THE VOTES ARE IN: **2026 Readers' Choice Product Awards**

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POOL & SPA MARKETING

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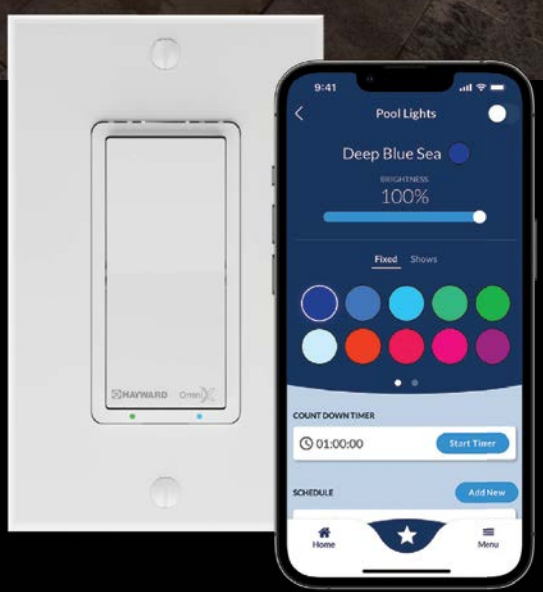

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A cast-concrete jump rock and sculpted boulders bring fresh character to this luxury pool, showing how targeted upgrades can refresh an aging backyard without a full rebuild. Artificial-rock kits give pool professionals a predictable way to add visual interest and extend the living space. From coping and water features to fire pits, a thoughtful retrofit can make the pool inviting again and easier to plan.

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1

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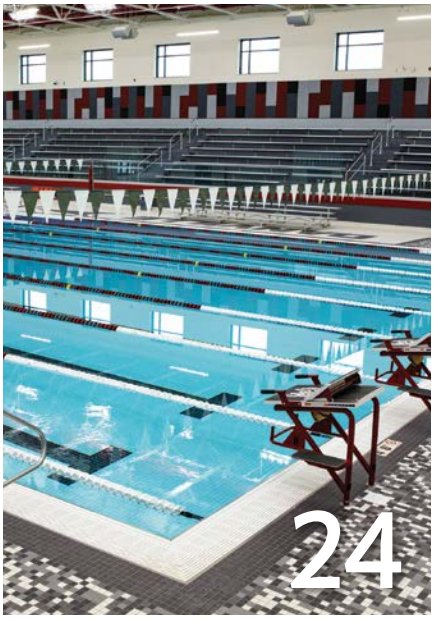

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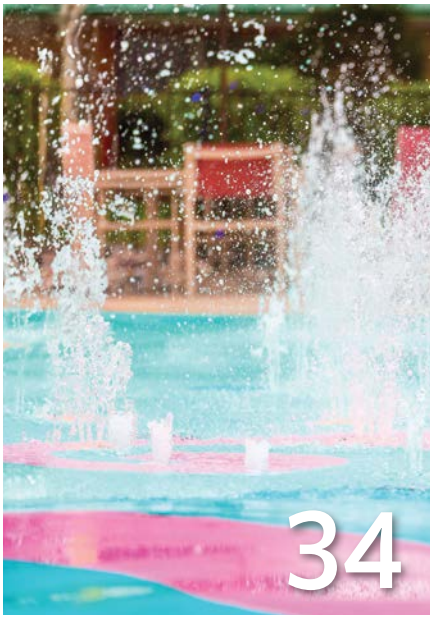

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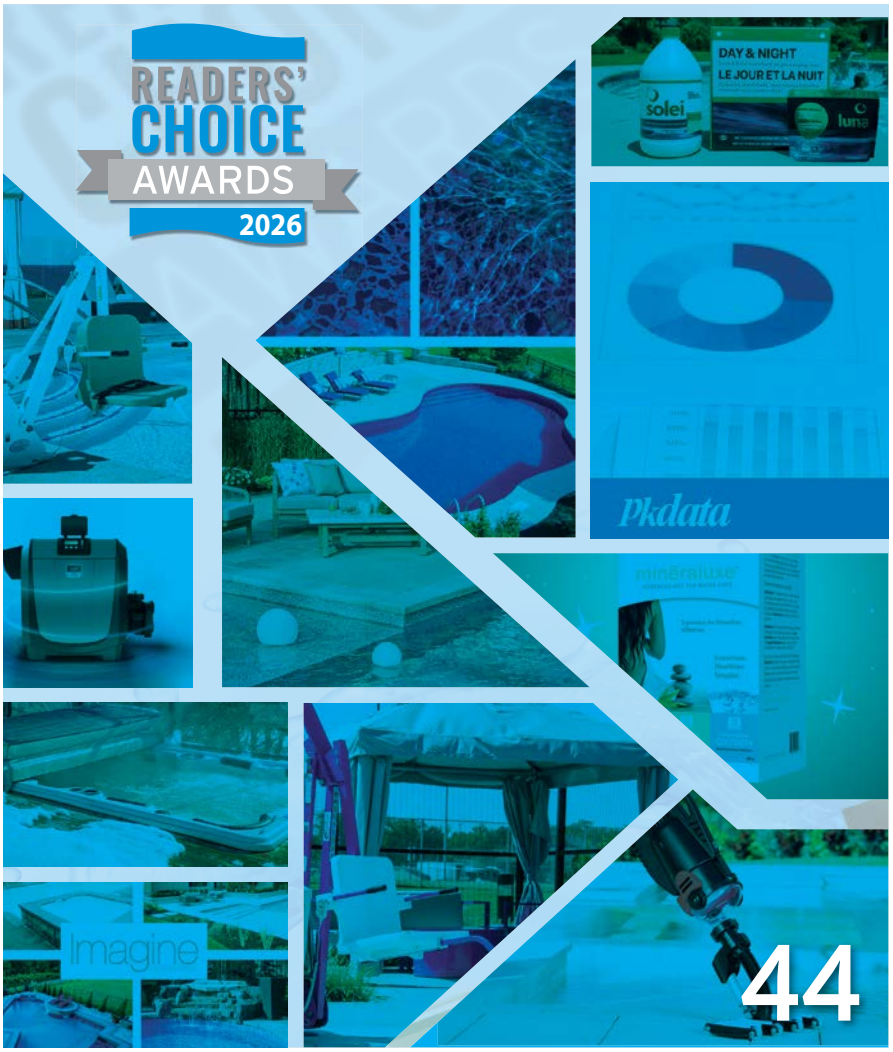

Top Pool Products for 2026

Celebrating innovation and craftsmanship across the pool and spa industry, the sixth annual *Pool & Spa Marketing* Readers' Choice Awards invited professionals to vote for the products that best represent excellence in design and technology.

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Making the Next Season Count

December brings a natural pause to the Canadian pool and spa season, but for pool professionals, it is also a chance to plan what comes next. This issue looks at off-season work—and how thoughtful upgrades, smarter operations, and useful innovation can prepare businesses and customers for the season ahead.

Our cover story, "The Backyard Retrofit" (page 16), by Bruce Riley, explores a growing opportunity: helping owners renew an existing pool rather than start over. Many backyards have sound structures but dated features, and homeowners are seeking fresh ways to enjoy them—from waterfalls and grottos to integrated spas and gathering spaces. As Riley puts it, "The structure is sound; the design is dated." For Canadian businesses, winter can be a valuable time to develop projects and, when conditions allow, complete work before spring openings fill the calendar. The reward is a backyard ready to enjoy from the start of the season.

That off-season planning also offers a moment to think about the expertise behind every service call. In "Sage, Rocky, and the Knowledge Harvest" (page 8), Dennis Gray considers how dealers can capture the practical knowledge experienced employees carry with them, and how AI tools might make it more accessible to the whole team. His point is not that technology replaces people, but that it can help preserve and extend what they know. "Dave's knowledge did not retire with him—it multiplied," Gray writes. As businesses navigate workforce turnover and increasingly technical products, knowledge-sharing is becoming an important part of operational resilience.

For commercial operators, resilience also means finding safer, more predictable ways to manage water. "Water Treatment for Commercial Pools" (page 24), by Myles Phelps, looks beyond the price on a chemical invoice to consider storage, maintenance, handling, and equipment costs. Jones sums up the calculation: "The useful metric is the cost of a kilogram of available chlorine delivered to the pool, not the cost of a litre delivered to the dock." The article examines solid chemical feeders and automated controllers, alongside emerging filtration technology, as ways to improve consistency and reduce operational burdens—while reminding operators to assess local costs, facility needs, and safety requirements.

Finally, our Readers' Choice Awards (page 44) celebrate products selected by industry professionals, from accessible pool lifts and hot tub care to cleaning, heating, and construction. The winners reflect the breadth of innovation shaping the market: solutions for easier maintenance, improved access, and more capable equipment, as well as products that help homeowners make more of the backyard they already have.

As the year winds down, these stories share a practical theme: progress does not always mean starting from scratch. It can mean renewing what is already there, carrying expertise forward, and choosing systems that work harder for the people who rely on them. That is a strong place to begin planning for the next season.



Jason Cramp
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Sage, Rocky, and the Knowledge Harvest

How the Intelligent Dealership Regains Its Tribal Knowledge

Editor's note: This is the final instalment of a four-part series by Dennis Gray on how independent pool and spa dealers can use artificial intelligence (AI) to keep expertise in the business.

By Dennis Gray

AI-GENERATED PHOTO COURTESY BACKYARD BRANDS INC.

This is a number that should keep every dealer owner awake at night.

Skilled workers are leaving North American trades faster than new ones are arriving. According to recruitment data from Handshake, applications per technical job posting among students using the platform fell by 49 per cent between 2020 and 2022.[1] BuildForce Canada projects that approximately 269,000 Canadian construction workers will retire by 2034, taking with them decades of practical experience and industry knowledge.[2] In the backyard leisure industry, this is not an abstract workforce trend. It is Dave.

