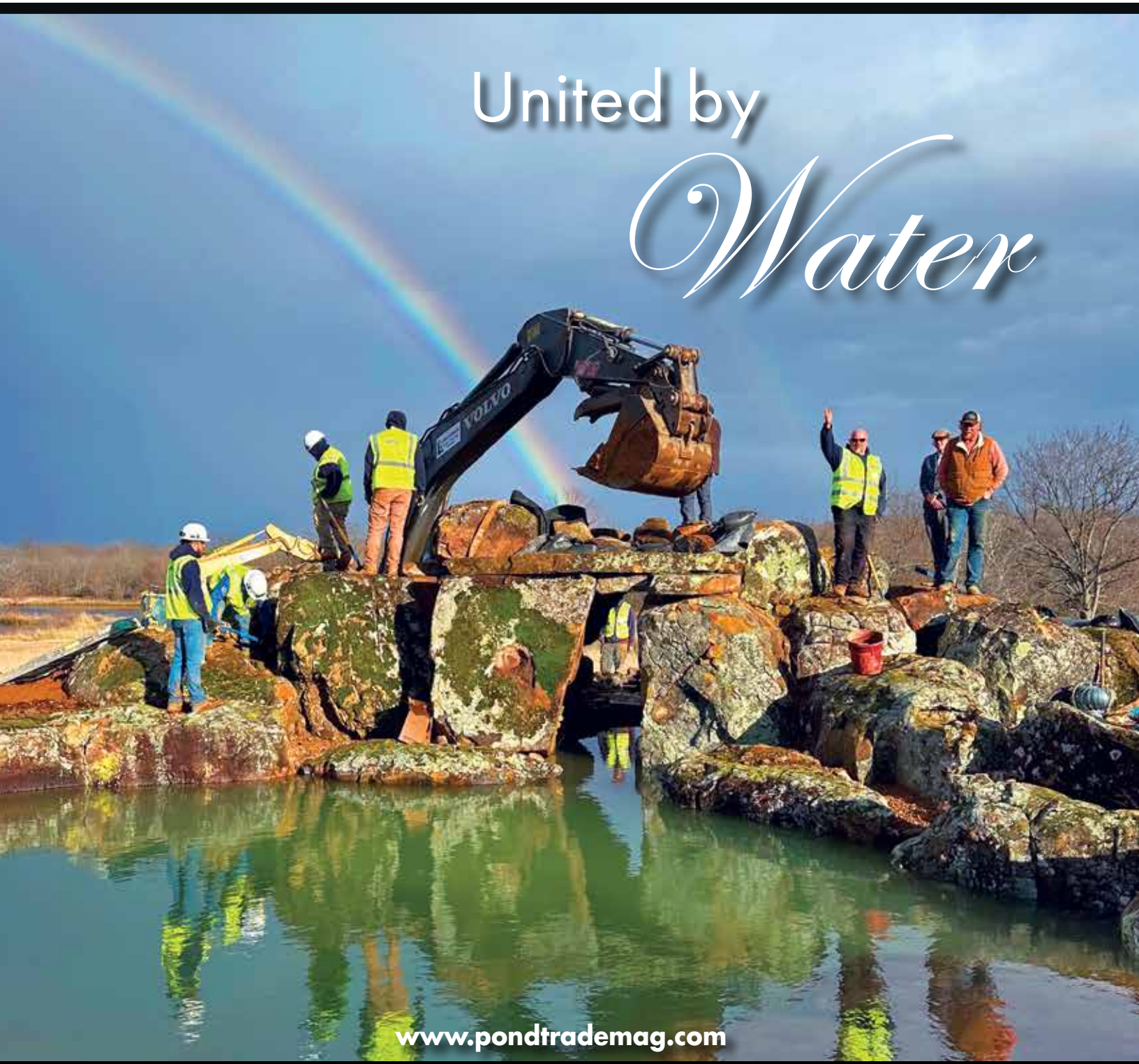
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www.linqacademy.net

