

Making a splash

By Bernadette Starzee

Some Long Islanders are opting for pools that defy the traditional blue rectangle.

Neil Gallow recently gutted the backyard of his Jericho home to install a gunite pool. "The yard is small, so we're putting in a small, kidney-shaped pool," he said. Around the pool, Gallow is opting for pavers, along with some river rocks and perhaps a waterfall. He said he selected gunite, which costs at least twice as much as vinyl, because it lasts longer.

Gallow's choices are similar to those that many North Shore residents are making. With its wooded terrain, the North Shore lends itself to pools that resemble mountain lakes rather than the perfect, bright-blue rectangles associated with suburban backyards. "We're seeing a lot of free-form, heated gunite pools," said Andrea Jablow, a licensed sales associate for Century 21 Laffey Associates in Greenvale. "People are putting a lot of money into their pools and surrounding them with magnificent landscaping. It's a wonderful focal point for family entertaining."

Among the notable trends are "stacked decorative stones that look like river rocks, with a waterfall cascading down," said Lisa Lauricella, a licensed associate broker in the Syosset office of Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty. "I recently had a listing in Muttontown in which everyone who saw it fell in love with the backyard. The setting was very natural, with the free-form pool, a stone wall and a waterfall."

While some pool buyers are opting for a dark bottom, which gives the pool more of a lake feel, bright colors, such as aqua or royal blue, remain more popular, Lauricella said. "Most people find them more refreshing and appealing," she said.

In the western reaches of the Hamptons, most people are going with geometric pools, said Joseph Musnicki,

who owns West Hampton Beach-based Ocean Spray Pools & Spas, which specializes in gunite pools as well as spas. "In West Hampton, Quogue and Remsenberg, a lot of the houses have a contemporary design, and a geometric pool fits well with them," he said. "Further east, there's more of a country setting, and the free-form style works better."

Swim King Pools, based in Rocky Point, installs concrete pools with vinyl liners throughout much of the Island. The company puts in an even amount of geometric and free-form pools, said Marketing Manager Beth Pranzo. "It depends on the yard and the family's needs," she said. "A 20-by-40-foot geometric pool will have more swimming space than a 20-by-40-foot free-form pool. A family with teenagers, who will be doing a lot of swimming, jumping off the diving board or going down the slide, might opt for more pool space. But a family without kids, or whose kids have grown, might choose the 'mountain lake' style for the aesthetic. They're not going to use it for a swimfest, but for relaxation."

According to Pranzo, Swim King Pools' vinyl pools start at about \$17,000 for a 16-by-32-foot pool, which does not include extras like pavers around the exterior. "Everyone wants a nice patio," Pranzo said, who added that other popular options include diving boards, heaters and underwater color-changing LED lights. "They give the yard a beautiful hue at night," she said.

At Ocean Spray Pools & Spas, gunite pools start at about \$50,000 for an 18-by-36-foot pool, said Musnicki, who said that some people get extras like underwater music and salt systems, which offer the benefits of salt-water swimming. "Many people are choosing to put a band of glass tiles, rather than ceramic tiles, below the coping stone," he added.

According to Pranzo, vinyl liners are

guaranteed for 15 years on a sliding scale. "For the first year, they are guaranteed 100 percent, and then the amount decreases gradually," she said. Holes in liners can be patched.

Gunite pools can be expected to last 30 to 40 years, Musnicki said. But they should be marble dusted every eight to 10 years, he added. Marble dusting ranges in price from about \$8,000 to \$12,000, depending on the size of the pool, he said.

Heaters are very popular options on Long Island, Pranzo said. "They extend the swimming season," she said. "And Long Island has a lot of commuters who get home late. They may want to go for a dip at 7 p.m. and have warm water."

Most of Swim King's customers choose a heat pump, which averages close to \$5,000 including installation, and can be installed at the same time as the pool or later, Pranzo said. Powered by electricity, heat pumps are more economical to run than propane- or oil-powered heaters.

However, among second-home owners, propane is a more popular choice, Musnicki said, because it heats water more quickly. "When people come out here on a Friday night, and the water is 70 degrees, they want to turn it on and get the temperature up to 80 degrees by the next morning," he said.

Solar heating systems, which are powered by the sun, are a new option that is poised to have a major impact on pool heating. While the initial cost is slightly higher – about \$5,500 for the average system – people can recoup their investment in the first year through energy savings, said Kevin Wert, president of Sunshine Solar Technologies, a Jericho-based pool heating company. Homeowners who go solar are also reducing their carbon footprint. However, solar systems have two limitations: The sun is an inconsistent heat source, and systems can not be installed on every property.