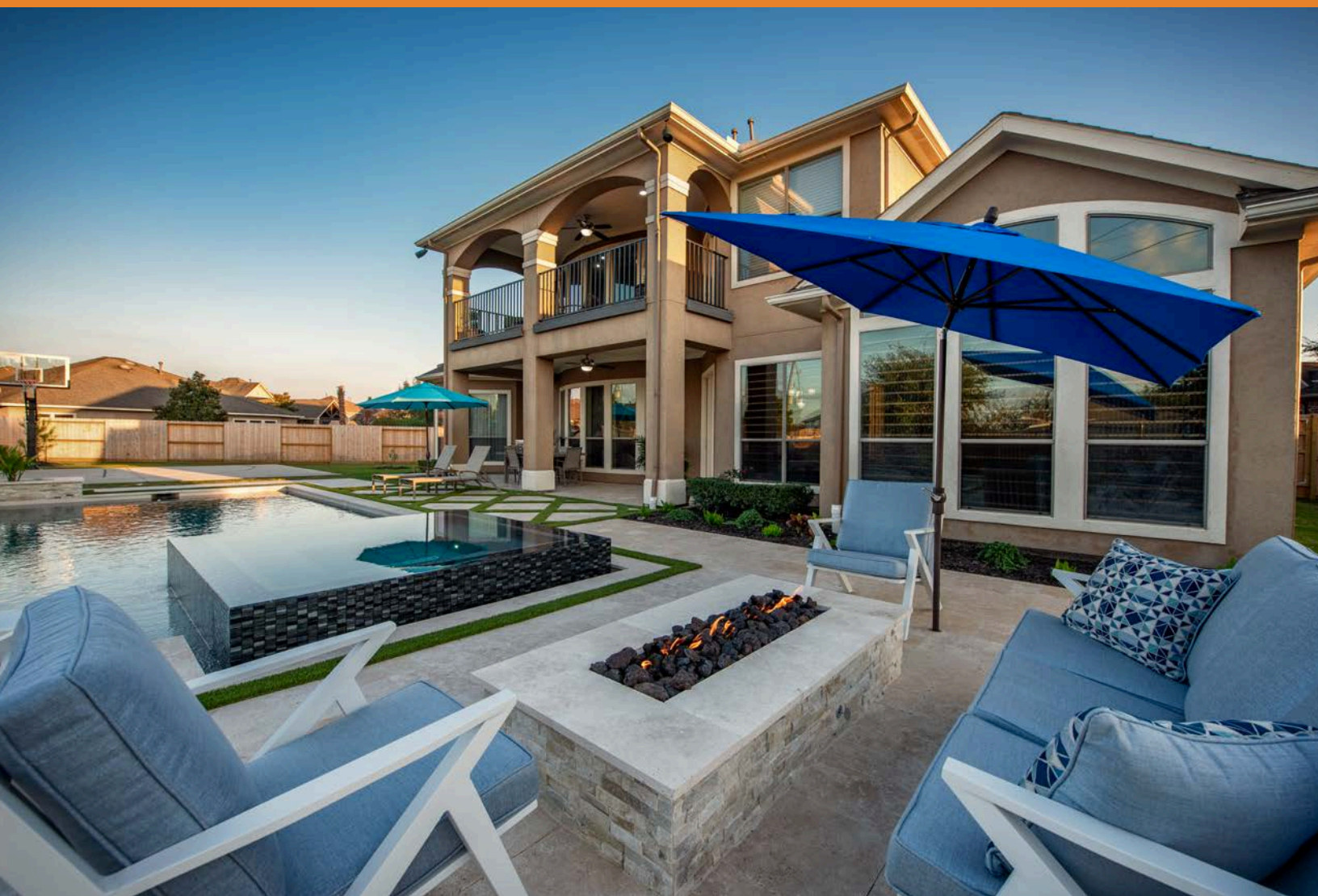




SUNSET POOLS OUTDOOR LIVING PLANNING GUIDE

EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE DESIGNING A
CUSTOM POOL & OUTDOOR LIVING SPACE



A NOTE FROM

ADAM & SONIA



Since founding Sunset Pools in 2001, we've had the privilege of helping more than 1,500 families transform their backyards into places where life happens.

Over the years we've learned that building a great outdoor living environment has very little to do with chasing trends and everything to do with understanding how each family wants to live. That's why we created this guide.

Whether you ultimately choose Sunset Pools or another builder, our hope is that these lessons help you ask better questions, avoid common mistakes, and create a backyard your family will enjoy for decades.

We appreciate the opportunity to be part of your planning journey.

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INTRODUCTION

EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE DESIGNING A CUSTOM POOL & OUTDOOR LIVING SPACE

Most people begin planning their backyard by thinking about what they want to build.

- ✓ A pool.
- ✓ A spa.
- ✓ An outdoor kitchen.
- ✓ A covered patio.

The conversation often starts with features, but the homeowners who are happiest with their investment years later usually begin somewhere else.

They start by thinking about how they want to live. As you begin planning your project, it's worth doing the same.

Imagine family dinners outside on warm evenings. Picture your children spending entire afternoons in the pool during summer break. Think about hosting friends without feeling crowded, enjoying quiet mornings with a cup of coffee outdoors, and creating a space that naturally brings people together.

In other words, focus on the experience before you focus on the construction. That distinction matters.

Because while pools, patios, fire features, and outdoor kitchens are important, they are ultimately tools. Their purpose is not simply to exist within a backyard. Their purpose is to support the lifestyle you want to create.

The most successful outdoor living projects are rarely the ones with the most features. They are the ones that feel intentional. Every element serves a purpose. The layout feels natural. The spaces are comfortable to use. The design complements the home rather than competing with it.

Years from now, you probably won't be talking about the square footage of the patio or the type of coping you selected. You'll be talking about birthday parties, holiday gatherings, afternoons spent with family, and memories made at home.

Since 2001, Sunset Pools has completed more than 1,500 custom pool and outdoor living projects throughout Katy, Fulshear, Cypress, Richmond, and surrounding Houston-area communities. Along the way, we've learned that great outdoor living isn't created by simply adding features. It's created by understanding how families want to live, then designing every detail around that lifestyle. The insights throughout this guide aren't just industry best practices. They're lessons we've learned from more than two decades of helping homeowners navigate design decisions, construction challenges, and the realities of how people actually use their backyards after the project is complete.

Whether you're considering a custom pool, a complete backyard transformation, or simply exploring ideas for the future, our goal is to help you make informed decisions with greater confidence.

Because great outdoor spaces are not created by accident.

They're created through thoughtful planning, experienced design, and lessons learned from hundreds of real-world situations.

CHAPTER 1

WHY ARE YOU INVESTING IN OUTDOOR LIVING?

It's easy to assume you're considering outdoor living because you want a pool.

In reality, you're probably looking for something much deeper than that.

For many families, the backyard represents one of the largest untapped opportunities within the home. While kitchens, living rooms, and interior spaces receive tremendous attention during the design process, outdoor environments are often treated as an afterthought. Yet in Texas, where much of the year can be spent outside, your backyard has the potential to become one of the most frequently used areas of your property.

The decision to invest in outdoor living is often driven by a desire to improve everyday life.

You may want more opportunities to spend time together as a family. You may want a place where your children can disconnect from screens and connect with friends. You may want an environment that makes entertaining feel easier and more enjoyable. Or perhaps you're simply looking for a space where you can relax after a long day without having to leave home.

Many homeowners describe the feeling as wanting their home to feel more complete.

The pool itself is rarely the end goal. The end goal is creating experiences.

A well-designed outdoor space encourages people to linger longer. Conversations last a little later into the evening. Family gatherings become easier to host. Ordinary weekends begin to feel more memorable.

This emotional component is often overlooked during the planning process, but it plays a significant role in determining whether a project ultimately feels successful.

When you focus only on features, you risk creating a backyard that looks impressive but doesn't fully support the way your family wants to live.

When you focus on lifestyle first, the design decisions become much clearer.

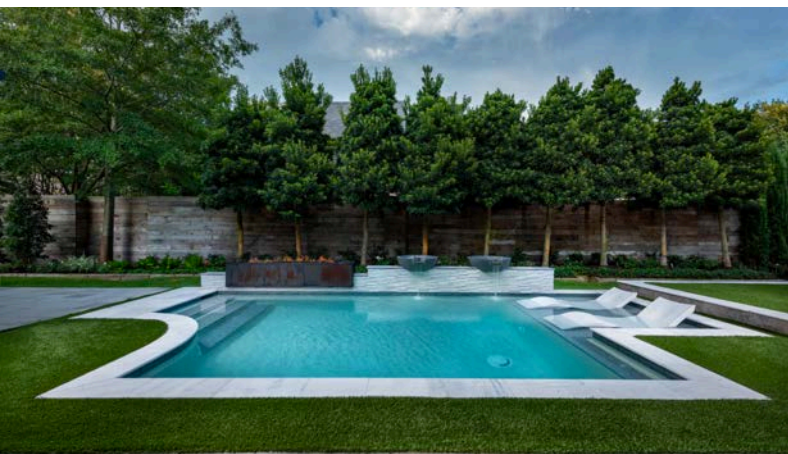
Instead of asking:

"What should we build?"

The question becomes:

"How do we want this space to make us feel?"

That shift in perspective often leads to better outcomes, better design decisions, and a backyard that continues to deliver value long after construction is complete.



Sunset Insight

After designing more than 1,500 outdoor living environments, we've found that the families who enjoy their backyards the most rarely talk about individual features. They talk about birthday parties, quiet mornings, weekends with friends, and how much more time they spend together at home. The best projects aren't built around a pool. They're built around a lifestyle.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE INVESTMENT: WHAT IMPACTS THE COST OF A CUSTOM GUNITE POOL & OUTDOOR LIVING PROJECT?

At some point during the planning process, almost every homeowner asks the same question:

"How do we want this space to make us feel?"

It's an important question, but it's also one of the most difficult to answer without first understanding the vision for the project.

Unlike many home improvements, a custom gunite pool and outdoor living space isn't a standardized product. There isn't a fixed price because there isn't a fixed design. Every property is different. Every family has different priorities. Every backyard presents unique opportunities and challenges.

That is why you'll often see wide ranges when researching pool costs online. The numbers themselves rarely tell the full story.

A more helpful approach is understanding what actually influences the investment and how those decisions shape the final outcome.

The Pool Is Only One Part of the Project

Many homeowners initially focus on the pool itself. But when you picture your completed backyard, you're probably not imagining the pool in isolation.

