

The new age of aquaria

Award-winning water shaper pools his expertise

by Rand Zacharias

The Boston-based Robb Report Magazine identified him as "the most influential pool designer" on an international basis. Aqua Magazine dubbed him "Mr. Vanishing Edge." His pools appear regularly on the covers and in the pages of magazines ranging from Architectural Digest to Better Homes and Gardens. He has been profiled in The New York Times and Millionaire Magazine, among others. Pools that he has designed have won over 100 local and national awards in the U.S. At the age of 57, he has been classified as having influence on rich and luxurious living with the likes of Armani and Cartier.

And believe it or not, Harold "Skip" Phillips flies up to the Okanagan Valley almost every month to design pools for well-heeled clients. Working in conjunction with Gene Brown, owner of Kelowna's Valley Pool and Spa, he attended four projects this month.

During the 50s, Phillips grew up with a father who worked on the Atlas missile program, and moved the family all over the country. When his dad started a tool company, he ended up working there for seven years, making measuring devices for NASA...until Dad told him to become a pool man.

Harold "Skip" Phillips has been designing on artistic, architectural and hydraulic levels for pool systems since the 70s. In 1979, with the design of his second pool, he won an award that he states, "shows how badly the pool industry needed, and needs, changing for the better."

"I love coming up to Canada and working with the people," he says. "I'm not working with the average guy who wants a pool to slap his BBQ pit next to. The people who contact us in Canada understand what pools have become... up here understanding the evolving art of intelligent living just seems to be part of the package. It's absolutely refreshing."

The evolution of the residential pool has seen a slow rising of the tide that's becoming a growing