Dave is a 28-year veteran. The one everyone calls when they are stuck. He can diagnose a heater problem by listening to it cycle. He knows that the calcium hardness in the west end of town runs 30 per cent higher than the east side because of a water main junction nobody documented. He can look at a water sample and know—before the test results come back—whether it is a phosphate problem or an early-stage algae bloom, because he has seen 10,000 samples and his pattern recognition runs on nearly 30 years of data.

None of that knowledge is written down. It lives in Dave's head, in handwritten notes stuffed in a

toolbox, and in instincts he cannot fully articulate. When Dave retires six months from now, that knowledge will not transfer to the next generation—it will vanish. And with it goes the diagnostic speed, the first-call resolution rate, and the customer confidence that Dave's expertise made possible.

This is not a staffing problem. Staffing problems have staffing solutions. This is a knowledge extinction event, and it requires a fundamentally different response.

Three kinds of tribal knowledge

Not all knowledge loss is the same. Understanding the three categories is the first step toward preventing it.

Leakable knowledge is expertise that walks out the door when an expert leaves. It is undigitized, undocumented, and irreplaceable through conventional training. Examples include Dave's diagnostic intuition, the retail manager who knows every hot tub owner's personality and buying patterns, or the installation specialist who can look at a mechanical room and know instantly whether the equipment layout will create service problems in two years. This knowledge was never captured by anyone else because nobody thought to capture it; it remained accessible until the person left.

Static knowledge is expertise that technically exists in documented form—but nobody uses it. This includes the three-ring binder of equipment manuals that has not been opened since 2019, the training videos from a product launch four years ago, and the installation guide that was accurate when it was written but does not reflect the three product updates since then. Static knowledge is not lost. It is trapped—locked in formats that are too slow, outdated, or inaccessible to be useful at the moment of truth.

Scarce knowledge is expertise that only one or two people in the organization possess. This could be the person who knows how to configure the salt system for the commercial installation, the technician who has diagnosed every heat pump model on the market, or the retail associate who has closed more hot tub sales than anyone in the company's history. Scarce

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Tribal knowledge taxonomy

Leakable knowledge

Expertise that walks out the door when an expert leaves—undigitized, undocumented, and irreplaceable through conventional training. This means Dave's diagnostic intuition, retail managers' relationship maps, and installation specialists' spatial judgment.

Static knowledge

Expertise that technically exists in documented form—but nobody uses it. Binder manuals, outdated training videos, and installation guides that no longer reflect current products. Not lost but trapped in formats too slow or outdated to be useful at the moment of truth.

Scarce knowledge

Expertise that only one or two people in the organization possess. The salt system specialist, the heat pump diagnostician, or the top-performing sales associate. It is neither documented nor widely distributed. When that person is unavailable, the entire operation degrades.



Sage is an AI advisor that draws on more than 50 years of accumulated water treatment science, product-specific formulations, and regional water profiles.

AI-GENERATED PHOTO COURTESY BACKYARD BRANDS INC.

knowledge is not documented; it is not widely distributed, and when the one person who has it is unavailable—sick, on vacation, retired—the entire operation degrades.

Every dealership has all three. And every dealership is losing all three—to retirement, turnover, and the simple passage of time. The question is not whether knowledge is being lost. It is about whether it is being captured faster than people leave.

Meet Sage: the retail JARVIS

Throughout this series, the articles have described what an AI-augmented dealership can do using general-purpose tools configured by skilled humans. It is time to see what happens when AI is purpose-built for backyard leisure from the ground up.

Sage is an AI advisor designed to live on every team member's phone and every customer-facing screen in the dealership. It is not a chatbot, and it is not a search engine. It is the embodiment of the Augmented Human Intelligence (AHI) principle—a system that knows because of people, not instead of people.

When Priya—the retail associate from the third article—faces a customer with a complex water chemistry question, Sage does not give her a generic answer pulled from the internet. Sage draws on more than 50 years of accumulated water treatment science, product-specific formulations, regional water profiles, and diagnostic protocols developed by the people who created the products. It knows the product line the way Dave knows it—because Dave's knowledge, and the knowledge of every expert who built these products, is encoded in the system.

Sage operates in multiple modes. In dealer staff mode, it provides comprehensive diagnostic support, product recommendations, and selling guidance calibrated for the trained professional. In consumer mode—available to homeowners through the dealership's digital channels—it provides accessible, brand-specific guidance that drives product usage and subscription renewal.

This is not a future product. Sage is live and deployed across hundreds of Canadian dealerships. It has been demonstrated at dealer conferences across the country and is operating on iOS, Android, and the web. It is learning from every interaction, growing more capable with every question, becoming more valuable with every deployment.

Remember Sarah from the first article—the associate who diagnosed the water chemistry cascade failure in four minutes? That was not hypothetical; it was Sage in action.

Meet Rocky: the field JARVIS

If Sage is the suit for the retail floor, Rocky is the same thing for the mechanical room.

Rocky is the AI-powered field service companion designed for technicians. It is voice-activated and hands-free. When James encounters the erratic pump cycling described in the third article, Rocky is the voice in his ear. It walks him through diagnostic sequences, identifying probable causes, confirming his instincts, and providing equipment-specific guidance drawn from a comprehensive knowledge base of installation procedures, troubleshooting decisions, parts identification, and field-proven repair protocols.

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The accretive loop: every interaction compounds the intelligence. Six months of learning creates an exponential advantage.

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Rocky is an AI-powered field service companion. Voice-activated and hands-free, it is the veteran's knowledge at every moment of truth.

AI-GENERATED PHOTO COURTESY BACKYARD BRANDS INC.

The design principle behind Rocky is simple and absolute: hands on tools, eyes on work. A technician in a mechanical room cannot stop what they are doing, pull out a phone and look for an answer, and then resume the repair. Rocky replaces that broken workflow with a conversational interface working the way field technicians do—by talking through the problem.

"Rocky, I've got a variable-speed pump cycling on and off every four minutes. No error code on the display. The capacitor was replaced last week by another company. What should I check next?" James asks. Rocky responds with a diagnostic sequence tailored to the equipment, symptom pattern, and repair history. The technician never takes their hands off their work. Their eyes never leave the equipment. Dave's knowledge, distilled and multiplied, is right there, at the moment of truth.

The Iron Man parallel is completed here. Rocky is the field service suit. The camera on the technician's phone or in their smart glasses captures what the technician sees. Rocky's knowledge base interprets what it sees; the technician drives the interaction, the repair gets done, and the customer is served. The knowledge that made it possible did not come from a manual nobody reads or a phone call to an expert who is no longer there. It came from an intelligent system that carries 53 years of expertise in every technician's pocket.

As writer, inventor, and explorer Arthur C. Clarke stated, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." To the homeowner watching a first-year technician diagnose their equipment with the confident fluency of a decades-long veteran, it does look like magic. But behind that confidence is a system, a methodology, and a principle: to build tools that make humans more capable, never less necessary.

The accretive loop: knowledge that compounds

Here is where Sage and Rocky become something more than applications. Here is where they become a moat.

Every interaction makes the system smarter. Every water chemistry diagnosis adds to the pattern library. Every equipment troubleshooting sequence refines the diagnostic decision tree. Every customer interaction that ends successfully reinforces the recommendation engine. Every interaction that fails teaches the system what to do differently.

This is not static software that ships a version and waits for the next update. This is a learning system that compounds. The more the team uses it, the better it gets, and the better it gets, the more the team uses it. This widens the gap between a dealership's capabilities and those of its competitors.

Think about that in competitive terms. A dealership that deployed Sage and Rocky six months ago has six months of accumulated learning baked into its system. A dealership that deploys today starts with a full knowledge base but lacks local learning. A dealership that waits another year falls further behind—not linearly, but exponentially, because the learning compounds.

This is the early-adopter advantage described in the first article, made concrete. The advantage is not just that a dealership started using AI first; it is that their AI has been learning from their specific



market, customers, and challenges for longer. That learning cannot be purchased. It can only be earned through deployment.

The underlying architecture of both Sage and Rocky is designed to work across any field service industry where human expertise matters—a patent-pending platform that captures, compounds, and delivers domain-specific knowledge at the point of need. For backyard leisure dealers, it carries the accumulated wisdom of five decades of water treatment science and product innovation. The architecture itself, however, is industry-agnostic. The fuel changes, but the engine is the same.

Dave's knowledge does not retire

Going back to Dave. He is six months from retirement with 28 years of diagnostic intuition. As the person everyone calls, he has the dealership's institutional memory, walking around in work boots and a company polo.

In the old model, Dave's last day is a knowledge funeral. Colleagues say nice things at the retirement lunch and wish him well. Then the calls that used to go to Dave start going to voicemail, junior techs who do not have the answers, or to competitors who do.

In the AHI model, Dave's last six months have been a period of knowledge harvesting. As he works through his final season of service calls, the system observes. It captures his diagnostic patterns and records the questions he asks and the order in which he asks them. The system also details the judgment calls—the moments when Dave overrides the obvious answer because something about the situation does not feel right—and he has learned to trust that instinct over three decades. It documents the shortcuts, the field-tested workarounds, and the "try this first" heuristics that no training manual contains because nobody ever thought to write them down.

Not every piece of Dave's expertise can be captured. The human element—the reassuring tone with an anxious customer, the rapport built over years of service, the judgment that comes from having seen everything twice—that stays with Dave.





Dave's knowledge did not retire with him. It multiplied and became available to every team member at every moment of truth.

AI-GENERATED PHOTO COURTESY BACKYARD BRANDS INC.

But the diagnostic knowledge, pattern recognition, and decision frameworks do not have to leave with Dave. They become part of the institutional intelligence that every current and future team member can access, at every moment of truth, forever.

Six months after Dave's retirement, two new technicians at the dealership are performing at levels that used to take five years to reach. They are not as good as Dave; nobody is. But they are 80 per cent of him on their toughest day and getting better every week, because the knowledge that feeds their AI assistant is still growing, compounding, and learning.