You're imagining the entire experience.

The pool may be the centerpiece, but it's often the combination of spaces around it that determines how much you'll enjoy the finished project.

One of the lessons we've learned after more than 1,500 projects is that homeowners rarely remember the exact dimensions of their pool. They remember how the entire backyard functions. The shaded patio where everyone gathers. The outdoor kitchen that becomes the center of every celebration. The landscape lighting that transforms the space after sunset.

The most successful projects are designed as complete outdoor living environments, not individual features assembled one at a time.



Site Conditions Matter More Than Most People Expect

One of the biggest variables in any project is the property itself.

While every backyard may appear straightforward at first glance, there are often factors behind the scenes that influence construction requirements.

These can include:

- ✓ Accessibility to the backyard
- ✓ Existing drainage conditions
- ✓ Utility easements
- ✓ Elevation changes
- ✓ Existing structures
- ✓ Soil conditions
- ✓ Engineering requirements

Many of these factors are invisible once the project is complete, but they play an important role in planning, budgeting, and construction.

After evaluating thousands of properties over the past two decades, we've learned that two backyards that look similar on the surface can require very different approaches once engineering, drainage, utilities, and access are fully evaluated.

Features Shape Both the Experience and the Investment

Every feature you include should support how you want to use the space.

For example, if you enjoy entertaining, an outdoor kitchen and expanded patio may provide more value than a larger pool.

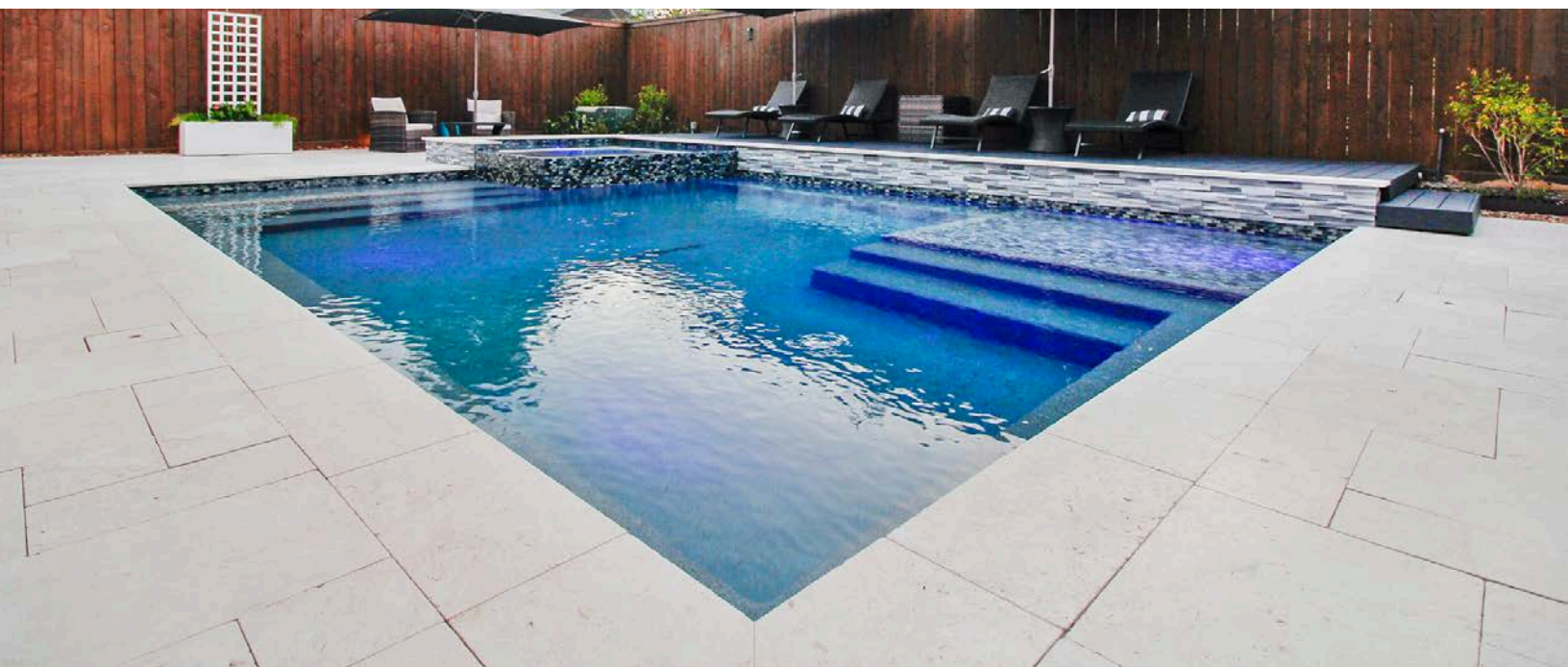
If relaxation is your priority, a spa, fire feature, or covered seating area may become some of the most-used parts of the backyard.

The goal isn't to include everything.

The goal is to include the features you'll actually use.

Sunset Insight

One of the biggest misconceptions we see is that larger pools automatically create better backyards. In reality, proportion, layout, and usability almost always have a greater impact on long-term satisfaction than pool size alone.



Material Selections Influence More Than Appearance

Material choices often have a significant impact on both aesthetics and long-term performance.

Pool finishes, tile selections, decking materials, coping, outdoor kitchen finishes, and architectural details all contribute to the overall character of the space.

Some homeowners prefer a clean, contemporary look. Others gravitate toward a more natural or resort-inspired aesthetic.

While appearance is certainly important, it's also worth considering durability, maintenance requirements, and how materials will age over time.

The best selections typically balance beauty, performance, and longevity.

Think Beyond Construction Costs

One of the most common mistakes homeowners make is evaluating a project based solely on the initial investment.

A few more valuable questions are:

- ✓ What will this space add to our lives?
- ✓ Will it encourage your family to spend more time together?
- ✓ Will you entertain more often?
- ✓ Will you use your property differently?
- ✓ Will your home feel more complete?
- ✓ Will the space still feel right ten years from now?

These questions are harder to quantify, but they're often far more important.

Because while the investment may be measured in dollars, the value is often measured in experiences.





Planning for the Right Outcome

As you begin considering budgets and priorities, remember that the goal is not simply to build a pool.

The goal is to create an outdoor environment that supports the way you want to live.

The most successful projects are rarely defined by a single feature or material selection. They succeed because the design, layout, functionality, and overall experience work together.

When that happens, the backyard becomes more than an addition to the home.

It becomes one of the places where life happens.

Reflection Exercise

Before moving forward, take a few minutes to think through the following questions:

- ✓ What is most important to you about this project?
- ✓ How do you envision using the space on a typical weekend?
- ✓ Which outdoor features would genuinely improve your lifestyle?
- ✓ What would make the finished project feel successful five years from now?
- ✓ Are you primarily investing in a pool, or are you investing in a complete outdoor living experience?

The answers will help guide every decision that follows.

CHAPTER 3

QUESTIONS EVERY HOMEOWNER SHOULD ANSWER BEFORE MEETING A POOL BUILDER

One of the biggest misconceptions about planning a pool or outdoor living project is that the design process begins once you meet with a builder.

In reality, some of the most important decisions happen before the first consultation ever takes place. Not because you need to know exactly what you want.

But because having clarity around your goals helps create a much better outcome.

The most successful projects are rarely the result of homeowners arriving with a fully developed design. They're usually the result of homeowners having a clear understanding of how they want to use the space and what they want it to accomplish.

Before you begin discussing layouts, materials, or features, take some time to think through the following questions.

How Do You Want to Use the Space?

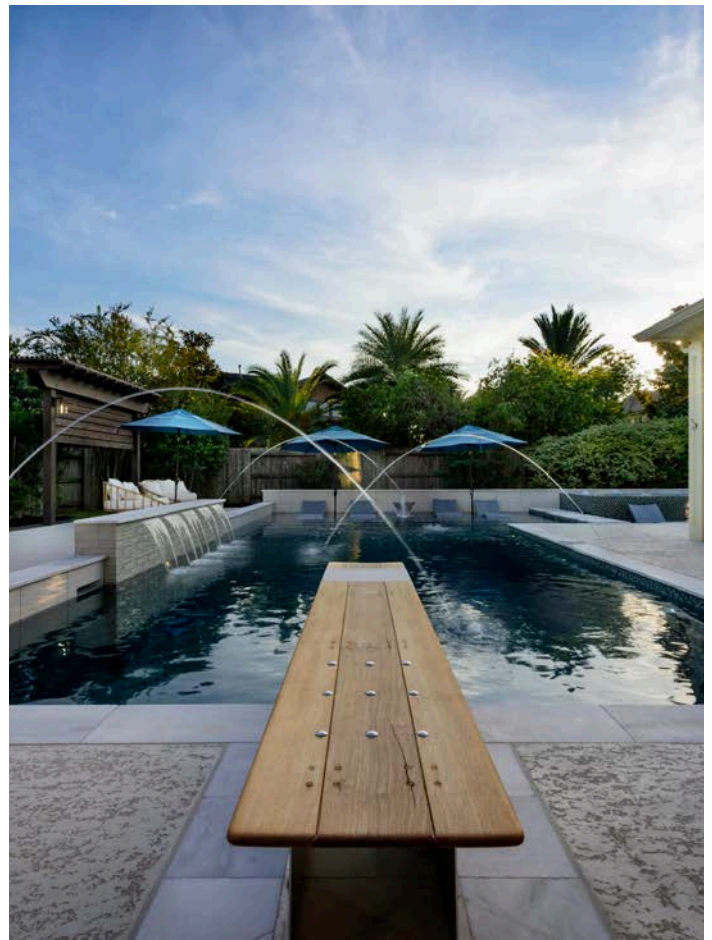
This may seem obvious, but it's one of the most important questions you can ask yourself.

Will the backyard primarily be used for:

- ☒ Family time?
- ☒ Entertaining?
- ☒ Relaxation?
- ☒ Exercise?
- ☒ A combination of all four?

There is no right answer.

A backyard designed around entertaining may look very different from one designed primarily for quiet evenings and relaxation. Understanding how you expect to use the space helps establish priorities from the beginning.



What Does a Perfect Weekend Look Like?

Instead of focusing on features, picture the experience. Imagine it's a Saturday afternoon a year from now.

- ✓ What does the day look like?
- ✓ Are friends gathered around the pool?
- ✓ Are your children swimming with neighbors?
- ✓ Are you grilling outside while everyone relaxes on the patio?
- ✓ Are you enjoying a quiet evening in the spa?

