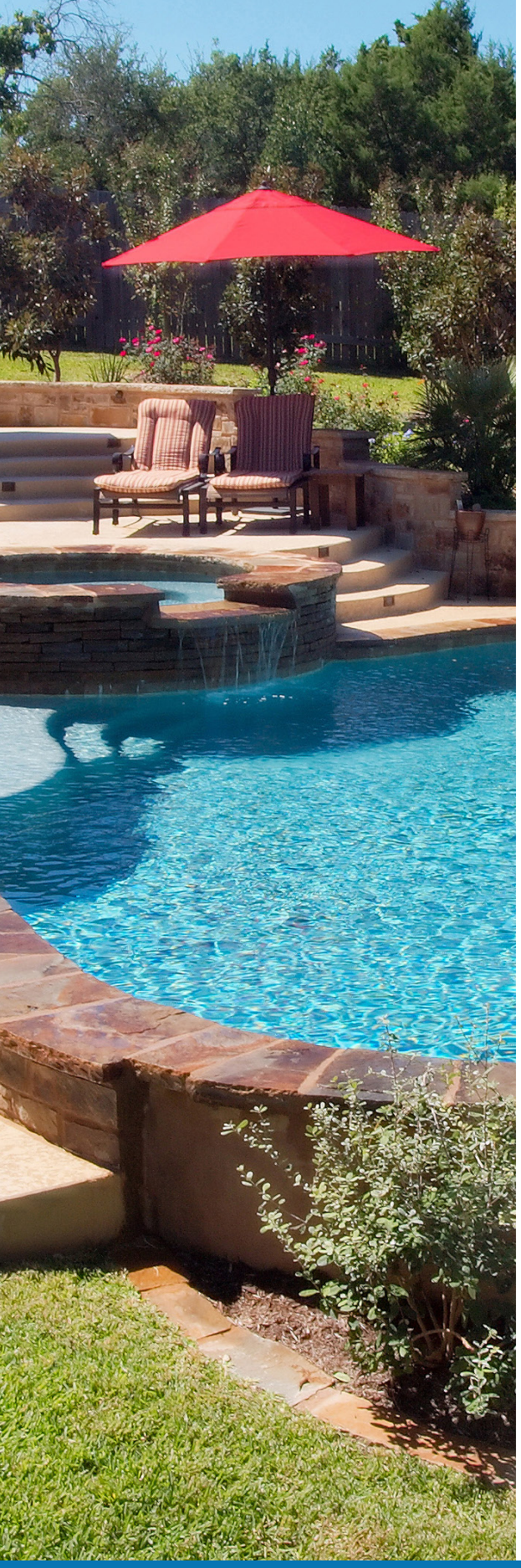

MYSTIC POOLS

CRITICAL POOL PLANNING QUESTIONS

WHAT YOU NEED TO ASK BEFORE YOU BUILD A POOL

Why ask the Questions

We know that investing in a swimming pool is a big decision. And since a lot of this may be foreign to you (unless you have been through this process before) you may be experiencing a bit of the "FUD Factor": Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt.

Anytime we deal with things that we don't have a lot of experience with - we tend to get a little uncomfortable (some more than others). The investment in a swimming pool is a big decision. But it is one of the best decisions you can make as a backyard swimming pool can bring many years of enjoyment and wonderful family memories to your life.

So pardon the pun but please DIVE IN to this information. It should address many of your concerns and help to educate you as you begin this process. If you still have questions after you read this we welcome the opportunity to discuss any and all of your questions or concerns.

What is the best way to choose the right pool company?

Experience and industry studies tell us that most people reference two primary sources of information in their decision making process; referrals and the internet.

1. REFERRALS – talk to your neighbors, friends, business associates, etc. to see if they have experience with any local pool builders. If you don't produce some builder names in this process then at least ask any pool contractors you may be considering to provide you with a list of some recent customers that you can contact. Now it is unlikely that a contractor will give you a list of unhappy customers – but there still is merit in speaking with people who have been through the process. You should ask them what went right and what to watch out for along the way; and how did the contractor resolve any issues along the way. Some questions to consider asking include:

- How long did the total project take from start to completion? All things considered - was everything completed in a reasonable amount of time?
- What did the contractor do to educate you on the construction process? Was this done at the time of sale or at a pre-construction meeting?
- Did any unforeseen or unexpected costs arise that you weren't warned about up-front? In other words – did the pool builder complete the entire project at the original contract price? And, if there were changes (deletions or additions) were they handled via a written contract addendum or change-order?
- How was the communication throughout the process? Did the builder keep you informed as the job moved ahead and in the event of any unforeseen delays, inspections, etc?
- Was a final walk-through conducted giving you the opportunity to address any/all concerns prior to completion? Did all of your concerns get addressed to your satisfaction?
- Lastly, are you satisfied with your pool builder to the point where you would not hesitate to recommend the builder.

