holding various roles and supporting British Columbia and Alberta as a dealer development specialist at Backyard Brands. She also helps lead the Women of Water CARE Network, fostering mentorship and growth for women in the industry.



Sustainable by Nature

How Reinforced PVC Reduces Chemical and Carbon Footprints

By Matthew Sands

PHOTOS COURTESY RENOLIT

Sustainability in aquatic environments goes far beyond energy-efficient equipment or smart filtration strategies. Increasingly, the materials used to waterproof and finish the interior of a pool influence ongoing maintenance, chemical demand, water conservation, lifecycle carbon emissions, and overall operational costs. Reinforced polyvinyl chloride (PVC) membranes have become one of the most effective ways to minimize both operational and embodied carbon, combining durability, watertight performance, and circular economy principles into a single material system.

Unlike plaster, aggregate, tile, or exposed concrete, which depend on the substrate for waterproofing and degrade predictably over time, reinforced PVC

acts as a standalone waterproofing and finishing layer. Its multi-layer thermoplastic construction, fused to a polyester mesh core and protected by UV- and chemical-resistant surface coatings, guarantees long-term stability and minimal surface degradation. This consistency is one of the most powerful tools for sustainability available to aquatic designers.

Lower chemical demand through a non-porous surface

Traditional plaster and grout surfaces become more porous over their service life. Microcracking, etching, roughness, and biofilm adhesion all contribute to increased chlorine demand, necessitating frequent shock treatments. Reinforced PVC removes these



Top: A deteriorated pool basin restored to long-term watertight performance through reinforced PVC membrane installation.

Top right: A worn aquatic surface restored with reinforced PVC membrane to eliminate water-infiltration issues and stabilize long-term performance.

Side: A failing plaster and tile surface upgraded with reinforced PVC membrane installation delivers long-term watertightness, safer footing, and reduced maintenance needs.

Bottom: A rebuilt aquatic basin finished with reinforced PVC membrane to eliminate recurring resurfacing cycles and restore long-term structural reliability.

vulnerabilities. Its smooth, non-porous surface offers few places for algae and biofilm to anchor, resulting in more stable water chemistry and significantly lower sanitizer demand, often 20 to 30 per cent less chlorine compared to aging plaster pools. Reducing chlorine use directly diminishes environmental impacts related to chemical production, packaging waste, transportation emissions, and facility handling.

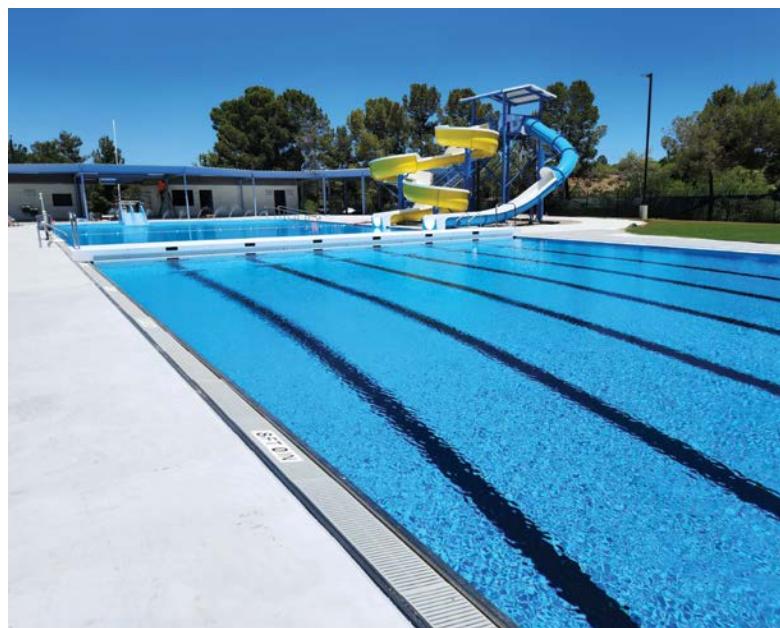
Water conservation through independent watertightness

Water loss ranks among the most overlooked environmental and financial costs in aquatic operations. Structural leaks, failed gutters, deteriorated expansion joints, and cracked shells not only waste thousands of gallons of water each year but also demand constant reheating and re-chemicalization. Reinforced PVC membranes are impermeable to liquid and vapour, and because they act independently of the substrate, they preserve watertight integrity even when the underlying concrete is damaged.

