

# Just Add Water

## *How to incorporate water into your log home's design*

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Myths and legends have long been told about the mysterious and restorative qualities of water. Today water bodies are synonymous with recreation and relaxation. As a child, I learned that the sound of the ocean or a river would ease me into a deep and restful sleep. Perhaps it is because our bodies are made up mostly of water. Explanation or not, water has more influence on us than we often realize.

While working on this column, I was staying at a wonderful Victorian Bed and Breakfast in Ottawa. The décor was sumptuous, the ambience animated by a fountain set amid a jungle of tropical plants. It exuded a quality that was both energizing and calming. Visiting the National Gallery of Canada, not far away, an Attendant gave my son a penny to throw into a large indoor pond for good luck. I noticed that the bottom of the pond was glass, and formed the ceiling of the floor below. Not only was this interior landscape a soothing contrast from the galleries that surrounded it; looking up through the underside of the pond from the lower floor was a unique and wonderful experience.

The Chinese have been influential in integrating water into design. The art and science of Feng Shui, literally meaning 'water and wind' is about balancing the forces of nature and ourselves. Water is one of the key elements that shape our lives. Feng Shui

suggests its placement can have very tangible effects on our well-being. It is said that the presence of water in our homes offers good fortune, including money. Moving water is even better. In general, water should always be to the front of our house. It helps to control unheeding energy. I am well aware of the calming effect water has on me. Hospitals and other healing environments are more frequently introducing water into their exterior and interior entrances.

We can introduce water into our design in two general ways. The first is by using water primarily to support or define the environment, the look and feel of a space. This can include stationary ponds, fountains and waterfalls. The second is by using water primarily to serve recreational needs, for example, swimming pools and spas. While both types produce some of the same restorative benefits, in design they are handled quite differently.

### **Ponds, Fountains and Waterfalls**

Ponds, fountains and waterfalls add beauty and dramatic impact to your home. They also calm intense energies. You can buy a small portable waterfall fountain today for a reasonable price. Building custom ponds and waterfalls can be quite expensive. Take utmost care to design and build them correctly. Start by asking what the fountain or waterfall is for. Is it primarily for reflection and meditation or does it have an important architectural role? How much sound do you want the fountain or waterfall to make? Normally, the more water going over the spillway, the more sound. They generally work best in an entry area such as a large foyer or entrance hall. While they can be made from concrete or use vinyl liners, prefabricated units, even if custom-designed and built, offer

more flexibility. For example, you can have a unit made from fiber-cement bonded to a fiberglass shell so that natural stone and tile can be adhered easily. Plumbing is usually easy to access. If the pump is not incorporated into the unit, then locate it in an adjacent room. Provide adequate electrical supply.

There are several different types of fountains. The simplest is a low water fountain, a freestanding unit with a small pump. It can also be placed in a pool that collects the water and gives another dimension to the fountain. A 'wet wall' is a fountain or waterfall where the water runs evenly down a wall. It can even be designed so that there is no visible pool at the bottom. Water is emitted from the top of the wall in different ways. The wall can be covered in tile or stone or other materials. The 'wet wall' can be integrated with other waterfalls or fountain pools, as well. Another idea is to place a sculpture in a fountain pool with sprays around it or with water running down it. Waterfalls can be created with either a collector pool and spillway or by using a regulated waterfall fixture. The pump can be located behind the wall or at a remote location. In each of these scenarios, water filters and purifiers are required. With all types of fountains and waterfalls you can use floor lighting or integrated fiber optic lighting to create dramatic effects.

When designing fountains and waterfalls, try to place the equipment close to, and at or below the level of the fountain. Integrate filtration and disinfecting equipment or chemical treatment will be required. Due to evaporation, fountains need to be filled regularly. If an automatic filling system is used, overflows may be required in case of pump failure.

## **Ornamental Garden Pools**

Ornamental garden pools use aquatic plant life and fish to bring beauty and life into an environment. You can also incorporate fountains and waterfalls into them. Photosynthesis requires a minimum of six hours of sunlight but too much direct sun can stress fish. If the pools have abundant plant life and enough fish, filtration should not be required. Attention must be paid to obtain the optimal balance. You must ensure adequate oxygen and avoid a build up of nitrogenous wastes.

## **Spas**

I have a personal love of spas. Although most spas are made of fiberglass, they can also be found with a fiber-cement surface, so that tiles and stone can be adhered. Unlike pools, spas do not usually require an elaborate ventilation system to remove humidity. A simple exhaust fan will usually suffice. However, it is important to separate spas from primary living areas and to cover them when they are not in use. The room can then dry out on its own. Using in-floor heating warms the floor for your feet and helps dry up any splashed water. The Spa can be a freestanding unit with its own 'skirt' or it can be integrated into the room with custom tile decks or sunken into the floor. If you really want to take your spa concept further, you may wish to incorporate a waterfall or grotto into the spa area. Seats can be placed under the waterfall with adjustment valves to regulate the water flow. A grotto, or stone cave, can be built behind the waterfall as an additional feature. Due to the plumbing around a spa, install and level the spa first, then complete any deck finishing around it. Ensure access to all plumbing connections, heating and filtration equipment. Temperature can be adjusted from the spa heater or

from an electronic control at the spa. While chemical purification and PH balance are necessary, ozone generators keep the spa clear and reduce the amount of chemicals required. Jets and lighting come in a wide range of styles and configurations.

## **Swimming Pools**

More people are incorporating swimming pools into their residences. While traditional pools require considerable space and expense, lap pools and therapy pools take up much less room. For example, lap pools are usually very narrow. Resistance swim systems push water towards a swimmer so the swimmer remains stationary. Therapy pools can incorporate a resistance swim system or exercise rails and other equipment. Or you can combine a pool with a spa. It can all be built as one unit with differing water temperatures and features for each area.

Pools require more thought when it comes to heating and ventilation. You can use solar heating with either glazed or unglazed systems. Evaporation can lead to condensation and rusting of components if not properly ventilated. Good pool covers are the best way to reduce humidity concerns. The U.S. Department of Energy's free software package "Energy Smart Pools" can be obtained from <http://www.eren.doe.gov/rspec/software.html>. Pools also require more attention to filtration and disinfecting. New technologies are making the job easier. For example, magnetics can be used to keep water clear and small but powerful ultra-violet lamps can kill bacteria.

As a pool or fountain of any kind can be a substantial investment, take the time to really look at your needs, both short and long term. Be clear on the cost, time and

frequency of maintenance. If all those make sense, then incorporating water into your design can add richness to your home. Whether it is for recreation or relaxation, water can have a powerful and wonderful effect on our lives.

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