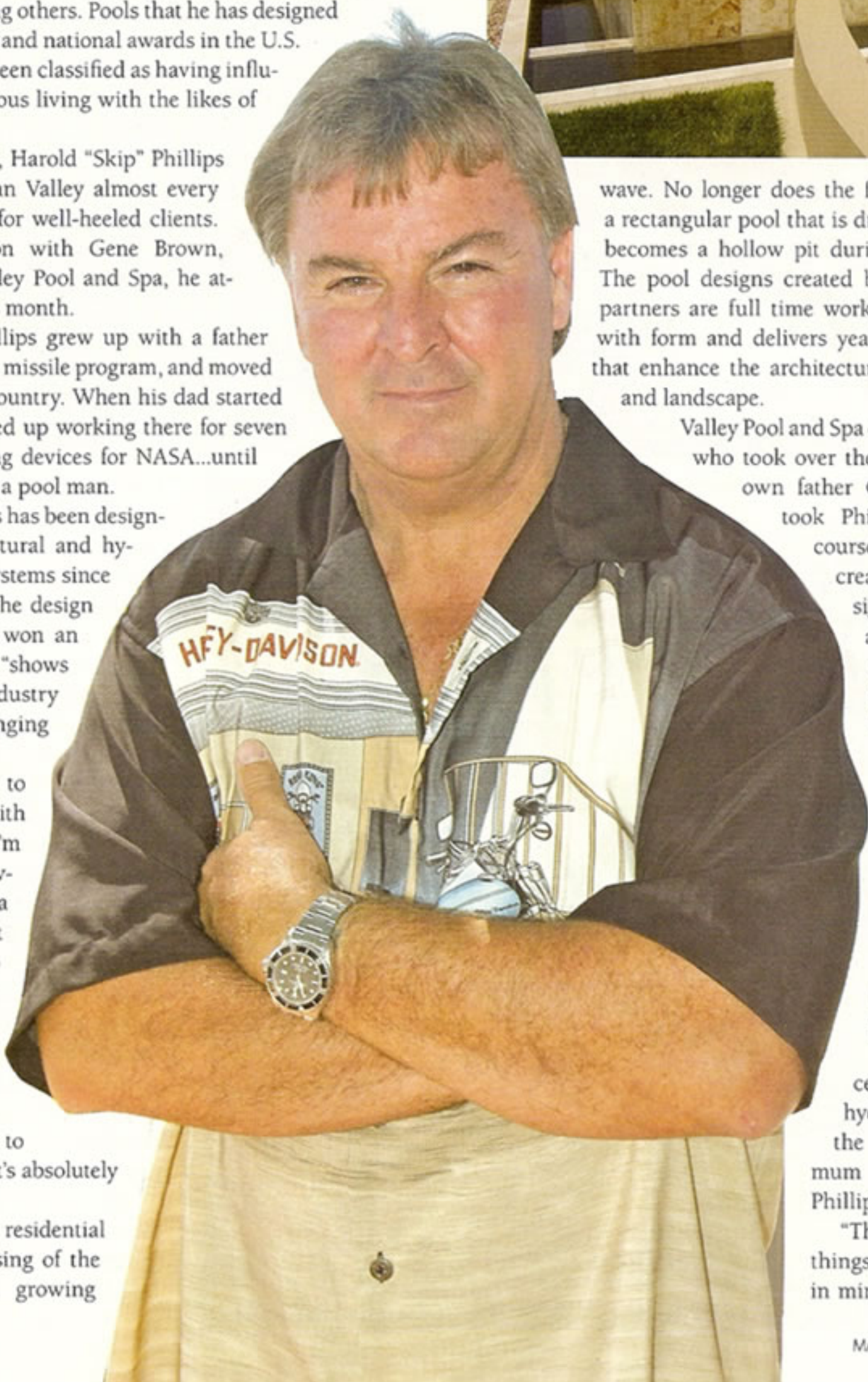


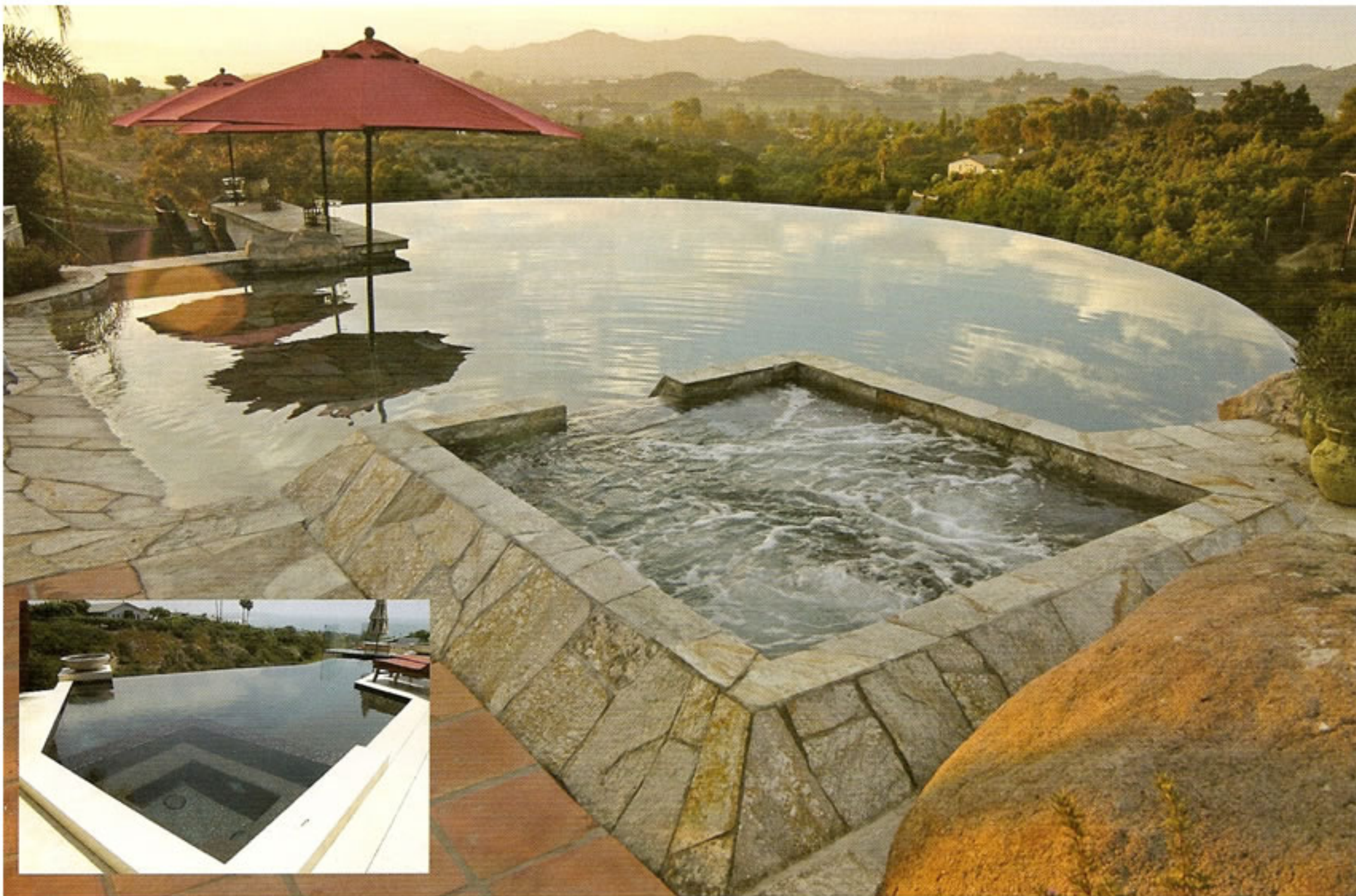
wave. No longer does the family splash about a rectangular pool that is drained each fall and becomes a hollow pit during winter months. The pool designs created by Phillips and his partners are full time works of function, flow with form and delivers year round enjoyment that enhance the architectural beauty of home and landscape.

