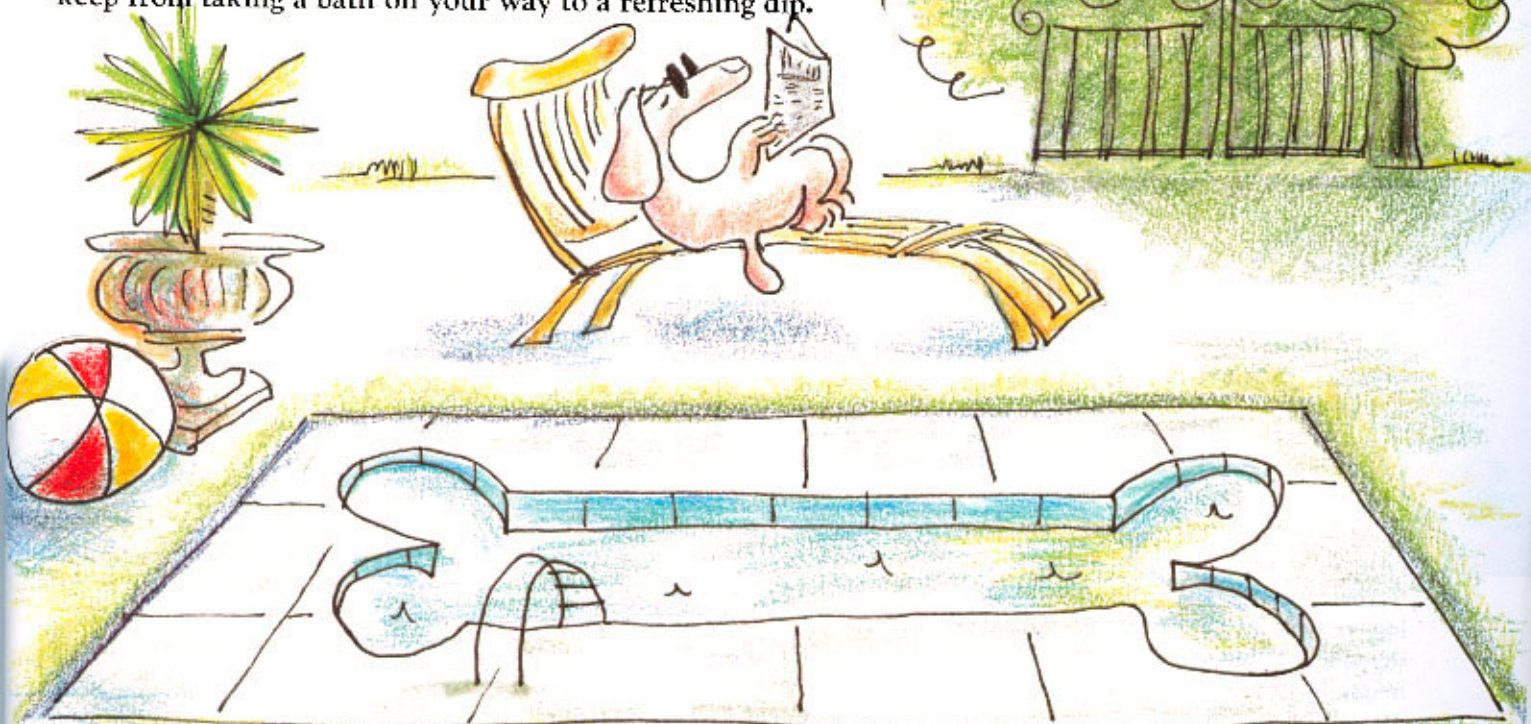


# The **15** Most Common **Pool & Spa** **Mistakes—**

## *and How to Correct Them*

Not going to think about how your unconventional pool shape will impact your pool cover options? *Oregon Home* asked four water wizards—a landscape architect and three pool and spa experts—about what you should consider to keep from taking a bath on your way to a refreshing dip.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATI LOGGAN

**1.** Taking a cookie-cutter approach to your pool's design. It's definitely a major project—a huge hole in the ground filled with thousands of gallons of water—but it's still only one element of your property, which includes your home. "The pool shouldn't be distinct from the rest of the landscape," says landscape architect Sam Williamson, the principal of Samuel H. Williamson Associates in Portland. "It should be integrated into it."