The clearer you can visualize the experience, the easier it becomes to design a space that supports it.

How Important Is Entertaining?

Many homeowners underestimate how much entertaining friends and family influences design decisions.

Think about the way you currently host guests. Do you enjoy:

✓ Large gatherings

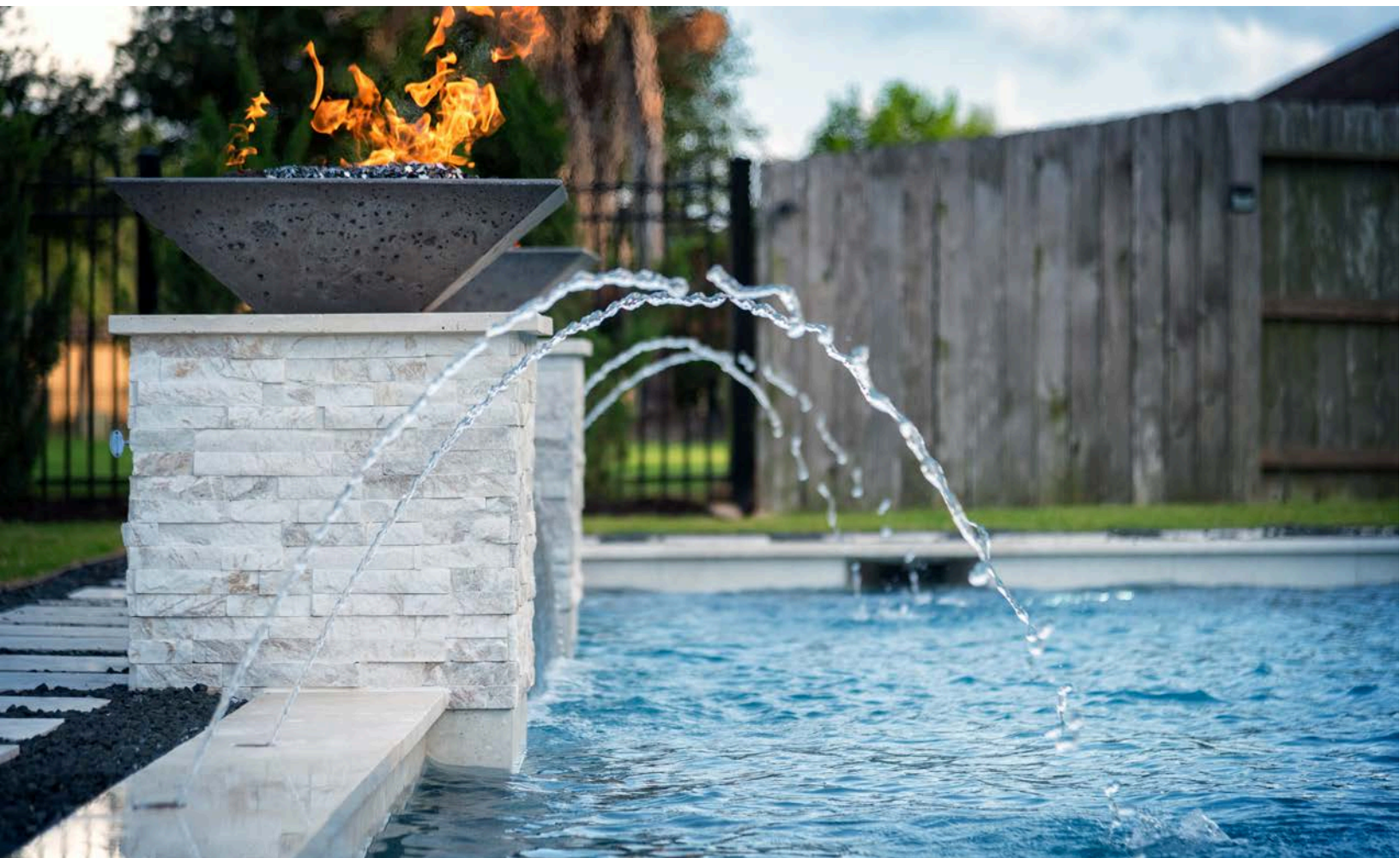
✓ Small group

✓ Family celebrations

✓ Holiday events

Your answers can affect everything from patio size and seating areas to outdoor kitchens, fire features, and traffic flow throughout the space.

A beautiful backyard is important, but a backyard that functions well when people are actually using it is even more important.



What Features Matter Most to You?

Every homeowner has a different vision. For some, the pool is the primary focus.

For others, the outdoor living areas become just as important as the water itself.

As you begin planning, consider which features would have the greatest impact on your lifestyle.

Examples might include:

- ✓ A spa for year-round relaxation
- ✓ A sun shelf for lounging
- ✓ An outdoor kitchen for entertaining
- ✓ A covered patio for shade and comfort
- ✓ Landscape lighting for evening enjoyment
- ✓ Fire features for ambiance
- ✓ Open lawn space for children and pets

Understanding your priorities helps create a more intentional design process.



What Are Your Must-Haves vs. Nice-to-Haves?

This exercise can be incredibly helpful. Many homeowners discover that some of the features they initially considered essential are actually lower priorities once they think through how they'll use the space.

Create two lists:

Must-Haves

Features that would significantly impact your enjoyment of the project.

Nice-to-Haves

Features that would be enjoyable but are not critical to the overall experience.

This simple exercise often creates immediate clarity.

How Long Do You Plan to Own the Home?

A backyard should not only support your needs today. It should also support your needs in the future.

If you plan to stay in your home for many years, it may make sense to think beyond your current lifestyle and consider how the space could evolve with your family over time.

The best outdoor environments often balance immediate enjoyment with long-term functionality.

Think Beyond Inspiration Photos

Collecting inspiration is one of the best ways to begin planning your project. Photos help communicate preferences that are often difficult to describe with words.

However, one of the most common misconceptions we encounter is the belief that a favorite Pinterest or Instagram photo can simply be recreated in any backyard.

- Every property is different.
- Every home has its own architecture.
- Every family lives differently.

A design that works beautifully on one lot may not function nearly as well on another because of elevation, drainage, lot dimensions, sun exposure, neighboring homes, or the way the family plans to use the space.

After more than two decades of designing custom outdoor living environments, we've found that the best projects aren't copies of someone else's backyard. They're thoughtfully designed responses to the home, the property, and the people who will enjoy it every day.

Use inspiration photos to communicate the feeling you're trying to achieve, not as a blueprint to duplicate.

What Would Make This Investment Feel Worthwhile?

This may be the most important question in the entire chapter.

Five years after construction is complete, what would make you feel like this was one of the best investments you've made in your home?

- More family time
- More entertaining
- More relaxation
- A more complete property
- A stronger connection to your home

Your answer will often reveal what matters most.

And once you understand that, the design process becomes significantly more meaningful.

Reflection Exercise

Complete the following statement below. Don't focus on features. Focus on experiences. The answer may become one of the most valuable planning tools you have.

Our ideal backyard would allow us to

Sunset Insight

One question we often ask homeowners during the design process is, "How do you want to spend a Saturday in this backyard five years from now?"

That conversation almost always leads to better design decisions than simply asking which features they want to include.

CHAPTER 4

LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED FROM 1,500+ CUSTOM PROJECTS

Since 2001, we've had the privilege of designing and building more than 1,500 custom pools and outdoor living environments throughout Katy, Fulshear, Cypress, Richmond, and surrounding Houston-area communities.

Every project has been different.

Different homes. Different families. Different properties. Different goals.

But over the years, certain patterns have emerged.

We've seen what homeowners love years after construction is complete. We've heard what they wish they had done differently. We've learned which investments consistently create the greatest long-term satisfaction and which decisions are often reconsidered later.

If we could sit down with every homeowner before they began planning their project, these are the lessons we'd want to share.

One of the Biggest Regrets We Hear Is Not Planning Enough Shade

This is probably the most common comment we hear after homeowners have spent a full Texas summer enjoying their new backyard.

"I wish we had added more shade."

When people first begin planning, they're naturally drawn to the pool itself. They imagine the water, the finishes, and the overall appearance of the backyard.

What they're less likely to imagine is where everyone will actually spend most of their time.

In reality, much of outdoor living happens outside the pool. Family members gather around dining tables. Friends relax under covered patios. Parents watch children swim from comfortable seating areas. Conversations continue long after everyone gets out of the water.

Without adequate shade, those spaces often become difficult to enjoy during the hottest parts of the day.

Whether it's a covered patio, pavilion, pergola, strategically placed landscaping, or a combination of shade solutions, creating comfortable places to gather is one of the best investments you can make.

After more than 1,500 projects, we've never had a homeowner tell us they wished they had built less comfortable outdoor living space.



Homeowners Almost Always Underestimate How Much Patio Space They'll Use

When most people picture their future backyard, they imagine the pool.

What they don't always picture is everything happening around it.

Where will guests gather while dinner is being prepared?

Where will children leave towels and toys?

Where will everyone sit during birthday parties or holiday celebrations?

Where will outdoor furniture go?

Where will people walk when moving between the pool, outdoor kitchen, and seating areas?

These questions rarely come up when homeowners are looking at inspiration photos online, but they become incredibly important once the backyard is being used every weekend.

One of the biggest differences between a backyard that feels cramped and one that feels effortless is having enough space for people to comfortably move, gather, and relax.

That's why we often recommend larger patios than homeowners initially expect.

It's not because bigger is always better.

It's because families almost always use those spaces more than they anticipated.

The Best Projects Are Designed as One Complete Vision

Every family's budget is different, and every project has its own priorities.

Sometimes it makes sense to phase certain elements over time.

But one lesson we've learned consistently is this: Homeowners rarely regret planning the complete vision from the beginning.

Many clients initially plan to "add the outdoor kitchen later."

Or install landscaping after construction.

Or build the patio extension next year.

While those additions can absolutely be completed in phases, we've found that designing everything together from the start almost always produces a better long-term result.

