



# Paradise

## AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Whether grand and paradisaical or small and delightfully carefree, these three local pools offer ideas that you can apply to any new pool or pool remodel you may be considering. BY GAYL BIONDI

**T**he fantasy of a dream vacation generally conjures up images of a Zen-like paradise with one element at its core—water. Sure, you can travel to the South Pacific, the Mediterranean or Hawaii to immerse yourself in luxury or solitude. Or, you can do what many desert residents do and create a personal playground in your own backyard.

Pools come in all shapes and sizes to fit a wide range of pocketbooks and lifestyles, but there's a significant cost involved with building and maintaining a pool. So, what is it that makes people take the plunge?

### TO THAI FOR

For Gary Ashe, it was 20 trips to Thailand over eight years that gave him the inspiration to create a million-dollar oasis on his Rancho Mirage estate. "At first, people thought I was crazy when I proposed a pool design with a series of bridges, islands, Thai huts and firebowls," he says. "They warned that my concept would look 'too busy.' Once they understood my vision, though, everyone was not only on board, but excited about the outcome."

The outcome was a one-of-a-kind, 4,000-square-foot pool and Thai-style outdoor entertainment plaza featuring eight large Buddhas imported from Angkor, Cambodia, with permission from the U.S. Embassy. The pool area has been

PHOTOS BY YASIN CHAUDHRY



This one-of-a-kind, 4,000-square-foot pool and Thai-style outdoor entertainment plaza in Rancho Mirage features a series of bridges, islands, a Thai hut, firebowls and eight large Buddahs imported from Angkor, Cambodia.

featured on MTV Cribs and won the 2010 American Society of Interior Designers Best Outdoor Living award for interior designer Jeffrey Jones.

When asked to describe the overall theme of the backyard showpiece, Ashe says, “It’s not just one thing, it’s the unique feel of the entire setting. My pool designer, Dave Stewart, and I worked on every inch of the project to get the proportions, sightlines and textures just right. The result is a hideaway that takes me back to Thailand in spirit.”

You could experience Bali Ha’i for yourself and 11 of your closest friends. The estate, known as Serrano, has its own Facebook page ([facebook.com/serrano.rancho Mirage](https://www.facebook.com/serrano.rancho Mirage)) and is available for vacation rental through California Vacation Rental by Owner.

### SPOOLING AROUND

When retired banking executive Anne McNab found her ideal vacation home in Trilogy La Quinta, one of the first

things she did was have a small splash pool—or “spool”—designed for the backyard of her corner lot. The site features views of the mountains to the south.

As a seasonal “snowbird” from Canada, Anne was looking for an installation that would serve as a saltwater lounging pool, hot tub and water feature with low-maintenance costs and minimal upkeep. “The entire project was done while I was in Canada,” says Anne. “I reviewed the pool and landscape designs online. They sent me photos as the work was being accomplished. Now that it’s done, it’s basically idiot proof. The remote controls are user-friendly and the equipment is simple to operate, which gives me peace of mind when I’m away and the maximum enjoyment while I’m here.”

The cost of installing and maintaining the spool was not an issue for Anne. “When you’re from out of town,” she observes, “you get lots of company. There’s a big clubhouse pool at Trilogy if I have a houseful of guests, but the back-

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yard pool works great for most of my entertaining needs. Once I weighed the costs of landscaping against the costs of a ‘wee’ pool, the pool just made sense.”

What Anne loves most about her petite pool is its versatility. “I can lay on an inflatable raft, I can do water aerobics, or I can soak in the hot tub. The saltwater feels great on my sensitive skin. On those perfect desert evenings when the sky is full of stars, I sit in my pool and say, “This is what makes all those 60-hour weeks I worked worth it.””



Anne McNab's “spool” was designed for the backyard of her corner lot, to not only offer soaking, but a waterfeature component as well.

## MODERN-DAY MOAT

Some people fall out of bed in the morning. The owner of our third home can practically dive out of bed into his secluded lap pool, and then swim back into his bathroom to take a shower. His Guy Dreier-designed estate at Bighorn Golf Club is a 2.4-acre work of art that integrates the home's contemporary design using materials such as slate, limestone, aluminum and steel with natural desert plants and terrain.

Water is ubiquitous, starting from the stream that flows down the hill at the front entryway and under glass floor panels into the house and on to the panoramic infinity-edge pool that spans the entire view from every room to the 18th green and the mountains beyond. The sensation is like being on an elegant yacht in a very private harbor. But, despite its over-the-top wow-factor, the design is more thoughtful than flamboyant.

An unobtrusive walkway extends out from the master bedroom, creating a bridge that divides the lap pool from the rest of the water feature, allowing the owner to heat the swimming area without wasting energy heating the reflecting pools. Says the homeowner, “As we were designing the estate, the pool grew more than the house did due to the character of the lot.”

## SOME DESIGN TIPS

If you already have a pool, consider its basic shape to suggest your landscape and hardscape choices. Here are a few suggestions:

◆ **Kidney- and bent-elbow shape pools express a mid-century vibe.** Sculptural plants like banana palms, if you want a tropical feel, or agaves, work well. Smooth paving or pebble texture reinforce the mood. Poolside cushions and umbrellas in turquoise will pick up the color of that blue tile at the waterline.

◆ **A classic rectangle or oval pool, particularly one with steps gracefully placed across the width at one end, conveys an elegant, formal ambiance.** Enhance the style with topiary shrubs in square planters or pigmy date palms in large Italian-style terra cotta pots symmetrically placed around the perimeter. You can't go wrong with black or white traditional furnishings and accessories in this setting.

◆ **A freeform pool suggests a tropical lagoon or grotto.** Lush but desert-compatible plants, which don't drop debris into the water on every windy day, will transport you to Hawaii or the South Pacific. Hot tropical hues in cushions and umbrellas go well here.

**If you're contemplating building a pool, you'll have many more options, but also multiple details to consider:**

◆ As with the design of the Thai-inspired pool, it takes a series of correct decisions to capture the overall setting you want to convey. One off-note—a discordant sightline of a neighbor's rooftop, the wrong material used to edge the pool—can dissolve the mirage you're trying to create in an instant. Make a careful study of the style you want beforehand or work with a professional designer.

◆ The style of the architecture of your home should be taken into account. If you're living in a contemporary 1980s house, you'll have more latitude in your new pool's look than if the house is a Spanish Colonial-style hacienda.

◆ The shape and vista (or lack) of your pool site will suggest choices, as well as limit your options. If, like our third pool, your home is on a hillside, the pool can follow the contours of your site, even offering the opportunity for an infinity edge. However, if you're looking out at a neighboring wall from the rear of your home, you may be best off with a clean-line lap pool set off dramatically by the wall.

◆ Decide exactly how much maintenance you can absorb. Know the costs of upkeep for the size and style pool you're considering. You may ultimately decide, like our spool pool's owner, that it's transporting enough to sit under a starry sky in total (low energy-cost) comfort and bask in gratitude at simply being here in the Coachella Valley.—CH