**SOLUTION:** Get help from professionals, especially landscape architects and pool designers, who have a firm grip on the principles and techniques of integrating a pool into a landscape masterplan. As Spencer White of Cascade Pool and Spa in Lake Oswego, Ore., puts it, "Your pool will come off a lot nicer if you take everything into consideration as you design it, even the style of your home."

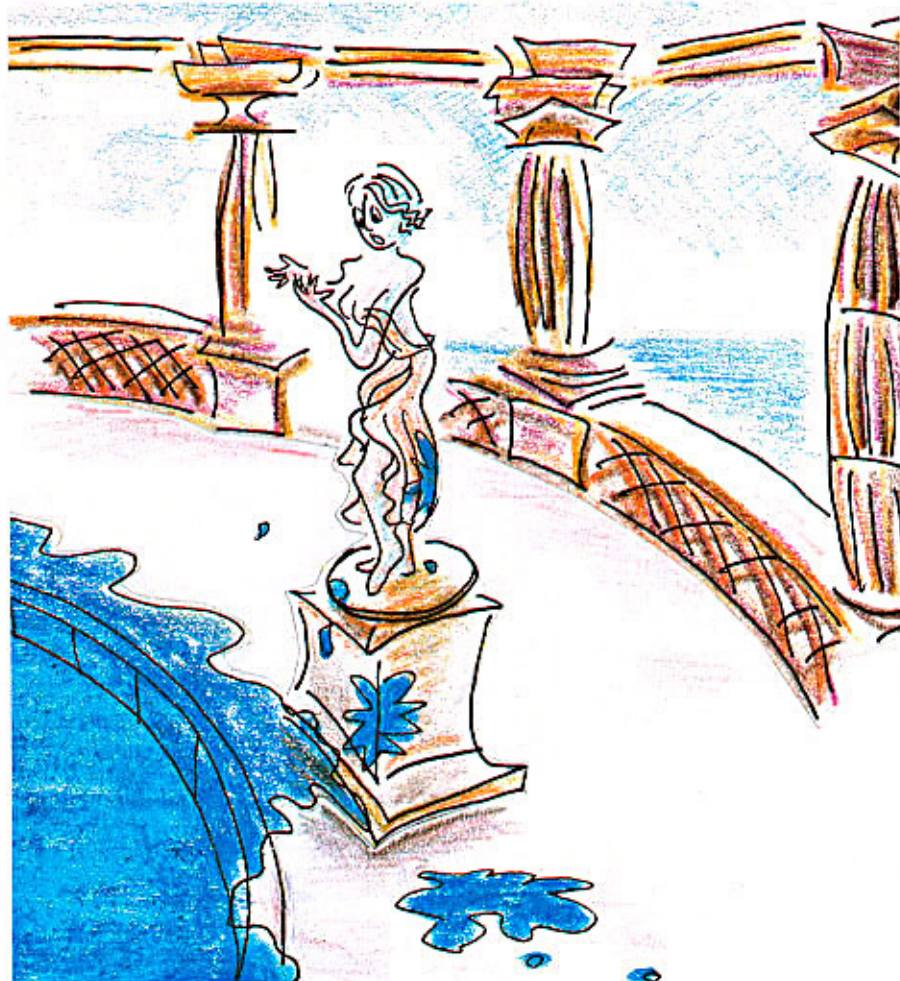
**2.** Letting the necessities of water treatment and maintenance trump the aesthetics of pool design. "Even on high-end pools, I often see skimmers—those big white plastic circles—in the middle of elaborate pool decks," says Williamson.

**SOLUTION:** Keep your pool's private parts private. "You can just as easily set the skimmers down a bit and cover them up with the paver," Williamson says.

**3.** Forgetting that your pool is a major element of your landscape throughout the year, not just during summer. Sure, your pool looks fabulous through your new french doors that frame the water, but will it still merit its center stage position when it's covered for the winter?