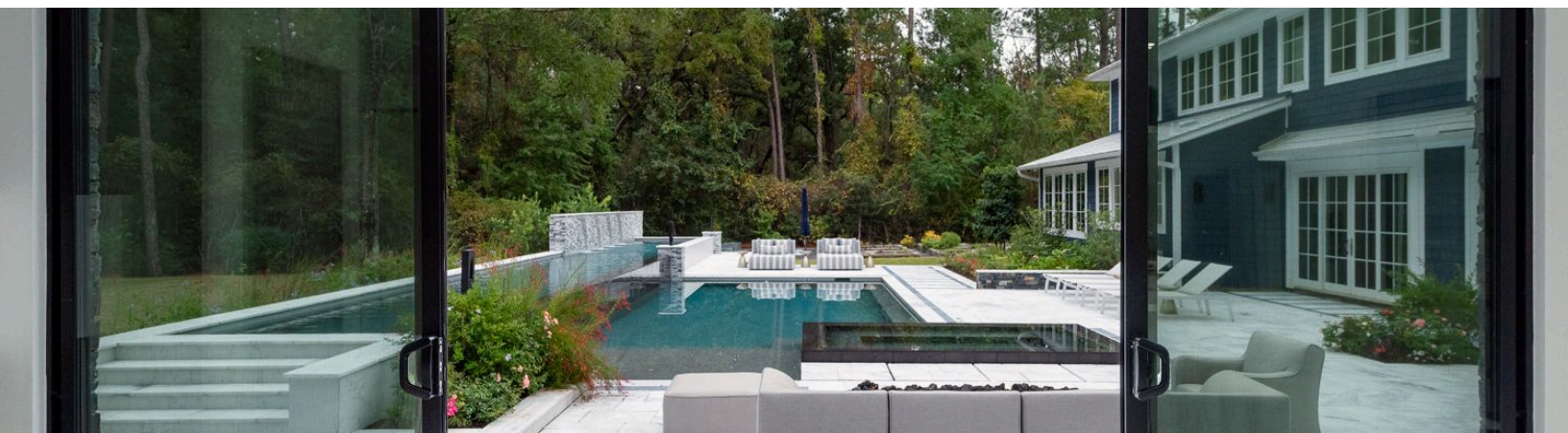
When the entire outdoor environment is planned as one cohesive project, every element works together.

The pool relates to the patio.

The patio connects naturally to the outdoor kitchen.

The landscaping softens the architecture.
The lighting highlights the design.

Even if portions of the project are completed later, having a master plan from the beginning creates a backyard that feels intentional instead of pieced together.





Bigger Pools Aren't Always Better Pools

One of the biggest misconceptions we see is that the size of the pool determines the quality of the backyard.

In reality, the opposite is often true.

Some of the most enjoyable projects we've completed feature pools that are intentionally sized to leave room for entertaining, landscaping, open lawn space, or outdoor living areas.

A pool that's too large can limit the flexibility of the rest of the backyard.

The goal isn't to maximize the amount of water. The goal is to maximize the way the entire property functions.

We've found that proportion is often more important than size.

A thoughtfully balanced design almost always feels better than simply making every feature larger.

The Features Homeowners Use Most Often Are Sometimes Unexpected

Before construction begins, many homeowners assume the pool itself will be the center of every memory.

After the project is complete, they're often surprised by which features become favorites.

Sun shelves quickly become one of the most popular spaces for children, relaxing, and simply sitting in the water with family and friends.

Spas become year-round gathering places. Covered patios often become outdoor living rooms. Landscape lighting completely changes how frequently the backyard is used after sunset.

Outdoor kitchens naturally become gathering spaces during holidays and celebrations. Some of the features homeowners initially considered "extras" eventually become the parts of the backyard they use the most.

That's why we encourage families to think beyond individual features and instead consider how they want to spend time together outdoors.

Great Design Begins Long Before Construction

One of the biggest differences between designing and simply building is everything that happens before construction ever starts.

When we begin designing a backyard, we're evaluating things homeowners often don't realize influence the final result.

We're studying views from inside the home.

We're watching how sunlight moves across the property throughout the day.

We're considering privacy from neighboring homes. We're evaluating drainage, grading, construction access, utility easements, and setbacks.

We're thinking about furniture placement, entertaining flow, and how people will naturally move throughout the space.

We're asking questions about how your family lives today and how that might change years from now. Good design isn't about fitting features into a backyard.

It's about creating an environment where every decision supports the way you'll actually live.

The Most Successful Backyards Feel Effortless

The best outdoor living spaces don't call attention to individual features.

They simply feel right. Guests naturally know where to gather.

The transition from inside the home to outside feels seamless. Children have room to play. Adults have comfortable places to relax.

Everything feels connected.

When every element is working together, homeowners often stop noticing individual design decisions altogether.

Instead, they simply enjoy being outside. That's ultimately the goal.

After more than two decades of designing outdoor living environments, we've learned that the greatest compliment isn't hearing someone say, "Your pool is beautiful."

It's hearing them say, "We spend more time together out here than we ever imagined." Or, "This has completely changed the way we use our home."

Because at the end of the day, that's what great outdoor living is really about.

It's not just building a beautiful backyard. It's creating a place where life happens.



CHAPTER 5

THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR LIVING PLANNING CHECKLIST



Before meeting with a designer or pool builder, spend a few minutes working through this checklist.

You don't need every answer today. The goal is simply to create clarity around your priorities, your property, and the experience you want your backyard to create.

The more prepared you are before the design process begins, the easier it becomes to make confident decisions later.

After helping more than 1,500 homeowners through this process, we've found that the families who are happiest with their finished backyard aren't necessarily the ones who started with all the answers. They're the ones who took the time to think about how they wanted to live before making design decisions.

Use this checklist as a planning tool, not a test. It's completely normal if some sections are easier to answer than others.



Lifestyle & Vision

- ☐ I can clearly describe how I want to use my backyard.
- ☐ I know whether relaxation, entertaining, family time, or recreation is my primary goal.
- ☐ I have discussed the project with everyone involved in the decision-making process.
- ☐ I have considered how my family may use the space differently five years from now.
- ☐ I have thought about what would make this investment feel worthwhile long-term.

Notes

Sunset Insight

One of the first questions we ask homeowners isn't, "What kind of pool do you want?" It's, "How do you picture spending a Saturday in your backyard a few years from now?"

That answer almost always provides more valuable design direction than discussing features alone.

Design Inspiration

- ☐ I have collected photos of outdoor spaces I like.
- ☐ I have identified architectural styles I am drawn to.
- ☐ I have saved examples of pools, spas, patios, and outdoor living spaces that reflect my vision.
- ☐ I understand the difference between features I love and features I simply admire.
- ☐ I can describe how I want the finished space to feel.

How do you want your backyard to feel?

- ☐ Relaxing
 - ☐ Resort-like
 - ☐ Family-focused
 - ☐ Elegant
-
-
-

Sunset Insight

Inspiration photos are incredibly helpful, but remember they're exactly that: inspiration.

Every home, every property, and every family is different. Great design isn't about copying someone else's backyard. It's about creating one that feels like it was always meant to belong to your home.





Pool Planning

- ☐ I know whether I want the pool to be primarily recreational, aesthetic, or both.
- ☐ I have considered pool size relative to the overall backyard.
- ☐ I have thought about how much deck space will be needed.
- ☐ I have considered future needs for children, guests, and entertaining.

Features I'm Interested In

- ☐ Spa
 - ☐ Sun Shelf / Baja Ledge
 - ☐ Water Features
 - ☐ Fire Features
 - ☐ Pool Lighting
-
-
-

Sunset Insight

One lesson we've learned over the years is that homeowners often spend far more time discussing the pool than the spaces around it.

Ironically, some of the most-used parts of a finished backyard are the patios, shaded seating areas, outdoor kitchens, and gathering spaces that surround the pool.

Outdoor Living Priorities

- ☐ I have considered how the outdoor space will function beyond the pool.
- ☐ I have thought about where guests will gather.
- ☐ I have considered outdoor dining and entertaining needs.
- ☐ I have thought about evening use of the space.

Outdoor Living Features of Interest

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Outdoor Kitchen | ☐ Outdoor Audio |
| ☐ Covered Patio | ☐ Cabana / Pool House |
| ☐ Pergola | ☐ Artificial Turf |
| ☐ Fire Pit | ☐ Landscaping |
| ☐ Outdoor Fireplace | ☐ Additional Seating Areas |
| ☐ Landscape Lighting | ☐ Other: |
-
-
-

Sunset Insight

One of the most common comments we hear after projects are complete is:

"We had no idea how much we'd use the outdoor kitchen." Or "We spend every evening sitting on the covered patio."

The backyard isn't just about swimming. It's about creating places where life naturally happens.





Shade & Comfort

- ☐ I have considered where shade will be needed throughout the day.
- ☐ I have thought about how the backyard will feel during Texas summers.
- ☐ I have identified areas that may need covered structures.
- ☐ I have considered both daytime and evening comfort.

Shade Solutions I'm Interested In

- ☐ Covered Patio
- ☐ Pergola
- ☐ Pavilion
- ☐ Trees & Landscaping
- ☐ Retractable Shade
- ☐ Other:

Sunset Insight

If there's one lesson we've learned from more than 1,500 projects, it's this:

Homeowners almost never regret adding more shade.

Comfort determines how often you'll actually use your backyard.

Property Considerations

- ☐ I understand my property boundaries.
- ☐ I am aware of any HOA requirements.
- ☐ I have considered utility easements.
- ☐ I have considered drainage needs.
- ☐ I have identified any site access challenges.
- ☐ I know whether there are existing structures that may impact design.

Property Notes

What Sunset Will Be Evaluating

During your design consultation, we'll also be evaluating details that homeowners often don't think about, including:

- Sun exposure throughout the day
- Views from inside the home
- Privacy from neighboring properties
- Existing drainage patterns
- Construction access
- Furniture layout
- Entertaining flow
- Utility locations and easements
- Grading and elevation
- How the outdoor spaces connect with your home

These behind-the-scenes considerations often have a significant impact on how the finished backyard feels and functions.



Investment Planning

- ☐ I have established a preliminary investment range.
- ☐ I understand that outdoor living projects vary based on design, site conditions, and features.
- ☐ I have identified my must-have features.
- ☐ I have identified my nice-to-have features.
- ☐ I am prepared to prioritize features if necessary.

My Top 5 Priorities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sunset Insight

When homeowners begin prioritizing, we encourage them to think about daily life instead of individual products.

Ask yourself:
"What will improve our everyday experience the most?"
That question often makes decisions much easier.



Builder Selection Preparation

- ☐ I have researched multiple builders.
- ☐ I have reviewed project portfolios.
- ☐ I have read reviews and testimonials.
- ☐ I have prepared questions for consultations.
- ☐ I understand what matters most to me in a builder relationship.

What Matters Most?