Dave's knowledge did not retire with him—it actually multiplied.

The invitation

Four articles. One argument. The backyard leisure industry is at an inflection point. The expertise that built this industry—the diagnostic intuition, the product knowledge, and customer relationships that make independent dealers irreplaceable—is walking out the door faster than it can be replaced through traditional means. The poachers and pillagers, such as online retailers, mass merchants, and mobile service companies, do not need dealers' expertise. They compete on convenience, price, and scale, and they are winning customers who should be with traditional dealerships.

But they have a structural weakness. They cannot replicate what dealers know, cannot build the relationships a dealer's team builds, and cannot deliver the judgment, empathy, and accountability that a skilled human provides face-to-face. They can sell a box of chemicals, but they cannot look a homeowner in the eye and say, "If this doesn't work, I'll fix it," and mean it.

AHI does not replace that advantage; it amplifies it. It captures it before it retires and multiplies it across every team member. It makes it available at every moment of truth—on the retail floor, in the service van, and in the customer's backyard at 6:30 p.m. on a Tuesday.

Sage and Rocky are live, deployed, and learning across hundreds of Canadian dealerships. The four skills these articles discussed—prompt engineering, concept engineering, context window management, and the discipline to choose real tools over free toys—are learnable by any team willing to invest the effort.

The three futures named in the first article have not changed. AI will replace teams, augment teams, or dealers will pretend nothing is happening and watch the parking lot empty one customer at a time.

The "intelligent dealership" is not a prediction, but an invitation. The competitive window is open. The knowledge is harvestable. The moat is buildable.

The only question is whether dealers will be among the first to suit up—or the last to realize they needed to.

Notes

[1] Handshake recruitment data, as reported by Scripps News, "Fewer young adults applying for trade positions despite more openings," WRTV, Jan. 24, 2023, wrtv.com/news/fewer-young-adults-applying-for-trade-positions-despite-more-openings

[2] BuildForce Canada, *"Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward 2025–2034" (2025).*



Dennis Gray is president of Backyard Brands Inc. and the architect of the Augmented Human Intelligence (AHI) platform deployed across more than 260 independent Canadian pool and spa dealerships. With 53 years of industry experience, he leads Backyard Brands' mission to ensure that independent dealers build the expertise moat that makes them irreplaceable.

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The Backyard Retrofit

Revitalizing Pools Using Cast-Concrete Rock Kits

By Bruce Riley

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1

Pool professionals are getting more and more calls from pool owners who want to update their 20-year-old pools. Often, the pool was originally built for a family that used it for diving and swimming, but now the owners simply want to sit by the pool in the evenings or entertain friends. The structure is sound; the design is dated. That makes the job a retrofit rather than a rebuild, and one of the easiest and fastest ways to give an existing pool a new look is to use cast-concrete rock.

Whether it is adding a water feature, replacing the coping, integrating a hot tub, or building a fire pit, cast-concrete artificial rock gives pools a "wow" factor. Artificial rock suppliers now offer a wide range of predesigned water feature components in kits to create grottos, caves, and cascading waterfalls, providing a predictable finished look that suits the client's home and backyard. These systems are designed to work with cast-concrete coping stones, boulders, and faux rock panels to renovate all areas around the pool, while also providing ample lighting and landscaping options.

As pools close for the season, this is also the right time to start the conversation. A retrofit that is designed and sold over the fall and winter, and installed where the weather allows, means the client pulls the cover off in the spring to a finished backyard rather than a construction schedule.

A retrofit any pool pro can specify

When pool owners are looking for advice or ideas for renovating their pools, they turn to their pool professional first. Many pros have embraced this opportunity, going beyond cleaning and balancing water chemistry to upgrade and install equipment and add railings, fencing, lighting, decking, and







Left: Water cascades from a cast-concrete rock feature into the pool, illustrating the type of water feature that is considered to be a pool retrofit.

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1

Right: This cast-concrete rock feature beside the pool illustrates how retrofits add a new focal point without rebuilding the pool.

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1

water features. Simple artificial rock structures are another impactful addition to that list, and they are easier than many think.

Even a pool professional who has not personally installed artificial rock water features can use the photo galleries offered by manufacturers, suppliers, and websites like Houzz, to inspire the client. Focusing on simple kits and stand-alone products makes it easy to start with something as modest as a jump rock or a small cascading waterfall and build from there. Because these are kits, the pool professional knows the price up front, which makes them easy to sell. And because they are component systems, what the client sees in the brochure is what they will get in their pool, right down to the rock colour.

Jay O'Neil, owner of Jobb 1, located near Windsor, Ont., has been installing cast-concrete water features for more than 15 years. "I love the water feature cast-concrete products because they are easy to sell and easy to install, especially for renovations on existing pools," says O'Neil. "When you are working with an existing pool, the deck is not likely to be constructed to support the weight of natural stone, but because these products are so much lighter in weight, there is

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A low cast-concrete rock feature sits beside the pool, illustrating how rock work can be incorporated into the surrounding hardscape.

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1



This backyard shows rock features being incorporated around the pool as part of a retrofit.

PHOTO COURTESY JOBB 1

no problem adding their water features on an existing pool and deck."

Demand is there, too. Pool professionals report a growing number of requests for renovations to existing pools, creating more opportunities to sell artificial rock features designed for use around pools. "Customers in our area really want water features on their pool," says O'Neil. "Price and how they plan to use the water feature tend to dictate their choices; older clients tend to want water features for their sound and beauty while younger families are looking for water features that are fun for swimmers, like grottos and jumping platforms."

Reframing the perimeter

Many pool professionals know the call: the coping has cracked, and tiles are starting to fall into the pool. In that situation, cast-concrete coping is worth proposing. It is a one-piece tile-and-coping product made of fibre-reinforced concrete, and it can be cemented directly over the existing tile, cantilevering into the water.

Replacing only the tile rarely solves the problem, because in regions with harsh winters, the damage tends to recur. The cost is often comparable to a tile replacement because one crew handles both the tile and the coping rather than two separate trades, and an entire perimeter can typically be finished in two to three days.

New cast-concrete coping immediately transforms the pool and backyard. Starting with the coping also opens the door to a conversation about other upgrades, such as rock water features.

The focal point: engineered water features

Adding one or two water features is one of the most visible ways to renovate a pool, and cast-concrete component systems are a straightforward way to do it. Because the components are cast from real rock, they reproduce its shape, character, and texture, making the finished feature difficult to distinguish from natural stone.

Unlike natural stone, these systems are available as kits. Once a customer chooses a style, the builder can order the kit and assemble the parts on-site. They are steel- or fibre-reinforced, and they generally cost less than natural stone.



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Workers assemble rock components beside the pool, reflecting the on-site assembly used for cast-concrete feature systems.

PHOTO COURTESY RICOROCK

For builders, the biggest advantage is predictability: the finished feature matches what the client saw in the photo gallery. That matters most with water features, because water flowing over the rock has to return to the pool. If it does not, it can get underneath the pool and cause serious damage. Component systems are engineered to manage that flow and to distribute weight properly. "The water features go together nicely and are easy to build and maintain so you don't need to worry about leaks, which are a real issue when you are building with natural stone," says O'Neil. "With these kits I can show the client the brochure, and what they order is exactly the way it will look once installed; no worrying about leaks or the way the water will cascade. They work perfectly every time."

They can also be installed in a day or two, much faster than natural stone. The labour savings help builders stay on schedule and on budget, whereas custom rock work can easily run past the original quote.

Options suited to renovations include a double modular waterfall with two spillways, measuring 3.7 m (12 ft) long and 1.2 m (4 ft) high at its highest point, and a loveseat grotto, a rock canopy built over a small seat where swimmers can sit inside the feature. "I also like the fact that these products are modular, so I can make larger water features by adding products together to give clients the look they want on their pool renovation," explains O'Neil.

Renovation makes sense for young families looking to add fun for their kids and for empty nesters who want a quiet backyard. Owners whose children have left home often stop swimming altogether. A waterfall gives them a reason to use the space again, whether that means listening to the water with a drink in the evening or eating breakfast outside.

Structural swap: diving board to jump rock

One straightforward retrofit option is to replace a diving board with a cast-concrete jump rock. Jump rocks are self-contained features that can serve as an appealing first project for professionals new to artificial rock installations. Over time, diving boards can become worn and unsightly, which makes this an attractive upgrade.

Once the old diving board is removed, a jump rock can be installed in its place to match the coping and waterfall. Cast concrete withstands harsh winters without rusting or peeling, and a step built into the back of the 0.9-m-tall (3-ft-tall) rock makes it easy to climb. Where a dated diving board detracts from the pool, a jump rock adds to it. "We literally just removed a diving board from a pool, and we are putting in a 5-ft [1.5-m] artificial rock installation in its place," says



Workers carry a rock component during installation, illustrating the on-site work involved in adding a pool water feature.

