



Photo: Annie Guilfoyle

A timeless design – Paley Park in NYC designed in 1967 by Robert Zion; a ‘pocket park’ featuring a wonderful water wall

# WORKING WITH WATER

Water can transform a scheme, but designing and working with it is always challenging. **Annie Guilfoyle** examines how to get it right

**T**here are so many different ways that designers can include water in the landscape – by creating tranquil or reflective pools, somewhere to relax or swim, or simply providing movement and sound in the environment. Incorporating water into a design is also the best way to encourage wildlife into the garden.

When designing with water, it is advisable to work with skilled contractors or water specialists, even if only to consult with them about your plans and specifications. I asked the advice of Martin Kelley, managing director of Fairwater. “Designers should ask themselves if it is to be a pond or feature,” he says. “Will the pond have plants and enjoy all of the benefits of a natural ecosystem with dragonflies and waterlilies? Or is it to be a chemically treated body of water, shiny and algae free? The former will have the downside of allowing algae to grow, and will require greater depth, but can be left almost to its own devices; whereas the latter will require a cleansing pump circuit and the room to house this, but will not grow any nuisance plants, providing the chlorine is kept topped up.”

From a technical point of view, Kelley suggests that unless you are building a pond with plants and wildlife, establishing a balanced ecosystem for a water feature will require some form of equipment. “Depending on how complex the installation is, this may include water-level control, chemical dosing, external filtration and feature pumps to move the water,” he says. “This all needs to live somewhere – as a minimum, a manhole alongside the pool, but more complex choreographed pavement jets, for example, will require a dry accessible plant room of 3m x 2m x 2m. As contractors and technical designers, we spend a lot of time fighting for space to house the equipment needed





Photo: Ian Thwaites



Photo: Claire Takacs

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Natural swimming ponds require close collaboration with specialists such as Biotop; Australian designer Phillip Johnson, who is speaking at the SGD autumn conference (see p46), specialises in natural streams such as this one for a memorial garden; a former swimming pool repurposed into a wildlife pond with contemporary waterfall feature; large, contemporary concrete basins featured in Cleve West's gold-medal-winning Saga Insurance garden at Chelsea in 2006

**“WHEN DESIGNING WITH WATER, IT’S ADVISABLE TO WORK WITH SKILLED CONTRACTORS, IF ONLY TO CONSULT WITH THEM ABOUT YOUR PLANS”**

to operate the feature. If you are planning something fancy, think about where we can house the kit.”  
 With water, safety is of tantamount importance, and clients may need to be given some protection from their new water features. This can be offered with ground patterning, raised kerbs and sensible siting of the pool – all mechanical methods of reducing risk and preferable to the unsightly grilles and cages sometimes seen adorning ponds. The current perceived wisdom with a formal feature near the house is to control the space with gates; into a walled garden, for example. For larger ponds and lakes, a good adage is, “If you can walk in, you can walk out”, so wide, gentle margins will make a pond safer for both humans and wildlife.

**From pool to pond**

A few years ago, on a project in Hove, I repurposed an underused swimming pool into a large wildlife pond; this seemed to be the best design solution in order to maintain water in the garden and save the expense of dismantling a large and structurally sound pool. A waterproof render was applied to the blue tiled walls and the original rectangular shape was disguised by creating a curved decking surround that cut across the corner at one end of the pool. With the addition of intersecting walkways crossing the water and a contemporary waterfall that emerged from a brightly painted wall, this previously unloved pool was



Photo: Annie Guilfoyle



Photo: Annie Guilfoyle

**TOP WATER TIPS**

**Sarah Eberle FSGD** shares her advice on designing with water



- 1. Remember that water** is literally and metaphorically the greatest leveller in the world. Its determination to do its own thing is even greater than mine!
- 2. Don't guess;** always employ a professional for the hydromechanics. If specified incorrectly, a water feature can be hugely and impossibly compromised.
- 3. Consider sound carefully** as this can both add and detract from the experience and overall aesthetic of a feature.
- 4. Attend to sustainability issues;** we must all be responsible for the use of water, an essential and critical resource.
- 5. Edge detail** and its relationship with the water level needs to be carefully designed – it will make a critical difference to its success.
- 6. Where a water feature is set** in a wider landscape, we have a responsibility to ensure a symbiosis between the two.

**Sarah Eberle FSGD is chairing the SGD Autumn Conference ‘Water Ways’ on 18 November – see page 46 for more information**



**ABOVE** A bird bath carved from Portland stone by Brighton-based sculptor and stone carver Jo Sweeting  
**RIGHT** A bespoke water feature design inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water

Photo: Annie Guilfoyle

## SUGGESTED READING:

- *Water Garden Construction: A Technical Guide for Designers*  
Martin Kelley  
Packard Publishing; 2015
- *The Water Gardener*  
Anthony Archer Wills  
Frances Lincoln; 1993
- *Landscape Detailing Volume 4: Water*  
Michael Littlewood  
Routledge; 2001



Photo: Annie Guilfoyle

given a new lease of life and saved a considerable amount of the client's budget.

It is often somewhat of a challenge to source modestly priced water features or fountains that are not only visually pleasing but also will stand the test of time. For this reason, I generally design my own water features – I enjoy the process of collaborating with makers and specialists.

### Going bespoke

On one project, several years ago, I was asked by the client to design a sculptural water feature. As part of the brief, she expressed a great love of the work by Frank Lloyd Wright. I set about designing a feature that would echo his most famous residential project, Falling Water in Pennsylvania. I sketched out some initial ideas, in collaboration with Suffolk-based

steel fabricator Richard Paine, and together we came up with a fountain that not only functioned well but also was reminiscent of Lloyd Wright's iconic building.

The metal fountain was secured onto a very tall block of Welsh slate and the water was fed up through the centre of the rock via a copper pipe, which connected to an adjustable, re-circulating pump housed in a shallow pool below. The rock sat on top of a heavy-gauge metal grille, which featured an access hatch to facilitate pump maintenance.

My advice when designing bespoke water features is that water never ever does what you expect it to. I thoroughly recommend taking the time to create a mock up of your design and try it out as best you can before you finally install it and turn on the water, otherwise you may experience some interesting and very unexpected results. ○