May 17 - 18
Aquashella / Dallas Koi Show
Dallas Market Hall
Dallas, Texas
www.aquashella.com

June 28 - August 9
KC Water Garden Society Tour
Various locations over five weekends
www.kcwatergardens.com

July 31 - August 3
Pond Professionals Alliance Training
Easy Pro Headquarters
Grant, Michigan
www.pondprofessionalsalliance.com

August 12 - 16
IWGS Symposiom
New York City, New York
www.iwgs.org

August 22 - 23
Koi Fest 2025 & Tri-State ZNA Koi Show
Fitz's Fish Pond Farm
Milford, New Jersey
www.fitzfishponds.com

August 28 - 31
Rocky Mountain Koi Show
Douglas Couny Fairgrounds
Castle Rock, Colorado
www.rockymountainkoiclub.org

August 29
Pondemonium
Online Training Event
www.aquascapeinc.com

September 22 - 24
South Carolina Koi & Goldfish Show
Kentucky Exposition Center
Simpsonville, Kentucky

October 22 - 24
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Publisher's Perspective

Turning the Page, Diving In



It is with great pride and excitement that I welcome you to this issue of POND Trade Magazine. When I first joined this vibrant, ever-evolving industry, I couldn't have imagined the journey ahead. Today, I'm honored to step into the role of publisher, following in the footsteps of my mentor and dear friend, Lora Lee Gelles.

For years, Lora Lee has been the heart and soul of POND Trade, shaping it into a trusted voice for pond professionals across the country. Her vision, creativity and leadership have left an a lasting mark, and I am endlessly grateful for her guidance. Thank you, Lora Lee, for believing in me — I promise to carry the torch with care, integrity and enthusiasm.

As we launch this first issue under new leadership, I'm thrilled to present a fresh lineup of stories that celebrate the craftsmanship, creativity and community that make this industry so special.

In this edition, Mike Gannon explores the artistic and functional value of driftwood in his article, "Driftwood: Nature's Timeless Sculptures in Water Features," (pg. 18) showing how these natural elements can become signature components in your next design. We also go behind the scenes with Marlon Ngo, who offers a rare glimpse into "The Life of a Koi Farmer & Dealer" (pg. 36) — a story filled with early mornings, tireless dedication and a deep love for these living jewels.

Our "2025 Water Garden Expo Round-Up" (pg. 52) brings you all the action — from educational seminars and panel discussions to standout moments like the fireside chat between Brian Fitzsimmons and Eric Triplett, where they discussed scaling pond businesses, leadership and staying true to your strengths. We also highlight the announcement of this year's Water Artisans of the Year, showcasing the best in pond and water feature innovation.

Another standout is the Pond Professionals Alliance group build — a powerful example of collaboration, passion and perseverance coming together to create something truly inspiring ("United by Water," pg. 8).

We're also diving into the business side of things. Wondering if home and garden shows are still worth the time and budget? We break down the pros, cons and strategies for making the most of your investment ("Home Shows," pg. 42). Plus, we're excited to introduce a new feature: The Entrepreneur's Angle — where business coaches and financial advisors offer insight into life as a pond business owner, helping you thrive both on the job site and behind the scenes ("The Two Most Important Days in a Business Owner's Journey," pg. 49).

None of this would be possible without the amazing team behind the magazine. I'm thrilled to continue working with Joanne Costin, our insightful web editor who has a gift for turning complex topics into engaging content. Joining us is Rae Cauley, our new graphic designer and an award-winning fine artist. Rae brings more than a decade of experience and a passion for storytelling through various artistic mediums such as graphic design, large scale murals and handcrafted jewelry.

Thank you for reading and for allowing us to be part of your pond journey. Here's to the next ripple.

Until the next splash!

