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Poolside living

By Cathy Dausman



Dive in! This finished 15-foot by 35-foot backyard inground pool is ready for use. Photo Cathy Dausman

solar heating, paving or repaving surrounding areas and adding or changing out vegetation. All of this extends the project timeline and adds to the cost.

While realtors caution that having a pool won't change a residence's appraisal value, there is an undeniable appeal to after-hours water fun in your own backyard. Ask Aaron and Anjuli Cargain, who recently completed their pool and now enjoy using it with their daughters.

Anjuli Cargain was ready to install a pool when the couple first purchased their home, but Aaron admits he needed "a little convincing." After coming to agreement on building a pool and deciding on its shape and materials (theirs would be an in-ground, concrete pool, with solar heating and a built-in spa) they began work with an electrical service upgrade to the house.

Pool pumps, lighting, an in-pool spa and heating systems all require at least 30 amps and 240 volts of dedicated service, says Rob Omo of Omo's Electric Company. He says it costs as much as \$5,000 to upgrade a main panel, and the older the home, the more likely that will happen. And while today's pumps cost as much as four times more than older models, they run five to 10 times more efficiently, which translates into a smaller hit on your electric bill.

The construction process hit a snag early on due to the electrical permitting process; when that was resolved, construction began in earnest.

The finished pool is a 15-foot by 35-foot rectangle incorporating a 7 by 7 spa cutout and sun shelf (wading) entry. The Cargains chose Pennsylvania blue stone to ring their pool deck. A matching low wall along the back length serves as an additional poolside seating area. A minor fence line revision shifted extra driveway space to the backyard. Related projects included the installment of driveway pavers to match those on the pool patio and a s'mores-friendly fire pit in a secluded corner.

Work on the finishing touches continues (paver sealing and landscaping) but the pool opened for play in July. "We love our new pool," Aaron Cargain says, "and have been playing in it a bunch" during summer. Both girls have taken swim lessons; their parents say the older daughter is now water safe and her younger sister is getting there. They've already hosted one pool party and already plan another. Cargain expects to be able to use the spa year 'round and hopes that because the pool itself is solar-heated, its off-season will be limited.

The couple was so impressed with their contractor they recommended him to Anjuli's parents for a landscape project. Aaron Cargain advises patience when considering a residential pool installation.

"It's a process," he says. "Expect the unexpected and (expect) delays. Make sure you're ready to have a construction zone in your backyard for the next several months." The couple kept neighbors apprised of upcoming construction work, apologizing in advance for short-term inconveniences. And as for their new pool setting? "It creates an environment to spend a lot of fun time with the kids," Cargain said.

Project timeline: September 2017 to July 2018

Warm weather often makes Lamorindans consider a dip in a pool; especially if that pool is just steps outside your own back door. And while the long summer daylight hours may be fading, the hot dry weather the Weather Network recently said was "anchored across the western half of the U.S." lingers into autumn.

Lamorinda pools got a good workout in 2018. But residential pool installations involve more than answering "yes" or "no" or "do we want one?" The project is multi-layered, time-consuming and possibly lifestyle-changing.

Above ground or in-ground? If in-ground, will it be vinyl, fiberglass or concrete? How will the pool area be kept safe? How will it be heated? Who will use it, and when? Who'll do the cleaning and chemical maintenance? What are the liability issues? Additionally, pool construction often forces homeowners to consider taking on related projects, such as upgrading electrical service, installing



Pool dug to 6.5-foot depth; circulation pipes installed. Photos Cathy Dausman



Gunite is sprayed over steel rebar forming the pool shape. Oversized first step is called a sun shelf.



Decorative tile installed; Pennsylvania blue stone used as coping stone is mortared to the top of pool.

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