- ☐ Design Expertise
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Reputation
- ☐ Experience
- ☐ Warranty
- ☐ Process
- ☐ Project Management
- ☐ Outdoor Living Knowledge
- ☐ Other:



Sunset Insight

Beautiful project photos are important. But after 25 years in this industry, we've learned that the homeowner experience is shaped just as much by communication, organization, and project management as it is by construction quality.

Ask builders how they'll communicate with you throughout the project, not just what they'll build.

Final Reflection

Before moving forward, complete this sentence:

"The most important thing I want this project to accomplish is..."

Don't worry about whether your answer mentions a pool, an outdoor kitchen, or any specific feature. Instead, think about how you want your family to experience this space.

Because once you're clear on that answer, every other design decision becomes much easier. And after helping more than 1,500 families create outdoor living environments, we've found that the most successful projects almost always begin with that simple conversation.

CHAPTER 6

CHOOSING THE RIGHT POOL BUILDER

By the time most homeowners begin meeting with pool builders, they've already spent weeks, and sometimes months, researching options.

They've looked at websites, scrolled through social media, read reviews, compared photos, and saved inspiration from countless projects.

Yet despite all of that research, many still feel uncertain about how to make the right decision. That's understandable.

A custom pool and outdoor living project is one of the largest improvements you'll make to your home. More importantly, it's a project you'll live with for years to come. The company you choose won't simply influence the final product. They'll influence the entire experience.

After helping more than 1,500 families through this process, we've found that homeowners almost never judge their builder based on a single moment. Instead, they remember how the company communicated, solved problems, managed expectations, and made them feel throughout the journey. Beautiful construction matters.

So does the experience of getting there.



Look Beyond the Portfolio

Every builder has beautiful photos, and they should. A portfolio is an important part of evaluating design quality and craftsmanship. But photographs only tell part of the story.

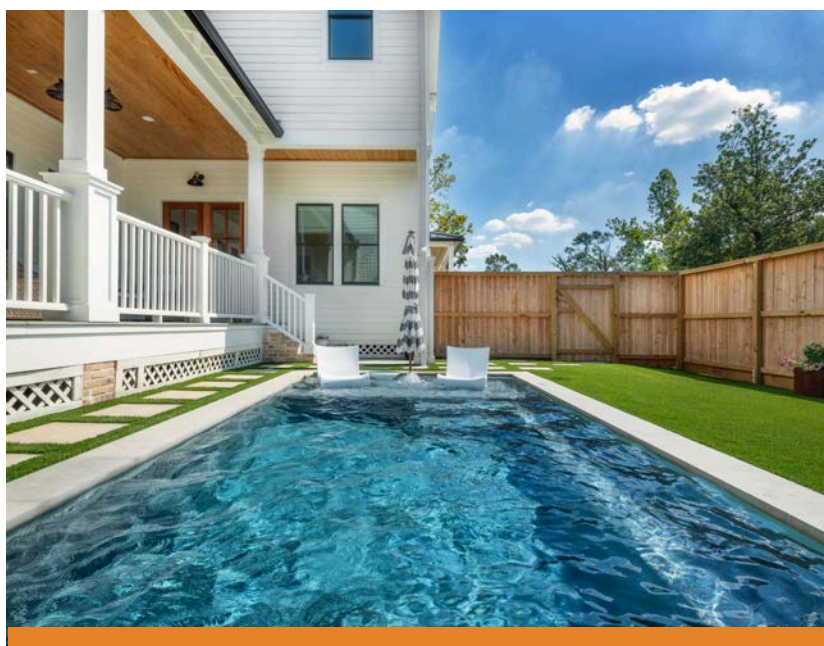
They don't show...

- How often clients received updates.
- Whether expectations were set clearly.
- How unexpected challenges were handled.
- Whether phone calls were returned promptly.
- How organized the construction process felt.
- Whether the finished project matched the original vision.

One of the biggest lessons we've learned over the past two decades is that the best projects aren't defined only by how they look.

They're defined by how homeowners felt throughout the entire experience. As you evaluate builders, don't just ask to see finished projects.

Ask about the process behind them.





Experience Doesn't Just Build Better Pools. It Helps Prevent Problems.

Experience isn't valuable simply because a company has been in business for a long time.

It's valuable because every completed project teaches something new.

After more than 1,500 custom projects, we've encountered virtually every type of backyard condition imaginable.

- ✓ Difficult drainage
- ✓ Limited construction access
- ✓ Complex HOA requirements
- ✓ Steep grades
- ✓ Unique engineering challenges
- ✓ Unexpected underground utilities
- ✓ Changing homeowner priorities during design

Every project adds another layer of knowledge. That experience doesn't eliminate challenges.

It helps identify them before they become expensive surprises.

One of the biggest advantages of working with an experienced builder is that they often ask questions newer builders don't yet know to ask.

Those conversations can make an enormous difference long before construction ever begins.

Understand Their Design Philosophy

Not every builder approaches projects the same way. Some primarily focus on construction.

Others focus heavily on design. Others specialize in creating complete outdoor living environments where every feature works together.

None of these approaches are inherently right or wrong. The important thing is understanding which approach aligns with your goals.

Consider asking questions like:

- ✓ How does your design process work?
- ✓ How do you learn how our family will use the space?
How are outdoor living elements incorporated into the overall design?
- ✓ How do you balance aesthetics with functionality?
- ✓ How do you ensure the backyard feels cohesive rather than a collection of individual features?

The answers often reveal how much thought goes into the planning process before construction begins.

Communication Is Often the Difference Between a Good Experience and a Great One

Construction involves many moving parts. There will be decisions to make, questions to answer, schedules to coordinate, and updates to communicate.

That's why communication matters so much. After completing more than 1,500 projects, one pattern has become incredibly clear: Homeowners are remarkably understanding when they know what's happening.

Uncertainty creates far more stress than delays themselves.

Pay attention to how a company communicates before you've even signed a contract.

- ✓ Are they responsive?
- ✓ Do they answer questions thoroughly?
- ✓ Do they educate rather than pressure?
- ✓ Do they set realistic expectations?

The way a builder communicates before earning your business is often a strong indication of how they'll communicate after construction begins.

Ask Who Will Actually Be Managing Your Project

One question many homeowners never think to ask is:

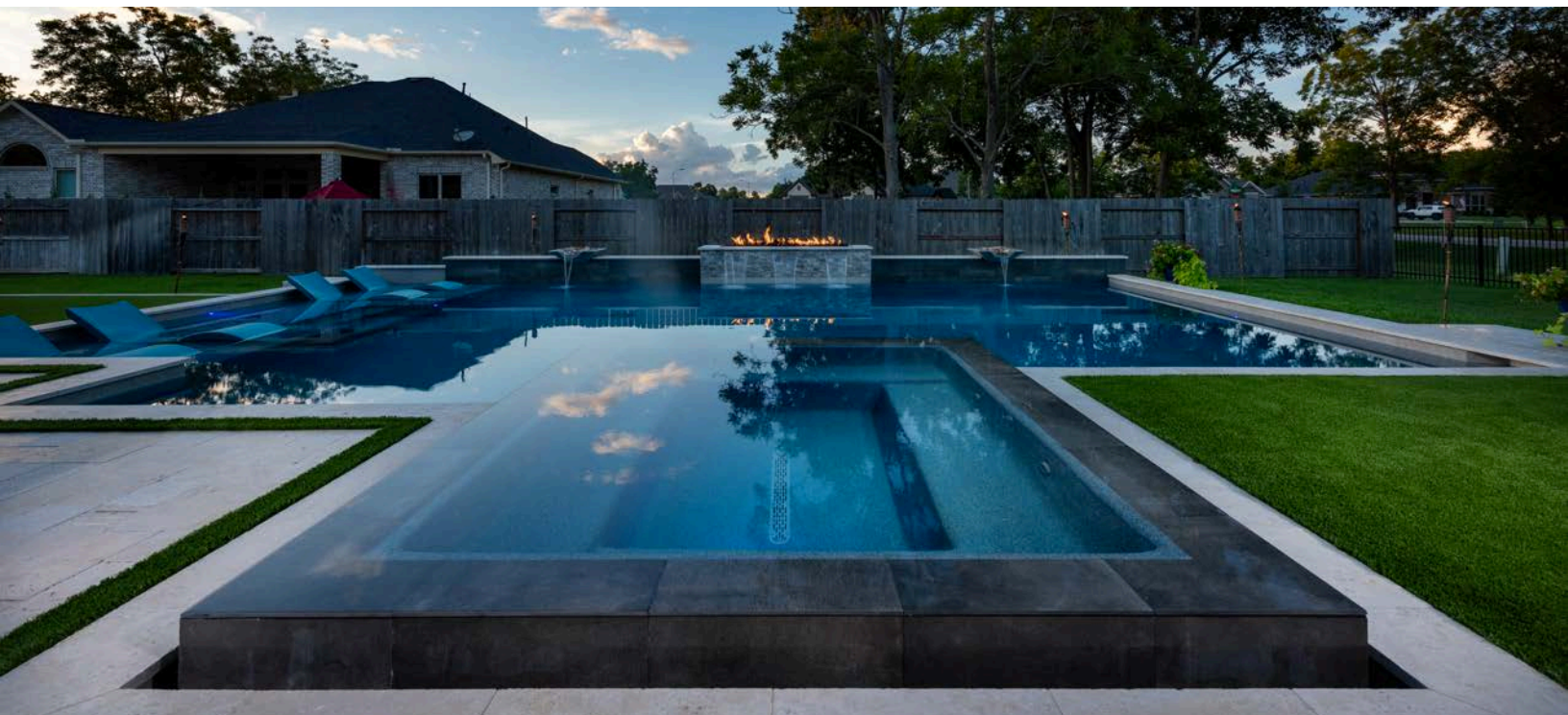
- ✓ Who will actually oversee my project?
- ✓ Will the person you meet during the design process remain involved throughout construction?
- ✓ Will there be a dedicated project manager?
- ✓ Who should you contact with questions?
- ✓ How often will updates be provided?
- ✓ How will progress be communicated?

Understanding these expectations before construction begins creates confidence for everyone involved.

Sunset Insight

At Sunset Pools, we believe communication shouldn't depend on homeowners wondering what's happening next.

That's one of the reasons we've transitioned to JobTread, giving homeowners a centralized place to follow project updates, documents, schedules, selections, and communication throughout the construction process.





Read Reviews Differently

Most homeowners naturally look at star ratings first. They're important.

But once you've confirmed a company has a strong reputation, start reading reviews differently.

Look for recurring themes.

Do homeowners consistently mention...

