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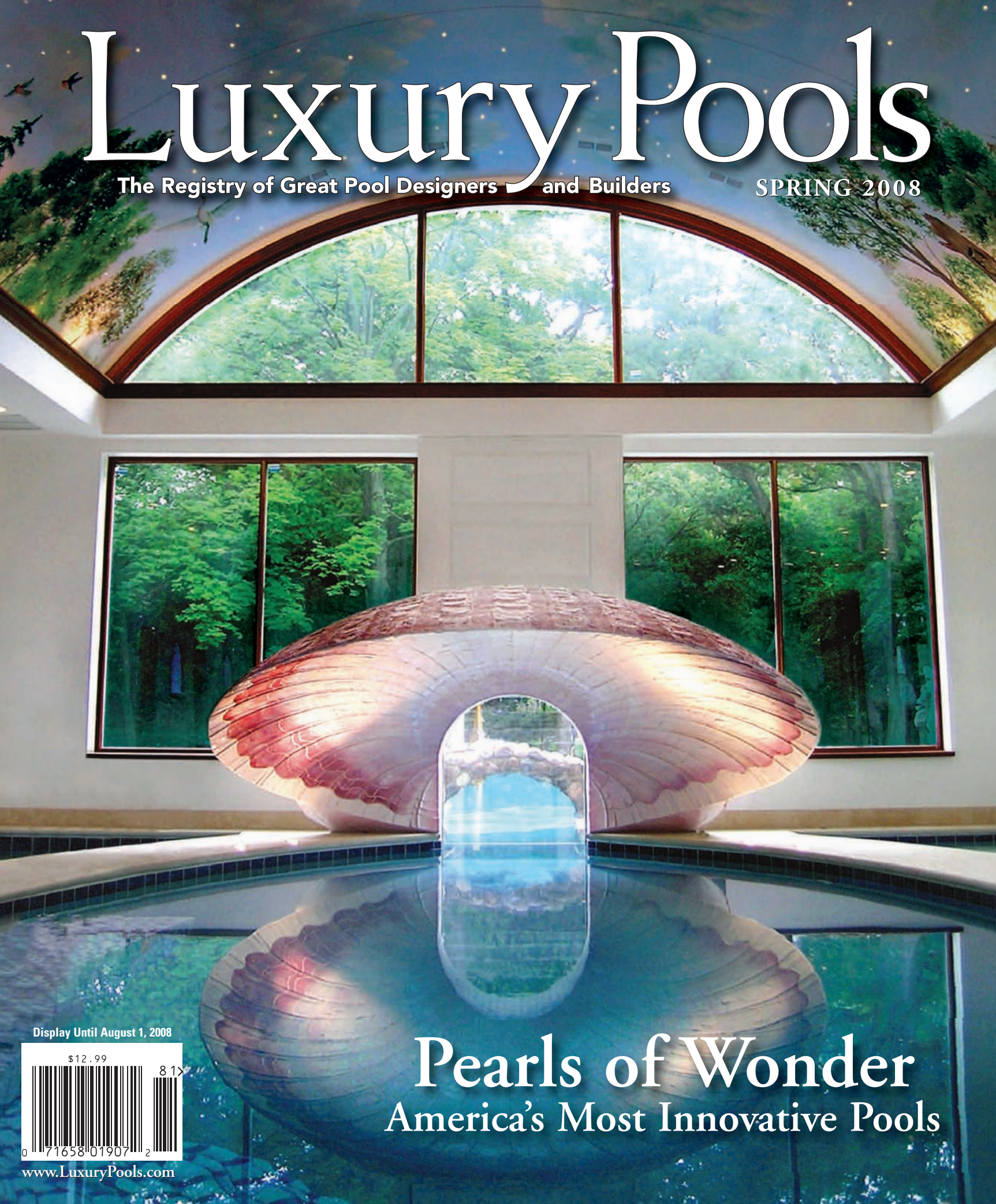