PHOTO COURTESY RICOROCK

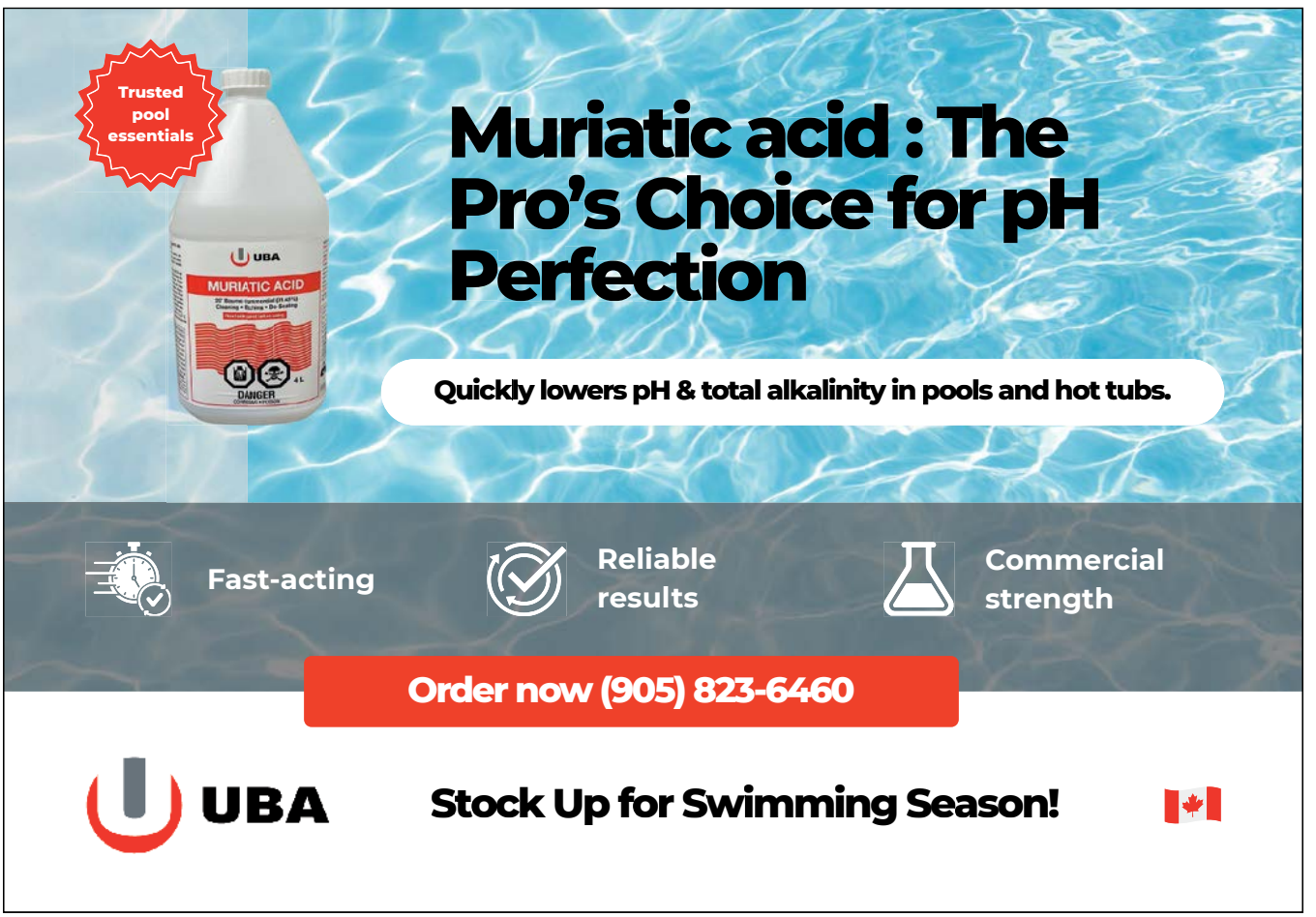
O'Neil. "It will have a grotto, water flow over the top, and once it's all done, the pool will have a water feature and jump rocks; the kids will love it."

O'Neil explains that diving boards have not only become less popular but are also quite cost-prohibitive. "Because of current pricing on diving boards, we can install a smaller water feature and jump rock system for the same price as replacing an old diving board, so clients are more interested in retrofitting their pool with something more exciting and functional that also really changes the look of their pool and backyard."

One hardscape: spas and fire pits

Pool owners often have spillover or raised spas that may not blend seamlessly with the surrounding pool and deck area. One effective method to integrate the spa into its environment is to use cast-concrete rock. This material can wrap around the spa's perimeter, complementing the cast-concrete coping and any nearby water features. In some cases, smaller acrylic hot tubs can be installed flush with the deck and paired with cast-concrete rock coping for a cohesive look.

Fire pits can also be built with cast-concrete rock. Crews excavate the area, add clean stone for drainage, and surround the pit with cast-concrete boulders, creating a gathering spot for evening socializing.





Water flowing over a cast-concrete rock waterfall shows how a water feature can add a focal point to an existing pool.
PHOTO COURTESY RICOROCK

The off-season build window

For pool businesses in colder climates, the service schedule slows between the closing and opening seasons. That makes the off-season the best time to sell a retrofit. The problems that prompt a renovation, such as cracked coping, loose tile, or a rusting diving board, are fresh in the owner's mind at closing, and there is time to talk through what the backyard could become.

Cast-concrete kits suit that conversation. The pool does not need to be open to sell one: the photo gallery shows exactly what the client will get, and the kit price is known up front. The client has the winter to choose a style and rock colour, and the kit can be ordered and on hand before the first opening of the year.

Installation can often move into the off-season as well. Because a coping perimeter takes two to three days and a component water feature a day or two, these projects fit into the short windows of workable weather in late fall and early spring. Features that sit away from the water, such as fire pits and boulder groupings, do not depend on the pool being open at all. Cement work does need suitable temperatures, so installers should follow the manufacturer's guidance and plan around the forecast.

The payoff comes in the spring. The retrofit is already complete, or first in line, instead of competing for a place on a crowded opening-season calendar. The client opens the pool to new coping, a waterfall, and a jump rock, and enjoys the whole season rather than losing weeks of it to construction. The pool professional, meanwhile, has added a new revenue stream in the slow months.

Finishing details: light and landscape

Once the rock work is complete, pool professionals can finish the retrofit with lighting and landscaping, which give the features a resort-like feel day and night. LED lights can be drilled directly into the rock, but because water features are tricky to light, installers often leave room for soil and plantings behind the feature, where uplights can be placed. A colour-changing light set in the pool directly beneath the cascade reflects up onto the waterfall. Landscaping then ties everything together.

For pool professionals, retrofit projects are rewarding work. Clients get new use out of an investment they had stopped enjoying, and the result is on display every time they entertain.



Bruce Riley is the managing director of RicoRock, a maker of cast-concrete rock products, including component systems for building caves and grottos, waterfalls, and waterslides for pool applications. Riley focuses on developing new products and managing commercial installations. He has built rock-type pools in Southern California for more than 25 years and now uses this experience to design standard waterfall kits for the company. He can be reached via email at bruce@ricorock.com.

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Water Treatment for Commercial Pools

The Case for Solid Chemistry and Smart Control

By Myles Phelps

PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC

Tablet and briquette feeders, paired with automated controllers, are changing the economics and safety profile of commercial water treatment. And a newer, chemical-free filtration aid is pushing the gains further.

More and more commercial aquatic facilities are taking a closer look at the real costs of liquid sodium hypochlorite compared with solid calcium hypochlorite tablets. Liquid chlorine is familiar, widely available, and usually the least expensive option per litre. The purchase price, however, is only part of what a facility pays.

Many of the costs associated with liquid chlorine do not appear on a chemical invoice, and some are not easy to quantify. The product loses strength in storage. Its high pH drives up acid use. Fumes and leaks corrode equipment. Feed pumps and tubing need frequent repair, and bulk storage requires





Automated controllers measure pool chemistry and regulate chemical feed to help keep sanitizer levels steady.

PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC



containment and careful handling. All these side effects cost facilities time, money, and effort, and several raise safety concerns for staff and patrons.

This article looks at those costs and explains why a growing number of operators are moving to solid chemistry: calcium hypochlorite tablets or briquettes for sanitizing and sodium bisulfate tablets for pH control, managed by an automated chemistry controller. It also examines a newer, emerging filtration technology that can further reduce chemical demand.

What liquid really costs

The first hidden cost is the product itself. Liquid chlorine begins to lose strength the day it is made, and heat, sunlight, pH drift, and trace metal





Fumes from liquid acid can corrode equipment and metal structures, adding maintenance and safety concerns in the chemical room.

PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC

contamination all accelerate the decline. Literature data cited in a 2022 white paper[1] on chemical costs in commercial pools show that with a short half-life, 12 per cent bleach loses roughly 20 per cent of its effectiveness in 20 days when stored at 29 C (85 F), and about half at 38 C (100 F). A facility with a hot pump room in July is paying for chlorine that never reaches the water. It is also feeding from a pump calibrated to a concentration that no longer exists.

The second is weight. Liquid chlorine is mostly water. The paper calculates that a 27-kg (60-lb) pail of calcium hypochlorite tablets delivers about 18 kg (40 lb) of available chlorine. Matching that amount with 12 per cent bleach takes roughly 150 L (40 gal), weighing close to 177 kg (390 lb). A single staff member can carry the pail. The bleach needs a hand truck at minimum, or a fixed bulk tank with truck access designed into the site.

Then come the costs of keeping a corrosive liquid where it belongs. Secondary containment is often required by code for liquid chlorine and acid, and polyethylene storage tanks should be proactively replaced every four to seven years. Bleach also releases trace corrosive fumes that attack electrical panels, electronic controls, and metal structures. A pinhole leak that produces mist multiplies the damage.

Finally, there is the chemical feed equipment. Peristaltic pump tubing in liquid bleach or acid service may need to be replaced every few weeks. Diaphragm pumps avoid tubing replacement, but their check valves can leak back, and oxygen bubbles released as bleach decomposes can cause gas-locking. They may also lose prime frequently, requiring a skilled person to re-prime them. For efficient operation, they need to be mounted directly above the tank with a straight vertical suction line; however, exposure to chemical fumes in that position can make them corrode faster than peristaltic pumps. Each failure can result in a loss of residual, a service call, or a pool closure.

How solid feed changes the picture

Calcium hypochlorite tablets and briquettes carry roughly 65 to 70 per cent available chlorine, against 10 to 12 per cent for liquid. Stored cool and dry, they hold that strength for months. What an operator buys is what the pool gets.

The delivery method matters as much as the chemical. In an erosion feeder, a controlled stream of pool water flows into the bottom of the erosion feeder, gradually dissolving the tablets or briquettes from the bottom up at a predictable rate. The chlorinated solution returns to the circulation line through rigid PVC pipe, moved by the circulation pump or a small booster. Depending on the feeder design, small-bore tubing may also carry the solution to a venturi. These systems use solid

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Sodium bisulfate tablets offer a dry-acid option for pH control, with fewer corrosive fumes than muriatic acid.

