

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

The Magazine of Southwest Living

AWESOME
200,000-GALLON
POOL

COMMENT

IT'S CODE. When asked if I've been through summer in the Valley yet, the implied inquiry is whether or not I can take the heat. Since July was the hottest month in Phoenix last year, this question has a certain urgency to it.

Keeping my cool will be easier than expected thanks to insights I've learned about pools. I now know they're as essential here as air conditioning, sunblock and frozen water bottles, especially when the temp hits the century mark and above. I also know that not all pools are created equal. Some get too warm to be refreshing as summer stretches on. Others, like the one in my backyard, stay cool longer, but lack the square footage for swimming laps or staging large pool parties.

None of these common concerns are shared by the owner of the majestic pool in *Making a Splash*. When Jerry Meek of Desert Star Construction first showed me images of the pool, which his company built, on his phone, I couldn't entirely grasp the scale or the drama of it. But, as he shared facts and figures; stories of how it was conceived, designed, built and engineered; and some of the owner's very precise expectations of its look and features, my understanding and awe of it grew exponentially.

This is not a pool to emulate; it is a pool to admire. For its sheer size, complexity, uniqueness, novelty

and location. It's cool that such an over-the-top pool has a Valley address. And, it's cool to take a virtual plunge in it via our story.

Thankfully, having a pond-size pool isn't the only way to stay or be cool this time of year. My favorite beat-the-heat approach is to kick off my shoes to feel the cool from the tile floor under my bare feet, pour a favorite beverage over a tumbler full of ice, relax into my linen-covered reading chair and call my sister in Duluth., Minn. Where the average temperature in July is a crisp 78.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karol". The signature is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Karol DeWulf Nickell
Editor

 Tap
Image

Making a Splash

*Respectful of its Mountain
Surroundings, This Pool is a Marvel
of Engineering and Technology.*

BY **REBECCA L. RHOADES**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GARRETT COOK**

Hidden from street view, this 99-by-33-foot pool with an 80-foot-long infinity edge is a stunning addition to its mountainside locale. A 15-foot-long stainless-steel and concrete sheer descent water feature conceals a cozy grotto. At the far end of the pool stands a Joshua tree chosen by the homeowner. Buff flagstone and custom wrought-iron railings complete the decking.



WHEN THIS PARADISE VALLEY, Ariz., property was purchased, it had only a small pool, which suited the new homeowner just fine. That's because he had carefully selected the residence with a specific vision in mind for constructing a new aquatic oasis, one that was grand but also discrete and honored its natural surroundings. "The idea to build such a pool has long been a dream of mine, even before we bought the house," he says. "The concept we had in mind was an infinity pool where we could see the view and the city lights when swimming."

To make his dream a reality, he engaged Desert Star Construction of Scottsdale. The firm had already impressed him with its quality of work during a renovation of the house two years prior. But this project presented two major challenges: the owner's desire to incorporate some of the most innovative yet rarely used pool technology available and the home's mountainside location.

"The magnitude of this project was exciting," says Jerry Meek, president of



DSC. "There was a 40-foot grade change. Imagine trying to build a four-story home on a bowling lane without going into the gutters." Assisting Meek were DSC's senior project manager David Schumm, along with conceptual designer Lash McDaniel and architect Greg Shouten.

Eighteen months of construction and hundreds of thousands of man-hours guaranteed that every detail was attended to, inch by inch. Because the homeowner wanted to preserve the

At the property's highest point, a 10.5-by-7.5-foot spa offers an unparalleled panorama of the pool and the Valley. Because the sloping landscape limited access to the premises, the builders had to hand-carry all of the surrounding flagstone, as well as all of the mortar and grout, up two levels of stairs.





One of two slides, the plunge slide is 17.5 feet long with a thrill-inducing angle of 47.5 degrees. Both it and its longer companion were constructed onsite of rebar and gunite. An epoxy finish was applied to achieve a smooth surface, while a custom color matches the boulders.

POOL STATS

99 feet long, 33 feet wide

2,566-square-foot surface area

80-foot-long infinity edge

12.5 feet deep

200,000 gallons of water

property's existing desert landscape, every tree, cactus and bush was removed and stored off-site until they could be replanted. Multiple concrete grade beams were set in place to support the pool, and tapered steel-reinforced concrete retaining walls, some as tall as 32 feet, were cast. When completed, 160 truckloads of concrete—enough to pave a 3.5-foot-wide sidewalk from Scottsdale to Tempe and back again halfway—had been delivered up the mountain.

Almost 850 tons of boulders selected by the homeowner from a site in Congress, Ariz., were brought in by crane to build the abutting landscape. “By using real boulders for the pool’s surrounding environment, we wanted to create the impression that the pool has always been here,” the homeowner says. Three stone slabs form diving platforms, while two slides—a long one that winds beneath a 20-ton boulder; and a shorter plunge one—add a playful touch.

An outdoor gourmet kitchen and attached bathroom/shower, an elevator that connects the pool level with the main house, a sheer descent waterfall and a spa situated at the top of the



POOL AND SPA MATERIALS

1,500 cubic yards of concrete

150,000 lineal feet (or **28.5** miles) of rebar

847 tons of boulders

28 tons: the largest boulder



Despite its size, the pool is not visible from the street, house or main patio. "The homeowner wanted to make it almost like a destination resort within his own home," says builder Jerry Meek.



boulderscape were also added to complete the setting. While this all creates a jaw-dropping display, it's what you can't see that elevates the pool from simply stunning to all-out wow.

"From a technology standpoint, we demanded no compromises, with the goal always being the best quality of water, both chemically pure and without any particulate matter on the water surface," says the homeowner. To help eliminate the infiltration of plant matter and dust, he designed a litter gutter that takes advantage of the prevailing southerly winds. Debris is blown into the gutter, lessening the need for skimming. A walkway bordering the infinity edge provides easy access for cleaning, and an underground surge tank ensures that the pool will never overflow.

Both the pool and the spa have their own heating and filtration systems, allowing them to be operated independently or together. Because the homeowner travels frequently, he likes the pool to be ready for use at a moment's notice. A 2 million BTU heater, accessible by computer or iPad, can heat the pool's 200,000 gallons at an



extremely fast rate. For example, even when it's near freezing outside, the water temperature can be raised from 60 to 90 degrees in less than 48 hours.

A commercial ozone generator oxidizes and sanitizes the water, reducing chemical odors and leaving no harmful byproducts behind. "There's less chlorine in this pool than there is in drinking water. Of all the pools we've done in our career, this is the absolute clearest water we've ever seen," says Meek. The

Located beneath the pool, the mechanical room controls every aspect of the pool and spa.





technology that supports this water world—and which also includes 10 identical motors to move the water up the steep elevation and pneumatic shut-off valves, imported from Switzerland, that automatically prevent backflow—is found beneath the pool in its mechanical room.

“This was by far the most complicated, detailed project in our history,” says Meek. “To see it in its completed state is just phenomenal.”

The homeowner is also pleased with the final outcome. “This pool isn’t just a place to swim but also a place for our family and friends to share good times together,” he says. “The children enjoy the thrill of the slides and investigating every inch of the pool, and even our family dog loves to join the fun. As for the older members of our family, it’s a wonderful place to stay young in spirit.” ■

Almost 850 tons of boulders were used to create an imposing backdrop. Here, a small staircase in the rocks offers a shortcut from the water to the slides and diving platforms.

