

Real Estate eNews

Natural Swimming Pools

Swimming holes were created exclusively by nature until 2500 B.C. Around that time, it is thought the first man-made swimming pool was excavated and lined with a combination of bricks and tar. The first indoor pool can be traced back to England in the early 1800s, and indoor and outdoor pools became increasingly popular. Today, the research firm marketresearch.com estimates that as much as 4 billion dollars per year will be spent on outdoor pool sales and maintenance in the United States by 2011.



Photo courtesy of www.totalhabitat.com

While the pool industry has a long-established history, a pool trend that began two decades ago in Europe has reached across the pond to the United States as homeowners are giving natural swimming pools a second look.

Natural swimming pools are not defined by the material from which they are created, but rather by the materials they deliberately and noticeably lack. Natural swimming pools, or ponds, as they are called in Europe, depend on a system of plants and organisms rather than chlorine and other chemicals to keep the water clean and clear.



The lack or almost complete lack of chlorine is made possible by the creation of a regeneration zone – an area designed to keep the pool water clean. Pumps and water skimmers remove plant debris, dirt and insects from the water, and keep it from becoming stagnant. Gravel beds and fast-growing aquatic plants absorb and filter out pollutants and bacteria. Friendly bacteria also attach to the wall of rocks, gravel and tile, and provide an

additional biological filter. The result is a miniature ecosystem and natural swimming pool that designers and builders say is as safe to swim in as a chlorinated pool.

The exterior of the pools can vary. Some homeowners create zen-like pools, while others go for a tropical or lagoon setting. Some are very contemporary looking, and others more closely resemble a rustic, rural or lodge setting. Whatever the design and the material (rubber or reinforced polyethylene for example), all such natural swimming holes depend almost exclusively on water movement and biology to keep water clean, swimmable and smelling good.

These pools are not inexpensive, in part because of the landscaping that is required to keep the ecosystem alive and healthy. Most estimates suggest that a pool can be designed and installed for about \$900 per square yard, at or slightly above the cost for a similar chlorinated pool.

An early proponent of natural swimming pools, Englishman Michael Littlewood has written a book on the topic, *Natural Swimming Pools: Inspiration For Harmony With Nature*. Littlewood says that natural swimming pools can be installed in most regions of the U.S., as long as preparation is done ahead of time to make adaptations to the local climate. In very warm climates, certain aquatic plants will thrive and choke out other vegetation. In weather that is too cool, some species may not grow adequately to keep circulating water fresh.



Photo courtesy of www.totalhabitat.com

Climate will also affect the proper depth for a natural swimming hole. In warm climates, pools should be dug about 10 feet deep, to keep the water from becoming too warm and encouraging algae growth. Cooler climates allow for a shallower depth.

If you want to learn more about natural swimming pools or view additional photos, visit www.totalhabitat.com.