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Calcium hypochlorite tablets provide solid chlorine for commercial pool sanitizing and retain their strength for months when stored cool and dry.

PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC

chemical rather than storing a supply of concentrated liquid chemical in the room.

That last point reshapes the risk profile. Manufacturer data indicates that the solution leaves a tablet feeder at 100 to 300 parts per million (ppm) and at a pH near 10.5. Bulk bleach has a concentration of roughly 120,000 ppm and a pH near 13. A leak from a tablet feeder spills mildly chlorinated water onto the floor. A spilled pail can be swept up. Because solids do not flow, the need for secondary containment is greatly reduced, and, in many cases, eliminated.

Maintenance requirements depend on the feeder technology and manufacturer. Spray-based systems may need thorough cleaning only once or twice a year, while some other erosion-feeder designs may require monthly cleaning or more. PVC components can last for many years. For staff, routine work with a solid-chemical feeder includes refilling the hopper; cleaning and other maintenance requirements vary by system.

One clarification for anyone weighing tablet options: Calcium hypochlorite is unstabilized. This means it does not add cyanuric acid, which is why it suits public pools where trichlor tablets do not. Cyanuric acid buildup slows disinfection and can confuse automated controllers.

The pH dividend

Acid is the chemical cost that liquid chlorine quietly inflates. The same white paper reports that when facilities move from bleach to calcium hypochlorite

tablets, overall acid use often drops significantly, in some cases by as much as two-thirds.

The reason is the calcium. A portion of it, typically 10 to 20 per cent, reacts with bicarbonate alkalinity in the pool to form calcium carbonate, which is captured in the filter and leaves with the backwash. Alkalinity that would otherwise have to be neutralized with acid is removed instead. The effect is strongest where fill water is highly alkaline.

The acid that is still needed can also be fed dry. As an alternative to muriatic acid, sodium bisulfate tablets also use erosion-feeder technology. The tablets cost more per pound than standard-strength muriatic acid, though the comparison does not establish equivalent potency or dosage. The case for them is the pump room. Muriatic acid fumes attack steel, aluminum, copper, concrete, and the electronics that run the facility. Dry acid tablets are practically fumeless, so ventilation demands fall and equipment lasts longer.

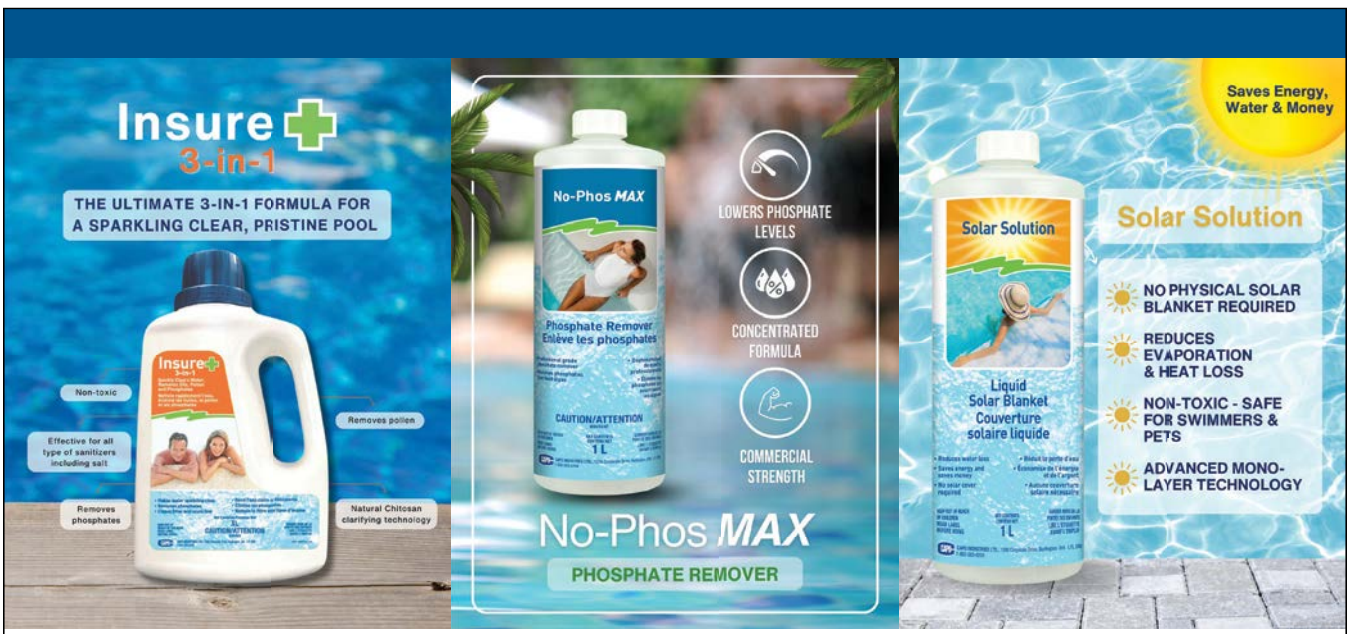
There is a logistics benefit as well. Solid products eliminate the risk of liquid leaks and splashes that make acid and bleach deliveries hazardous. However, acid and chlorine tablets still need to be kept separate in transit and storage.

Facilities that use carbon dioxide for pH control have a hybrid option. Carbon dioxide lowers pH but does nothing to reduce alkalinity, which climbs until the gas feed can no longer keep up. A controller can run carbon dioxide for routine control and call on dry acid only when alkalinity needs correcting.

The controller closes the loop

A feeder determines how chemicals enter the water. A controller decides when and how much, and that is where consistency for swimmers is won.

Current commercial controllers continuously measure pH and oxidation-reduction potential, and many now measure free chlorine directly in parts per million using membrane sensors. Higher-end units add total dissolved solids, alkalinity, combined chlorine, and a calculated saturation index. Feed is proportional: The further a reading drifts from its setpoint, the harder the system responds, and it



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In this particular erosion feeder, pool water gradually dissolves tablets from the bottom up before the chlorinated solution returns to the circulation line.

PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC

eases off as the target approaches. Residuals hold steady through a swim meet or a crowded Saturday instead of swinging between too little and too much.

Solid chemistry makes that job easier. A controller dosing a product of constant strength can rely on the same response every day. A controller dosing bleach is chasing a concentration that changes with the weather and the age of the delivery.

The safety functions matter just as much. Flow interlocks lock out chemical feed whenever circulation stops. Without that protection, acid, and chlorine can collect in a static line and, when the pump restarts, reach the pool as chlorine gas. The white paper notes that the simultaneous feeding of acid and chlorine has caused gas releases that have sickened bathers. Liquid systems carry a second exposure, too. Bulk deliveries have been pumped into the wrong tank.

Remote access completes the picture. Operators receive text or email alarms, check dashboards from a phone, adjust setpoints off-site, and pull logs for public health inspections. A manager can supervise several facilities, and a technician can diagnose a problem before driving to it. Many controllers also co-ordinate filter backwash, variable-speed pumps, and ultraviolet (UV) systems, extending the savings to water and energy.

Following the money

Tablets cost more to manufacture than bleach, and the invoice reflects it. The question is what happens when the rest of the ledger is included.

The white paper lists five items every operator should price before comparing sanitizers: product lost to degradation; acid demand; corrosion damage and replacement; hazard mitigation, such as containment, worker training, and engineering controls; and accident avoidance. It concludes that once those are counted, tablet systems are typically a very viable choice in terms of total cost.

Once the labour and handling required to handle that liquid are factored in, tablet chemicals can be the less expensive option. They are also the safer one, a benefit that is hard to quantify. Every facility's numbers will differ, so the comparison is worth running with local pricing, actual storage temperatures, and real maintenance logs. The useful metric is the cost of a kilogram of available chlorine delivered to the pool, not the cost of a litre delivered to the dock.

Then there is the cost that never shows up until it does. As the white paper warns, fines or litigation from a single chlorine gas release could easily dwarf every other line item.

Next: reducing the demand itself

Better feed and better control make the most of every kilogram of chemical. An emerging technology aims at the other side of the equation: how much chemical the water demands in the first place.

It is called electronic flocculation. A compact unit sends a pulsed, low-frequency electromagnetic signal through the recirculation system. The signal changes the surface charge on fine suspended particles, organic and inorganic, causing them to clump into masses large enough for the filter to catch. It works around the clock with existing sand

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Calcium hypochlorite briquettes are a solid sanitizer with roughly 65 to 70 per cent available chlorine.
PHOTO COURTESY LANDMARK AQUATIC

or other media filters, adds no chemical to the water, and, according to one municipal operator, has required no maintenance.

The link to chemical use is direct. Organic matter trapped in the filter is organic matter the sanitizer no longer has to oxidize, and it is the raw material for the chloramines behind eye irritation and the familiar natatorium smell. In field testing by the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), one pool recorded a 36 per cent reduction in combined chlorine and a 27 per cent reduction in makeup water. The developer says operators have also reported being able to dial back their chemistry.

Water savings are the headline result so far. At one municipal pool, operators reported a 79 per cent drop in turbidity and stretched backwashes from every two days to every 10 days, saving more than 745,000 L (197,000 gal). Another municipality installed the technology at three indoor pools in 2025 and projected savings of 4.5 million L (1.2 million gal) a year, along with lower chemical use and less chlorine odour. Clearer water also raises ultraviolet transmittance, which helps UV systems perform as designed.

What to plan for

Solid chemistry is not maintenance-free, and a conversion goes better when the trade-offs are understood up front.

