



# Swimming in Natural Waters

David Netteton explores a whole new concept in swimming pool design

**O**urs is an intensive health and safety culture. Together with widespread environmental destruction, this has led to certain losses from our lives.

One such recreational pleasure, largely missing in recent years, is that of swimming in natural waters. In times gone by this pastime was considered pivotal to health and vitality. Such an experience provides the rejuvenating sensation only found when jumping into a river, mountain pool, mineral spa, or maybe a tropical lake, surrounded by the wild and rugged beauty of the countryside.

When I think about swimming in natural waters, it conjures up childhood memories of swinging into a pond from a rope, the illusion of depth and conquest, and the liberation as you venture into the unknown. Swimming in natural waters can be one of the most exhilarating and fulfilling experiences, enjoyed by most people in Britain's past, but lost in recent times.

One of my first and most memorable experiences of such an experience was in the Sea of Galilee in Israel. It was warm,

clean and clear, and I went swimming in the moonlight. Such an experience enlivens every sense: the fresh smells, the initial uncertainty washed away by the comfort of engaging with nature; and the feeling of being so alive and fulfilled. Every time is different, but you're always left with a sense of purity and rejuvenation.

However, a new concept in swimming pools has won the hearts of the increasingly ecologically minded public here in the UK, and is allowing us to recreate these sensations in our own gardens – our personal slices of nature. This is the natural swimming pool.

I recently visited such a pool in Austria (where the concept of natural swimming pools – called swimming ponds – first arose) where absolutely no technology had been incorporated. Key design features had successfully stabilised the biology and water chemistry of this 'deep-ecology' pool. The owner was extremely proud of his creation, which had taken a large place in his life and home; it cost him around £5,000, even though it was about 10m x 5m across the

surface and 4m deep in the centre. The attention to detail and consideration of all the components of the pool's ecosystem was profound. It was obviously a great labour of love, and this was reflected in his voice as he explained how this all-natural pool worked. My jaw was on the floor!

Natural swimming pools can be created cheaply and self-built with a little expert guidance and the right supply of materials. This opens up a whole new world of swimming pool ownership. Not only that but it's also a year-round water feature that doesn't lose its appeal with the close of summer. Of course you could also go to the other end of the spectrum and spend a fair amount of money having a marvel of architecture installed, as the potential and design possibilities have an extremely broad spectrum.

A natural swimming pool makes use of a type of reed-bed treatment system to cleanse its water. The swimming area is structurally separate from the 'living filter' with its walls stopping short of the water surface, allowing exchange between the two

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areas. This gives the illusion of one body of water whose wild edges blend into the surroundings.

Depending on the complexity of filter design, it can make use of dense or sparse planting, generating starkly different results and possibilities.

The key to perfect water quality is in the pool's microbiology, with beneficial bacteria thriving in an oxygen-rich environment (provided by good circulation) within the filter zone, known as the regeneration zone. The ecological balance in a well-designed pool leaves it clean and clear, with no silting or harmful pathogens. Special microporous substrates, which are able to absorb unwanted nutrients, can also aid the process.

Natural swimming pools are supremely eco-friendly. They are magnets for wildlife, providing prime habitat if they are designed with a certain level of planting, and offer a wide range of design possibilities. As they are chlorine-free, they are especially beneficial for children and those with skin allergies or asthma. They demand very little maintenance and have minimal running costs – features typical of many types of sustainable building techniques. Now renewable energy is becoming more economic, people are demanding technologies to make their lifestyle yet more eco-friendly. If, for example, you want higher than natural temperatures, heating a natural swimming pool with solar thermal panels is a great example of creating a self-sustaining system.

With a growing awareness of and demand for ecological design and sustainability, and a desire for well-being and harmony with nature, the UK has opened its arms to the natural swimming pool concept. It could return us to the long lost passion for swimming in natural waters, and provide vital habitat for aquatic wildlife. It also opens up a whole new world of swimming pool design and enables us to move beyond those typical of 1980s Hollywood. Natural swimming pools are sympathetic to the environment and dwindling natural resources, and if you have a regular pool already and feel like a change, conversions are straightforward and will add a whole new dimension to your home and garden. □

**For more information on natural swimming pools contact David Nettleton on ☎07832 382653 or visit [www.clear-water-revival.com](http://www.clear-water-revival.com)**



Whole new worlds can be opened up by the natural swimming pool concept, as these three very different pools show