- ✓ Communication?
- ✓ Professionalism?
- ✓ Organization?
- ✓ Design expertise?
- ✓ Craftsmanship?
- ✓ Clean jobsites?
- ✓ Responsiveness?
- ✓ Problem solving?

Patterns tell a much bigger story than individual reviews.

When dozens or even hundreds of homeowners repeatedly describe the same strengths, you're getting a much clearer picture of what it's actually like to work with that company.

Compare More Than Price

It's completely natural to compare proposals. You should.

But remember that proposals often include very different scopes of work.

- ✓ One builder may include extensive engineering. Another may not
- ✓ Equipment packages may differ
- ✓ Warranty coverage may vary
- ✓ Material allowances can change significantly
- ✓ Project management and communication systems may look entirely different
- ✓ The lowest proposal isn't necessarily the least expensive project
- ✓ Likewise, the highest proposal isn't automatically the best value

One of the most important questions you can ask is simply: **"What exactly am I comparing?"**

Understanding the differences between proposals often matters more than comparing the numbers alone.

Confidence Should Grow Throughout the Process

One of the best indicators that you've found the right builder is surprisingly simple.

As conversations continue, you should feel more confident. Not more confused.

You should leave meetings feeling educated.

You should understand why recommendations are being made.

You should feel comfortable asking questions.

You should never feel pressured into making decisions before you're ready.

Building a custom backyard should be exciting. The planning process should build confidence, not anxiety.



Homeowners' Goal	Create a backyard where three generations of the family could comfortably spend weekends together while preserving open lawn space for grandchildren to play.
Design Challenge	The homeowners initially envisioned a significantly larger pool, but doing so would have limited patio space and reduced flexibility for entertaining.
Our Design Approach	Rather than maximizing pool size, we created a balanced outdoor living environment featuring an expanded covered patio, generous entertaining space, a sun shelf, integrated spa, and thoughtfully planned landscaping.
The Result	The family gained multiple outdoor gathering areas that are used year-round, while still enjoying a custom pool that feels perfectly proportioned to the property.
Key Takeaway	Great outdoor living isn't about fitting the biggest pool into a backyard. It's about designing every element to work together.

Questions Worth Asking Every Builder

Before making your final decision, consider asking each builder the same set of questions.

- How do you approach the design process?
- How do you learn how we'll actually use the space?
- What challenges do you immediately notice about our property?
- Who will manage our project from start to finish?
- How will communication work during construction?
- What project management software do you use?
- How are schedule updates communicated?
- What does your warranty include?
- How do you handle unexpected issues during construction?
- Can you share reviews from homeowners with projects similar to ours?



Final Reflection

Choosing a builder isn't simply choosing someone to construct a pool. You're choosing the team that will help transform one of the most important spaces in your home. The right builder should bring more than construction knowledge.

They should bring experience, guidance, honest recommendations, thoughtful design, clear communication, and the confidence that comes from helping hundreds of homeowners successfully navigate the same journey you're about to begin.

When those things come together, the result is more than a beautiful backyard. It's a project you'll enjoy long before the first swim and long after construction is complete.



CHAPTER 7

RED FLAGS HOMEOWNERS SHOULD WATCH FOR

Most homeowners spend weeks researching design ideas before they ever begin researching builders. They compare pool shapes, tile selections, water features, and inspiration photos, but spend far less time evaluating the companies they're trusting to bring those ideas to life.

The reality is that avoiding the wrong builder can be just as important as choosing the right one. After designing and building more than 1,500 custom pools and outdoor living environments, we've also met with thousands of homeowners who had previously spoken with other builders. Those conversations have given us a unique perspective on where confusion often begins and why some projects become far more stressful than they need to be.

While every company is different, there are a handful of warning signs worth paying attention to before making your decision.



A Proposal That's Significantly Lower Than the Others

Everyone wants to make a smart financial decision, and comparing proposals is an important part of the planning process. However, when one proposal is dramatically less expensive than the others, it's worth understanding why.

Custom pool proposals are rarely identical. One builder may include engineering, upgraded equipment, premium materials, or more extensive site preparation, while another may not. Allowances for tile, decking, automation, lighting, or landscaping can also vary significantly from one proposal to the next.

Over the years, we've found that many homeowners assume they're comparing the same project simply because the pool shape looks similar on paper. In reality, the scope of work can be very different.

Rather than asking, "Which proposal is the least expensive?" ask, "What is each proposal actually including?"

A lower price isn't necessarily a red flag. A proposal that lacks clarity is.

Sunset Insight

One of the most common misconceptions we encounter is that two proposals showing similar pool designs represent the same project. After reviewing countless competing proposals over the years, we've learned that's often not the case.

Equipment packages, structural specifications, material allowances, warranties, and project management can vary considerably even when the renderings appear nearly identical.



Conversations That Focus on Price Before Lifestyle

Every great backyard starts with understanding how the family wants to live.

If the majority of your first meeting revolves around pricing before anyone asks how you plan to use the space, it may be worth asking more questions.

A thoughtful design process should explore how you entertain, where people will gather, how your family spends time together, what challenges exist on the property, and how you want the finished space to feel.

Those conversations create better designs because they help determine which features actually support your lifestyle instead of simply filling the backyard.

After more than two decades of designing outdoor living environments, we've found that the best projects begin with listening, not selling.

Little Discussion About Your Property

No two backyards are exactly alike.

A builder should spend time evaluating the property itself before making meaningful recommendations. Factors such as drainage, grading, utility easements, construction access, neighboring homes, sun exposure, and elevation all influence the final design.

Many of these considerations aren't immediately visible to homeowners, but they can have a significant impact on construction, long-term performance, and overall usability.

One of the advantages of experience is recognizing potential challenges early, when they're easiest to address.



Vague or Incomplete Proposals

A proposal should answer questions, not create them.

Before signing an agreement, you should clearly understand what is included, what isn't included, and how decisions will be handled throughout construction.

A quality proposal should explain:

- ✓ Scope of work
- ✓ Equipment specifications
- ✓ Materials and allowances
- ✓ Structural details
- ✓ Warranty coverage
- ✓ Payment schedule
- ✓ Responsibilities for both parties

If important details seem unclear, don't hesitate to ask for clarification. A reputable builder should welcome those conversations.

Communication That Feels Inconsistent

Construction is a process that unfolds over several months, involving multiple trades, inspections, material deliveries, and important decisions along the way.

Because of that, communication becomes just as important as craftsmanship.

Pay attention to your experience before you've even signed a contract.

- Are phone calls returned?
- Are emails answered thoroughly?
- Do you feel informed after conversations?
- Does the builder explain why recommendations are being made?

One of the strongest predictors of a positive construction experience is consistent communication from the very beginning.



Pressure to Make Immediate Decisions

Designing a custom backyard isn't something most homeowners do often.

You should feel comfortable asking questions, comparing options, and taking time to make thoughtful decisions.

While scheduling and availability are certainly real considerations, you should never feel pressured into making a major investment before you're confident it's the right decision.

The right builder earns trust through education, transparency, and experience rather than urgency.



Common Myths We Help Homeowners Understand

One of the benefits of completing more than 1,500 custom projects is seeing the same misconceptions surface again and again. Here are a few we regularly help homeowners navigate.

Myth: Bigger pools are always better.

Reality: A larger pool isn't always a better experience. We've found that balanced proportions and functional outdoor living spaces almost always create a backyard that's enjoyed more often.

Myth: The lowest proposal offers the best value.

Reality: Similar-looking proposals often include very different materials, equipment, engineering, warranties, and levels of project management.

Myth: Decking is mainly a design choice.

Reality: Decking color and material can significantly affect comfort during the summer. Surface temperature, maintenance requirements, and durability should all be part of the conversation.

Myth: Interior finish only changes appearance.

Reality: Interior finish has a major influence on the final water color. The same pool can look dramatically different depending on the finish selected.

Myth: Permits and HOA approvals are simple formalities.

Reality: Depending on the community, these steps can influence the construction timeline. Planning ahead helps prevent unnecessary frustration later in the process.

Trust Your Instincts

As you compare builders, proposals, and design ideas, don't overlook something that's difficult to measure on paper: confidence.

Do you feel like the builder understands your goals?

Do they answer questions openly?

Do they explain the reasoning behind their recommendations?

Do they seem genuinely interested in helping you make the right decision, even if that means recommending against something that isn't in your best interest?

After thousands of conversations with homeowners over the years, we've found that the strongest builder relationships begin with trust long before construction starts.

Beautiful pools can be built by many companies. A great experience requires much more than beautiful construction.

Reflection Exercise

As you continue evaluating builders, ask yourself:

- ✓ Do I understand exactly what's included in each proposal?
- ✓ Has the builder taken time to understand how we'll use the space?
- ✓ Do I feel educated rather than pressured?
- ✓ Am I comparing overall value instead of simply comparing price?
- ✓ Can I confidently picture working with this team for the next several months?

The answers to those questions will often tell you far more than any rendering or proposal ever could.



CHAPTER 8

THE MOST COMMON POOL PLANNING MISTAKES (AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)

One of the greatest advantages of planning a custom pool today is that you don't have to learn everything through your own experience.

Since 2001, we've completed more than 1,500 custom pool and outdoor living projects throughout the Houston area. Every one of those projects has taught us something. Some lessons have come from solving unique design challenges. Others have come years later when homeowners tell us what they love most about their backyard, or what they wish they had done differently.

The good news is that most planning mistakes aren't the result of poor decisions. They usually happen because no one explained what to expect before construction ever began. Over the years, we've noticed the same themes surface again and again, and understanding them now can help you create a backyard you'll enjoy for decades.



Designing Around Features Instead of Lifestyle

It's easy to begin planning by creating a list of features. A spa. A tanning ledge. An outdoor kitchen. Fire features. Waterfalls. While those are all exciting elements, we've found that the most successful projects don't begin with a list of products. They begin with a conversation about how the family wants to live.

One family may host neighborhood gatherings every weekend. Another may want a quiet retreat at the end of a long workday. Some homeowners prioritize creating a space where grandchildren can spend summers, while others dream of entertaining clients or friends outdoors. Those conversations influence every design decision that follows.

After more than two decades of designing outdoor living environments, we've learned that the best backyards don't necessarily have the most features. They simply have the right features for the people who use them.

Underestimating Patio and Gathering Space

If there's one recommendation we make more consistently than almost any other, it's giving careful thought to the patio.