Lauren Nolan



Rae Cauley painting a 30ft mural in New Hope, PA



United by *Water*

The PPA's powerful collaboration to build more than a pond

by Ana York Arntson and Craig McBride,
Co-Founders of the Pond Professionals Alliance

In the world of water features, a pond is never just a pond. It's a sanctuary for wildlife, a place of serenity, and often, the realization of a dream. But when a group of dedicated professionals comes together to build something greater than themselves, it transcends its physical form. It becomes a symbol of community, generosity, and sheer perseverance. That is exactly what happened at the 2025 Water Garden Expo Group Swim Pond Build, where the Pond Professionals Alliance (PPA) spearheaded a collaboration that proved the power of unity in the face of adversity.

This project was far more than a showcase of craftsmanship—it was a mission. Designed for Shaun and Amy Lindley of Lindley Stone, the build was an opportunity to give back to two incredibly deserving individuals. Their dream of a beautiful, functional pond became a reality through the generosity and expertise of the PPA and its members. What made this build so special was the trust they placed in us—a newly formed grassroots organization. They gave us the green light to tear apart their yard, welcomed 50+ pond professionals onto their property, and they believed in our vision to leave it better than before. Their faith gave us the chance to create not just a pond, but a lasting impact.





(Right) Craig teaching some tricks of the trade when seaming Carlisle AquaTough Liner to eager listeners. - (Left) What a treat to see manufacturers working together!

From the beginning, the goal was clear: to create a hands-on learning experience that would inspire and educate while building something meaningful. And despite every challenge Mother Nature threw our way, we delivered.

Battling the Elements: A True Test of Grit

From the moment we broke ground, the weather seemed determined to test our resolve. Unrelenting cold, driving rain, and ankle-deep mud became our daily reality. Sub-zero temperatures froze our equipment and pond components solid. Diesel fuel gelled, rendering machinery useless. And then there was the mud—slick, heavy, and inescapable. It clung to our boots, weighed down every step, and turned the entire site into an impressively slippery mess.

There were moments when it would have been easy to quit. The conditions were brutal, and progress often felt impossible. But this team wasn't built to back down. With every setback, we dug deeper—both physically and mentally. Everyone kept showing up, day after day, despite the cold, the fatigue, and the constant battle against the elements. That collective determination defined this project. We refused to let the weather win. Instead, we let it shape us into a stronger, more resilient team.

Fueled by Generosity

A collaboration build of this scale wouldn't have been possible without the support of generous donors. From filtration systems to massive sandstone boulders, every contribution played a critical role in bringing our vision to life. Companies and individuals from across the industry saw what we were striving for and stepped up without hesitation. Their support wasn't just about materials—it was about believing in what we were building.

The Lindleys' own company, Lindley Stone, supplied the beautiful natural sandstone boulders that became the framework for the pond. Each piece was placed with precision and care, transforming the once-ordinary space into a breathtaking landscape. The plants that softened the edges and added vibrant beauty were generously donated by Kelly Billing of Water Becomes a Garden, whose time, knowledge, and dedication brought the finishing touches to life.

To every donor and contributor—this build is a reflection of your generosity. You didn't just donate materials; you donated belief, and for that, we are deeply grateful.











Big Rocks, Big Conversations; Speck Pumps, GC Tek Filters, OxyGen Ozone Generator, EasyPro PitViper Wetland Filtration. All generously donated to elevate the industry!

Designing with Purpose

The pond's design was a collaborative masterpiece. What began as a sketch by Craig McBride of SwimPond.com and All Aquatics was later reimagined by Larry Carnes of Reflections Water Gardens. Their combined creativity and expertise shaped a stunning, functional pond that would endure for years to come.

Even with the meticulous planning, the design continued to evolve as the build progressed. Midway through, it became clear that something was missing. That's when Shaun suggested adding a grotto—a bold, dramatic feature that would become the pond's focal point. The team rallied behind the idea, and despite the extra work it required, we all knew it was worth it. The grotto transformed the entire aesthetic, giving the pond a sense of grandeur and elegance that hadn't existed before.

