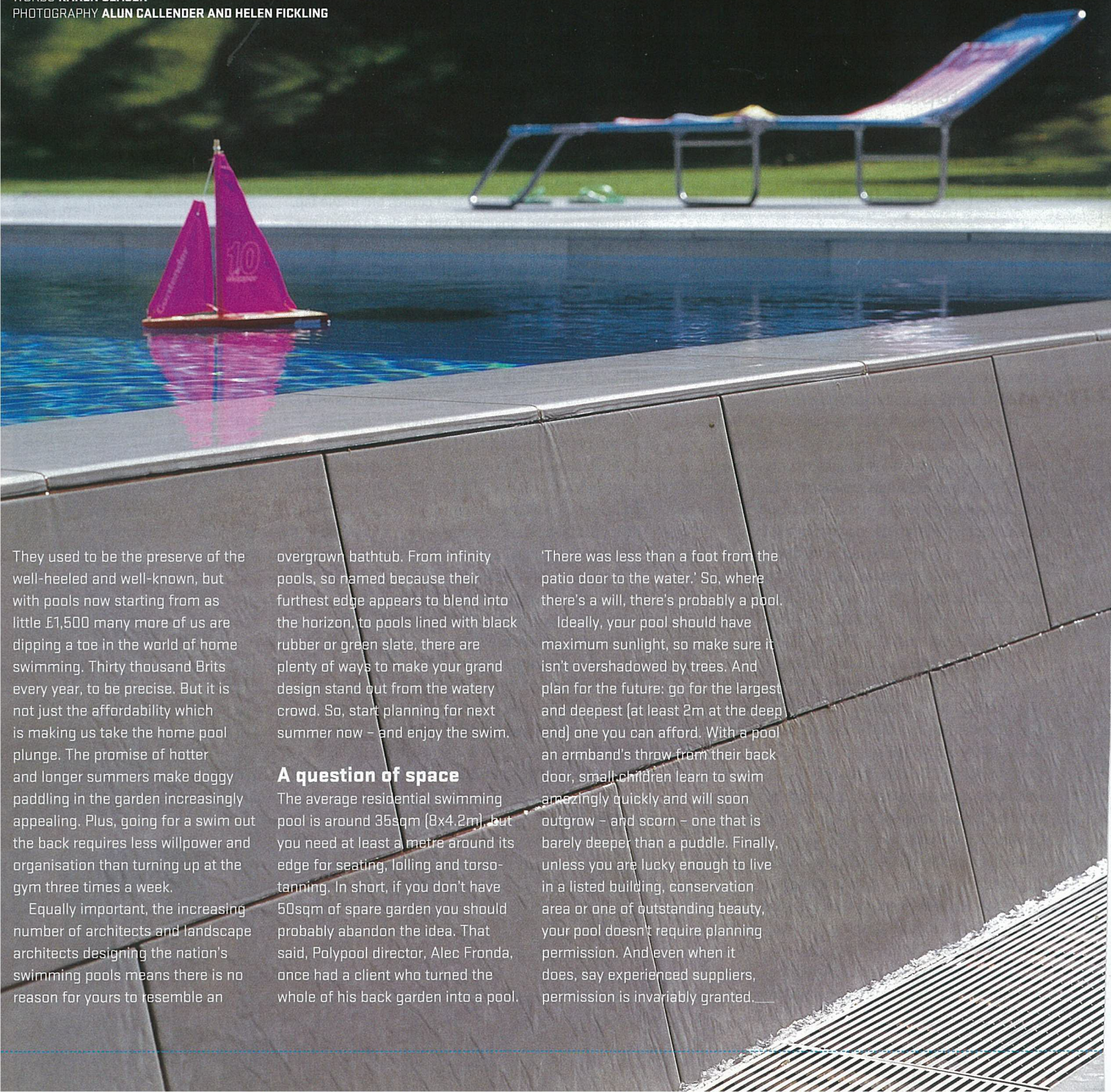


# Swimming pools

With British summers predicted to get longer and hotter, many of us are tempted into building a home pool. Read on to find out if you too could be splashing around in your back garden

WORDS **KAREN GLASER**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **ALUN CALLENDER AND HELEN FICKLING**



They used to be the preserve of the well-heeled and well-known, but with pools now starting from as little £1,500 many more of us are dipping a toe in the world of home swimming. Thirty thousand Brits every year, to be precise. But it is not just the affordability which is making us take the home pool plunge. The promise of hotter and longer summers make doggy paddling in the garden increasingly appealing. Plus, going for a swim out the back requires less willpower and organisation than turning up at the gym three times a week.