- Calcium hardness—most of the calcium in the tablets stays in the water, so hardness rises gradually. Track the saturation index, plan dilution when the source water is already hard, and adhere to the feeder cleaning schedule to stay ahead of scale.
- Storage—calcium hypochlorite is a strong oxidizer. It needs a cool, dry, ventilated space away from acids and organic materials. Feeders should only be loaded with the product they were built for, never with another type of chlorine tablet.
- Approvals and sizing—confirm equipment is certified to NSF/ANSI/CAN 50, check local health code requirements, and size the feeder for peak demand, not the average day.
- Training—lower risk does not mean no risk. Staff still need instruction on handling, feeder cleaning, and sensor calibration.

The bottom line

The pump room is where a facility's water quality, staff safety, and operating budget meet. Liquid chlorine requires operators to manage a product that degrades in storage, corrodes its surroundings, and relies on the most failure-prone equipment in the building.

Solid chlorine and dry acid, fed by erosion and governed by a controller that measures continuously and reports remotely, remove much of that burden. Filtration aids such as electronic flocculation promise to further reduce chemical demand. For patrons, the payoff is steadier, clearer water. For staff, it is a safer place to work. For owners, it is an asset that lasts longer and costs less to run.

Notes

[1] See Stanley R. Pickens, PhD, "Untangling the Total Cost: Chemical Related Expenses in Commercial Pools," Swim-Chem Consulting Services, Jan. 20, 2022, https://www.westlakewatersolutions.com/Portals/4/Resources/Untangling%20White_Paper_Digital%20Read%20Version%201%2020%202022.pdf



Myles Phelps is the vice president of strategic partnerships for Landmark Aquatic, a nationwide provider of commercial aquatic facility design, construction, and maintenance services. An aquatics industry veteran, Phelps has more than 14 years of experience, beginning behind the wheel of a chemical truck, which has given him a deep understanding of what it takes to keep aquatic facilities thriving. He can be reached via email at mphelps@landmarkaquatic.com.

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Smarter Safety Starts with Staff

Training and Technology Strengthen Aquatic Operations

By Briana Valente

PHOTO COURTESY LIFE FLOOR

Bright, innovative products with incredible promises top the charts year after year. A growing market trend highlights products that do not sacrifice beautiful design for reliable, inclusive safety. Alongside these products, there is an increasing demand for better, more engaging education across platforms. Education is equally, if not more, vital for creating safer facilities through the people who make them possible.

Education helps staff better use technology and implement products effectively, improving operational efficiency and the guest experience. While it may not always deliver immediate results, investing in education is meaningful because it can reduce turnover, increase job satisfaction, and foster workplace advocacy.

Aquatic facilities can improve their operations and guest experience by using safety products alongside ongoing education initiatives. They must focus on proactive strategies rather than depending only on reactive responses.

Proactive strategies include allocating planned professional development funds to employees, mandatory group training seminars, required quotas of continuing education units (CEUs), or even team outings to national conferences. These approaches are more easily adopted than reacting chaotically to new training requirements resulting from incidents. Lastly, maintain consistency in all efforts. Encourage teams weekly, lead by example every day, and always foster an open attitude to cultivate an innovative mindset for both the team and the company as a whole.

Richard A. (RAC) Carroll, chief operating officer of Ellis & Associates, comments on meaningful education by saying, "It's important that people can



Classroom and virtual learning environments support education and professional development by helping aquatic staff build knowledge, share ideas, and prevent working in silos.

PHOTO COURTESY LIFE FLOOR

touch it, feel it, make the mistake, try again, and know that they can find a way to get better at it."

Virtual learning is a fantastic tool for steady professional growth. Still, it is best complemented by hands-on encounters in controlled environments that offer practical experience and help people avoid critical mistakes at work.

Education often occurs with others, and shared effort fosters friendships and networking. Classroom settings and virtual learning environments help people avoid working in silos. This is a major reason why in-person office work is strongly encouraged and why the shift to remote work was challenging for many extroverts during COVID-19 isolation.

Carroll adds, "It's about getting individuals to understand how important relationships are. Good people with good relationships are more important than the products in some regards."

Whether it is a classmate or a colleague, people often rely on each other for both encouragement and

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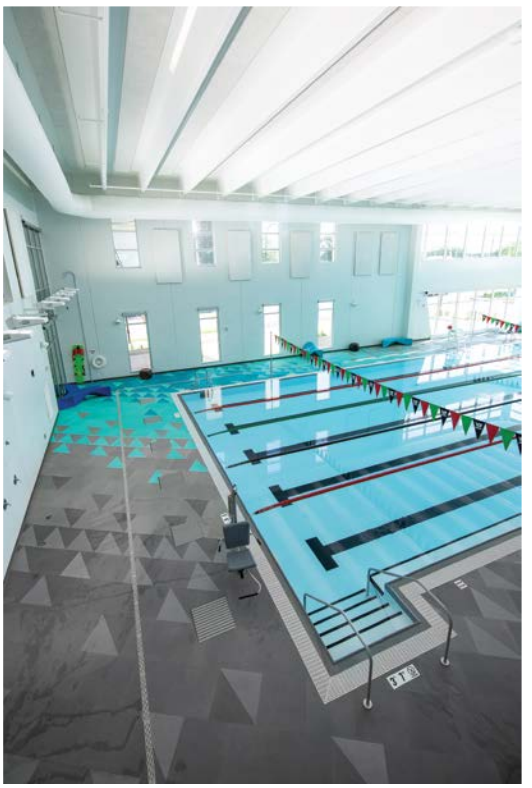
Above: New aquatic centres and community amenities continue to be developed each year, offering opportunities to integrate safety products and proactive planning from the outset.

PHOTO COURTESY URBAN PLAY



Right: Aquatic facilities can improve operations and guest experience by implementing safety products alongside ongoing education and proactive training strategies.

PHOTO COURTESY LIFE FLOOR

excitement, and no product can substitute for those experiences with lasting benefits.

When looking for educational opportunities, there are several key sources to consider:

- The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) provides both virtual and in-person training, along with opportunities for mentorship and certification, such as the IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive (ICAE) and IAAPA Certified Attractions Professional (ICAP) designations.
- Certified Pool Operator (CPO) training covers topics such as pool chemistry, facility maintenance and operation, proper record keeping, regulatory compliance, and best practices for reducing health and safety risks at aquatic facilities.
- Training companies such as Ellis & Associates provide a broad selection of educational courses, including lifeguard training, lifeguard instructor training, swim instructor training, and safety and health training courses.
- For those in the municipal sector, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides virtual and in-person learning opportunities focused on their pillars of health and well-being, equity, and environmental resilience.

No matter the track, type, material, or source, the key is to prioritize positive career growth and consistent effort. People create products, but the reverse is rarely true. Focus on people first, and product choice and implementation will often follow naturally.

Safety products

The aquatics industry is a well-established, traditional sector. Many facilities have been operating for more than 20 years, yet new aquatic centres, waterparks, local community amenities, training grounds, therapy pools, and more continue to emerge annually. Although they share many similarities, a clear divide emerges when selecting products for on-site implementation.

For blue-sky new-build projects, the possibilities are endless. Entire facilities can be centred around a few key products, which can be beneficial but may also be negative if they are inflexible for future development. Phasing and future planning are critical to preparing facilities for long-term success.

For many existing facilities, change can be challenging despite staff's efforts. The choices that shaped their foundations are now restrictive and may prevent meaningful improvements simply because implementing them is physically impossible or financially unlikely.

Before selecting products, it is important to review existing systems for proactive maintenance, improvements, and replacements. Aquatics starts and ends with water quality. From guest experience to esthetics and safety, water plays a crucial role in the success of a facility, and fortunately, it affects everyone. Examine the behind-the-scenes systems that support a positive experience. Pumps, filtration systems, and drainage may not be glamorous or

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Above: Drains and the systems that support them are a critical focus of regulation, testing, and training to help prevent incidents and ensure safe aquatic facility operation.

PHOTO COURTESY KA'ANA WAVE CO.



Right: Safety surfacing in aquatic environments helps reduce slip-and-fall risks while meeting certification standards for durability, cleanability, and resistance to UV and chemical exposure.

PHOTO COURTESY LIFE FLOOR

featured in promotional materials, but they are vital for the facility's longevity and guest satisfaction.

Viable safety products should be cross-referenced in third-party accredited certification source libraries whenever possible, such as NSF (formerly National Sanitation Foundation)/American National Standards Institute (ANSI)/Canadian Standards Association (CSA Group); ASTM International (formerly American Society for Testing and Materials); and International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES).



Pool lifts

Pool lifts are especially useful when investing in a deep-water stationary surf wave system to boost user confidence and promote inclusivity. A prime example of a multiproduct system that is third-party certified is EpicSurf's standing wave, a Certified Autism Resource (CAR) through IBCCES. In partnership with Aqua Creek Products, EpicSurf developed a standing wave lift system so that people with limited mobility can get on a wave without washing out and can remain on for the entire experience.

Julie Kline, director of sales and marketing for Aquatic Development Group, comments on an educational session takeaway she learned at the Surf Park Summit last year: "The difference between accessibility and inclusion is that with inclusion, you're being proactive with your effort to make sure everybody feels like they don't have to have a different experience and that it's all part of the whole experience."

Pool lifts are an important way to promote inclusive participation beyond surf applications. In some facilities, lifts are installed directly on the deck of competition pools to provide an alternative entry point and enhance access for swimmers.

Drainage systems and educated care

Drains have long been the focus of extensive testing and regulation after tragic yet preventable injuries. They exemplify how knowledge and products work together; drains are essential and beneficial, but they require proper oversight. People need to know what signs to watch for to take appropriate corrective actions, perform maintenance, and prevent potential incidents. Consequently, drains and their supporting systems are a key part of the CPO coursework. Drain-related best practices include water management through sustainable evaporation and recycling processes that work in conjunction with the broader



filtration system to ensure safety and proper functioning for users.