At its core, the build wasn't just about beauty—it was also about functionality. The pond featured a wetland filtration system, enhanced by pressure filters, UV, and ozone, ensuring crystal-clear water with minimal maintenance. The combination of sustainable design and advanced filtration technology guarantees that this pond will thrive for years, providing a stunning and low-maintenance sanctuary for the Lindleys to enjoy.

More Than a Build—A True Collaboration

What made this project truly remarkable wasn't just the finished pond—it was the people who came together to create it. The pond industry is filled with skilled craftsmen, but at its heart, it's about connection. At the Water Garden Expo, that spirit of collaboration was on full display.

Seasoned professionals worked shoulder to shoulder with up-and-comers, sharing knowledge and passing down techniques that will ripple through the industry for years. The build site became a classroom—a place where skills were





















honed and friendships were forged. This wasn't just a construction project—it was an educational experience, a mentorship opportunity, and a celebration of shared passion.

There were no egos on this build. Everyone came together as equals, setting aside their individual roles and titles. Whether a veteran pond builder or a newcomer eager to learn, we were united by a common goal. That humility and camaraderie became the project's defining feature—more than the waterfalls, more than the rockwork. The true masterpiece was the collective spirit of every person who showed up, despite the cold, the mud, and the exhaustion.

The Legacy: Ripples Beyond the Pond

As the final boulder was set and the water began to flow, we stood back and took it all in. What we had created was more than a pond—it was a symbol of what is possible when a community comes together with passion and purpose. The beauty of the pond will undoubtedly bring joy to the Lindleys for years to come, but the legacy of this build reaches far beyond their backyard.

It was a reminder of why we do what we do. When we build ponds, we're not just shaping landscapes—we're shaping lives. We're creating spaces for reflection, for connection, and for peace. And when we do it together, as a unified industry, the impact is far greater than any one project.

To everyone who contributed—whether through donations, labor, or support—thank you. This project would not have been possible without you. And to the members of the Pond Professionals Alliance, your passion and dedication give us hope. Hope that our mission is not only strong but necessary.

Together, we have shown that the heart of this industry beats strong. Because in the end, it's never just about the water—it's about the people who make the ripples and face every storm without being washed away.



We had a GREAT group of participants helping to pull off this epic build.



About the Authors



Craig McBride is the founder of All Aquatics, and more recently the sister company SwimPond.com. He is also the Co-Founder of the Pond Professionals Alliance. With a unique passion and attention to detail required to thrive on larger scale projects, he has set his sights on building bigger and better in the coming years.



Ana York Arntson is, first and foremost, a compassionate homeschooling mom of 4. Overcoming her initial reluctance, she played an integral role in transforming Stonebridge Pond and Waterfall Company in Austin, TX into the success it knows today. As Co-Founder of the Pond Professionals Alliance, she brings her communication skills and passion for building community connections to a larger space.

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Quotes from the **Build**



Shaun Lindley, Lindley Stone
Amy and I are just so humbled and grateful for all these people coming together, not just friends and business associates, but strangers too. They came here and worked their butts off, and you can bet they're our friends now! It's not just a yard for us any more, it's a part of our lives that will grow and develop with our family forever. And it's not just the pond, but everyone in the industry working together as a team. I mean wow. We're just so thankful.

Jeff Weemhoff, Atlantic-Oase
I think you guys are doing a great job of spot lighting manufacturers/distributors who want to engage. You are educating contractors who want or need that, you are enlightening contractors to new ways to build, design and sell water features. Keep it up. It won't always be right and/or make everyone happy, but that's hard to do in a five-person family, let alone multiple contractors and sponsors. Happily supportive.





Billy Franklin, Bedrock Nursery
My favorite thing about the Swim Pond is those great big boulders over there - they're so massive! I'm having a great time out here at this event sponsored by the PPA. I'm getting to build some cool stuff with all my buddies. It's nice to see Shaun be able to bring all us together and build something great for his family.

Josiah Crousore, Specialty Water Gardens
My favorite thing about the group build was the feeling of camaraderie amongst all the people involved. Professionals all focused and working together, enthusiastically tackling different aspects of the project to bring it to life.