What is the best way to choose the right pool company?

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2. INTERNET – you are reading this document because your search; whether because of a referral, curiosity, or whatever reason - got you to our website. You then completed the web form to request this information. We recognize the internet as a very valuable tool to help people conducting research. Obviously our goal is to provide some educational assistance in your decision on your time and on your terms. If your research leads you to the decision to acquire your own backyard pool we hope you will give us an opportunity to earn your business. We would like nothing more then to help you achieve your backyard dream as we have done for many other families.

What does the contract process typically consist of?

The research process should allow you to narrow your choices down to 2 or 3 pool builders. At this point each of the builders should, at a minimum, do the following activities for you;

- Consult with you to determine your needs and desires regarding your use of the pool, your preferences in design and educate you about options that are available. The builder will use the information gathered in the process, combined with the specific information about the available back yard space to do both a design and cost estimate.

- The builder must accurately measure your yard and conduct a site survey to determine the best access into the yard. The "net" size of the access (after factoring in all existing obstacles such as existing landscaping, fencing, A/C units, fireplace bump outs, etc.) determines the size of excavation equipment that can be used. The builder will also assess how much existing fencing (if present) must be removed and replaced.

- Provide you with a scale drawing of the pool and backyard. This process is not complete until you are 100% satisfied with the plan and it may require a few revisions to get to that point. While it is really at the discretion of the builder you should not expect the contractor to leave the drawings with you for other, less talented designers to copy. This is the work product for which he is paid, and it is not a standard practice to leave it behind. When a decision is made and the final plan is prepared, you are entitled to a complete copy before the actual construction process begins.

- Provide you with a written proposal/contract that defines all of the features included in the project. This document should define the responsibilities of both the contractor and you as the homeowner. A typical proposal should include at least the following information:

1. Pool and Spa (when applicable) lengths, widths and depths.

What does the contract process typically consist of?

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2. Materials to be used for the interior finish, the water-line tile, any water features, rock materials, etc.
3. Type and amount of decking
4. Utility runs and hook-ups as applicable (electric / gas)
5. Equipment to be installed (Pumps, Filter, Heater, Controller, Etc.)
6. Cleaning system
7. Water sanitation system
8. Responsibilities of homeowner
9. Contact information (Office and/or Cell phones)
10. Warranty information

Each of the tasks noted above will help give you a clear picture of what the pool project will cost and how to complete the project effectively. If a contractor skips any of these basic requirements, you have good reason to be concerned about the accuracy of the estimate and the true final cost. Caution should be taken with any contractor who gives you a piece of paper with a price written on it or a "bid" that is not specific. Remember, a substantially lower bid might indicate a mistake or lack of knowledge or experience. A bid that is "too good to be true" may cost you in the long run.

How do I choose a design?

Choosing the design that is best for you is one of the most critical parts of the process. A custom designed swimming pool and spa can take on just about any form. There are some basic categories and terminology that should help you along the way.

Geometric is a pool with straight lines and/or more geometric curves. A geometric type of pool usually takes on more basic shapes such as rectangular and/or "Grecian" and usually takes on a more "classical" look. Homes with more symmetrical property lines accommodate geometric pools quite well. A simple geometric design in the right setting provides a very elegant look.

Freeform pools have "non-symmetrical" curves. This style of pool design is often used to create a more "natural" look. Rock trim and pebble type interiors are often used to accentuate a freeform pool. Homes with irregular and non-symmetric property lines accommodate a freeform pool nicely.

Lap pool is the term applied to a swimming pool that is used for swimming "laps" for exercise or training. Most lap pools are geometric (for example, rectangular), but can also take on a freeform shape with enough length left in one direction, perhaps on a diagonal line, that lap swimming can still be accomplished.

Vanishing Edge/Infinity Edge/Negative Edge: you may hear any one of these terms and they all basically refer to the same style of pool. A portion of the pool is left just slightly below the water level allowing water to flow over that area into a catch basin – creating the illusion that the water is flowing into whatever the backdrop view consists of. In the right setting, typically where the backyard falls away – perhaps into a steep cliff, into a lake, etc.- the effect can be extremely dramatic.

