

IN THE SWIM

SWIMMING POND DESIGNER PAUL MERCER WANTS PEOPLE
IN NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK TO PLUNGE INTO NATURE

Sliding into the crystal clear water and sending ripples out across the glassy surface of his swimming pond, Paul Mercer feels at one with nature.

As brightly coloured dragonflies dart about, and a newt paddles at the water's edge, he explains the concept of a swimming pond and the beauty of his pool at Bressingham, near Diss.

"Not only can we swim in it on warm summer days, but we get to look at it for 365 days a year," he points out. "Even in the middle of winter it can look quite magical.

"The idea is to create a central garden feature that is visually appealing all-year round. We have a large oak deck that extends over the water and it is lovely just to sit and observe the life, not only within the water – the newts and whirligig beetles, for example – but also above and around it, such as colourful

dragonflies and birds dropping by to bathe and quench their thirst."

Bressingham-born Paul, who has also lived in Suffolk, first dipped a toe into the world of natural swimming pools after studying and then working in landscape and garden design.

"I was also lucky enough to have spent quite a bit of time travelling during my 20s and 30s, and one of my fondest memories was of swimming in a rock pool in South Africa on a really hot summer's day," he recalls. "The water was crystal clear and around four metres deep, and it was set among lush vegetation.

"It was such an exhilarating and inspiring experience diving into cool chemical free water that the feelings of that day have stayed with me ever since – so imagine my excitement when, some years later, I came across an article about the huge success of swimming ponds in Europe.

The concept was all about bringing my rock pool experience to my home." By the time Paul had finished reading the article he knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life. He got in touch with an old friend, Johan Vandenberg-Hider, who had been building and designing ponds and lakes in the UK for 20 years, and together they created their first natural swimming pond.

"In nature, lakes, ponds and pools are kept clean by a combination of plants and micro-organisms including beneficial bacteria. Organic waste matter is broken down into substances that plants can absorb in the form of nutrients. It is this natural occurrence in nature that is fundamental to the swimming pond concept," Paul explains.

"Swimming ponds are essentially made up of two merging zones, which together, make up an ecologically balanced and self-cleaning pond. Each zone is roughly

equal in size and referred to as the regeneration zone and swimming zone respectively. The shallow regeneration zone is a biological filter and is planted up with a wide range of aquatic plants. It is separated from the swimming zone by an internal wall, which terminates around 20cm below the pond surface, thus allowing free movement of water between the two zones and ensuring the swimming area is kept free of vegetation."

According to the Swimming Pond Company, installation costs start at around £45,000 +VAT for an 80 sq m swimming pond, which has a swimming area of 40 sq m but doubling the size does not double the cost, since the cost per square metre reduces as the area increases. Running costs only amount to the power for a small circulation pump, which would run 24 hours a day from early March through to early November.

"Providing there is enough space, a

swimming pond can suit most homes. We design ours so they sit easily within their surroundings and reflect the character of the property."

Recent projects include the creation of a pool at Booton, in Norfolk. This provided the opportunity to landscape the garden and incorporate a beautiful weeping willow into the design of the swimming pond. While at Hargham, in Norfolk, Paul took inspiration from the stunning views.

"A large chunky green oak deck sits over the regeneration zone, with the front edge dropping off into the swimming area. Not only is it extremely pleasant to see the water reflecting through the gaps in the deck, but the magnificent views are further enhanced by being able to look over the water in the foreground."

Paul offers a design service that will guide the client through the entire process, from conception to completion.

"Many factors need to be considered, such as the size and depth of the swimming pond, access to and from the water, whether the sound of running water is required and so forth," he says.

"But the ultimate aim is to design the swimming pond in such a way that it blends harmoniously into the garden and its surroundings, while being linked to the home in a stylish manner."

He adds: "Our own swimming pond really does provide us with so much pleasure. Swimming in chemical-free water, surrounded by lush aquatic vegetation, is simply wonderful and one really does get the feeling of connecting with nature." ■

Images by Richard Bloom (www.richardbloom.co.uk)

For more information call 01379 688000 or visit www.theswimmingpondcompany.co.uk