Most homeowners naturally focus on the pool because it's the visual centerpiece of the project. But once construction is complete, much of everyday life happens around the water rather than inside it. Friends gather around outdoor dining tables while dinner is being prepared. Parents watch children swim from comfortable seating areas. Guests naturally migrate toward shaded conversation spaces, and furniture requires more room than most people anticipate during the planning stage.

One of the most common comments we hear after projects are finished is, "I'm so glad we made the patio larger." It's remarkably rare for someone to wish they had built less entertaining space. A thoughtfully designed patio doesn't just make the backyard look larger. It changes how comfortably the space functions every single day.

Waiting to Complete the Backyard Later

Every project has a budget, and sometimes it makes sense to phase construction over time. However, there's an important difference between phasing construction and phasing the design itself.

Many homeowners initially plan to add landscaping, an outdoor kitchen, lighting, or additional hardscape after the pool is complete. While that approach can certainly work, we've found that homeowners are almost always happier when the entire vision is designed together from the beginning, even if certain portions are built later.

Designing the complete outdoor environment allows every element to work together. The pool relates naturally to the patio. The patio connects seamlessly with the outdoor kitchen. Walkways, lighting, landscaping, and gathering spaces all feel intentional because they were planned as one cohesive experience rather than individual projects completed years apart.





Assuming Bigger Is Better

One of the biggest myths in our industry is that a larger pool automatically creates a better backyard. In reality, the opposite is often true. A pool should complement the property, not consume it. Some of the most enjoyable projects we've completed feature pools that are intentionally sized to preserve generous entertaining space, comfortable seating areas, thoughtful landscaping, and open lawn where appropriate.

The goal isn't to maximize the amount of water in the backyard. The goal is to maximize how the backyard supports your lifestyle. Balance almost always creates a better result than simply making every feature larger.



Overlooking the Importance of Shade

If we asked our design team to identify the most common homeowner regret after construction is complete, the answer would probably be the same across the board: not planning enough shade.

Texas summers are beautiful, but they're also demanding. A backyard can look incredible in photographs and still be uncomfortable to use during the hottest part of the day. That's why covered patios, pergolas, pavilions, and thoughtfully placed landscaping are such an important part of the design process.

Comfort determines how often you'll actually use your backyard. After more than 1,500 projects, we've never had a homeowner tell us they wished they had created fewer comfortable places to gather outdoors.



Treating Landscaping as the Final Step

Landscaping is often viewed as the finishing touch of a project, but we've found it's much more than that.

Thoughtfully designed landscaping softens hardscape, creates privacy, frames important views, and helps the backyard feel like a natural extension of the home. Without it, even an exceptionally well-built pool can feel incomplete.

The same principle applies to lighting. During the day, landscaping defines the space. At night, lighting transforms it. Together, they create an outdoor environment that feels welcoming long after the construction equipment has left.

Looking Beyond Construction Day

It's easy to focus on the day the project is finished. After months of planning and construction, every homeowner looks forward to that moment.

But we've learned that completion day isn't really the goal. It's simply the beginning.

The projects homeowners appreciate most five or ten years later aren't necessarily the ones with the longest feature list. They're the ones that continue supporting family dinners, birthday parties, holiday celebrations, quiet mornings, and everyday moments that gradually become lifelong memories.

That's why thoughtful planning matters so much. The decisions you make before construction begins will shape how your family experiences your home for years to come.

Reflection Exercise

As you continue planning your project, consider these questions:

- ✓ Am I designing around the way my family actually lives?
- ✓ Have I planned enough space for gathering, entertaining, and relaxing?
- ✓ Will this design still feel right five or ten years from now?
- ✓ If I could only change one thing after construction, what would I hope it isn't?

The answers often provide the clarity needed to create a backyard that feels just as rewarding years from now as it does on the day it's completed.



CHAPTER 9

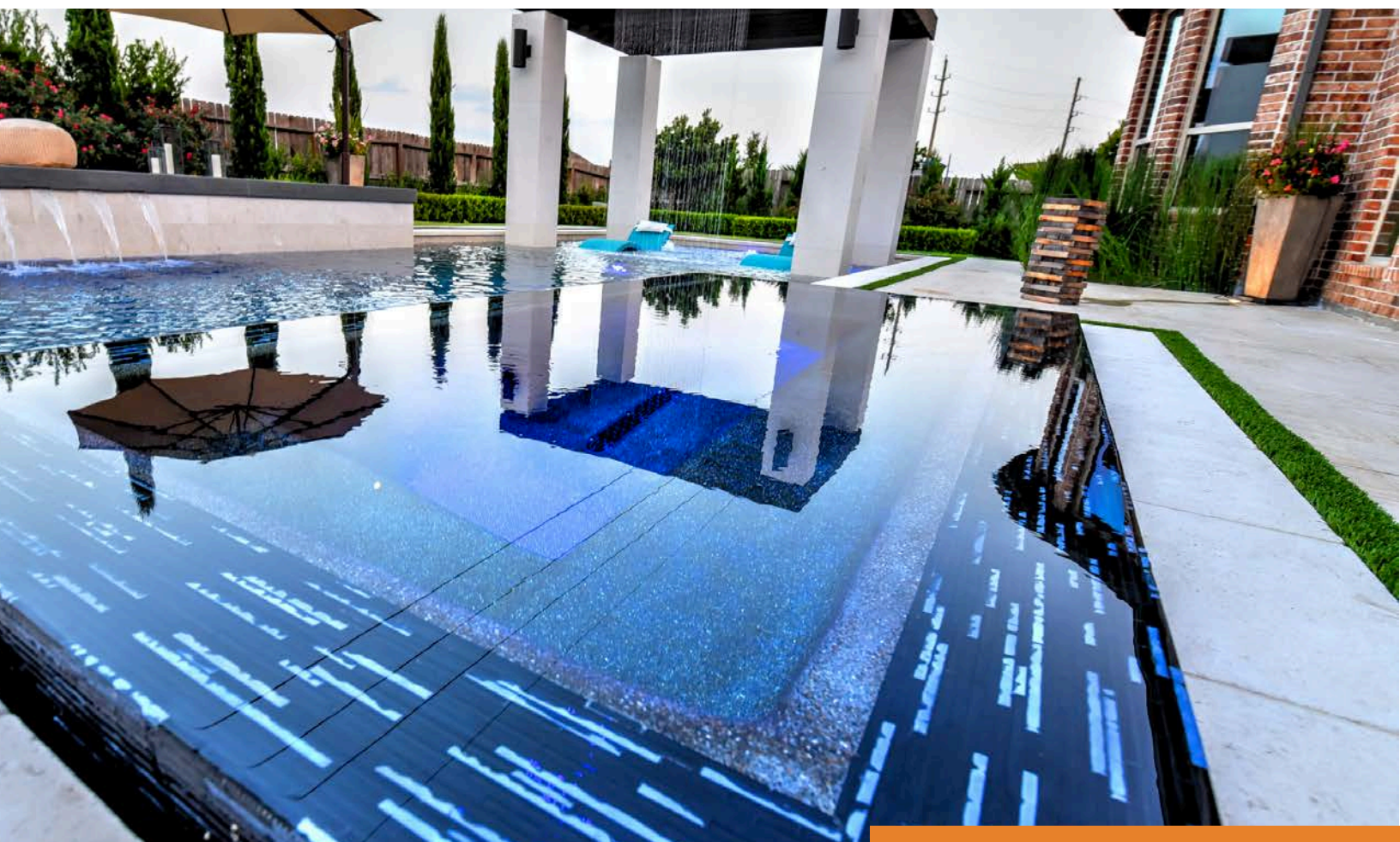
CREATING A COMPLETE OUTDOOR LIVING EXPERIENCE

When most homeowners begin planning a backyard project, the pool naturally becomes the focal point of the conversation. It's often the largest visual element in the space and, for many families, the primary reason they begin exploring outdoor living improvements.

After designing more than 1,500 custom pools and outdoor living environments, we've learned something that surprises many homeowners: the pool is rarely what determines whether someone truly loves their backyard years later.

The projects that create the greatest long-term satisfaction are the ones where every element works together. The pool, patio, outdoor kitchen, landscaping, lighting, shade structures, and gathering areas all feel connected because they were designed as one complete environment rather than a collection of individual features.

A well-designed backyard functions much like a well-designed home. Every space serves a purpose, but the overall experience depends on how those spaces connect. That's why we believe outdoor living should always be planned as a complete lifestyle, not simply a construction project.





Behind the Design

One of the biggest differences between designing a custom outdoor living environment and simply building a pool is everything that happens before construction begins.

When we walk into a backyard for the first time, we're evaluating much more than where a pool will fit. We're looking at how the home sits on the property and how the backyard is viewed from inside. We study the way sunlight moves across the yard throughout the day and think about where comfortable shade will be needed during the hottest months of the year. We evaluate drainage, grading, construction access, utility easements, setbacks, and neighboring homes.

We're also imagining how people will actually experience the space.

- Where will guests naturally gather?
- Where will outdoor furniture fit comfortably?
- How will someone move from the back door to the outdoor kitchen, the pool, and the seating areas?
- Where will children leave towels and toys?
- Where will someone enjoy their morning coffee?

Those aren't details most homeowners think about before the design process begins, but they're often the details that determine whether a backyard feels effortless once it's finished.

After more than two decades of designing outdoor living environments, we've found that the best projects don't happen because individual features are impressive. They happen because every design decision supports the way a family actually lives.

The Flow From Your Home Matters More Than You Think

One lesson we've learned over the years is that homeowners often focus on the destination while overlooking the journey.

The pool may be the destination, but the experience begins the moment someone steps outside.

- How easily do people move from the house to the patio?
- Is there a natural connection between indoor and outdoor living?
- Can someone carry food from the kitchen to the outdoor dining area without weaving around furniture?
- Do guests instinctively know where to gather?
- Does the backyard encourage people to stay outside longer?

These are subtle details, but together they create a space that feels intuitive and comfortable rather than crowded or disconnected.

In many cases, improving the flow of the backyard has a greater impact on daily enjoyment than adding another feature.

Why We Recommend Certain Features

Homeowners often ask why we recommend certain layouts or design elements so consistently.

The answer isn't based on trends. It's based on watching how families actually use their backyards after construction is complete.

For example, we frequently recommend larger patios because homeowners almost always underestimate how much entertaining space they'll need. The pool may be the centerpiece, but the patio becomes the place where conversations happen, meals are shared, and guests naturally gather.

We often recommend generously sized sun shelves because they've consistently become one of the most-used areas of the pool. Children love them, adults enjoy relaxing in shallow water, and they create an inviting transition between the pool and surrounding outdoor spaces.