Even smaller yards or those looking for "just something to get wet in" can be accommodated. So depending on your available space and your intended use you may also find the following designs of interest:

Spas while often built as an attachment to the pool and sharing the pool equipment may also be built as a free standing project. Spas can be incorporated within or

How do I choose a design?

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attached to any swimming pool. Spas provide another means to enjoy your "body of water" whether it is for the therapeutic value or simply as a relaxing end to a hard days work or after an exercise session.

Spool is a fairly new term that describes an oversized spa or small pool that can be used for parties, entertainment and relaxation. Many people choose a "spool" to accommodate a smaller space. Spools can range from simple to extravagant depending on the features incorporated.

There are many other design considerations that can arise based on the terrain, your desire for water movement/water features, etc. A good designer will assist you through this process while insuring that what is conceived is buildable.

What other questions should I ask a pool builder before choosing that builder to build my pool?

If you feel comfortable that a builder is qualified to build your pool and they have provided you with an estimate there are some additional questions you might ask prior to signing a contract. Your builder may have already addressed some or all of these items during the process so just focus in on the areas that weren't covered.

Who will oversee the construction process? Does the contractor have a full-time construction superintendent that will oversee your job? Some companies insist that the sales representative or company owner will manage the entire job. This is not necessarily a problem depending on how busy everybody is. If an issue on your job needs immediate attention but your sales representative is engaged with another project who can you turn to for information and assistance? Some companies employ very competent construction coordinators who primarily handle coordinating the people involved with the various phases of construction and can address issues that may arise.

How many "quality-checks" will be made throughout the construction process? Each phase of construction; from layout, to excavation, to plumbing, etc., must be completed correctly to insure the project comes together as per your expectations. Have the builder walk you through the construction process and the procedures they have in place to insure quality.

What "standards" will the pool be built to? Does the builder have written construction standards? Can you see them? Without construction standards, contractors essentially allow their subcontractors or laborers to build your pool. The problem is that no "one" subcontractor or laborer can see the entire pool project. They do not have a "vision" for the entire plan that was initially presented to you. Instead, they see only their own individual responsibility. Clear construction standards will assure not only that each stage is done correctly, but also that all consecutive stages will fit seamlessly together. Also, it is common for contractors to "cut corners" if they don't have a code of standards.

What are some of the factors that can affect the construction costs?

Due to a number of potential factors another very similar swimming pool built in your neighborhood may not necessarily cost the same as your pool. For this reason, no one can give you a reasonable cost estimate over the telephone; many factors can impact the cost that a pool builder must assess prior to giving you an accurate estimate for building a pool in your yard.

These factors include:

- Amount of room for the excavation equipment (referred to as access space)
- Any obstacles in the excavation access area (air conditioning units, gas meters, fencing, etc.)
- A "hard dig" meaning rock or hard soil conditions
- Where is the nearest legal area to dump the dirt removed from your site?
- Demolition of existing landscaping, concrete walkways, etc.
- Will grading be required prior to pool layout & excavation
- Overhead or underground utilities that might require re-routing
- Size of the pool
- Amount and type of Decking
- Electrical service panel upgrades
- Retaining walls and other masonry work
- Make and quality of equipment and construction materials

Remember that in most cases, your contractor has no way of knowing what lurks below the surface. Unforeseen issues can arise, such as:

- Septic tank or sewer lines
- Other underground utilities (Electric, Sewer, Cable TV)
- Fill soil that will not bear the weight of the pool
- Rock or hard-pan conditions that require special digging equipment
- Underground water

A contractor must assume that you, the homeowner, has more knowledge of the property than anyone else and no one likes surprises. To mitigate unexpected costs during construction, be sure you let your contractor know of any conditions you are aware of before construction begins. Also, ask your contractor what costs might be assessed if problems are encountered. Most importantly, if a con-

What are some of the factors that can affect the construction costs?

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tractor says prior to signing a contract, "We don't need to worry about that right now," you might want to look for somebody else.

Any unforeseen construction costs should be handled with a Change Orders (or Contract Addendum). This is a legal, written change to your construction contract. Some unscrupulous contractors might try to lure you into signing a contract with them by "low-balling" the price of your pool with the intent to later make changes to your project during construction in order to recoup money they would lose if they stuck to the original contract price. Before you sign a contract with a contractor, ensure that he has a process and policy for executing change orders. Do not allow any changes to your construction contract without written agreement.