Valley Pool and Spa owner Gene Brown, who took over the business after his own father Gary passed away, took Phillips' pool design course. The pool master created his Genesis Design School in 1997 after he realized that industry practices in pool design were abysmally lacking. Phillips and his partners, Brian Van Bower and David Tisherman, formed Genesis 3—a collective that specializes in education for pool professionals.

"Ninety-five percent of the time, pool hydraulics don't meet the industry's minimum standards," says Phillips.

"There are three things that must be kept in mind when creating a





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pool for any home. First are cosmetics... the material and décor you wish to use to enhance your pool. Secondly, you want structure that will survive. And finally, the mechanical. This is the sanitation, transit of water and decibel level of the mechanical works of your pool."

It takes ten days for the first design draft of a pool.

"Design is intuitive," states Phillips, "I go for coffee here in a local cafe...the woman has the colors, the décor and all of the necessary balance for her cafe. How did she do that? Intuition. She knew intuitively what worked for the space she had to work with. I do the same thing with the pools I'm asked to create."

Another six weeks allows for revisions by the owner and communication with the pool designer.

"Many in the industry of the past never bothered to sample soil. In many cases, it's an absolute must," exclaims Phillips with a sincere passion for his art and profession.

The next six months to a year result in a complete pool for the client.

On a recent project in St. Lucia called Jade Mountain, featured in the April issue



of Water Shapes, the project took just a little longer.

Phillips showed up on site with running shoes and a brief case. His challenge was to create one of the world's most uniquely designed and integrated pool systems. This 26-unit resort has an indoor/outdoor vanishing edge pool in each unit, all connected by a gutter system. The mechanical and architectural completion of this technical pool system took ten years. Canadian architect Nick Troubetzkoy dreamed this impossible dream involving 25 years of his own life to realize the completion of this magical place. Check out the website at www.jademountainstlucia.com.

Where does all this leave the middle-income earner who just wants to build a pool?

"It's trickle down," states Phillips. "Sure, I build pools residential and commercial that require flying all over the world. But a pool doesn't have to cost a million dollars. New energy savings with quieter, more efficient pump systems create better use of solar energy for heating pools. The cost of the equipment may be more expensive, but the pay back with lower monthly mechanical bills eliminates the cost differential in no time."

Phillips' passion for this industry seems indefatigable. His desire to challenge himself and others by encouraging expertise in design and structure is incredible to witness.

It may just be a new dawning age of aquarium. The piece and solitude of an infinite pool. The design fantasy of expanding your home simply by shaping water into land, land into sky and sky into space. In a fast-paced world with little rest for the busy... it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the calming sanctity of a pool at home... but it might require the son of a rocket scientist to design it properly. 🐼

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