

# Southern Hospitality

magazine

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# Making a Splash With the

Zero-entry pools, larger hot tubs, waterslides, elaborate theming, a lazy river winding around the property, separate kids' play areas, private cabanas and even mini-waterparks on site. These features are becoming increasingly popular (and important) parts of a hotel's design, as pool and patio areas become more elaborate, more fun and more family friendly.

In today's economy, it just makes sense to keep guests on site, says Winthrop Knox, principal of Northeast Aquatic Design of Massachusetts and Pool People Commercial of Florida. "By having guests stay longer at the hotel's pool area or small waterpark, especially in the vacation resort areas, our customers are finding that they can get some of that revenue that guests would otherwise be spending at other attractions."

From the Hard Rock Hotels and Casinos piping underwater music into their pools all across the country, to the Sea Mist Resort in Myrtle Beach offering 10 swimming pools, a three-story waterslide and a lazy river—it's all about providing guests with a unique experience. And even if they don't want to go as elaborate as a full waterpark, many hotels are building or renovating their pool areas to become comfortable gathering spots for their guests.

## A Relaxing Oasis ...

The new St. Regis Atlanta Hotel and Residences is embracing the

"pool as an oasis" concept with relish; its 40,000 sq. ft. Pool Piazza is scheduled to debut this spring. It will showcase a grand, sweeping staircase leading to a zero-entry pool amongst tropical landscaping, a dramatic eight-foot waterfall, overstuffed lounge furniture, a poolside grotto bar, an eight-foot-wide outdoor fireplace and five private cabanas complete with TV's and a refreshment center.

General Manager Simon Rusconi explains, "We wanted an amazing year-round focal point for the whole hotel where guests can meet and get together and mingle."

Rusconi says that though they're targeting business travelers, including providing wi-fi access poolside, "We also want to attract families, wedding parties and banquets. We'll even have a pool butler handing out towels and popsicles!"

Overall, he says that a great pool is critical for a hotel's atmosphere. "We wanted to position our hotel as a beautiful, upscale resort with the tropical, lush feel of a poolside oasis. It's a place where guests can easily spend two or three hours in absolute comfort. They're buying an experience from us, and we're dedicated to providing the best one possible."

When asked if he had any advice for others considering a pool renovation or new build, Rusconi said, "Make your pool area a place where people want to spend time. Treat it almost like a good

St. Regis Atlanta Hotel and Residences, rendering





# Newest Pool & Patio Trends



## Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort

restaurant where people want to hang out, with great service and great food—and where they feel comfortable and invited.”

### No Mickey Mouse Renovations Here ...

Walt Disney World loves tying its elaborate pool areas to its resorts' themes. The Boardwalk Inn features a rollercoaster-shaped waterslide and carnival-themed pool. The festive, Mardi Gras-themed pool area of the Port Orleans French Quarter showcases a brightly colored sea serpent waterslide. And at Stormalong Bay, guests enjoy a lazy river, a pool with a sandy bottom and a two-story waterslide shaped like an old ship.

For many years, Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort has featured a pool designed to look like an old Spanish fort, with one small waterslide and a tiny kiddie pool off to the side. After an extensive nine-month renovation, which included closing, gutting, rebuilding and expanding, Caribbean Beach reopened its pool area this past September. The main community pool has been greatly extended and is now zero entry and has two new waterslides. And water now shoots out of its decorative fort cannons. Even more impressive is the all-new kids' water play area, with a giant pirate ship sitting in the middle of a shallow zero-entry pool. The ship itself is decked out with water curtains and water fountains, two small waterslides, an enclosed water flume and a large 158-gallon water dumping barrel.

Robin Burkett, area manager of recreation for Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort, says, “At Disney, we try to keep things fresh, and it was

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just time to do a new pool with some of the new features that are popular in the world today. Also, we wanted our new pirate theme to carry over from the pool to our new room designs and back so that it all flows together into one branding message.”

She says that they chose the features they did because “the trend in the industry today is to have aqua play areas with all the different features, such as buckets and slides and everything, and we knew we needed to greatly expand our children’s area. We also wanted to change out our main pool to become zero entry. Not only does that make it easy for folks to get in and out of, but it’s also good for little kids to play in due to being so shallow. We really focus on the children, and when they’re happy, then their parents are happy.”

The resort also updated its patio areas by tripling the amount of deck lounge furniture and adding more tables and umbrellas. “A lot of people like to just go and sit out and maybe not ever go into the water,” says Burkett. “They want a nice place to go to relax. So we tried to make sure there’s room for everybody.”

When asked why Disney builds such elaborate and fun pools for its resorts when the attractions are so hugely popular, Burkett replied, “Our resorts are a nice place to rest up in between going to the parks.

And some of our guests that keep coming back year after year end up just coming for the resorts and skipping the parks completely. So the resorts have become destinations themselves. We just like to provide a nice atmosphere—relaxing and peaceful in some areas and a little louder and fun in others. In the long run, it’s going to pay off. Something fresh and new keeps guests coming back.

“To keep everyone happy during our renovations, we offered a lot of other activities and showed pictures of what the pool would look like once it was done. And I think that helped as far as any guest complaints. In all my 30 years working here, I think this was the easiest rehab that I have ever been through.”

### South vs. North

Northeast Aquatic and its sister company, Pool People Commercial, build pools, water features, waterparks, slides, water rides and more for clients all over the Eastern Seaboard. They design and build for hotels, timeshares and even full-blown waterpark attractions such as Splish Splash in Long Island. “We’re now on our 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> expansion for them. And next year, when we add a wave pool, they will become the largest waterpark in the country,” says Winthrop Knox. “Plus, we’ve probably been involved in some way in over 80 percent of the waterparks in Florida.”

With his companies located in both Massachusetts and in Florida, Knox has a good idea of the differences between what’s popular for hotels in the North versus those in the South. “Many of the northern hotels are putting their water features indoors so they can use them year-round. And we have a large percentage of them doing full-fledged waterparks on site, in order to position themselves as a destination. They see that a waterpark will fill up their weekends for sure.

“In the South, we get the higher end hotels doing the really fancy stuff. And even in the lower-cost hotels, you’re seeing lounging areas that create an atmosphere, and where holding parties and banquets are very popular. Many places in the South already seem like resorts, so they don’t always need the more elaborate stuff.”

Knox says that “action rivers” are becoming increasingly popular both indoors and out. “A lazy river was often just a plain little circle where you floated around in an inner tube and that was it, with no action at all. But now, we like to make it much more interactive by adding sprays, waves, waterfalls, fountains, caves, buckets dumping water and on and on and on. We also started building tube slide entrances into them. Pretty much, no one asks for a lazy river anymore—they all want action rivers.”

Overall, Knox says that his company has found that hotels in the southern areas are leaning more toward adding a river, a zero-entry pool and a children’s water-play structure. “And those that can go ahead and put in a small waterpark find that they can increase that length of stay. They can get their guests to come and stay at their resort or hotel longer for additional revenue.”

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