The environmental and operational consequences of watertightness become particularly evident when examining real-world renovation projects.

Case study: Restoring a deteriorated pool to full operation

A community pool remained empty for nearly 10 years, from 2014 until its reopening in June 2023. It suffered from continuous water loss, structural failure, and complete breakdown of its mechanical



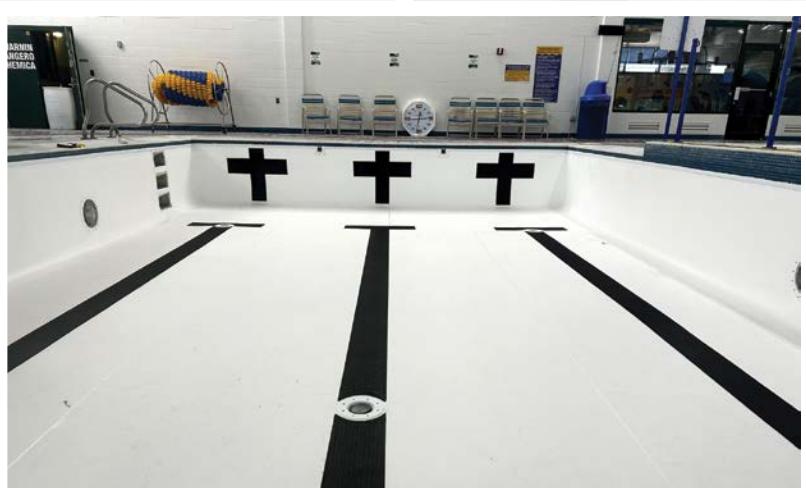
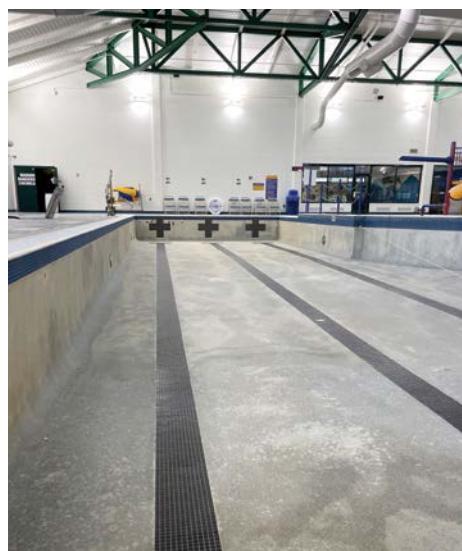
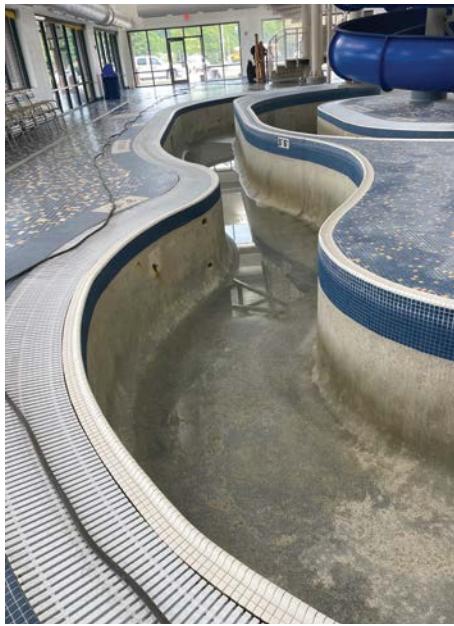
systems. The concrete gutters had failed, large sections of the floor were missing, the perimeter piping system had collapsed, and the facility lacked a functioning filtration system. Before closure, the pool required excessive refilling and constant chemical adjustments to stay open, and even then, the structural issues made operation unsustainable.

