

Gibbs is president of Toronto-based Gib-San Pools Ltd. A 22-year veteran with the company, he serves on the Board of Directors with NSPI of Canada. His company has won hundreds of awards.



The Greenhouse Effect

A builder uses bamboo and glass to create a tropical aquascape in the Great White North

This client's father owns a resort in the Caribbean, and decided he wanted a tropical

environment here in Toronto, where it's freezing much of the year. He envisioned an atrium below the main level

of the home, filled with exotic tropical plants.

To make this a botanical garden, we needed a lot of

natural light, and the widows weren't enough. Our solution was to put in a retractable glass roof.



Tropical mood: With light streaming in through a glass roof, you'd almost think this is an outdoor pool. Bamboo decking adds to the indoor environment's tropical look.

GIB-SAN POOLS

The roof did more than just help the plants — letting in beautiful, bright sunlight changed the whole atmosphere of that space. Whether it's 80 degrees F outside or 20 below zero, it still looks like the outdoors and gives you an awesome feeling.

Textures played an important role in making this space seem authentic. The customer had seen bamboo decking while traveling abroad, and asked the general contractor about installing it in the atrium. I'm glad he did because we've found a

unique material with great properties for pool decking.

The texture is very similar to wood, with its natural warmth and richness, but is much more consistent. You don't see the radical differences that one batch of wood can have from another, depending on its age and how it's cut. Bamboo grain is finer and doesn't have knots or heavy veins. Additionally, rather than being splintery — it's smooth to the touch, almost like a velvet carpet. The bamboo we used came with a matte finish so it's not slippery.

Besides texture, another advantage to bamboo is its durability. Bamboo is as hard as rock, and doesn't absorb water or warp. Right now, it costs more than wood, but bamboo grows very fast so the material can be replenished.

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Caribbean. Because the clients entertain a lot, we installed about 500 square feet of decking, and designed planters to wind around the area to break up the expanse and create private conversation areas.

The pool continues the tropical theme with tile mosaics of a treasure chest, dolphins and turtles. Red border tile around the steps make the colors pop. In addition, fountain sprays shoot up from a small platform in the middle of the steps.

The client also wanted to swim laps, but with all the plants, we didn't have a lot of room. Our solution was to design a T-shaped pool and place jets on the small leg so he could swim against the current.

My favorite thing about this space is its serenity. As you enter, you smell the plants and feel the warmth of the sun pouring in through the glass roof. You feel as if you've walked into another world, far from the Canadian winter. ■

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