Certified products enable decision-makers at aquatic facilities to confidently select equipment that meets applicable codes and performance requirements. As another example of third-party tested equipment, pool drains used in aquatic environments are commonly certified to NSF/ANSI/CAN 50. Performance criteria such as UV resistance, vertical and pull load capacity, and protection against finger and limb entrapment are key factors evaluated to meet safety expectations.

Safety surfacing

There are many different types of surfaces for various applications. In aquatic environments with barefoot traffic, it is best to choose a safety surface that is both slip-resistant and cushioned to protect against falls. Since slips and falls are two of the most common injuries at aquatic amenities, a safety surface helps reduce these risks and liability.

NSF/ANSI/CAN 50 includes two categories related to surfaces: one for interactive water play venues (also known as splash pads) and another for pool perimeter finishes. These sections assist decision-makers in selecting a safety surfacing product that complies with all certification requirements. Criteria encompass metrics for slip resistance, cushioning, impermeability, cleanability, and UV and chemical resistance.

Intelligent video systems

One emerging application of artificial intelligence (AI) in aquatic environments is the development of intelligent video monitoring systems. These systems integrate AI with analytical software to support drowning prevention and improve overall facility security.

Unlike traditional monitoring methods that rely only on lifeguards scanning their designated zones, these systems employ networks of cameras positioned throughout a facility to continuously monitor activity and evaluate conditions such as ride operation, obstructions, structures, and traffic flow. In practice, the technology acts as an extra layer of observation—similar to having a large monitoring presence that operates nonstop without the fatigue or distractions that can impact human attention.

When the system detects unusual behaviour or conditions, alerts can be sent to trained operators, who





Intelligent video monitoring systems use networks of cameras and analytics to help facilities identify unusual activity and alert staff before situations escalate.

PHOTO COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES, ELLIS AQUATIC INNOVATIONS

can relay the information to lifeguards and facility staff. The purpose of these systems is to complement human supervision by assisting in incident recognition and situational awareness. By identifying potential risks and alerting staff earlier, facilities can respond more swiftly before situations escalate.

Some systems also incorporate thermal imaging for low-light conditions, remote monitoring, occupancy counting, geolocation tracking, chemical monitoring, and security alerts. Over time, the AI learns patterns specific to each facility or zone, which helps train staff, audit processes, and establish efficient operational procedures.

A new ASTM standard and amendment for 2026

After five years of extensive discussion, research, and proposals, ASTM published an updated standard, F2461-26, *Standard Practice for Manufacture, Construction, Operation, and Maintenance of Aquatic Play Equipment*, in July 2026. It provides "information for manufacture, construction, operations and maintenance of aquatic play equipment," according to the official ASTM listing.

The ASTM Committee F24 on Amusement Rides & Devices was established in 1978. Its current voting membership includes 1,113 members and oversees 29 standards. In 2021, a task group under ASTM F2461 was formed to review the use of the term "slip resistance" throughout the standard.

This group includes designers, engineers, manufacturers, facility owners, amenity operators, subject matter experts, and legal advisors who collaboratively developed and refined the proposed language, which was recently adopted by the voting membership. The following bulleted briefing is paraphrased with the approval of Brian Howell, a member of the F24 committee and director of strategic initiatives at Life Floor.

- 1.2 Inclusions: Climbable and climb-resistant aquatic play components, composite aquatic play structures, user controls, water sprays, fountains, and slides that occur on aquatic play surfaces, along with wading, swimming or leisure pools. The play components specified herein occur for use in aquatic play areas.
- This newly approved ballot references ASTM F3313, *Standard Test Method for Determining Impact Attenuation of Playground Surfaces Within the Use Zone of Playground Equipment as Tested in the Field*, specifically focusing on aquatic play components intended for foot contact and play activities, has reasonably foreseeable use for standing or walking, and is intended to be wet.
- This focus for aquatic play area surfacing is highly focused on slip resistance, and very specifically endorses the British Pendulum Tribometer with its subsequent British Pendulum Number (BPN), or Pendulum Test Value (PTV), while using the softer barefoot-use "Slider 55." The new requirement also requires the aquatic play area surface to meet or exceed the P4 friction classification of Standards Australia AS 4586-2013 utilizing this potable water-wet Slider 55.

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Handrails, slip-resistant surfacing, and clearly defined pool edges help young swimmers enter the water safely, supporting the proactive approach to safety this article describes.

PHOTO COURTESY LIFE FLOOR

- This newly approved ASTM standard also correlates to the "Head Injury Criterion" (HIC) playground standard established in ASTM F1292-22, *Standard Specification for Impact Attenuation of Surfacing Materials Within the Use Zone of Playground Equipment*, that requires compliance from a drop height of 1 m (3.3 ft) in areas with an in-use water depth of 0.91 m (3 ft) or less. This test method provides a means of determining the impact attenuation performance of a playground using a test method that simulates the impact of a child's head with the playground surfaces, and is specific to surfacing materials used in conjunction with playground equipment, such as that described in specifications F1148, F1487, F1918, CSA Z614 (Canada), and SS457 (Singapore).
- In Section 6.2.5, this new standard requires replacement when an aquatic play surface no longer meets the frictional requirements or impact attenuation requirements in Section 6.2.1; it shall be removed from service, repaired, retreated, or replaced.
- This new approved standard mirrors elements of the Consumer Safety Performance; specifically 5.3.1, where composite play structures using multiple aquatic play components are permitted on/in aquatic play surfaces, wet decks, wading pools and as a means of access to a pool when it conforms to the requirements of Consumer Safety Performance Specification F1487-21.
- This new standard (Section 6.2.1) now requires the owner/operator to create their own internal "Risk Assessment" as it states: In an operational condition and when open for patrons, aquatic play surfaces shall meet at least one of the following, depending on the risk assessment as referenced in Section 8.2.1.
- 7.3 Aquatic Play Surfacing Performance Validation: When required per the designer/engineer or manufacturer, the owner/operator shall validate the frictional requirements of the aquatic play surfaces in accordance with 6.2.1, subject to 7.3.1.1, with the testing frequency and locations as directed by the designer/engineer or manufacturer.
- 9.7 and 9.8; Zones: The designer/engineer or manufacturer shall determine a use zone for each play component. Use zones are not to be determined by the area of incidental water splash, such as from dumping buckets, but by the area intended to be occupied by persons.

The new language is now part of the standard, published as ASTM F2461-26 in July 2026. Specifiers should note that if they choose to follow the standard, zoning will be important for design, and not all products will meet the new criteria. Owners and operators are encouraged to review the standard and select products or services that comply with the specifications to proactively reduce risk and enhance guest experience and peace of mind.

From behind-the-scenes operations to the pool deck itself, safety and a proactive mindset work together harmoniously. Protecting people during their visit is critically important, as is safeguarding the facility's reputation while addressing staff training needs. Whether choosing safer products from the start or renovating with safety as a top priority, every decision counts in reducing risks at a venue. A curated, themed experience is only as strong as the people who make it happen.



Briana Valente serves as a marketing manager for Life Floor. She has been with Life Floor since 2018 and has more than eight years of experience in the aquatics industry. She works extensively with industry publications, conferences, and workshops that bring meaningful education to individuals spanning municipalities, resorts, waterparks, and more. She holds a bachelor's in marketing from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota.



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Top pool products 2026

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2026

Celebrating innovation and craftsmanship across the pool and spa industry, the sixth annual *Pool & Spa Marketing* Readers' Choice Awards invited professionals to vote for the products that best represent excellence in design and technology. Entries spanned a broad range of categories, including business and leisure tools, commercial pool systems, spa accessories, and innovative construction and maintenance solutions. Voting took place throughout August and September. The 2026 Readers' Choice Award winners are Aqua Creek Products, Aquiform, Backyard Brands, Fluidra, H.S.T. Synthetics Ltd., P.K. Data Inc., Poolside by CGT, PoolWerx Inc., and Water Tech Corp. Refer to the following pages for complete product details.

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P.K. Data Inc. provides market research and economic analysis for the pool and spa industry. Its annual reports examine consumer insights, industry benchmarks, and trends shaping the U.S. and Canadian swimming pool and hot tub markets. P.K. Data also offers custom research tailored to specific market areas and research needs, helping manufacturers, builders, distributors, and service professionals identify opportunities and make informed business decisions. The company's "Canada Swimming Pool and Hot Tub Report (YE2025)," now available online, adds the residential hot tub market and the commercial pool segment to its Canadian research for the first time.

https://pkdata.com

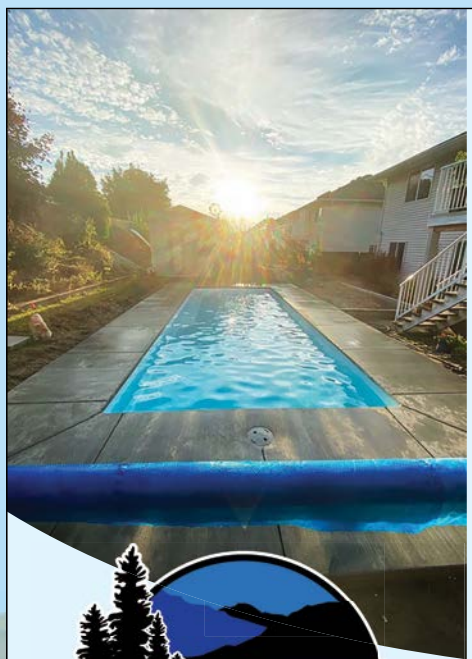
COMMERCIAL POOL • **AQUA CREEK PRODUCTS**

The Ranger Pool Lift



Aqua Creek Products' award-winning, top-selling Ranger Pool Lift combines functional design with accessible pool entry. Designed to be approachable and easy to use, it helps pool owners make aquatic spaces more welcoming. The lift is UL safety-certified and *Americans with Disabilities Act* (*ADA*)-compliant, offering reassurance to users and facility operators. Designed and manufactured in Montana by Aqua Creek's in-house engineers and industry professionals, the Ranger is backed by what the company describes as the industry's best warranty. Custom colour combinations are available to complement pool decor, along with options including solar power, a cycle attachment, a chest strap, a headrest, covers, a pull-out leg rest, and multiple anchor options.

