

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Pooling Water

Lamorinda cistern called a Nor Cal first

By Cathy Dausman



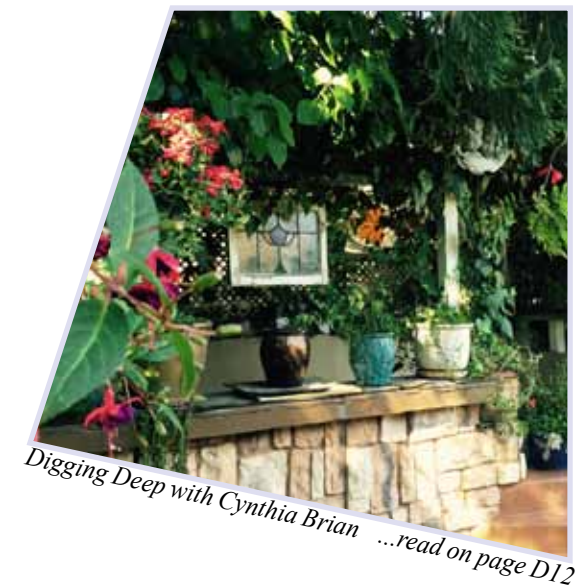
Contra Costa County Water District water conservation coordinator Chris Dundon, left, learns about the cistern project from landscape contractor Roxy Wolosenko. Photo Cathy Dausman

Jeff and Kathleen Johnson seem to like holes in the ground filled with water. When they bought their house 15 years ago, the backyard featured a 30,000-gallon swimming pool, which served their family of four well for a number of years. Jeff Johnson said both daughters, now grown, “loved it.”

“It had a slide, and a diving board,” he said. But the home was built in 1974, and the pool became

cracked, discolored and “in dire need of work.” In fact the pool took up so much space, the backyard was under-landscaped – leaves are a pool owner’s nemesis – and underused. Johnson said even the custom pool cover was ugly.

Keeping the pool filled, heated with solar panels and chemically balanced was expensive. Johnson estimates he spent \$100 to 200 per month on



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maintenance, including water replacement (evaporation accounts for tens of thousands of gallons per year). Eventually the Johnson family stopped swimming and considered pool removal, at a cost of \$6,000 to \$15,000.

Then landscape contractor Roxy Wolosenko of Roxy Designs suggested converting their unused pool into a cistern.

“It’s really a very simple system,” she said. A cistern, dating back more than 4,000 years to ancient Greece, is an artificial reservoir or underground tank for storing liquids, especially rainwater. Unlike wells, cisterns have waterproof linings. Wolosenko pitched this project to three other clients, but the Johnsons were the first to take the plunge. Jeff Johnson was already familiar with the concept; his parents had a cistern in Texas, where he grew up.

The project is a first in Northern California, said Julie Lienert, special projects manager for Roxy Designs.

Mike Garcia, owner of EnviroScape LA, completed a similar project in Los Angeles about three years ago. “It’s a pretty simple process but it’s getting to be a big deal,” he said. Closer to home, Walnut Creek’s Ruth Bancroft Garden recently held an education program for its members, one of whom has built a 10,000-gallon rainwater collection system used to refill a large pond and irrigate garden and orchard flowers and edibles.

Work on the Johnson project began in mid-August, with a completion date set for early October. A portion of the existing hole was back-filled with pool debris so only the rebar had to be taken off site.

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