In 2021, renovation plans resumed, and based on community feedback, the project expanded dramatically—doubling its size—and included a zero-entry area, splash pad, new heater, upgraded decking, improved programming space, and a movable bulkhead for competitive swimming.

Natare Pools installed a reinforced PVC membrane system, creating a fully watertight basin that had previously been in a catastrophic condition. With the membrane installed, the community eliminated the need for yearly surface repairs, frequent repainting, and ongoing water-loss fixes, ending the cycle of endless maintenance that had plagued the pool for nearly a decade. The membrane restored the pool's integrity and significantly lowered its long-term operational and environmental impact.

Case study: A rapid retrofit with reinforced PVC

This indoor aquatic facility, covering approximately 700 m² (7,500 sf), previously had a deteriorating plaster and tile surface that showed signs of failure in several areas, especially in high-wear zero-depth zones and stair areas. Before the renovation, the facility experienced periodic micro-leaks, increased chemical usage, and surface deterioration that required more attention from staff.



During a scheduled one-month maintenance closure in 2024, Natare Pools installed more than 850 m² (9,000 sf) of reinforced PVC membrane, with precise detailing around curves, stairs, and other complex shapes. The project also included new main drain covers and was combined with upgrades to the HVAC and mechanical systems. The reinforced PVC membrane resolved previous water infiltration issues, stabilized water chemistry, reduced chloramine formation, and created a cushioned, safer environment for young children and high-traffic areas.

The finish now provides long-lasting watertightness, consistent performance, and significantly lower maintenance requirements compared to the original plaster and tile system.

Reinforced PVC supporting sustainability

While the community pool and aquatic facility are primary examples, additional Natare Pools installations offer further measurable proof of the sustainability benefits of reinforced PVC membranes.

Restoring a century-old community pool

- Originally constructed in 1929.
- The structure had deteriorated beyond repair after decades of patching and unsuccessful resurfacing.
- The facility was rebuilt with stainless steel walls, a roll-out gutter system, reinforced PVC lining, and vacuum sand filtration.
- The new system significantly reduced long-term maintenance, eliminated future plaster cycles, and restored structural reliability.

Restoring a long-overdue pool surface

- The pool had not been resurfaced in more than 21 years, and the aging plaster and aggregate finish caused significant water loss through the shell.



A severely degraded basin with significant water loss is renewed with a reinforced PVC membrane installation, providing a stable, low-maintenance surface across its complex perimeter layout.

- Renovation involved over 1,200 m² (13,000 sf) of reinforced PVC membrane and 210 m (687 ft) of stainless-steel skirt liner.
- The perimeter includes more than 70 individual skirt sections due to its large, figure-eight layout.
- Construction took place during severe weather—40 per cent of the construction days experienced rainfall—yet the membrane installation was completed successfully, resulting in a fully watertight restoration.

Across all these projects, the common issues before renovation remain consistent: chronic water loss, frequent resurfacing, structural degradation, chemical waste, unstable water chemistry, and rising operational costs. Reinforced PVC membranes addressed all of these concerns.

Extended service life and carbon reduction

Plaster finishes typically require resurfacing every seven to 12 years, depending on the water chemistry and usage patterns. Each resurfacing cycle involves demolition debris, cement-based materials (which emit high CO₂ levels), transportation emissions, staff travel, and large amounts of replacement water—all of which add to embodied carbon.

Reinforced PVC membranes are designed to last well beyond 20 years and are typically provided with a warranty that guarantees up to 20 years of watertightness. In public facilities, replacement often occurs before the end of service life for reasons unrelated to performance, such as esthetic preferences or planned renovation budgets. Avoiding just one resurfacing cycle can save:

- Thousands of kilograms of cement-related CO₂
- Multiple truckloads of demolition waste
- Weeks of downtime
- Tens of thousands of gallons of refill water
- Chemical rebalancing cycles
- Heater energy used to re-warm fresh water

The long-term carbon savings are substantial and accumulate over decades.

Reinforced PVC and the future of sustainable aquatic Materials

Modern reinforced PVC membranes incorporate increasing amounts of recycled content—up to 60 per cent in certain commercial membrane products—and can be recycled at the end of their service life. Some manufacturers hold certifications that ensure traceability of recycled inputs and verify their compliance with circular economy standards.

