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## Fix it or Fill it? Pool Remodeling (or Removal) Can Go Swimmngly

By Cathy Dausman



Current landscaping in the Thomas backyard shows little signs of the pool they removed when they bought their house. Photos courtesy the Thomas family

says Reilly, and unless the pool is poorly placed on the lot it won't greatly affect resale value. However, given the right home with the right pool, "I might have to arm wrestle you for it," she says with a laugh.

New owners of a home with a pool are quickly confronted with whether to keep it or remove it, leave it "as is," or remodel it. Pool removal can be done quickly and easily with good access to the yard, says Ann Thomas of Moraga. "Filling in [removing] our pool was the first thing we did when we purchased our home four years ago."

Thomas and her husband grew up with backyard pools, but she says having pre-school aged children made it an easy decision to take theirs out, due to maintenance and liability issues. Their priority was a grassy play space for her children. Besides, she says, when her children swim they want to be with friends, so her family joined a swim club. Their backyard pool was gone in three days, says Thomas.

Orinda Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu says, "Most pool demolitions are done in such a way that you can landscape that area afterwards, but not build a house."

Lack of information on residential pool removal led one south Bay Area man to create his own support website several years ago. His website ([www.poolremoval.net](http://www.poolremoval.net)) discusses demolition costs, how to find the right contractor and whether realtors consider a pool an asset or a liability. The short answer: "It depends. . . ."

Moraga residents Nancy and Peter Bennett remodeled their backyard pool in 2003. They first considered a Pebble Tec finish but settled on a fiberglass refinish. "They come in and rough up your existing plaster," Nancy Bennett says, "then they fiberglass over it...two coats, I think. It took a week and we have been pleased with it. The water always looks light blue as they said it would." The work came with a 10-year warranty.

Bennett recently heard that pool manufacturers suggest re-plastering every seven years, "but I don't know anyone out here who has done anything to a pool until at least 25 years," she says.

Backyard in-ground pools, whether vinyl, fiberglass, or concrete all require servicing, ideally once a week, says Darlene Simpson of All Pool Services. She says there is "definitely a cost" to keeping a pool and that "maintenance is a year 'round thing." Simpson says chemistry is the key to keeping a pool looking and performing well, and cites one customer's 35-year-old pool that has not even been re-plastered. "It's in great shape," she says.

Ellen and Mason Walters of Lafayette bought their current house in 1998 and updated their pool in 2002. They had the surface redone, got new edging, new tile and re-caulked the perimeter. The Walters also built a pump house that doubles as a repository for emergency supplies. Its insulation minimizes pump noise and hides the gear and chemicals needed to maintain the pool. Walters estimates he spends 90 minutes weekly on pool chores and about \$400 a year on miscellaneous pool-related materials, including chemicals.

When asked if their in-ground pool is an asset or a liability, Walters says simply, "It depends who in this family you ask."

Thinking of Removing your Pool? Don't forget the permit.

Moraga:

<http://www.moraga.ca.us/dept/publicworks/docs/PoolRemovalPermitAppRev082310.pdf>

Orinda:

<http://orinda.waterware.com/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-4470/Building%20Permit%20Application.pdf>

Lafayette:

Lafayette doesn't have an online building permit process, says Assistant City Planner Michael Cass. For pool removal, applicants submit site plans to the Planning Services Division, and the work is referred to the City Engineer. Approved plans and a completed Building Permit Application Form go to Contra Costa County Building Inspection Department. CCCBID issues the permit. Questions can be directed to CCCBID at (925) 299-0263.



The Thomas family removed their aging Moraga pool when they bought their house.



Peter and Nancy Bennett of Moraga resurfaced their backyard pool with fiberglass nine years ago.



Photos courtesy of the Bennett family



The Walters' pump house Photo Cathy Dausman

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