**SOLUTION:** Work closely with your pool designer and landscape architect to come up with a design that, during our long winter season, won't be just a forlorn reminder of last year's delights. If you cover your pool, place potted plants or other decorative elements around the edge to break up the blank expanse.

With a smaller pool, to have a "live" body of water as a year-round element of the landscape, Williamson recommends leaving the pool uncovered and heating the water just enough so that it doesn't freeze. "Keeping a pool uncovered all winter is an expense," says Williamson, "but it's a strategy you can take if you're



trying to fit a swimming pool onto a small site that you'll look at all year."

**4.** Assuming your pool's underwater surface has to be a just-scrubbed-with-Comet turquoise. There's nothing wrong with a turquoise pool; just be sure it's the best option to accent your landscape.

**SOLUTION:** Think about the overall look you're trying to create before you choose the color of your pool's biggest feature—the water. The interior of a pool can be finished in plaster, paint or tile, so your color choices are unlimited. "A swimming pool should be part of the whole landscape, and that means tying it in with color," says Williamson. "Dark pools look more like a natural pond."

**5.** Believing that plants have to be kept a cannonball's splash away from poolside. Williamson notes that people are afraid to bring plants to the edge of a pool. (They imagine stomped flowers and a pool surface full of leaves and petals.) "A residential pool isn't like a public pool,"

he says. "You won't have hundreds of kids jumping in and out of the water all day."

**SOLUTION:** Bring greenery near the water to add visual texture to the pool's edge, either with planters—low and stable, please!—or by leaving spaces for plants in your poolside paving. "Plus, when you're in the water, it's a surprise to see plants close-up," says Williamson.

**6.** Taking an "I'll do it when I get around to it" approach to pool maintenance. Returning from vacation to find 25,000 gallons of *boïllabaisse* in your pool isn't for the faint of heart—or thin of wallet.

**SOLUTION:** Pool pros agree that the secret to maintenance is regularity. Ron Nelson, the president of Neptune Swimming Pool Company in Clackamas, Ore., whose company has been installing pools for more than 40 years, says, "A pool doesn't need a lot of care, but it does need some care."

The good news is that you needn't be a marine biologist to do the job. If you have doubts about your ability and commitment to spend an hour a week during the summer

doing maintenance by the book, sign a maintenance contract and let the pros keep you out of the soup.

**7.** Forgetting about maintenance after you close down your pool for the winter. Nobody's using the pool, the cover's in place—it'll be fine til May, right? No way. The complex processes of water chemistry aren't put on hold by the absence of kids or the presence of a high-tech pool cover. "Pool maintenance decreases in the winter, but don't forget about it," says White. "You still need to check the chemicals a couple of times a month to make sure they're not out of whack."

**SOLUTION:** Continue a reduced, but regular, maintenance regimen



through the off-season, even if you don't use your pool. If you live where winter temperatures put brass monkeys at risk, run your heater enough to keep the water from freezing.

**8.** Limiting your pool design ideas to those in books and magazines. These are great places to begin, but seeing real pools is the best way to generate ideas and hear pros and cons of each design approach.

**SOLUTION:** Tour as many pools as you can before finalizing your design. Pool owners will give you a long-term perspective that's invaluable.

**9.** Thinking of a pool cover as an optional accessory. For all spas and all but small decorative pools, a quality cover is an essential feature. "If you don't buy a good cover, it won't wear well," says Wilfried Mueller-Crispin, the owner of Oregon HotSpring Spas. "And it won't seal well; heat will escape in the form of steam all the time, so you keep paying for that heat that escapes."

**SOLUTION:** Include a cover in your plans from the beginning. Automatic

pool covers, in particular, aren't retrofit features. They're installed with their own motor, tracks and storage compartment when the pool is built. Get a sturdy spa cover that fits with no gaps under the spa lip.

Spencer White brings up another important point. "The best safety device we have is an automatic pool cover," he says, "which is fastened into the side of the pool on tracks. It's operated by a motor, and there's a key switch in full view of the pool."