A notable example is a membrane developed for an international aquatic venue hosting the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Made from approximately 60 per cent recycled PVC and designed to be fully recyclable, the membrane performed at the highest level of international competition. This proven performance demonstrates that circular PVC membranes can deliver watertight integrity, structural protection, safety, and durability without compromising sustainability.

These advancements highlight a key message: reinforced PVC membranes are not only durable and chemically efficient but are also emerging as



leading examples of circular material innovation in aquatic infrastructure.

Long-term performance through smarter material choices

Across indoor, outdoor, municipal, competitive, and recreational facilities, reinforced PVC membranes reliably address the core environmental and operational challenges of aquatic design: water loss, structural degradation, chlorine instability, ongoing

repairs, frequent resurfacing, and unnecessary embodied carbon.

By selecting reinforced PVC, as demonstrated through actual installations at community pools, municipal aquatic centres, and major international competitive venues, designers and facility managers can greatly improve the sustainability, dependability, and long-term performance of aquatic facilities.

Sustainable design truly begins with durable materials. Reinforced PVC is built to last—and the results speak volumes. 



Matthew Sands is a sales engineer with RENOLIT and has more than 20 years of specialized experience in construction renovation, product installation, and project engineering. His background includes working for one of Europe's leading flooring manufacturers and supervising complex renovation projects such as the La Fenice Opera House in Venice and the LAC Cultural Center in Switzerland. At RENOLIT, Sands supports architects, installers, and distributors across North America with technical expertise, field training, and system design guidance. Additionally, he trains international customers through RENOLIT's Global Training Academies worldwide. He can be reached at matthew.sands@renolit.com.