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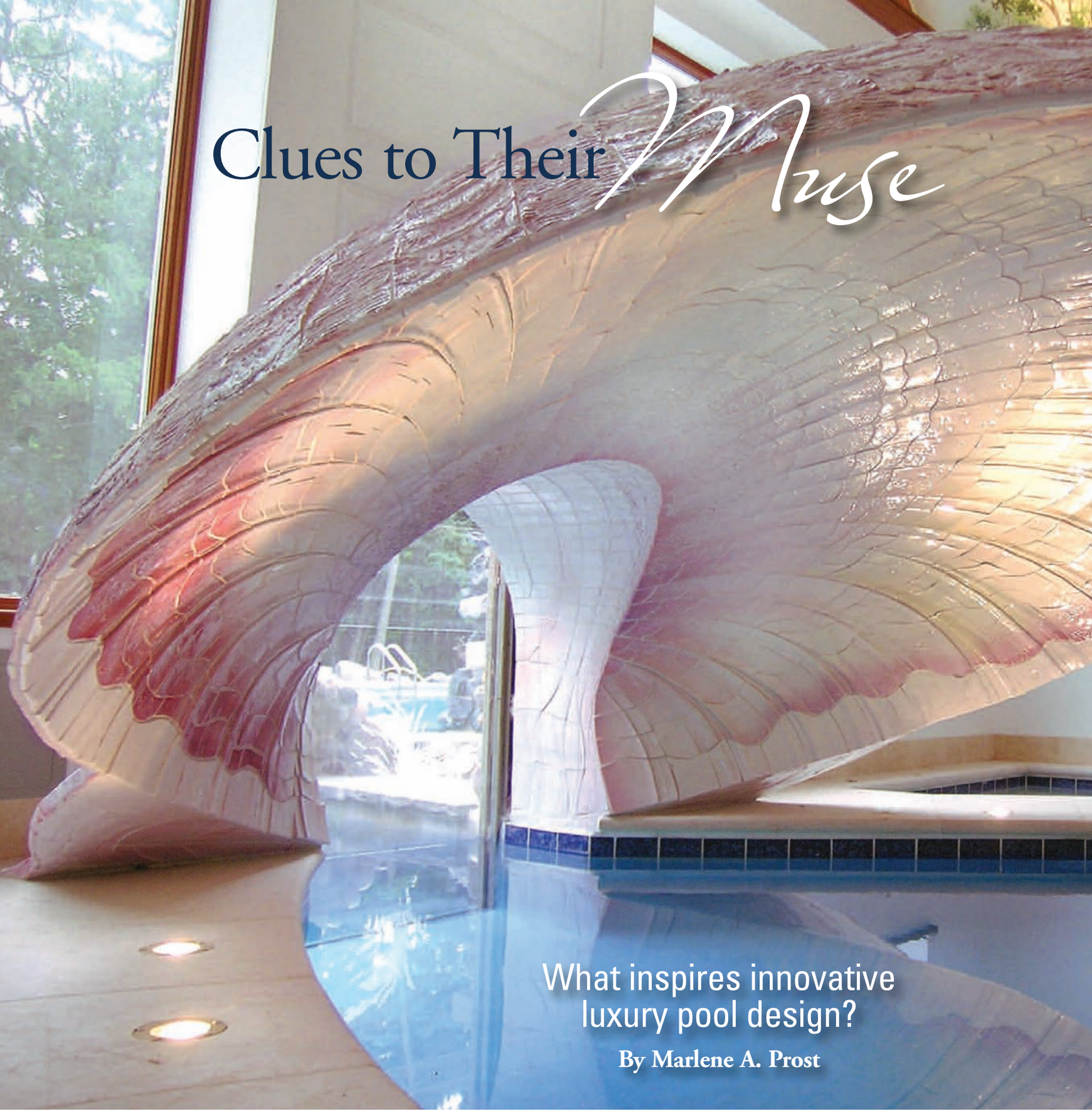
Clues to Their *Muse*



What inspires innovative luxury pool design?

By Marlene A. Prost

What do these things have in common? A Hermès scarf. A clamshell ashtray. Japanese knives. Andy Warhol. Give up? Each has served as the cultural inspiration behind a luxurious swimming pool crafted by leading builders and designers, resulting in a project that exceeds expectations…and delights customers.

Every unique, high-end swimming pool design begins with the spark of desire. It could be a homeowner's yearning to hold on to a souvenir or memory from a trip abroad, a beloved treasure from childhood, or an admired

Rising up like a fantasy from the sea, this clamshell feature was inspired by, of all things, an ashtray. Part of an elaborate indoor/outdoor pool setting by Platinum Poolcare, Ltd., this remarkable artwork doubles as an entrance to the equally fabulous backyard portion of the poolscape.