https://aquacreekproducts.com/product/ranger-2-pool-lift/



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MAINTENANCE • **BACKYARD BRANDS**

Day & Night

Backyard Brands' Day & Night pool care system pairs Solei, a "Day" solution designed to use sunlight for ongoing oxidation and replace traditional stabilizer, with Luna, a complementary "Night" product used once a week. The company says the system helps maintain clear, clean water while reducing common water-care issues. Developed for specialty dealers, Day & Night is positioned as a differentiated alternative to commodity chemicals sold through mass-market channels. Backyard Brands says the system can support customer satisfaction, reduce service callbacks, and help dealers strengthen their premium offering. Day & Night won the Best New Product Award at the 2025 Canadian Pool & Spa Conference & Expo.

https://youtu.be/d6VwWBRLw0s



ACCESSORIES AND SPECIALTY FEATURES • **AQUA CREEK PRODUCTS**

Mighty 600 Pool Lift

Aqua Creek Products' Mighty 600 Pool Lift is designed to provide safe, dependable access to inground pools and spas, with a 272-kg (600-lb) weight capacity suited to high-use aquatic facilities. Its stainless-steel construction and durable powder-coat finish provide corrosion resistance in aquatic environments, while the low-profile design fits neatly into pool decks. Available in standard and custom colours, the lift can be matched to a facility's setting or branding. User-friendly controls support independent operation or caregiver assistance, and the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (*ADA*)-compliant seat features adjustable armrests and a footrest. Optional accessories, including headrests, chest straps, and transport carts, allow further customization. Aqua Creek says the lift is backed by its industry-leading warranty and support.

https://aquacreekproducts.com/product/the-mighty-600/



MAINTENANCE AND CLEANING • **BACKYARD BRANDS**

Mineraluxe Hot Tub Care

Backyard Brands' Mineraluxe system is designed to make hot tub water care simpler for owners and easier for retailers and weekly service companies to support. Its easy-to-use cubes and oxygen-based system aim to reduce confusion and routine support needs. Mineraluxe is also designed to help remove scale and biofilm from pipes and surfaces, helping protect hot tub equipment. According to the company, the system eliminates the need for clarifiers, enzyme cleaners, stain and scale products, pipe cleaners, and water enhancers. By simplifying maintenance, Mineraluxe can help retailers support customer satisfaction and retention.

https://youtube.com/shorts/AVYGjWjurjY



SPA TYPES AND ACCESSORIES • **H.S.T. SYNTHETICS LTD.**

Swim Spa Covers



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https://www.hstsynthetics.com/swimspa-covers/



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http://www.poolwerxfab.com/



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http://jandy.ca/

VINYL LINERS • **POOLSIDE BY CGT**

Twilight—New Aquashift Pool Liner Pattern

Twilight is a new addition to Poolside by CGT's 2026 collection, featuring a terrazzo print on a Royal Navy base film. The pattern incorporates the company's exclusive Aquashift ink, which shifts in colour from shimmering silver-teal to violet-blue across the pool's curves and angles. As sunlight reflects on the water, the deep tones and teal accents create a luminous, colour-changing effect. Manufactured in Cambridge, Ont., Poolside by CGT vinyl is engineered for durability, weather tolerance, and colour performance. The company draws on more than 55 years of manufacturing experience, and dealers and installers can connect interested homeowners with a local fabricator.

https://poolsidebycgt.com/residential-liner



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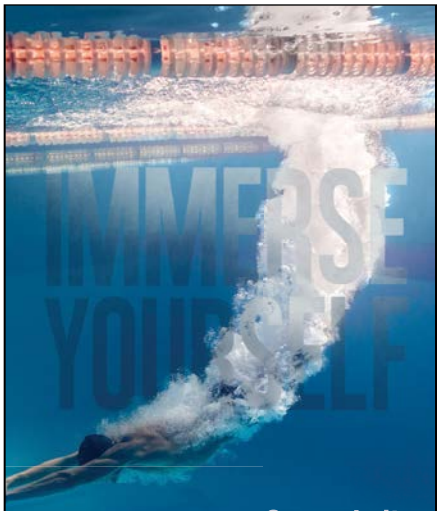
https://watertechcorp.com/products/water-tech-precision-v10/





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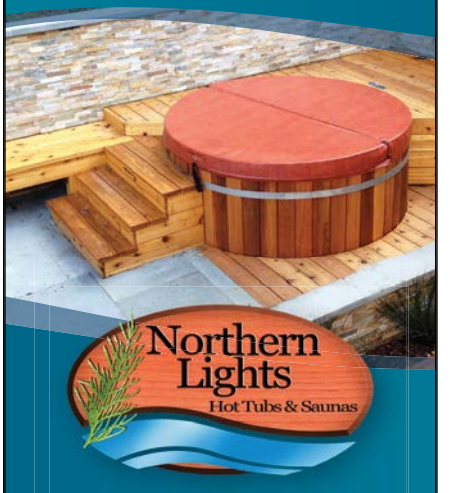

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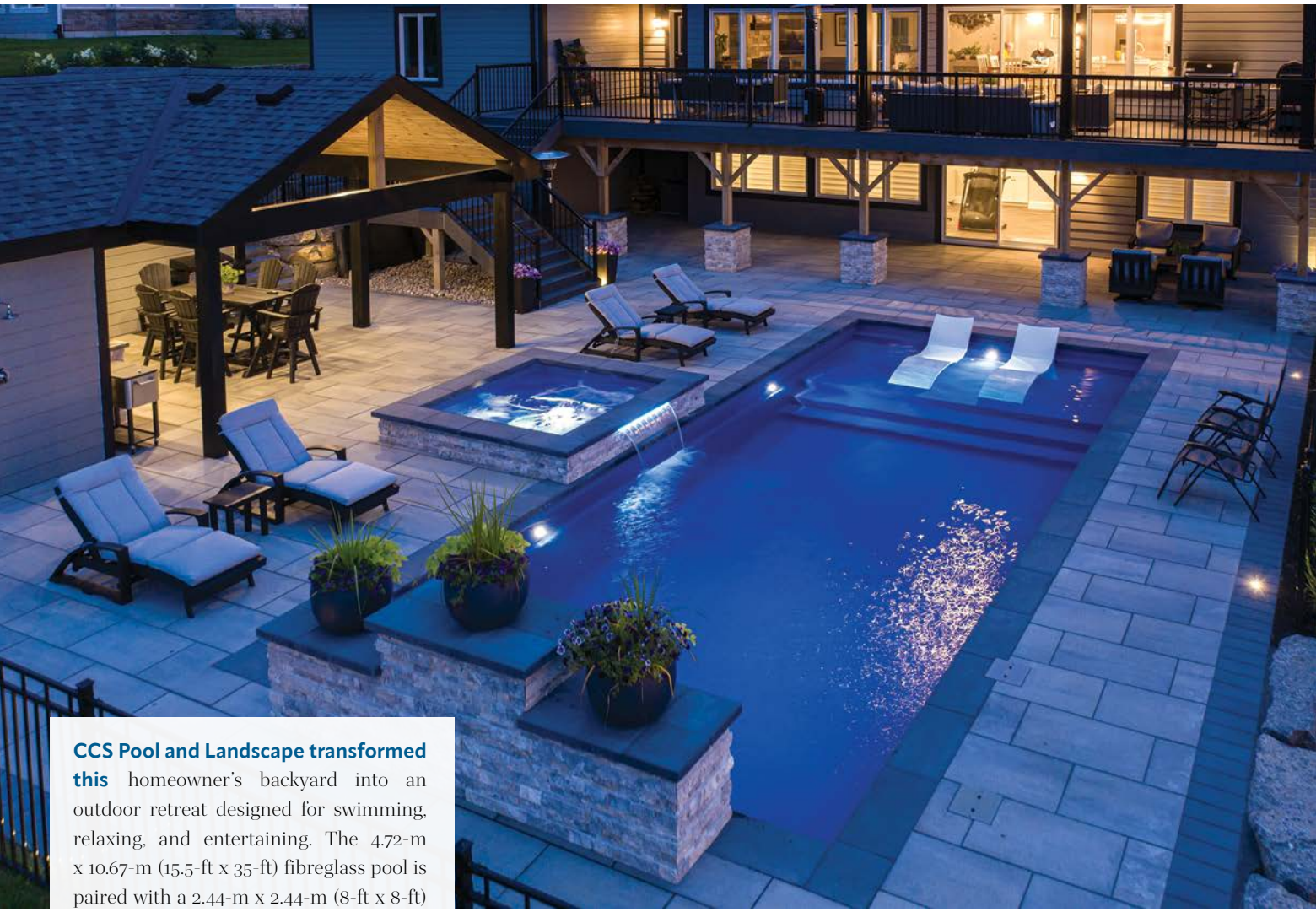

CCS Pool and Landscape transformed this homeowner's backyard into an outdoor retreat designed for swimming, relaxing, and entertaining. The 4.72-m x 10.67-m (15.5-ft x 35-ft) fibreglass pool is paired with a 2.44-m x 2.44-m (8-ft x 8-ft) spa, together providing 56.3 m² (606 sf) of water surface. A shallow lounging shelf with in-pool loungers offers a place to cool off, while the cabana and paved deck provide space to gather.

Multiple water features add movement and sound to the setting, and extensive pool and landscape lighting carry its appeal into the evening. Full backyard automation, state-of-the-art equipment, and plumbing are designed to support efficient performance and help reduce energy and natural gas use. Insulation throughout the spa's shell, lines, and equipment enables year-round operation, even in harsh winter conditions.

—Jason Cramp

PHOTO BY NAT KAY/COURTESY CCS POOL AND LANDSCAPE



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