Equally important, the increasing number of architects and landscape architects designing the nation's swimming pools means there is no reason for yours to resemble an

overgrown bathtub. From infinity pools, so named because their furthest edge appears to blend into the horizon, to pools lined with black rubber or green slate, there are plenty of ways to make your grand design stand out from the watery crowd. So, start planning for next summer now – and enjoy the swim.

## A question of space

The average residential swimming pool is around 35sqm (8x4.2m), but you need at least a metre around its edge for seating, lolling and torso-tanning. In short, if you don't have 50sqm of spare garden you should probably abandon the idea. That said, Polypool director, Alec Fronda, once had a client who turned the whole of his back garden into a pool.

'There was less than a foot from the patio door to the water.' So, where there's a will, there's probably a pool.

Ideally, your pool should have maximum sunlight, so make sure it isn't overshadowed by trees. And plan for the future: go for the largest and deepest (at least 2m at the deep end) one you can afford. With a pool an armband's throw from their back door, small children learn to swim amazingly quickly and will soon outgrow – and scorn – one that is barely deeper than a puddle. Finally, unless you are lucky enough to live in a listed building, conservation area or one of outstanding beauty, your pool doesn't require planning permission. And even when it does, say experienced suppliers, permission is invariably granted.

# Toolbox

## Something for the weekend

### Swimming pools

#### Perfect match

**Client** Angela and Daniel Moon  
**Architect** Wilkinson King Architects  
**Installer** London Swimming Pool Company  
**Budget** £100,000

#### Exercise or family fun?

Pools can be built in virtually any shape or size your heart desires, but what is yours really for? If the answer is family splashing it can be pretty much any shape you want. If exercise is your objective, you should probably go for a long, thin strip in which you can do proper laps. However, rules exist to be broken and in waterland that's what a jet stream is for. The device, often called a wave-resistance machine, pumps turbulent water along one side of the pool, so you feel as if you are swimming against a current, giving you a work-out irrespective of your splasher's shape or size.

#### Easy on the eye

'Swimming is a primordial experience – you are half-naked in water. Respect that by affiliating your pool to nature in some way,' says architect Angus Morrogh-Ryan of De Matos Storey Ryan, which has completed several waterborne projects. 'And if you can't draw on the landscape for inspiration, make a feature of materials. We lined one of our pools with Cumbrian Broughton Moor slate. It made the pool look natural, like a lake.'

Architect Alfred Munkenbeck, of Munkenbeck + Marshall, agrees. 'I like lining my pools with navy or green slate. They look okay when they're dirty and you can't tell how deep the water is, which makes the pool feel natural. Black rubber, which is quite cheap, can look great, too.'

Munkenbeck, whose current pool projects include one for a 200-year-old castle, also recommends indoor/outdoor pools. 'There is nothing like swimming into your house, and nothing looks better than a

