



Jonathan Abram, who lives at the Rosedale Conservancy in Northwest, swims in the pool recently added to his home.

David Houshewitz/The Washington Times

# Pool planning is no easy task

By Jen Waters  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**J**onathan Abram lives in a Colonial-era home in Northwest, but he wanted the modern advantages of having a swimming pool in his back yard.

While renovating his farmhouse in the Rosedale Conservancy, one of the oldest areas in the District, he decided to install a 60-foot-long liquid oasis. The pool was completed in November.

In the past few months, he and his wife, Eleni Constantine, have enjoyed swimming laps in the morning for exercise. He is pleased that the pool

## As much thought needed as if designing a room

has made his home a gathering place for the friends of his two daughters, Zoe Abram, 16, and Cleo Abram, 11.

This summer, the final landscaping work will be completed. Holly trees and wildflowers will be planted along the opposite sides of the pool.

A pool pavilion, which looks like an old farm shed, also was built on the property to hide the pool equipment, says Rich Cassagnol, division manager at Baker Odmark Weinberg

and Associates Builders in McLean. Mr. Cassagnol headed the building projects on Mr. Abram's property.

The structure consists of a shed and an open area with a roof that provides shade. It is designed to complement the architecture of the original farmhouse.

"It provides a setting to relax," Mr. Cassagnol says. "The pool can be enjoyed both while you're in it and while you're out of it. It's a nice area

for gatherings. It adds to the total enjoyment of the exterior living environment."

While some people enjoy gathering at a community pool, others value having a private getaway on their property. Similar to any other part of the home, in-ground pools can be individualized to the tastes of the owners. Deciding whether the pool will be inside or outside the home is just the beginning.

Several decisions are involved in installing a pool, Mr. Abram says. For instance, he chose a plaster finish and tile made of earth tones as a decorative surrounding, a gas

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Daniel Rosenbaum/The Washington Times

Harry Constantine swims in the backyard pool belonging to daughter Eleni Constantine and her family in Northwest. The pool is a recent addition to the family's farmhouse at the Rosedale Conservancy.

## POOL

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heater to warm the water during cool days and an automatic pool cover. He uses a standard sand filter, along with an activated charcoal filter, to clean the water, which reduces chlorine use.

"The number of details you have to figure out when you build a pool is almost as many as when you build a kitchen," he says. "The options are innumerable."

Although every pool requires water and a solid structure in which to contain it, other features are optional, such as underwater speakers and underwater lights, Mr. Cassagnol says. The deck around the pool can be anything from brushed concrete to interlocking concrete pavers, flagstone or exposed aggregate concrete.

Popular interior finishes in an in-ground pool can be surfaces such as plaster, tile or exposed aggregate with a non-slip coating. In addition, some people opt to have a "negative edge" or a "vanishing edge," which gives the illusion that there's no wall at the sides of the in-ground pool and the water is floating in midair.

The pool should be designed like any other room in the house, says Burton Gray, president of Town and Country Pools Inc. in Springfield. Pri-

mary seating, secondary seating and sun patterns should be considered when designing the area. Many clients consult with exterior designers such as landscape architects.

In most instances, it is difficult to design and install a pool in the District, Mr. Gray says. Because the majority of plots for homes are smaller than in Virginia or Maryland, it is harder to navigate construction. Finding a place to deposit the unneeded soil can be complicated, for instance.

It also takes longer to obtain a permit because of stricter regulations, he says. However, Mr. Gray says he still works on about 20 pools a year in Washington.

"You have traffic issues," he says. "You have inspection issues. You have access issues."

Mr. Gray says on some occasions he has had to use cranes to get equipment to D.C. back yards. The added complications can increase the price of the pool.

The cost for an 800-square-foot swimming pool in the greater metro area can start at \$50,000, according to Mr. Gray and other pool installers. The size, difficulty of installation, material composition and other features affect the total cost of the pool area.

"You think about the same kinds of things when building a swimming pool as when you would design a living room," he says. "Many things go into putting together the total package."

Even the shape of the pool can vary, says Mary Hohne, vice president of Hohne Pool and Spa in Baltimore. For instance, clients can build pools as rectangles, L-shapes, kidney shapes or figure eights. Fountains and waterfalls around the pool and islands in the pool also are popular. Diving boards and slides are options as well.

For safety purposes, Mrs. Hohne says, most county building codes in the Metro area require a fence. Further, to prevent accidents, the switch for closing an automatic cover must be placed so the entire pool can be viewed as the cover is closed.

Sometimes clients choose to have the pool inside the house, says Chris Landis, owner of Landis Construction in Northwest. He is working with a homeowner who wants an indoor pool with a spa, similar to what would be found in a hotel. In this instance, features such as a tanning bed, changing room, workout room or television could be added to the area.

"For resale value, it makes the house a very unique thing," he says. "It usually makes the home their castle."

As preparation for her retirement years, Beverly Denbo of Bethesda asked Mr. Landis to build an indoor lap pool. The pool is about 8 feet by 15 feet, with a motor that creates a current in the pool so the swimmer can swim in place.

The area has skylights, large windows and a heated floor.

Mrs. Denbo used to swim laps at the neighborhood pool. She thought a pool would be a good thing to have in the house while aging. She mostly uses it for exercise, but sometimes she swims with friends.

"I take my 3-year old grandson in it," she says. "I've tried to get my book group to come, but no one wants to come and put on a bathing suit anymore."

Whether the pool is inside or outside the house, homeowners who might want to add the feature one day should plan in advance, says Tom Hazzard, director of design build operations at Natelli Homes in Gaithersburg.

Homeowners who don't plan may expand their home and then later be unable to install the pool of their dreams because of space restrictions. Alternately, a pool could be installed without having a long-term plan, which may cause a problem when renovating or expanding a kitchen or living room area.

Mr. Hazzard is working with a client on adding a screened-in porch, three-car garage and in-law suite, with the long-term goal of also adding a pool in the back yard.

"Particularly this time of year, homeowners are in a big rush to get a pool into place," he says. "In hindsight, they wish they had planned better."

"The pool places a lot of demands on the house."