We're also strong advocates for incorporating landscaping into the original design whenever possible. Landscaping doesn't simply make the backyard look finished. It softens hardscape, creates privacy, frames views, and transforms a construction project into an outdoor living environment.

Most importantly, we encourage homeowners to think about the entire backyard as one vision. While construction can certainly be phased over time, designing the complete project from the beginning almost always produces a more cohesive and satisfying result.





Outdoor Living Happens Beyond the Water

It's easy to assume the pool will be where everyone spends their time. In reality, many of the most meaningful moments happen outside the water.

Friends gather around the outdoor kitchen while dinner is being prepared.

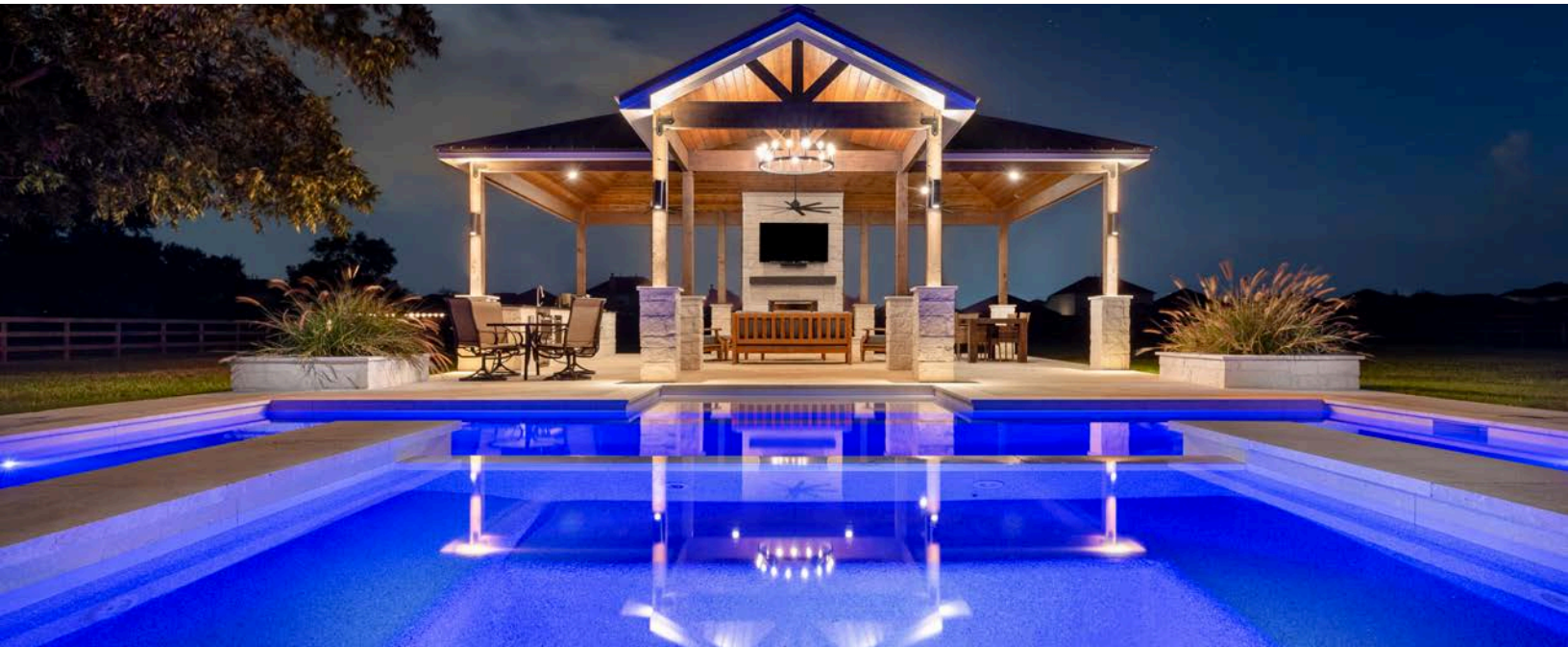
Children play on the lawn while adults relax beneath a covered patio.

Family conversations continue around a fire feature long after swimming is finished.

Morning coffee becomes a daily ritual on the patio overlooking the water.

One of the biggest surprises homeowners share with us after their projects are complete is how much they enjoy the outdoor spaces surrounding the pool.

That's why we believe every successful project should create multiple destinations throughout the backyard instead of a single focal point.



Homeowners' Goal	Create a backyard that felt like an extension of their newly renovated home while providing comfortable spaces for entertaining throughout the year.
Design Challenge	The original concept focused almost entirely on maximizing pool size, leaving limited room for seating, dining, and circulation.
Our Design Approach	Rather than expanding the pool, we redesigned the layout to include an oversized covered patio, dedicated outdoor dining space, a large sun shelf, layered landscaping, and carefully planned lighting that extended the backyard's usability into the evening.
The Result	The homeowners gained multiple outdoor "rooms" that naturally support different activities while maintaining a balanced, resort-inspired aesthetic.
Key Takeaway	The best outdoor living spaces aren't defined by a single feature. They're defined by how every element works together.

Bringing It All Together

A truly successful outdoor living environment isn't measured by the number of features it includes.

It's measured by how naturally it supports your everyday life.

When every decision is made with the overall experience in mind, the finished backyard feels timeless. It complements the home, encourages people to gather, and continues delivering value long after construction is complete.

Years from now, you probably won't remember every material selection or design detail.

You'll remember family birthdays, holiday cookouts, evenings spent around the fire, and quiet mornings overlooking the water.

That's what thoughtful design is really intended to create.



CHAPTER 10

UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOM GUNITE POOL CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

For many homeowners, construction feels like the most intimidating part of the journey. After months of planning, design discussions, and selecting materials, it's finally time for work to begin. While this is an exciting milestone, it's also where many homeowners begin wondering what to expect over the weeks ahead.

After guiding more than 1,500 families through construction, we've learned that confidence comes from understanding the process before it begins.

No two projects are exactly alike, but every successful project follows the same general progression. Along the way, there will be exciting milestones, quieter periods where important work is happening behind the scenes, and moments where patience is required.

Knowing what's normal helps make the entire experience much more enjoyable.

Step 1 Discovery & Design

Every successful project begins with understanding your goals rather than discussing construction. During this stage, conversations focus on how your family wants to use the space, what experiences matter most, and how the backyard should complement your home and lifestyle. Ideas begin taking shape as layouts are developed, features are evaluated, and the overall vision comes together.

For many homeowners, this is the most exciting part of the process because the future backyard begins to feel real.

It's also completely normal to make adjustments during this stage. In fact, refining the design before construction begins is one of the best ways to ensure the finished project truly reflects your goals.

Step 2 Engineering, Approvals & Permitting

Once the design is finalized, much of the work moves behind the scenes. Engineering, structural plans, permitting, HOA approvals, drainage reviews, and other technical requirements all take place before construction can begin.

This phase can sometimes feel quiet because there isn't visible activity in the backyard. However, significant work is happening to ensure the project is properly planned and ready for construction. One of the most common questions homeowners ask during this stage is why permitting timelines vary.

The answer depends on the municipality, HOA requirements, engineering reviews, and other factors outside anyone's direct control. While waiting isn't always exciting, thorough planning at this stage helps prevent much larger issues later.

Step 3 Layout & Excavation

Construction officially begins with laying out the project and preparing the site. This is often the first time homeowners see the design represented at full scale in their backyard. It's an exciting milestone because the vision begins transitioning from drawings to reality.

One surprise we frequently hear is that the excavation appears much larger than expected. That's completely normal.

Before the pool shell, decking, landscaping, and surrounding features are installed, the excavation often looks oversized. As construction progresses and the surrounding outdoor living spaces take shape, everything begins to feel properly balanced.

Step 4 Structural Construction

Following excavation, the structural foundation of the project begins.

Steel reinforcement, plumbing, electrical infrastructure, and the gunite shell all work together to create the strength and durability that custom gunite pools are known for.

While much of this work will eventually be hidden beneath finished materials, it's among the most important stages of the project. The quality of what's built below the surface influences the long-term performance of everything above it.

It's easy to become excited about tile, coping, and finishes, but the structural work happening during this phase is what allows those beautiful details to last for decades.





Step 5 Outdoor Living Construction

As structural work progresses, attention begins shifting to everything surrounding the pool. Patios, walkways, outdoor kitchens, pergolas, fire features, retaining walls, and other outdoor living elements begin taking shape.

This is often the stage where homeowners begin recognizing how the entire backyard will function together. What previously looked like individual construction areas now starts becoming a cohesive outdoor environment.

Many homeowners tell us this is the point where they can finally picture themselves enjoying the space.

Step 6 Finishes & Final Details

This is where the personality of the project truly comes to life.

Tile, coping, interior finishes, lighting, landscaping, and architectural details all begin transforming the construction site into a finished outdoor living environment.

Homeowners are often surprised to learn that certain finishes continue changing in appearance as the project progresses. Interior finishes, for example, don't reveal their true water color until the pool is filled and natural light reflects through the water.

This stage requires patience, but it's also one of the most rewarding as every design decision begins coming together.

Step 7 Startup & Project Completion

Before the project is considered complete, equipment is tested, systems are calibrated, and the pool is carefully prepared for operation.

Just as importantly, homeowners are introduced to the equipment, automation, maintenance recommendations, and ongoing care of their new backyard.

Our goal isn't simply to hand over a finished pool. It's to make sure you feel comfortable, informed, and confident enjoying everything that's been created.

Throughout construction, homeowners also receive updates through JobTread, making it easy to follow progress, review documents, communicate with the project team, and stay informed throughout the entire process.

Understanding the Timeline

One of the most common questions we hear is, "How long will everything take?"

While every project is unique, it's important to remember that custom outdoor living involves many moving parts. Weather, permitting, inspections, specialty materials, and scheduling between skilled trades can all influence the timeline.

Over the years, we've found that homeowners are much more comfortable with schedule adjustments when they understand why they're happening.

Our focus has never been on moving through construction as quickly as possible.

Our focus is on building every project correctly.

The finished backyard will likely be enjoyed for decades. Taking the time to do each stage properly is always a worthwhile investment.

Final Thoughts

Whether you're months away from building or simply beginning to explore ideas, we hope this guide has helped you approach the process with greater confidence.

Every backyard is different.

Every family is different.

But one thing we've learned after more than 1,500 projects is that thoughtful planning almost always leads to better results.

Thank you for allowing us to share what we've learned over the past twenty-five years.





SUNSET**POOLS**