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The highlight of this pool in Montauk is the sun shelf with waterfalls pouring in through a stone wall, creating a spot to sit and sunbathe within the pool.

COURTESY PRESTIGE POOLS

Styles to **make a splash** in the landscape

My family had the first in-ground swimming pool in my neighborhood. Twenty feet wide, 40 feet long, 10 feet deep. A big white gunite rectangle with three steps down in the shallow end, a ladder out of the deep end and a springy wooden diving board for grand entrances. In the 1960s, this pool made our house a very popular place in the summer.

Backyard pools have come a long way since then, and every year seems to bring new variations. For a while, free-form pools were the must-have; now angles are back, but with new twists on the old theme of a big rectangular hole in the ground. ►

Instead of the pool being installed as an afterthought, more homeowners and architects are using it as a focal point for a home's exterior space. "We do a lot of work with landscape architects," said John Tortorella, owner of J. Tortorella Pools in Southampton. "We're seeing the pool incorporated as an extension of the social area, rather than something remote from the house."

Greg Darvin, owner of East Hampton's Pristine Pools, agrees. "I find that now, a lot of the time, I'm brought in prior to the architecture and construction of the house being sorted out, to work directly with the client on the pool and outdoor spaces," Mr. Darvin says. "Those areas are very important to the homeowner, especially when it's a second home."

"People are looking for a nice pool that's going to suit their lifestyle," he continued. "We're doing things a little more out of the box—water coming out of the top of a wall, free-standing fountains, clean lines and a modern aesthetic."

More often than not, the pools and hot tubs built today use salt water rather than fresh. While not eliminating the need for chemical treatment, salt-water pools provide a gentler environment with no chlorine smell.

Rimless and negative edge pools are also growing, both in popularity and in scope. A rimless pool, explains Mr. Tortorella, is one where the water comes to the very top on all four sides, overflowing into a small slot that runs along the perimeter of the pool. "When the sun shines on it, it appears like a floating sheet of glass," he said.

In a negative edge pool, the water on one or two sides flows over into a shallow basin. Artfully placed in front of a drop-off to the ocean or garden, the water appears to flow right off the pool and into the scenery. Tortorella is currently building one with an impressive 160-foot negative edge.

Even traditional pools are going a bit to extremes. "People are looking for more of an elongated look—slimmer, longer rectangles. The average pool we build used to be 40 feet,

then 50 feet, now the average is more like 60 feet," Mr. Tortorella says.

Pool features have also been ramped up, with deep-end bench seats, sun shelves, and shallow-water platforms suitable for lounge chairs. "We're seeing pools with very gradual edges with shallow water for the kids to play in," says Southampton architect John David Rose. "It's like bringing the beach into your backyard."

"In planning for a pool, it's not just the pool you have to consider," explains Mr. Rose. "There's a lot to think about to do it properly. There's the view, where the pool service guy is going to park his truck, where the pool equipment goes."

"What about the material surrounding the pool?" he says. "Bluestone is beautiful, but it gets very hot; we can use radiant cooling under it to keep it comfortable."

"A properly designed pool harmonizes with the house and the landscaping," says Mr. Tortorella. "You want to get that 'ooh!' when the client sees it. I enjoy seeing the client's face

when it's all done, getting that pat on the back and hearing them say it's beautiful."

Water for Wellness

With all the talk about sun shelves and in-pool seating, it might seem that pools and hot tubs are all about self-indulgence. Maybe they are, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

"Today it's all about wellness," says Joe Musnicki, owner of Ocean Spray Hot Tubs & Saunas in Westhampton Beach. "People are living longer, they want to take care of themselves, whether that means eating healthier, exercising or reducing stress. Hot tubs become kind of a go-to place in the evening or on the weekend. People tell me, 'This is one of the few places that I can sit and enjoy some family time,' because everybody is out doing so many things all the time."

In the past, hot tubs tended to be attached to swimming pools, but Ms. Musnicki says that trend is fading, largely because a stand-alone hot tub is available for year-round use. Today's most popular hot tubs manage to be both energy-efficient and pampering, with massaging jets, soothing salt water and year-round, moment's-notice availability.

Behind the Scenes

"Automation is one of the most important developments in pool technology in recent years," says Mr. Tortorella. Using a mobile app, his clients can turn on the pool heater when they start heading east, assuring a nice warm swim upon arrival. Pool lights can be turned on or off from anywhere, and automated pool covers enhance safety while helping to retain water warmth.

From a maintenance perspective, automation allows pool managers to see what's going on in a client's pool remotely, assuring that if chemical levels are off they'll know about it—and be able to address it—quickly.

Peter Persico, owner of Casual Water, cautions against taking a too-casual approach to pool maintenance. "Sometimes clients want to save money so they cut back on the chemicals, but then the water becomes acidic and damages the equipment."

A better choice for economy is investing in energy-efficient pool pumps and heaters. Mr. Persico says the best pool pumps are 75 percent more efficient than their predecessors, with the monthly electric cost to run a pool often less than \$50. Rebates from PSEG cut the cost of upgrading outdated equipment,

letting homeowners gain a lot of efficiency with less out of pocket.

Quality Pays

A well-designed and maintained pool is one home investment you will recoup in the value of your home, but as in any type of construction, pool contractors vary widely in quality. The best price doesn't always accompany the highest quality. "Ask around, ask professionals, who's the best pool guy you know?" recommends Mr. Tortorella. "Who has the best service and support if you have a problem?"

Mr. Persico seconds that thought. "The biggest trend I see is that people expect a higher level of service, they want you to respond right away when they call with a problem."

He says most of his new customers are people unhappy about the lack of response from their old pool company. "I like helping people and ensuring that they have a pool that is functional," he says. "Our clients have a right to expect us to call them back quickly and get to their house when there's a problem."

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