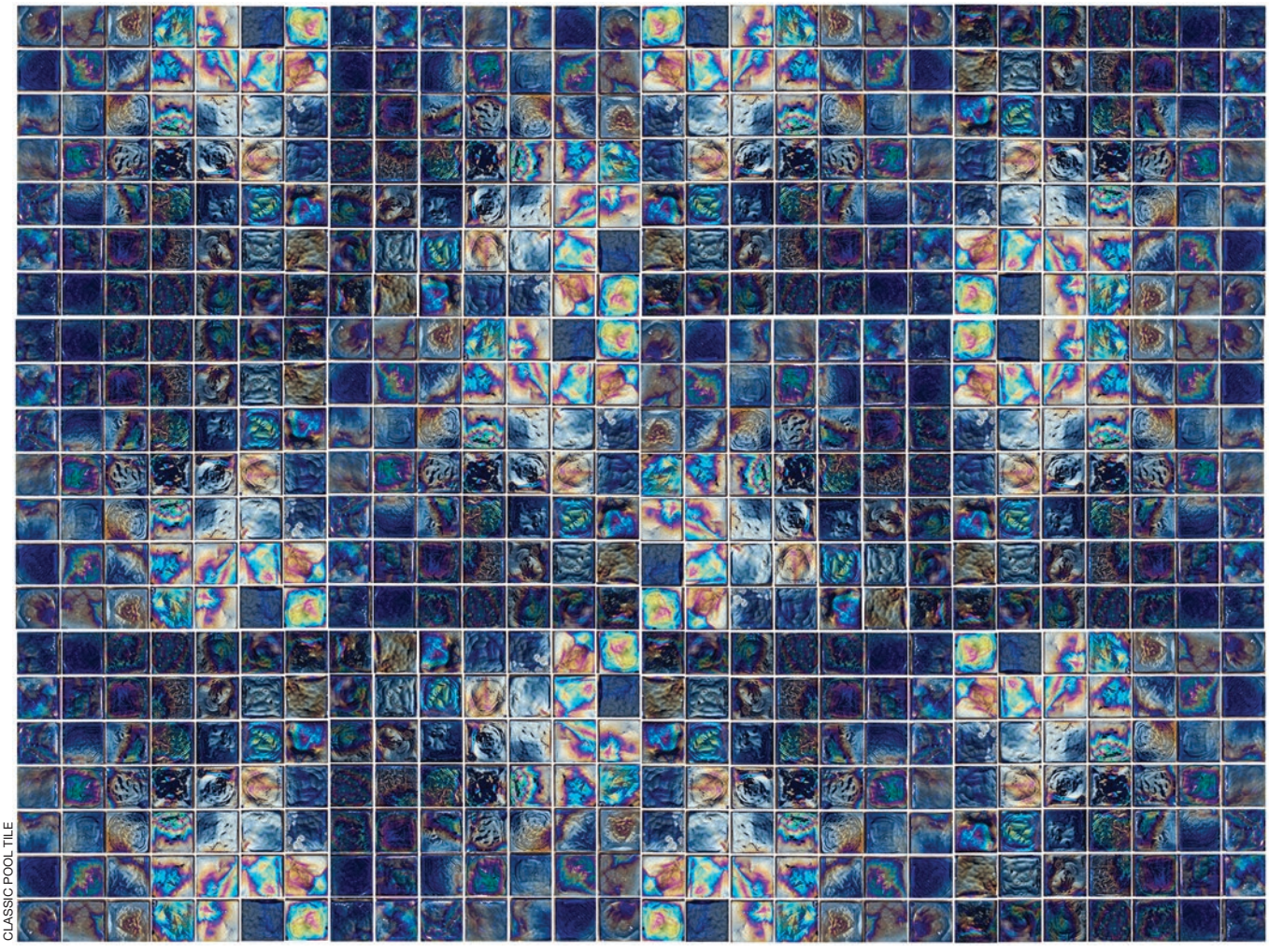
Finishing Touches

Nothing sets off a spa or pool quite like decorative tile

| By Linda G. Green



CLASSIC POOL TILE

Humans have had a love affair with tile for thousands of years, with its use in waterfeatures dating back to ancient Rome. Indeed, even though the Italian city of Pompeii was destroyed by a volcano in 79 AD, remains of tiled pools and fountains were found in surprisingly good shape among the ruins.

Fortunately, today's decorative tiles for pools and spas don't generally see as much abuse. Whether they're used to accentuate a pool perimeter, cover an entire spa or create a mosaic, they are as popular as ever — and the sky's the limit for imaginative designers.