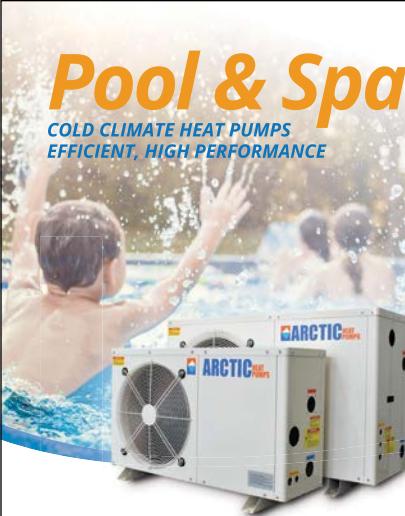
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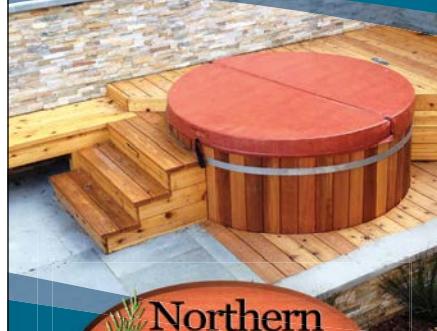
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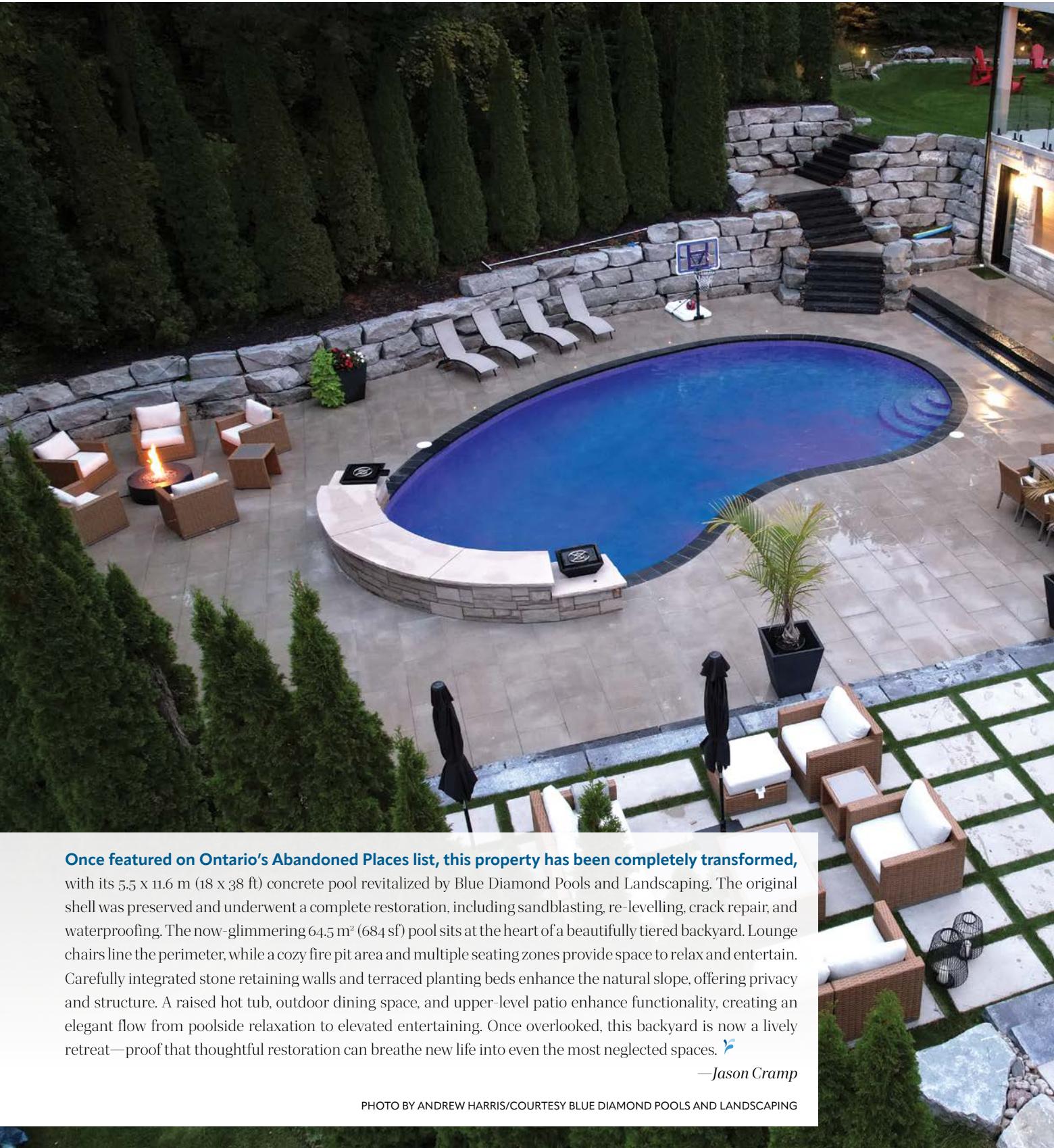
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Once featured on Ontario's Abandoned Places list, this property has been completely transformed, with its 5.5 x 11.6 m (18 x 38 ft) concrete pool revitalized by Blue Diamond Pools and Landscaping. The original shell was preserved and underwent a complete restoration, including sandblasting, re-levelling, crack repair, and waterproofing. The now-glimmering 64.5 m² (684 sf) pool sits at the heart of a beautifully tiered backyard. Lounge chairs line the perimeter, while a cozy fire pit area and multiple seating zones provide space to relax and entertain. Carefully integrated stone retaining walls and terraced planting beds enhance the natural slope, offering privacy and structure. A raised hot tub, outdoor dining space, and upper-level patio enhance functionality, creating an elegant flow from poolside relaxation to elevated entertaining. Once overlooked, this backyard is now a lively retreat—proof that thoughtful restoration can breathe new life into even the most neglected spaces. 

—Jason Cramp

PHOTO BY ANDREW HARRIS/COURTESY BLUE DIAMOND POOLS AND LANDSCAPING

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I have been self-employed for over 20 years but never in the retail market. The Northern Leisure marketing plan is easy to understand, easy to implement and follow. Everything is laid out for you to create a successful business.

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Jim Elliott, Bruce County Leisure Products Ltd. Port Elgin, ON



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