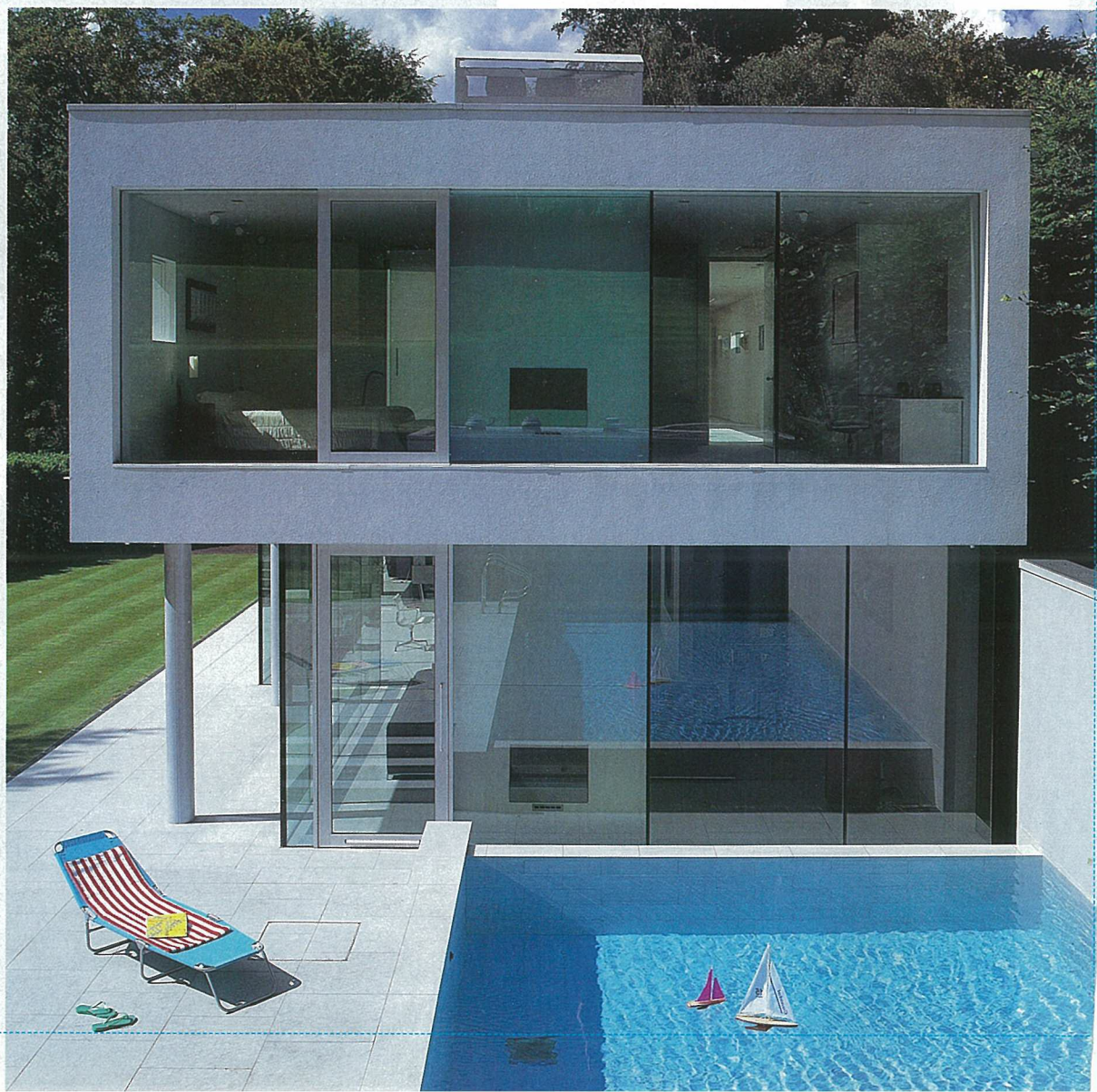
from four underwater lights that are part of the garden's lighting system. It is all part of Wilkinson King Architects' attempt to blend the pool, house and garden into one seamless, modernist whole. An attempt which has won the scheme a clutch of design awards, including last year's Royal Institute of British Architects award for the South East.

'The house is basically a big, white box flanked by a retaining wall that also shelters the pool like a protective arm,' says practice partner, Chantal Wilkinson. 'The pool has become an extension of the ground floor.'

This blurring of boundaries is also achieved by the pool's vanishing edge: when you look at the pool from the living room you can't tell

where the structure ends. Getting the pool's limestone infinity edge absolutely level was the most challenging aspect of the job, says Tony Line, managing director of the London Swimming Pool Company.

More practically, the constant circulation of water means the pool is kept well filtered and clean. That said, this well-to-do couple also has a £250-a-month cleaning contract with the London Swimming Pool Company.





## Natural choice

**Client** Peter and Liz Stabler  
**Designer** Woodhouse  
**Natural Pools**  
**Budget** £60,000

Peter and Liz used to holiday in the Loire and swim in the region's many rivers and lakes. The experience of swimming in natural waters never left them and they promised themselves they would repeat it in years to come. And so they have, albeit somewhat nearer to home.

The couple's swimming pond was installed in their back garden, near Stebbing, in Essex, last March. They swam in its unheated water every day until November, and emboldened by alcohol, they took a dip on Christmas Day, too. This year, they donned their costumes in March and intend to keep doing so daily until well into autumn. None of which surprises landscape architect, Will Woodhouse, who built the pool. 'The large, shallow filter pool of a swimming pond means it naturally heats to a comfortable temperature, particularly in the summer. It is certainly a lot warmer than an unheated, regular swimming pool.'

For their growing number of fans, natural pools are also more attractive than the regular variety.

Edged in York stone and larch deck, and home to flora that includes native yellow iris, flowering rush, pink water lilies and pickerel weed, the Stablers' 75sqm lagoon is also regularly visited by kingfishers, dragonflies and the odd duck. At night, bats have been known to skim the water's surface. 'They go when they realise you are bigger than them,' says Liz, who often enjoys an after-hours bathe.

But the biggest pull of a natural pool is its lack of chemicals. 'The combination of plants and a balanced eco-system keeps the water clean,' says Will. 'The zoo plankton filter the volume of the water 1.7 times every 24 hours.'

Actually, for Liz there is an equally big pull to chemical-free water. 'I don't have to clean the pool all the time. If I did, I'd disturb the silt layer at the bottom,' she says. 'It's been vacuumed once by Will, and we pull out the odd bit of blanket weed when we're swimming. I don't like spending time hoovering my house, so why on earth would I want to do it in my garden!'

half-solid, half-watery room. Like all good design, it blends your house into your garden, enhancing the scheme's spatial continuity,' he says.