Photo courtesy of Craig Bragdy Designs, Wales, U.K.

piece of artwork. But what inspires those who create spectacular outdoor poolscapes?

Usually, it's their client, and what they glean from *inside* the client's home.

"We empty ourselves of our own assumptions and views and go in with a blank slate," says James Atlas of Platinum Poolcare, Ltd., in Wheeling, Illinois. "Once we figure out what they really want, we show them examples of what we've done. We freely hand out magazines such as *Luxury Pools* to help them. But most people have a style, a taste. Maybe they can't convey it, but most have a picture in mind."

James Atlas

That is why leading luxury pool designers and builders rely on more than just their technical skills. With their eyes and ears, they collect subtle details about their clients' desires — both in practicality and in fantasy. How do they do it…and what does this mean for you?

Eyeing the Inside

Before checking the pool site, a savvy designer is often eyeing what is inside the home — its furniture style, artwork, bric-a-brac and even the client's clothing…all for clues into personal taste.

Talk may turn to the realities of cost, structure and how the pool will be used. But never underestimate a client's cultural experiences, says Tom Driscoll of Cabana Aquatech in Houston, Texas.

Tom Driscoll

For instance, Driscoll deals with many clients in the oil business, who travel around the world. One had a passion for Asian artwork. "He collected all types of original artifacts, like knives. So I started thinking about how I can enhance this pool design with a little Asian flair: gentle flowing water and with other features outside the pool area, like urns and bamboo."

Advice: When meeting with designers or builders to learn more about them and their work, don't be shy to let them know more about *you* — the figurative and literal roads you've traveled. Give a tour of your home to show off clues to your muse: Your choice in décor, with explanations of what inspired it, can offer important information for your luxury pool design.

Bringing the Indoors Outdoors

The home itself is the grandfather of pool design. The pool area should be a natural extension of the house, which the experienced designer will carry through in his

TOP: **Whimsical in every detail, the ceramic mural in the pool created by David Tisherman's Visuals Inc., illustrates an aquatic environment that can stand alone as a piece of art.** ABOVE: **This magnificent waterscape by Pure Water Pools, Inc., offers an array of amazing features, including a koi pond, a fish tank in the deep end and a two-story waterwall inspired by the client's love for Andy Warhol artwork.**

design — not just in choice of materials and design, but when planning a specific motif or theme.

"I try to make the outdoor area an extension of the indoors so it flows, so there is some movement, balance and rhythm," notes Driscoll. "When I'm standing in the formal living area, I want an extension of that mood to continue outdoors."

When clients live in southern California, for example, architectural inspiration usually comes from the area's Spanish and Moorish roots, says Randy Beard of Pure Water Pools, in Costa Mesa. One example is the "runnel," a long, fabricated stream of water that runs through the house and, in early Spanish culture, cooled off the indoors. "Swimming pools melt into the house," he explains. "I've done my job if you don't recognize where the house and pool combine."

Advice: Consider key areas of your home to be incorporated with the outdoor pool area — a favorite room or scenery-showing wall of windows, perhaps. Lounging, eating and private areas such as bedrooms work especially well.

Embracing Culture

One key challenge in using the client as a muse, says Don Gwiz of Lewis Aquatech in Chantilly, Virginia, arises when a client is from a foreign country with a different frame of reference. He recalls a client originally from India who hired his firm to remodel a 10-acre home in Potomac, Maryland, including a $1.3 million pool area.

"Once we understood their cultural background and the architecture of India, we incorporated them in the design," says Gwiz. The pool's 4,000- square-foot granite deck was inlaid with tile, with Indian architectural detail throughout. At the bottom of the pool is a glass mosaic emblem with the client's last name in cursive. "In this case, our own ideas were not in play. We helped them develop their vision."

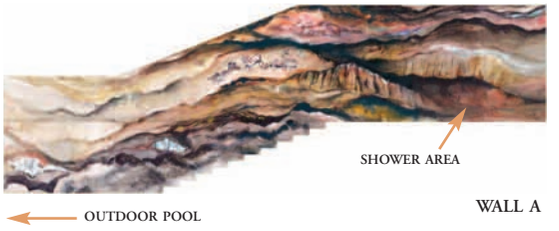
Don Gwiz

Advice: If you favor the style or architecture of a particular culture, take time to explore it further. Some focused research — at the library, a well-stocked bookstore or on Google — will help you discover the design elements you like the most; take note of these elements and share them with your builder or designer.

