

A sampling of the diverse pool styles achieved by Elite Concepts, Inc.

how to avoid pool-building pitfalls

photography by terri glanger and elite concepts, inc.

It's time. That space in your backyard is crying out for water and you're ready for the dream to become a reality. But,

who's going to take those vague ideas of what you want in a pool and turn them into something more than just a concrete watering hole?

Providing some insights is Michael Nantz, founder and president of Elite Concepts in Dallas, a design and building firm of both swimming pools and water features. As a national

lecturer on the construction and methodology of pool design, Nantz prides himself on building pools and water features that interface seamlessly with the surrounding environment, architecture and interior decor of the home, but says that's not a given when homeowners start the search for the right "pool guy."

"There are hundreds of pool builders in the Metroplex and it's a self-taught industry, which means there isn't a university degree that proves you've got the necessary training or qualifications for the work," Nantz warns. "People typically don't know what to look for or even what's available, and a lot of pool builders don't know a thing about pool design."

Simply put, it's not a good combination. "Our industry hasn't done a very good job of educating the public — or even the pool builder — on what they should expect from the

pool-building process," Nantz adds. "So it falls to consumers to be very cautious before signing on with somebody whose work is going to have such a incredible impact on both the look of their home and their enjoyment of it." That said, the good news is that it's easy to avoid the soggy scene of dashed dreams as long as "you know what types of questions to ask" before jumping in headfirst. Typically, Nantz says clients will simply take three bids on a pool project and then "go with the guy they like the most," but he recommends spending a lot more time and energy considering the candidates and questioning

them about their experience and background. The goal, he explains, is to find a professional who mixes design elements such as architectural style, landscaping influences, color, texture and proportion to create the most aesthetically pleasing environment, and

more importantly, someone who has the expertise to bring the project to fruition.

"What you don't want is another so-called custom builder who is just modifying the idea they sold to the folks down the street," he says.

"Far more important than the trendy things like grottos and Tiki huts is being able to create something that is classic and that meshes with all the elements of the property." Nantz adds that great pool design doesn't automatically carry a high-end price tag and he says his clients in the \$40,000 range are frequently

surprised to find his unique pool environments so competitively priced. "You can build a pool inexpensively," he says, "but you want to avoid having someone build you something cheap. There's a big difference between the two."

the pool of your dreams

questions for (and about) your "pool guy"

In terms of interviewing contractors and deciding who has what it takes to deliver your dream poolscape, Nantz offers the following advice:

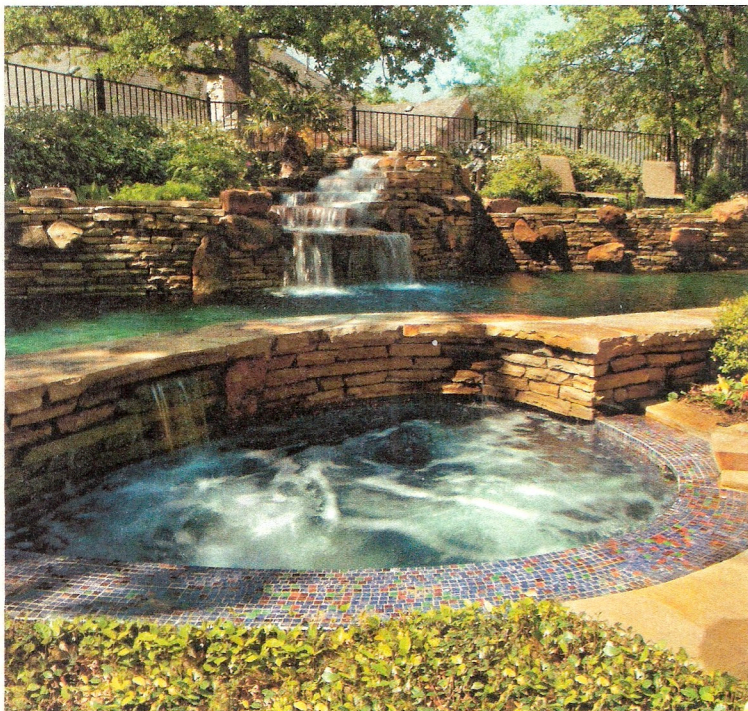
- ▶ If the pool guy heads straight for your backyard and without a glance at your style of architecture or interior décor, asks, "where do you want it?" you're better off showing him the driveway.
- ▶ When your pool guy proudly tells you he's been in the business for 25 year, inquire further as to what, precisely, he's done during that time? What continuing education avenues has he pursued regarding professional growth in the design process and construction methods? What is he doing differently now than his company did ten years ago? Good answers would indicate professional growth and a quest to continually improve on past successes.
- ▶ If a contractor's only idea of color palette is to match the home's brickwork, ask many more questions about his design training and background.
- ▶ When someone offering a bid says things like, "I always put a four-foot deck around my pools," take that to mean he's operating on a "cookie-cutter" mentality. Likewise, anyone suggesting you need a negative edge treatment because the client down the street was very pleased with the results may be more motivated by the appeal of adding an extra \$5,000 to your project price tag than his creative vision regarding your perfect pool.
- ▶ A pool guy who answers questions about what size pump he recommends with something to the effect of, "I always use a such-and-such because it's bigger and it'll do what you need it to do," should be peppered with many follow-up questions. Expect clear and detailed explanations of technical matters such as mechanical and structural aspects, including piping sizes, line velocities, steel schedule, and wall and floor thicknesses. If they're not forthcoming, prepare to be disappointed with the results.
- ▶ If someone boasts that his large company builds 1,000 pools a year, question how much time and attention his personnel will spend making yours a masterpiece of form, function and individuality.

Elaborating further on his own approach to pool design, Nantz explains: "I get my ideas from the mood of the house and the client's personality. I treat the pool, the backyard, the total environment, as something that will be used 365 days a year. You may not be swimming in it or physically using it every day, but you'll look at it and see it every day, so it's an integral part of the home."

A member of an industry

educational organization called Genesis 3, Nantz is one of a select few associate members of that group. He is also a past member of the National Spa & Pool Institute (NSPI) and served on the organization's National Builders Council (which he chaired in 1998-99). ■

This month's cover story is sponsored by Elite Concepts by Michael Nantz.
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