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# Taking the plunge

Simultaneous construction projects can be more cost-effective, less disruptive

But you have to be very clear about your budget, one homeowner warns

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

If you stand at the farthest end of Ned and Linda Atalla's backyard, you'll quickly note that their outdoor living space and custom-built home are a mirror image of each other.

The angular, sleek, design of their terrace and concrete pool are purposefully an extension of the contemporary architecture of this unique Oakville home.

That's not surprising, considering their home and pool were built at the same time. And according to Ned, he wouldn't have done it any other way.

The house — a structure that is void of interior walls, built only with stainless and concrete materials — was designed and built first, followed closely by the landscape and pool construction, ensuring continuity with the look and feel of the home's interior.

"It made sense to do it all at the same time. We were very clear about the look we wanted to achieve and its function," explains Ned, whose outdoor space artfully combines casual country living with all the amenities of home.

"We weren't interested in a three-hour drive to a cottage. We've built everything we need to enjoy the best of outdoor living right here."

During the summer months when Ned isn't working at his software company, Scancode, he spends most of his time with his family and friends, enjoying all the features of his luxurious backyard setting, which includes a partially covered, outdoor pavilion with a fully-equipped kitchen and lounge area and, serving as a backdrop to the pool, a 17-foot wide, straight-edged waterfall.

"It's become a favourite spot for the kids to hang out, listening to their voices echo while they sit on a bench located about 18 inches behind a solid wall of water."

Ned advises anyone considering this kind of project to "pay the bucks" for a really good design, and to hire experts who can see the big picture, noting that two companies exceeded his expectations in service and quality. Landscape designer Iain Souter from Aldershot Landscaping in Burlington took Ned's vision and ensured its long-term sustainability with "innovative ideas, professionalism and efficiency."

And the pool construction was done by Gib-San Pools Ltd., whose workmanship, Ned comments, "was simply excellent." Gib-San president Ed Gibbs would like to see a greater trend to integrate home building with landscape design.

"Interest in outdoor living is the highest it's been since the early '70s," says Gibbs. "Cottage prices are becoming unreachable for most, and there seems to be a growing emphasis on coming home — creating a more inviting space for family and friends."

Gibbs says building a pool at the same time as the home can be a cost-effective investment if the project is amortized into the mortgage. And it can be cheaper and less disruptive than adding a pool or landscaping after the house is finished.

"We're seeing an increased trend south of the border, particularly among production builders, to build the pool at the time of home construction," he says. "I'm hopeful that production home builders in Canada will also be able to accommodate the needs of consumers who want to enjoy the convenience of this type of service."

As a member of the Master Pool Builders Guild, Gibbs says it's important for pool builders around the world to share information, education, new technologies and innovative ideas.

"Today's consumers are increasingly more decisive about how they want to use their outdoor living space," he says.

"And it's my responsibility to merge their dreams with our expertise, to deliver what they want."

Although the home/pool building trend hasn't quite caught on here yet, there might be evidence it's not far off. Gib-San has worked with custom builder Tony Gornik of T. Gornik Build/Design Ltd. and production builder Mattamy Homes to construct pools on new housing sites.

Gornik agrees a joint project has some built-in cost savings.

"When all the trades work together, there are going to be fewer complications," adding however, that it's not always possible to accommodate all the elements of a client's wish list. "The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the City of Toronto have jurisdiction over certain properties that abut conservation land. It's imperative to receive the necessary permits from these departments before we can build. We often get asked by the TRCA where we're planning to put pool equipment or where an outdoor fireplace is going to go, as they want to ensure the integrity of trees, wildlife, embankments and soil stability. While it's good to know that the land is so well protected, it often means that a client's plans will need to change."

Gornik advises that people who want to buy a property with the intent of building a home and a pool are well advised to do all the necessary research before they make their purchase. He says that the most positive outcomes are a result of thorough planning.

Mattamy homebuyers Maher and Mary-Lynn Kassis called Gib-San before they bought their new home in Mississauga. Like so many people, the couple was looking to build an outdoor space as an extension of their home, in lieu of making a cottage purchase.

"We both commute to Toronto every day for work and the last thing we wanted to do was pack up the kids and the car for that trek to the cottage every weekend.

"We loved the home, but we wanted to ensure that our elevation and grading could accommodate a pool and our lifestyle," explains Mary-Lynn.

"We also thought that because the development wasn't complete, it would be easier for Gib-San to reach our property and we wouldn't have to disturb any of our neighbours in the process."

Mary-Lynn said she relied on Gib-San because of their willingness to work on pool construction and landscaping simultaneously.

"We liked their one-stop-shop service and we trusted their expertise and ability to work with the builder."

But as the family prepares for its second summer of outdoor living, Mary-Lynn offers some advice:

"It's easy to get carried away with some exceptional ideas from landscapers and pool design experts," she warns.

"You have to be very clear about your budget going into a project like this. The questions you ask up front and during every phase are directly related to your overall satisfaction of the end product."

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