Jake Bradley, Easy Pro
Being part of this build was a huge blessing! Getting to know so many awesome installers, and other manufacturers, in a hands on setting to this scale will be a highlight of my year! Seeing such a diverse mix of equipment and installation methods was a great opportunity to be a sponge and learn as much as I could. We, EasyPro, are so thankful to be platinum sponsor of the PPA and to have participated in the build. Thank you for using our new wetland filtration system, 10oz underlayment, and speck pumps on the project!!

Trey Bradley, DFW Ponds
My favorite part about this build was the big rocks, and everybody coming together as one united body building something like this. No arguments. It's all been fun. Communication has been going well. The PPA is just amazing for putting on an event like this.

**With skilled hands,
We shaped,
Proud to build and learn as one,
Water tells its tale.**

- Haiku, by James Tiliton

James Tilton, Oklahoma Ponds
Being part of the regional swim pond build was an incredible experience, where I had the honor of working alongside talented pond builders, learning new techniques, and contributing to something truly special.

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Quotes from the **Build**



Craig McBride, SwimPond.com; CoFounder, PPA
Helping facilitate the 2025 PPA Big Swim Pond Build was truly an honor and a huge moment for me personally. It was amazing to see the vision come together alongside some of the most talented people in the industry. The passion, teamwork, and energy out there reminded me exactly why I love what I do.

Ana Arntson, Stonebridge Pond and Waterfall Co-Cofounder, PPA
Getting this event organized was well-worth the effort involved. It was truly humbling to see such enthusiasm and support for the project and I'm incredibly grateful for everyone who pitched in with both materials and physical labor. Many, many thanks to the Lindleys and everyone involved for taking a chance on us!





John Magyar, Universal Aquatics
For me, one of the best parts about attending the build was working with larger boulders than what we typically get a chance to work with. It's also always interesting seeing how other folks create water features. Whether you agree with their style of building or not, there is always something to learn if you're open to it.



