

Splashing out

You can't have a high-end property in France without a luxury pool – the problem is choosing from the many styles on offer

You have built or purchased a dream property and may now be considering installing a swimming pool to complete your French lifestyle. A quality pool – and perhaps also a spa – will not just satisfy your desire to cool off, relax and exercise and offer a luxurious place to entertain your guests, but will also meet the ever-growing expectations of discerning clients. A well-designed pool can also provide an attractive water feature to complement your property and add value to your investment.

All these benefits depend, however, on the standard of project management, workmanship and materials, as with most things you get what you pay for and pools are no exception. It is a good idea, therefore, to consult a pool specialist who can head up the process to make sure the end result will be a pool of your dreams.

Getting started

A survey of your property and land to assess the suitability of installing a pool needs to be carried out. Although a planning consent *per se* may not be needed – which should certainly provide one less obstacle to the proceedings – you are required to lodge an architect's style drawing of the pool at your local *mairie* (town hall), where the information is primarily used to calculate your property tax.

Tony Line, managing director of London Swimming Pool Company Ltd, has offered expertise over the last 20 years to many high-profile Britons building pools across the Channel. His advice is to choose a reliable, reputable building company on recommendation. "Since the French have their set ways of doing things and may not explain them fully, get as much as possible in writing and have it translated, so you know exactly what you are letting yourself in for. Then have the contract checked out in the UK and even get your lawyer involved, since building a pool is a capital expenditure. Ask to view three or four completed pools and speak to the owners. Knowing some French and a little about pools is always going to be an advantage".

However, if you do not have a recommended company to turn to, then contact the FPP – *Fédération des Professionnels de la Piscine*, the French equivalent of SPATA (Swimming Pool and Allied Trades Association) in the UK. The organisations maintain standards in their respective industries by requiring that members adhere to their codes of practice and contact. The FPP can give you details of affiliated contractors in your area of France.

One British property owner in the Dordogne found out the hard way the importance of building a quality pool from the start, as curing problems after completion is disruptive and expensive. He



had to summon Tony's assistance to put things right a few years ago when the walls of his pool literally collapsed due to changed ground conditions following a period of drought.

You should also carefully consider the location of the pool from an aesthetic point of view, making sure that it integrates properly with the landscape and surroundings; a pool in the wrong place can look odd. It should be positioned out of the shade and away from trees which will drop leaves and other debris into it. While it is a good idea to build the largest pool possible, to accommodate for a growing family and circle of friends, there must also be space for a plantroom which houses the pump, water filtration unit and heating system.

Design details

Building a bespoke swimming pool and employing the services of a professional pool designer or an architect with specialist pool experience will ensure that the finished pool will meet with your exact specifications. You can determine the size and shape, and choose from the vast selection of interior and exterior pool finishes available, to complement the style of your property, whether traditional or modern.

To create a natural looking pool there are now materials such as pebbles, basalt and granite marble available. And for conventional finishes,

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adventurous new colours like large Indian white porcelain tiles or Venetian black iridescent mosaic glass tiles, which can provide a stunning mirror impression of the house and garden, are *de rigueur*.

Different levels of surround, planted areas, island stepping stones, peninsulas or bathing platforms extending into the pool, cascading water falls and fountains are features that can add further beauty and interest to your pool area. An increasingly popular request is to include a bench seat with massage jets along one side of the pool to provide delightful therapeutic benefits. And to create a few special effects, why not incorporate an underwater sound system and LED lighting?

When it comes to the architectural design for outdoor pools, infinity edges are now very much *à la mode*, giving the illusion that the pool extends endlessly, all the way to the horizon. The infinite edge of the pool will draw the eye of the observer, so it is important that there is something beautiful beyond it. The design is best suited to a natural sweeping landscape and on a smaller piece of land, a pleasing backdrop can be created. For indoor



pools, underwater windows and glass walls are very much on trend.

The shape of most pool designs have lately reverted to the more traditional rectangle from the kidney shape fashionable a few years ago. The reason for this is that clients now, with a few exceptions, request that their pools have covers, not just for safety and cleanliness, but also for the

benefits of heat retention, and the choice of high functionality covers is far greater to fit the rectangular shape.

Safety first

“This development fits in perfectly with the fairly recent security regulations issued for pool safety in France – the AFNOR,” says Peter Lang, chairman of SPATA’s technical committee, also involved in European pool activities. “All French pools need to be fitted with one of four security features; a cover, a fence surrounding the pool, an alarm system or an enclosure. While your contractor is legally obliged to inform you of all requirements, it is best to check with your *mairie* for local variances.”

If children will be using the pool, then a sloping depth and non-slip pool surround must be added to the design. A moving pool floor, which can be adjusted up and down and effectively ‘grows’ with the children, could be well worth considering and this technology is more and more often being incorporated in advanced projects. This feature also allows for the space to be used for another purpose when the pool floor is raised.

And finally, buying chemicals to put into your finished pool in France could not be easier – many supermarkets stock them in the garden section! ☐



London Swimming Pool Company Ltd

is currently heading up high-end projects near Nice, France and Colorado, USA.

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