Take caution when a builder quotes you a low "over the phone" price…because without completing a design and seeing your yard, a blind estimate will rarely be a realistic one. Familiarize yourself with the market and be prepared to adjust your plans as necessary to accommodate the budget you have in mind.

What will I need to do to prepare for the start of construction?

Your pool builder will explain to you what you will need to do. Before construction actually begins, your contractor should:

1. Provide a final drawing – which you should review carefully and sign off - that reflect everything on the contract. Some builders have their customers sign off on the drawing at the time of sale. Others may have a more detailed drawing created within a few days (or even weeks – depending on the complexity of the job) which they will provide to you. Some details on your pool may require structural engineering. In that case plans or details relevant to a particular element of the plan may be prepared by a licensed structural engineer.

2. Permitting requirements can vary from city, to county, to state and your builder will typically handle this. However it may be necessary for you to assist the builder in obtaining permits. Permit responsibility should be spelled out in your contract. Important: Disclose all easements/setbacks, etc. that you are aware of to your contractor prior to getting permits. This will help to avoid plan conflicts or design changes.

3. Your builder may ask to schedule a pre-construction meeting with you, the salesman, and the construction supervisor. This meeting should prepare you for construction and is essential to making sure your project runs smoothly. The following things are typical of what could be discussed at this pre-construction meeting:

- Expected date of excavation
- A review of all material selections
- Realistic expectations of backyard construction
- Responsibilities of the homeowner (if applicable)

There are also things that should be completed by you, the homeowner such as:

1. Get "Home Owners Association" approval (if applicable). Failure to do so could lead to fines and delays on the pool project. As the homeowner, you are usually responsible for obtaining HOA approval.

2. Have all financing completed. Contractors should not be expected to start any work until financing has been approved and/or appropriate payments have been made.

What are considered normal delays?

What are considered normal delays?
Even though many pools are built according to the original schedule it is not uncommon for delays to occur. Unfortunately, many things outside of a pool builders control can delay a pool project.

Some of the more typical things that can lead to construction delays include:

- Work by others, not part of the pool contract
- Change Orders
- Weather
- Natural disasters such as fires or floods
- Delays by City inspectors
- Economic/supply shortages such as cement or steel

Your builder wants things to run just as smoothly as you do so don't get all worked up if a delay occurs. Your pool is something that will provide you with many years of enjoyment. A few days or even weeks delay along the way is well worth the wait.

Why not just build my own pool?

Building a swimming pool is not a simple construction project. The process requires coordination of a minimum of ten different specialized trades. Even most general contractors, with extensive experience at home building, do not have the skills or experience with subcontractors required to build a pool. In fact, it is very common for general contractors to hire pool companies as the contractor for their pool projects.

If you are willing to accept all of the responsibility, and you have the required knowledge, experience and the time then you might consider it. Just keep in mind that in addition to the complexities of design, supervision, and construction, there are also many liability considerations. Most homeowners do not realize that they assume total liability for every subcontractor (and his employees) while he works on your property.

There are some people out there who may attempt to talk you into being your own general contractor, or "owner/builder" as it is referred to. "Owner/builder" describes a situation in which the homeowner becomes the general contractor; as an owner/builder you (not the person you hire) assumes responsibility for the whole job.

Your responsibility may include such things as state and federal taxes, worker's compensation insurance and other legal liabilities. You may be required to hire various subcontractors for your project, scheduling their work and supervising the job. If a worker is injured while working on your property, you could be asked to pay for injuries and rehabilitation through your homeowner's insurance policy.

By signing a building permit application as an owner/builder, you assume full responsibility for all phases of your project and its integrity. While it may appear a cheaper way to go at first glance, hiring an unlicensed 'consultant' to manage the project does not save you money in the long run. By hiring a licensed (where applicable) and experienced contractor for your project to hire licensed knowledgeable tradespersons, the contractor becomes responsible for all phases of construction. Unless you are very experienced in construction, it is best to leave these matters to your licensed contractor.

Summary

A swimming pool is an investment that keeps providing returns year after year. Those returns are in the form of family fun and family memories. You've worked hard to get to a place in your life where you can make your backyard dreams a reality. We hope this report has provided you with some very valuable information. We would love to work with you if you reach the point where you are ready to "Build your backyard dream". Let us know if we can be of any assistance.

Look for another free report in your in-box soon: "Building a more Eco-Friendly Pool"