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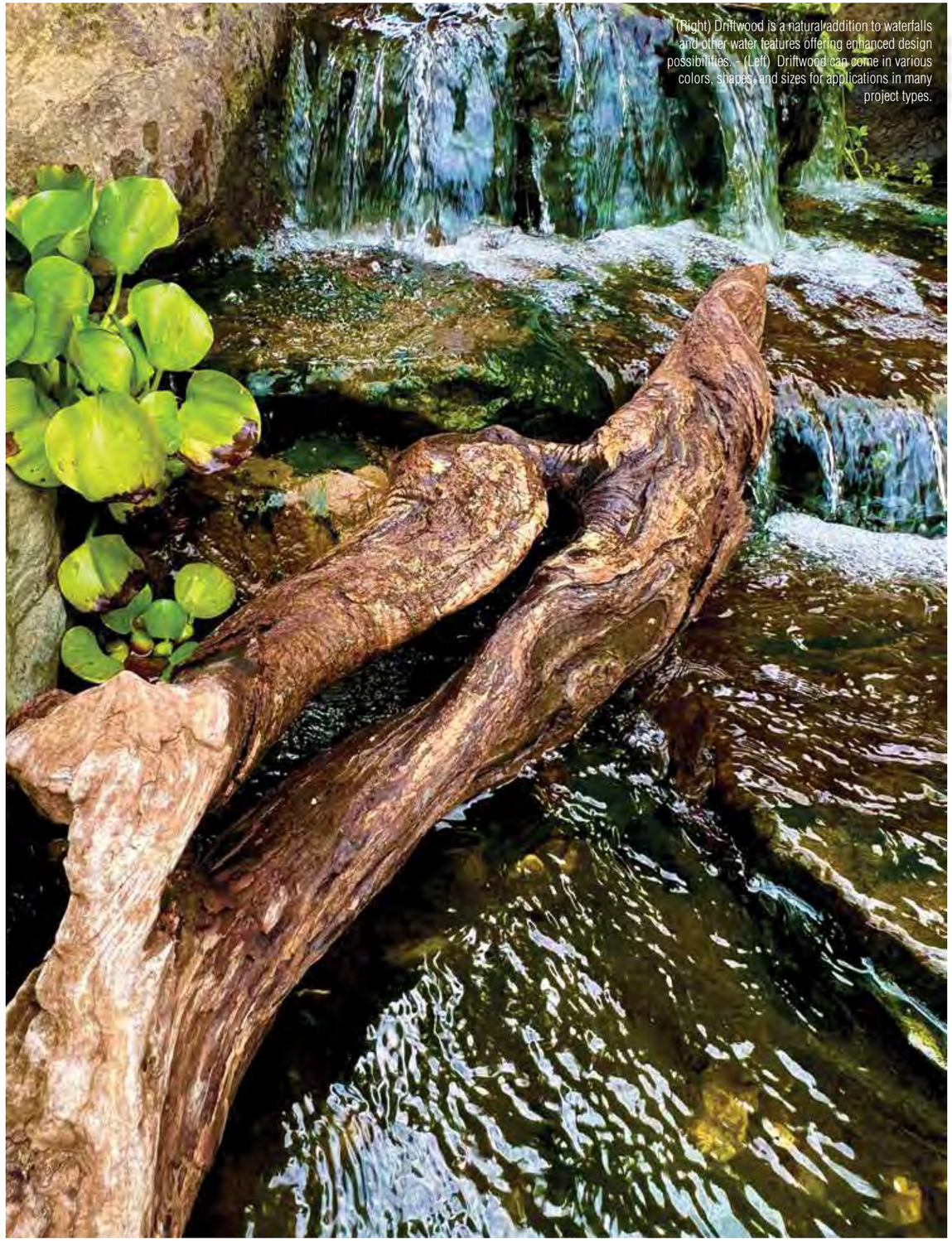
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(Right) Driftwood is a natural addition to waterfalls and other water features offering enhanced design possibilities. - (Left) Driftwood can come in various colors, shapes, and sizes for applications in many project types.

Driftwood

Nature's timeless sculptures in water features

by Mike Gannon
Full Service Aquatics

There's a rugged and romantic appeal to driftwood. The thought of it often brings our minds to windswept shorelines or desolate, forgotten landscapes. Driftwood has a way of taking us momentarily out of time—acting as a portal to somewhere, sometime else. Most driftwood has been on an epic journey of transformation, and if you look closely, it reveals its story. Once-mighty trees fall, become submerged in cold darkness, and are forgotten—only to be rediscovered, brought back into the light of day and into the landscape.

More Than Just Weathered Wood

Driftwood is a worldwide phenomenon, with roots in cultural myths, legends, poems and songs. It even appears in some creation and flood stories. In Norse, Celtic, Polynesian and other maritime cultures, driftwood was considered a strong omen—a carrier of tidings from other worlds. It symbolized a connection to nature, transformation and renewal.

It's no surprise, then, that driftwood still captivates us today. Even in our digitally connected, screen-addicted world, it can grab the attention of distracted minds. You'll find decorative driftwood pieces in big-name retailers like HomeGoods, Restoration Hardware and Pier One. Touristy beach and lake town gift shops often display driftwood selections as rustic, nature-inspired décor.

But for pond and landscape designers, sourcing driftwood is a whole different story.





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Sourcing Driftwood: No Easy Task

When it comes to using driftwood in large-scale designs, where do the "big boys" go? Well, there are options—but not many. Driftwood is a unique commodity because it is still harvested directly from nature. There are no production facilities cranking out stock, no driftwood "season," no farms growing it. There are only collectors—and there aren't many of them.

The idea of collecting driftwood yourself may seem romantic—strolling along a scenic shoreline, hand-picking perfectly weathered pieces to whisk away to your client's pond. But it rarely works that way. The best driftwood, the premium stuff, doesn't come from beaches or roadsides. It comes from underwater.