Here, we visit a couple of recent tiled projects by Platinum Poolcare Aquatech, a *Pool & Spa News* Top Builder based in Wheeling, Ill., a suburb of Chicago.

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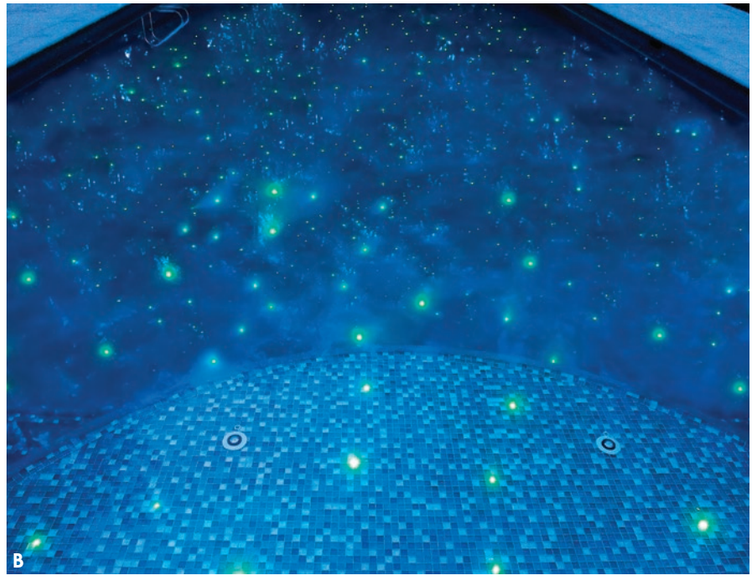
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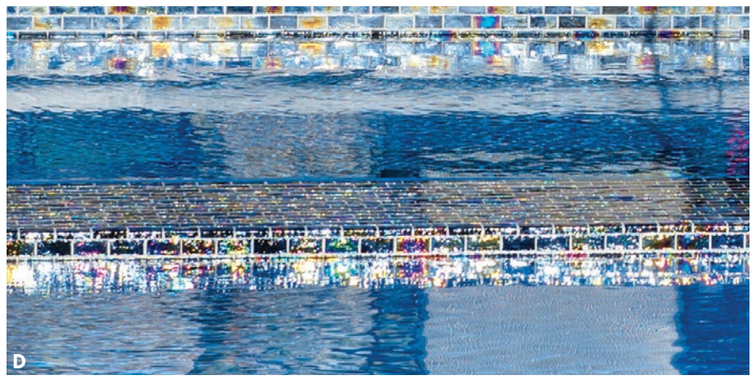
PHOTOS BY OUTVISION PHOTOGRAPHY

A) Starry, starry night: This pool features twinkling fiberoptic stars, a tiled perimeter and sun shelf. Built last year, the pool has depths ranging from 3.5- to 7.5 feet. The project posed an unusual challenge, says James Atlas, co-owner of Platinum Poolcare Aquatech, because the fiberoptic network needed to be protected from damage in case the pool surface ever had to be redone. To address that concern, a circular indentation was made in the pool floor, with enough fiber stored inside to reinstall the star system in the future, if needed. In addition, special care was taken to avoid damaging the small fiberoptic stems holding the stars. It took three weeks to install the 1-by-1-inch tiles, made by Materials Marketing; the entire project took four months.

B) Custom made: The pool features close to 250 fiberoptic "stars" and a custom blend of glass tile and natural stone on the sun shelf. The homeowner was particular about the tile/stone color mix, wanting to make sure it perfectly accented the French gray plaster of the pool before he would approve it. "Layout and preplanning were essential," Atlas says.

C) Shelf talkers: A pleasant sound emanates from the pool's sun shelf, which features five bubblers. Atlas was looking for uniformity of shape and height, and constructed each of the mini-geyers to shoot water 18 inches into the air.

D) Powerful perimeter: In this spa renovation project done last year, the 1-by-3-inch glass tiles make the entire installation pop. "With these tiles, surface prep is [particularly] important," Atlas says. "We must get it perfectly level, and any loose material is sandblasted away. Tile must go on a good substrate, with proper bonding and grout." The tiles are manufactured in China and distributed by Classic Pool Tile. Platinum Poolcare uses an in-house crew for its tile work and puts perimeter tile on all projects. The region's repeated freeze/thaw conditions mean this type of tile is unsuitable for larger surfaces.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