From: Pool and Spa News May 29 2009
Posted on: May 29, 2009

Four-sided Transformation

Genesis 3 co-founder Skip Phillips renovated this stunning perimeter overflow pool

By Rebecca Robledo

When Skip Phillips, president of Questar Pools and Spas in Escondido, Calif., walked into this backyard, he found a pool that needed help.

The vessel had a perimeter overflow system that leaked water into the house, a badly constructed deck, and design elements that clashed with the home's architecture.

Here, we show what Phillips did to turn a problem pool into a hillside gem.

Form, but not function

The perimeter overflow for this project was installed during a prior renovation, and it had proved to be disastrous. The gutters were undersized by about half, and were connected to the deck, rather than the pool shell.

Thus, when the deck moved, the gutters cracked and drained into the ground. This problem was greatly compounded by shoddy workmanship on the deck. Rather than back buttering the pavers, the installers merely daubed them with mortar, resulting in gaps between the pavers and the base. When water leaked from the pool's undersized gutters, it flowed through those gaps and into the house. The surge tank also ran dry.

"Whoever decided to try the slot-overflow detail mimicked the pictures, but they didn't know how to put the pieces together," Phillips says. "It really wasn't functional."

Unfiltered discharge was skimmed off the top of the pool and pumped back in without passing through the filter. Additionally, the system didn't have an atmospheric vacuum breaker, a crucial component in any perimeter overflow system.

The perimeter fix

For this project, Phillips worked with John Crystal Pools in Northridge, Calif. Crystal's crews completely tore out the gutters and the top few inches of the pool wall. New gutters were poured and epoxy doweled into the shell.

In addition, a concrete holding tank, about three times the size of the original fiberglass version, was attached to one wall of the pool.

Taking shape

Though the overall shape of the pool matched the geometry of the house, the previous renovators outfitted the vessel with wedding-cake steps and radiuses in the cove.

“I don’t think they even thought about [matching the home],” Phillips says.

The steps were kept in the same place, but modified into a stack of cubes. To get rid of the cove radiuses, Phillips added a perimeter bench and raised the deep end of the pool. Besides eliminating the coves, this also helped update the gutter system, since the benches and raised floor provided a place to route plumbing lines.

On the wall

A fountain featuring a stainless steel water wall had been placed next to the pool.

However, due to mechanical problems, the wall remained dry in certain areas.

To remedy this, a stainless steel fabricator modified and leveled the edge at the top so it would distribute water evenly.

The fountain then was retiled and fitted with the same custom grates used in the pool, so the two vessels would be better paired aesthetically.

The tile work was completed by Jimmy Reed of Rock Solid Tile Installation in Calabasas, Calif.

The details

If the aesthetic for this project could be distilled down to one word, it would be “smooth.”

To maintain that theme, Phillips sized and designed the drains, returns and vac line so they would fit seamlessly into the tile pattern. Stainless steel trays were custom fabricated to fit over these openings and accommodate tiles placed on top of them. To make them even harder to detect, setters with Rock Solid Tile Installation planned the tile configuration to minimize the number of cuts on the trays.

To give the pool a feeling of detail reminiscent of the famed Hearst Castle, Rock Solid even tiled inside the surge tank. “Their surge tank looks better than most people’s pools,” Phillips says. “We wanted it to be nice.”

But the returns weren’t the only part of the installation that the designers wanted to make as inconspicuous as possible. The homeowners selected a solar system, but didn’t like the idea of PVC lines running up the side of the house. So they, along with the steel fabricator, designed a faux ladder. Two stainless steel pipes, replacing the PVC lines, were installed a few inches from the wall. Ladder rungs were then welded onto them. The home now has a contemporary stainless detail similar to those used on the windows and pool lights.

“It looks like it was a ladder designed to get up on the house,” Phillips says. “It turned a deficit into a positive. It’s an architectural detail.”

The unit was constructed to support enough weight to function as a ladder.

All squared away

Rectangles were repeated throughout the pool, including the brick-patterned, clear gray glass mosaic tile used to blanket the entire interior.

“The client wanted to maintain that rectangular geometric pattern, so we kept repeating the same detail,” Phillips says.

As an added bonus, that specific tile showed particularly striking color differences with the different depths. “The color saturation changes based on depth, but it’s really apparent on that pool,” he says. “I think that the bench highlights that because there’s a shallow area all the way around, where most people don’t have that reference.”

The deck and coping were finished in similarly shaped porcelain deck tile.

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