Collecting driftwood is hard, dirty, and sometimes dangerous work. It requires skill, equipment and plenty of time. Self-collecting can be a rewarding adventure, but as a business model, it rarely makes financial sense. The labor doesn't stop at collection, either. Properly processing driftwood takes additional effort. De-barking, power washing, and sometimes curing can all add to even more time and labor.

For most professionals, sourcing from specialty driftwood vendors is the best option.

Where to Find Quality Driftwood

Specialty vendors offer large inventories of driftwood in a variety of shapes and sizes. While some aquarium shops carry smaller pieces, and landscape nurseries may have a few, professional vendors are your best bet for high-quality stock.

Local marketplaces like Facebook, Craigslist and eBay occasionally feature driftwood collectors selling their finds. However, dedicated driftwood suppliers are the best source. One example is The Driftwood Forest of NJ in Stewartsville, New Jersey, which works with pond contractors, landscapers and the general public. Specialty vendors like this offer massive driftwood selections, ranging from small 12-inch branches to towering 9-foot trunks. They typically carry driftwood stumps, trunks, knots, branches, logs, planks and other unique pieces. Reliable vendors will also offer wholesale pricing and contractor discounts.

The Value of Water-Cured Driftwood

When sourcing driftwood for aquatic use, look for water-cured driftwood. It offers several advantages over shoreline-aged driftwood.

Water acts as a preservative, significantly slowing decay. Archaeologists have recovered wooden artifacts, shipwrecks and even carved canoes dating back thousands of years from waterlogged sites, still in remarkable condition.

The water-curing process involves submerging wood for an extended period. While 3,000 years isn't necessary, five years or more will properly cure most woods. This process leaches out tannins that can discolor water and alter pH levels. It also removes debris, bark and sap, leaving the wood clean and safe for aquatic life. Water currents and natural decomposition smooth and polish the wood's surface, giving it a beautiful, refined look.

Water-cured driftwood also reduces the risk of introducing pests, contaminants or pathogens. Through submersion, the wood undergoes a kind of natural sterilization. Softer materials decompose and break away, leaving behind stable, durable wood.

Finally, water-cured driftwood tends to be waterlogged, making it sink and stay in place. Water molecules slowly replace air within the wood, increasing its density and reducing buoyancy. Uncured wood, by contrast, floats, rots faster and introduces unwanted organics into the water, creating cloudy conditions and water chemistry issues.







(Top) Many wholesale driftwood vendors will offer bulk delivery for their contractor customers. - (Center) Possibilites are endless with the uses of driftwood. This plank could make a beautiful waterfall spillway, or a fun hanging sign! - (Bottom) Mother Nature's sculpture! The Driftwood Forest of NJ offers an amazing stroll through endless driftwood choices.



(Top) A “mother load” haul of freshly harvested cedar driftwood. - (Right) Premium driftwood should be harvested from below water, fully cured, nicely cleaned, untreated, and ready for market.

Choosing the Right Wood Species

Not all wood is suitable for water features, even if it looks weathered. Some species are more durable and water-resistant, making them ideal for ponds and waterfalls.

Good choices for submerged driftwood include:

Cypress: Highly rot-resistant and naturally dense, making it perfect for aquatic use.
Manzanita: Twisting, intricate branches with a naturally hard, water-resistant quality.
Cedar: Durable and attractive, with a pleasing texture and color.
Mangrove Wood: Common in aquascaping, known for its toughness.
Black Locust and Oak: Dense and slow to break down, making them suitable for water features.

Woods to avoid:

Fruit Woods: (apple, cherry) — they can leach harmful compounds.
Softwoods: (pine, fir, spruce) — they break down quickly and can release resins.
Treated Woods: — highly toxic to fish and other aquatic life.

For landscape use (above water), uncured driftwood can be incorporated safely. However, for submerged applications, fully cured wood is essential.

Creative Ways to Use Driftwood in Water Features

Driftwood offers limitless creative potential for pond, stream and waterfall designs. Its unique textures, shapes and colors add a natural, artistic quality to any water feature.