Artwork: Worth a Thousand Words

When it comes to art, most people know what they like. So the paintings on a client's wall are a sure-fire source of inspiration.

Inspiration can come from anywhere, and in this case, a Hermès scarf depicting cave drawings was the muse. These conceptual drawings by Nick Powell from Craig Bragdy Designs, Wales, U.K., show the ebb and flow of the design that Atlas' Platinum Poolcare, Ltd., used to craft a swim-in grotto that leads into a cave sauna.



Randy Beard

Beard recalls a "lovely couple in their 60s" who built pools at both their beach home in Newport Beach on the Balboa Peninsula, and at their "standard East Coast house" in Santa Monica, California.

The client had an outstanding modern art collection, with pieces by Andy Warhol and California sculptor Guy Dill. "We knew the pool needed to lead down that road. My job was to interpret that and make the indoors and outdoor consistent," Beard says.

Dill himself was commissioned to create an abstract sculpture to be mounted on the wet coping edge of the pool in Santa Monica.

The Newport Beach pool was far more extravagant. There, the art collection inspired a two-story water wall that resembles a Warhol painting, with giant, brightly-colored disks that spin with the water. When it's noted that the wall looks like a big pachinko game, Beard chuckles, "I just got back from Japan. [The wall] was very artistic; people have called it many things."

Atlas recalls a client in the northwest Chicago suburbs who wanted her sauna to have a "cave feel."

"She pulls out a $600 Hermès scarf in maroon she bought in Paris with cave paintings; the pattern was taken from actual cave paintings. She lays the scarf on the table and says, 'This is what I want.'"

And that's what she got: The swimmer travels from the pool under a rain curtain, through a grotto, then up steps to a sauna lined with cave drawings in ceramic tile and stalactites.

Advice: Share your art preferences with your prospective designer or builder. Knowledgeable craftsmen understand that a Mondrian lover will probably find the most beauty in a geometric pool, while a Dalí devotee will much prefer an imaginative freeform design.

Independent Study: From Color to the Classics

For elite luxury pool builders, inspiration for a spectacular pool design comes from meeting with, and learning about, a client. But those trained in art history, architecture and

Subtle in design, conservative in color choice, this poolscape by Hydroscapes, LLC is a wonderful example of simple elegance. Using neutral tones, geometric shapes and plants familiar to Arizona, the pool fits easily into its desert setting.

color theory are better equipped to take their clients' seeds of desire and make them bloom.

When one client wanted his pool to have a nice "clean" look with a vanishing edge seven feet above a lake, Driscoll drew on courses he's taken at the prestigious Genesis 3 Design School, where top builders are educated on the soup-to-nuts aspects of distinctive poolscape craftsmanship, from color theory and ancient architecture to the latest techniques in hydraulics and engineering.

Roger Soares

Driscoll's design involved black blended glass tile, white marble coping, and a black onyx pool bottom. "It's a very contemporary home. I wanted some real contrast. I didn't want the area to be all black. ... When you understand [color theory], you understand what happens to colors, the different depths of color, how the color spectrum will give the pool a different look."

Roger Soares of Hydroscapes in Fountain Hills, Arizona, has traveled the globe to study architectural styles to inspire his poolscapes, especially those related to water, such as the Turkish baths.

When a Scottsdale client expressed a fondness for Japanese tea gardens because her father had been stationed in Asia, Soares took a trip to San Francisco to study the tea gardens there. And in Spain recently, he toured buildings by Antoni Gaudi, a leader of Spain's art nouveau movement. "Gaudi is probably one of the most diverse builders I've seen," says Soares. "He has a mix of Gothic and modern. ...Gaudi blended all kind of broken tiles on columns...little techniques maybe we could apply in a pool. I've done it in the past."

Advice: Realize your interview meetings with designers and builders are a two-way street. Just as they are asking you about your life and likes, ask about theirs: Inquire about special training and interest in art, history, travel, engineering and other areas that could influence your pool design.

Inspiration, after all, is contagious. ❖

Learn more about these builders and their companies:
Page 62 – Hydroscapes, LLC
Page 88 — Pure Water Pools, Inc.
Page 120 — Platinum Poolcare, Ltd.
Page 168 – Cabana Aquatech
Page 190 — Lewis Aquatech

Marlene A. Prost, *who writes for* Pool & Spa Living *and other magazines, recently completed her first book.*