Infinity or vanishing-edge pools also play visual tricks and epitomise why architects love working with water. It doubles the size of their buildings and abstracts them, making them look as if they are floating.

Although there are no simplistic rules about swimming pool design – a contemporary pool can work well with a country pile or a modernist masterpiece – there is little doubt that natural swimming pools like Peter and Liz Stabler's (see opposite) are set to make a big splash. Consisting of two artificially lined and linked pools – one for swimming in, the other for naturally filtering the water with plants and minerals – they are, in addition to being gentle

on the planet, a designer's emporium. A rocky river pool, a classic ornamental garden pond, a formal lily canal, a shallow lake with beaches: a natural swimming pool can be all things to all people. 'Every pond is individually designed for its site,' says landscape architect Will Woodhouse, whose firm Woodhouse Natural Pools, established five years ago, was one of the first natural swimming pool companies in Britain.

### Construction options

A natural swimming pool might be the greenest option, but with prices starting at £30,000 (£50,000-plus including landscaping) it is not the cheapest. That honour goes to the ever-popular, above-ground pool, which starts at £1,500 including all filtration equipment. If you are planning to self-assemble, make sure you buy the kit from a SPATA – standing for the Swimming Pool and Allied Trades Association – supplier. In fact, get in touch with this friendly organisation whatever your watery plans: it is the Citizens' Advice Bureau of the swimming world.

Next on the ladder are ceramic or fibreglass one-piece shells that are simply lowered into a pre-prepared hole. They start at £9,000 and can be up and running within a week. Around a third of pool owners opt for a liner pool – essentially, a big PVC bag that fits inside a surround of concrete blocks, steel or fibreglass panels. An average, fully installed 12x6m liner pool costs £30,000, but one that measures 7.3x3.6m can be half that price. The actual liner, however, typically lasts five years.

At £25,000-plus, reinforced concrete pools, finished with tiles, stone or waterproof paint and



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including heating and filtration, are the most expensive, but also the most durable, option.

Forget all-year outdoor swimming within these shores. However, invest in a temporary cover and you can happily splash from May until October. The cheapest solution is the air dome (available from most pool suppliers), a plastic blow-up bag that costs around £3,000. Telescopic covers, which can be rolled back in fine weather, are also popular.

#### Heating and maintenance

Costing an average 22p a day, a gas heater is a cheap way of keeping warm in the water. At 26p per day, oil heaters are also popular, but

consider more environmentally friendly options such as ground source heat pumps and solar panels, which cost £3.50 per sqm. But be warned: in our climate, solar heating is unreliable at maintaining a constant pool temperature and is most effective when combined with another fossil fuel heater. The thermal barrier of a Polypool – two sheets of plastic-covered steel covered by polyurethane foam – is another heating alternative.

In the winter months, protect your pool from debris, insects and other unwelcome guests with a water-permeable winter cover. Come spring, it will mean less cleaning and less chemicals. In the summer,

you'll need to spend about 10 minutes a day cleaning and 'weeding' the water, but if even that seems onerous many companies now offer 24-hour pool maintenance. At Tanby Pools, for example, an annual fee of £2,000 will buy you weekly check-ups in the swimming season, three maintenance visits in the winter and immediate attention to annoying things such as rogue algae.

#### Safety issues

Bossy Britain is surprisingly relaxed when it comes to water and the back garden. Unlike the New World, there are no UK legal requirements regarding home pool safety. That said, it goes without saying that children should be supervised at all times, and your pool covered when not in use. Finally, did you know that under the National Curriculum, youngsters should be able to swim 25 metres by the age of 11? Another reason, if one were needed, to take the home pool plunge. ★

#### SUPPLIERS

##### Architects

**De Matos Storey Ryan**

(020 7336 0100; dmsr.co.uk)

**Munkenbeck + Marshall**

(020 7739 3300; mandm.uk.com)

**Wilkinson King Architects**

(020 7284 1975;  
wilkinsonking.com)

##### Installers

**London Swimming Pool Company**

(020 8874 0414;  
londonswimmingpools.com)

**Polypool**

(01489 890 800; polypool.co.uk)

**Tanby Pools**

(01883 622 335; tanbypools.co.uk)

**Woodhouse Natural Pools**

(01223 290 029;  
naturalswimmingpools.com)

##### Expert advice

For expert advice and to find suppliers in your area, contact the following organisation:

**Swimming Pool and Allied**

**Trades Association (SPATA)**

(01264 356 210; spata.co.uk)