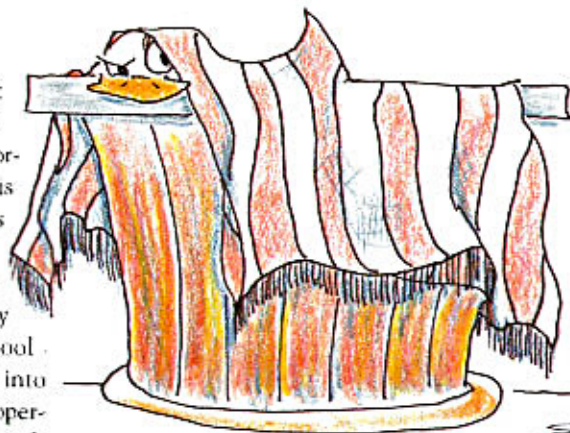
**10.** Paying too much attention to bells and whistles when buying a spa, whether it's motor horsepower or number of jets. "Large motors cost a lot more money to run, and the only reason is because they have more jets," says Mueller-Crispin. "But how many places can you sit at one time?"

**SOLUTION:** Scrutinize the energy efficiency of a unit. In a well-insulated spa, a smaller motor running more frequently is better than a large motor cycling on and off at long intervals.

**11.** Not anticipating a pool's impact on household traffic and tidiness. The constant parade of dripping bodies and wet feet in and out of the house to use the bathroom or eat a snack can have you fantasizing about leaving the pool covered—permanently!

**SOLUTION:** Budget for poolside areas that serve basic needs. "More and more homeowners are realizing that it's nice to have a gazebo or a bathroom area where wet kids don't need to go in and out of the house," says Nelson. "And a fair number of people are putting small kitchens near the pool so they have a place for entertaining."

**12.** Forgetting about the practical implications of a pool's unconventional shape. The kidney-shaped pool you've dreamed of may not be ideal for your spouse's lap-swimming routine, and it may throw a hitch in your plans—or budget—for an automatic pool cover. White says that pool covers on free-form pools are expensive. Pools at the more natural end of the spectrum—think boulders accenting the pool's center—



can make it impossible for a lap-swimmer to get a good workout.

**SOLUTION:** Work closely with a landscape architect or pool designer to see if your pool fantasies can be realized in a way that allows multiple activities.

**13.** Dividing a pool into a deep end for older children and adults, and a shallow area for toddlers. "Parents think that a shallow end will give them a place to teach a kid how to swim," says Nelson, "but as soon as the child learns to do anything, he doesn't want to stay in the shallow end."

**SOLUTION:** Williamson recommends installing a safety ledge—a footwide platform 2 to 3 feet below the water—to serve as a seat for adults and an intermediate depth for kids.

**14.** Leaving your spa unchecked for extended periods during the winter, especially if you live where sub-freezing temperatures regularly occur. Freezing can do significant damage to a spa and its innards, which is why properly insulated and sized equipment is so important. "Having that little pump running continuously makes a huge difference," says Mueller-Crispin. "When you circulate water through the equipment, it's always warm down there and you don't have to worry about freezing. If you run a pump a few hours a day, when it's off, the water cools quickly."

**SOLUTION:** Make sure your unit is well-insulated and that its cover fits tightly. "When you lift the cover, you want a little suction on it," Mueller-Crispin says.

For cold locations such as the high desert areas around Bend, consider a timer to guarantee the pump and heater come on at safe intervals.

**15.** Deciding to drain your own pool to get rid of a mess created by poor maintenance. This is a mistake of major proportions, especially if undertaken when the ground is rain-soaked. Adding your pool's water load to what's already in the surrounding earth can create enough hydrostatic pressure to lift your pool out of the ground. "A swimming pool is basically a concrete boat that's in the ground," says Nelson. "In Oregon you can get rain for three weeks at a time, and if you drain a pool, you might get water behind the shell which will pop that baby out of the ground, taking the decking with it, too."

**SOLUTION:** Don't drain your own pool—ever. Get help from a pool professional. As Nelson points out, murky pool water usually isn't as bad a problem as it may seem to you. "Odds are, you haven't ruined the water in your pool; you've just polluted it," he says. "But we can filter water. We can even clean up a pool that looks like a frog pond."

—Ken Logan

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