

From spa baths to ponds: cool ways to stay cool

With a swim spa making a splash at Chelsea, everyone is now clamouring for a little back garden bathing, says Jayne Dowle



This swimming pond in East Sussex cost £250,000 to construct by Garten Art
GARTENART

The garden designer Kate Gould certainly made waves at the Chelsea Flower Show this year when she put a Jacuzzi swim spa in her Out of the Shadows sanctuary garden. Some whiskery traditionalists huffed, not least because this was the first time they had seen a swim spa in a garden at Chelsea. And, well, lounging about in water in your own back garden? It's thought of as simply not British, whether there's a heatwave coming or not.

That's about to change. A swimming pool of any kind has become the most sought-after

and highest-ranked outdoor amenity, according to research by Savills — 30 per cent of homebuyers with the estate agency said they wanted one. Such a water feature adds value to a property, agreed 90 per cent of agents; 43 per cent said one could mean an asking price premium of at least 5 per cent.

The Chelsea judges, too, recognised the £28,999 spa as representative of a key way in which people want to use and enjoy their outdoor space these days — to improve their wellbeing, as well as for relaxation — and awarded Out

of the Shadows three medals, for best sanctuary garden, best construction in the sanctuary garden category, and a gold.

“Covid has given the [swimming pool] market a boost,” says Tim Evans, owner and manager director of the swimming pool and swimming pond company Gartenart. “Our sales of swimming ponds, for example, were 30 per cent up in 2021, with an average project cost of £150,000.”

For her garden scheme, Gould chose a 16ft long J-16 Poweractive swim spa with a counter-current for swimming, a floor designed to support aqua aerobics — it's popular to have a TV on the wall to follow online classes — and hydrotherapy seats for chilling out. “I wanted to showcase a garden design that responds to people's needs and wish list as we come out of the pandemic,” she says. “Now more than ever people expect their homes and gardens to deliver so much — they are looking to entertain, exercise, relax and be soothed all in the same space.”

Gould chose to surround the swim spa with lush tropical planting, and used an earthy colour palette of terracotta and natural woods to create a spa-like feel. She acknowledges that one of the criticisms of swim spas, especially in a small outdoor space, is that they can look bulky and awkward. “That's why we chose to partly sink the swim spa to minimise its bill in the garden. We then decked over and around it over a bespoke steel frame to ensure





Andrew and Nicola Hunter's pond at their eco-friendly home in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, was created by The Swimming Pond Company for £100,000
RICHARD BLOOM

it sat comfortably in the garden and was not too dominant a feature.”

In 2017 the total number of swim spas sold on the UK market was about 1,000 units, says Laurence Hookway, the general manager of [Aqua Spa and Leisure Limited](#). “Today you would be looking at a 400 per cent increase, with an estimated total number of units being around 5,000. The growth of this particular segment is outperforming even that of hot tubs.”

The weekend that Gould's garden launched there was a 150 per cent increase in swim spa inquiries at Aqua Spa and

Leisure Limited.

The concept of “stationary swimming” has been around since the 1980s, but in the past 40 years there has been considerable development in research and technology, lifting swim spas out of the “hydrotherapy” category. Swim spas are a practical and popular bridge between a hot tub and a swimming pool and its eco-friendly cousin, the swimming pond, which uses natural filtration instead of chlorine.

“We've known for many years now the benefits of swimming in cold water,” says Paul Mercer at [the Swimming Pond Company](#) in Norfolk. “One of

the things that's helping us is that the views of Wim Hof [the Dutch extreme athlete and motivational speaker] are now becoming well respected.”

In the past, clients would contact Mercer directly to discuss a swimming pond project, but he says that in over the past couple of years far more garden designers have approached him wanting to incorporate swimming ponds into schemes for their clients.

Rupert Sweeting, head of national country sales at the estate agency Knight Frank, says: “What's becoming increasingly popular are these swimming ponds. They're self-



cleaning, it's this big wellness thing. I have a friend who we were staying with and he said, 'Would you like to come for a swim? I'll see you in the hall at 8.30am in your swimmers.' He said that it's the best legal high I can get, but I didn't jump in."

Concerns about running costs for traditional pools are one of the reasons why swimming ponds and swim spas are gaining popularity. John Roberts, an associate director of Strutt & Parker estate agency in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, is selling a £2 million six-bedroom [Edwardian family house with a swim spa in a glass enclosure in the garden](#), and says that the feature is attractive to "all buyers" because it's low maintenance and has low running costs, which are of increasing concern as energy prices rise.

"One crowd of people who don't want a pool of any kind are the really wealthy internationals. Weirdly, the super-rich are not fussed by them, partly because they will have homes outside the UK with amazing pools," says Theo James-Wright, an associate director at Savills. "The wealthy middle classes want one for their kids. There is definitely a feeling at the £3 million to £3.5 million mark that, 'We're spending this money, we want to show it off, this house should have a pool.' It's quite common now to see a property with a big lifestyle pool outside and, inside, a pool with a counter-current for exercise and fitness."



A six-bedroom house in Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire, with a hydrobath pool is on sale for £2 million with Strutt & Parker

What your pond says about you

Swim spa

From your back garden in Maidenhead you can imagine you're on a rooftop in Manhattan. Whether you're battling in breast stroke against the prevailing current or sunbathing, swim spas are the suburban pool of choice because they don't take up too much space, are practical and don't cost the earth.

Natural swimming pond

You'd love to plunge into a cold river like Wim Hof, but you're worried about the pollution and undesirables in the bushes. So, with £150,000 to spare you're showing off your eco-credentials and boring the pants off your guests with detailed descriptions of the natural filtration system.

Outdoor heated pool

Yes it is expensive — the Smart Meter is beginning to prick your conscience — but having a pool is all about "making memories" for the kids, even though the monthly cost would pay the rent on a villa on Corfu. Plus, it makes a great picture for the Christmas round-robin. You're



The seven-bedroom Old Rectory in Buckinghamshire has a heated pool. On sale for £3.5 million with Knight Frank

often up in the night with a torch checking that the cover is securely fastened in case the elderly cat falls in.

Indoor heated pool

And why not? If you're going to go to the expense of installing and running a pool you may as well put a roof on it. So what if padding down in your bathrobe and slippers makes you feel like Joan Collins in *The Stud*? The slide is being delivered next week.

Hot tub

Everyone looks at splashing out on what your mother-in-law sniffily refers to as "a sex pond" as a (very) expensive lockdown mistake. Honestly, it wasn't. With the lid firmly shut no one — especially the neighbours — knows it has been drained and switched off since November.

Paddling pool

All the other well-organised parents had booked their kids into camp and lessons, and, well, you were still trying to flog the cot on Nextdoor and deal with the washing. This will do. It has to do. And, yes, there's lots of water, but it's great for the lawn. ■

