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MAKING A SPLASH

Elmcrest Country Club in northeast Cedar Rapids recently completed a \$1.3 million pool project with a zero-depth entry that allows adults to place their chairs in the water and watch the kids play.

ANGELA HOLMES

New trends in pool design focus on creating relaxing, resort-like spaces

By Angela Holmes
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Pools aren't just for swimming or a refreshing reprieve from the heat these days.

As people have become more selective on how they spend their time and money, the traditional swimming pool has morphed into an oasis that reflects the owner's lifestyle.

"We believe it's more about creating the experience and environment than it is just to put the pool in," said Rick Whiteaker, president of Pool Tech Midwest in Cedar Rapids. "Time is limited these days, and creating your own backyard customized space for you to enjoy family and friends is something that always gives back to you."

Now that the economy is rebounding, consum-

ers are putting more thought into how they want to spend their discretionary dollars.

"Before the recession started around 2007, things were sailing along and people had ideas on how to spend their discretionary income," Mr. Whiteaker recalled. "Then, the faucet basically turned off. People that had the wherewithal to do it wanted to postpone it for a while."

The recession also changed buyers' habits, he said. Consumers are looking for more quality in products, regardless of price, and are doing more research online. Most clients have an idea of what they want by the time they arrive at the showroom, Mr. Whiteaker said. That's when the professionals get involved and "massage it."

"In the end, it should complement and add value to the home, and not just look like a body of water was placed out there," he said. "It is not only important to have a pool, but to have spaces that are useful to you to plan out daytime and nighttime activities so it gives you a full use of the environment."

Pool Tech recently received several awards from the International Master Pools Guild for its work on residential and commercial swimming pools, spas

and water features.

A gold award was received for a residential project Pool Tech completed in 2013 at a home on East Post Road in Cedar Rapids. The project replaced the original court yard, with its variety of planters, slabs and

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ANGELA HOLMES

Elmcrest Country Club's renovation gives the pool area a resort feel with high-end furniture and unique plantings.



TIM SCHOON

This award-winning residential pool in Cedar Rapids built by Pool Tech features a spa, sun shelf with a fountain backdrop, tall fire bowls and outdoor kitchen with a large-screen television. The project cost upward of \$750,000.

elevations, with a modern, accessible space.

"It wasn't improving the property value," Mr. Whiteaker said of the original courtyard. "He [the owner] wanted to do something that would be consistent with the value of the home."

Pool Tech worked on the project with architect Greg Sundberg, who developed different spaces like changing rooms, open screened porches and a full outdoor bar and kitchen with a large-screen television. The project, which also includes various water features, iridescent glass tile, LED colored lighting and a set-in spa, cost upward of \$750,000.

"It's always how you weave the fabric with the right people to align their creative skills to help the customer get the outcome they are looking for," Mr. Whiteaker said.

The East Post Road pool features a raised wall, which offers a three-dimensional look. A sun shelf sits in front of the wall with a backdrop of a waterfall.

"You can set loungers out there and have the water trickle behind you with a nice soothing sound," Mr. Whiteaker said.

Special features such as sun shelves and tanning ledges are a popular trend in pools, both residential and commercial, he said.

"People can get the resort feel by going into a shallow piece of water where they can put a lawn chair out there," he said.

Cooler clubs

Pool Tech also recently completed a \$1.3 million pool project at Elmcrest Country Club in northeast Cedar Rapids in an effort to create a more resort-like atmosphere for its members.

"If you look at the clientele at the country clubs, they are in competition for leisure activities," Mr. Whiteaker said. "It gives them a feel that they don't have to travel very far to have that same feel and comfort as a resort."

The Elmcrest project replaced a pool that was more than 25 years old, said General Manager Max Moreno, and resulted in a complete reconfiguration and new landscaping of the site.

Planning for the renovation began in 2013, with work beginning just after Labor Day of last year. The project, designed and built by Pool Tech, Rinderknecht General Contractors and OPN Architects, was finished several days before its Memorial Day target date.

One of the primary goals of the redesign was for the area to be family-friendly, said Elmcrest Controller Brandi Ramirez. While the previous pool had a separate

children's area, the new design incorporates a zero-depth entry, allowing adults to place chairs in the water and watch their kids.

"It's a tremendous convenience for families," Ms. Ramirez said.

Elmcrest is following a trend that has been building for the last decade, in which clubs are working to involve the entire family, as opposed to just golfers.

"We want to make sure we have something for everyone," Mr. Moreno said. "It definitely goes against the traditional country club model."

While family-friendly, the new pool area still gives members the feeling of exclusivity with its variety of modern amenities. The resort-style patio now has seating for 210 people, and includes upscale furniture and three covered cabanas.

The pool area's WiFi was expanded for those who want to do business poolside and a state-of-the-art sound system was installed. Other technology includes LED globe lights that synchronize colors at night. Mr. Moreno said the LED lights give the area a Las Vegas resort feel, which caters to people's desire for quality.

"People are more into aesthetics," Mr. Whiteaker noted. "They appreciate quality and will spend for the quality and experience." CBJ