Here are some ways to make the most of driftwood:

Natural Edge Treatments: Lay driftwood logs along pond or stream edges. Pack gravel and aquatic plants around them to create a seamless, natural transition.

Fish Habitat: Submerge driftwood stumps, branches and knots to create hiding spots and shelter for fish. They’ll love the added structure.

Waterfall Accents: Add driftwood along your waterfall to soften the look and create visual interest.

Water Flow Features: Use hollow driftwood logs as water spouts, creating unique, rustic water delivery points.

Underwater Lighting Effects: Strategically light driftwood pieces to enhance their visual impact at night.

Planted Driftwood: Add mosses, ferns or aquatic plants to driftwood for a wild, natural look.





Let Driftwood Inspire You

Driftwood tends to be an overlooked design element, yet it offers an exciting and organic touch to water features. It draws the eye and captures the imagination, telling a story shaped by time, water and the elements.

Whether you’re using it to create a habitat for fish, a whimsical landscape feature or a visual focal point, driftwood adds authenticity and artistry to your designs. It has the power to make any pond, waterfall, stream or fountain feel more natural, more grounded—and more alive.

If you’ve never designed with driftwood before, now is the time. A whole new form of visual inspiration is waiting just beneath the surface—patiently, timelessly—ready for you to discover it. So drift away into new creative possibilities, and let your clients experience the magic.

About the Author



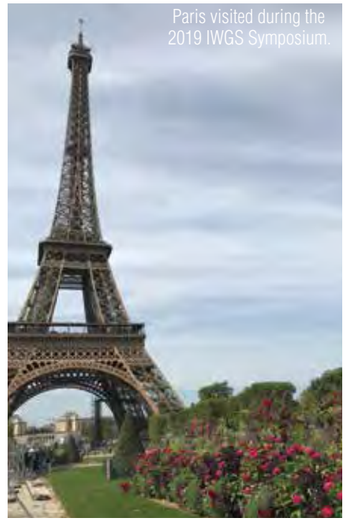
Mike Gannon is the owner of Full Service Aquatics based in Summit, New Jersey. Mike has been a lifelong pond enthusiast and fishkeeper. Mike began Full Service Aquatics after working as a fish dealer and a stint at the New York Aquarium. FSA has been specializing in pond and water feature design and services since 1995. Mike is host of The Pond Hunter Radio Broadcast found on iTunes. His Pond Hunter videos can be found on youtube.com/thepondhunter, and he is the author of the Love Your Pond blog found on fullserviceaquatics.com.

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A waterlily timeline featuring hybrids created from the late 1800's to the early 2000's. Plants as art.


Paris visited during the 2019 IWGS Symposium.

Reflecting on the *Roots*

How water gardening grew into an industry

by Kelly Billing,
Water Becomes a Garden

Water gardening may seem like an established corner of the green industry, but in truth, it's relatively young. Its journey from a hobby of the elite to a passion shared by homeowners and professionals alike is rich with innovation, trial and error, and creativity.

The Latour-Marliac Legacy

In the late 1800s, a man named Joseph Bory Latour-Marliac began hybridizing waterlilies. Between 1870 and 1880, he developed 19 new cultivars. These hybrids had compact root systems and eliminated the prolific seeding issues common to species plants. The result? Round islands of foliage crowned with vibrant flowers that were just as captivating then as they are today.

His work gained global attention when the new hybrids were showcased at the 1889 World's Fair in Paris. Among those enchanted was Claude Monet, who later said, "It took me a while to understand my water lilies... Then suddenly I had a revelation and clearly saw these wonders on my pond." Monet went on to paint the most iconic and influential waterlily art in history. But it wasn't just the lilies that captivated him—it was the interplay of sky, ground, and reflection. To see his pond in real life is to witness that revelation firsthand.

"If I could rename every day of the year, I would look out at my garden and choose something beautiful, something rich and full of color that appeared on that very day. You can do that, you know. A well-planned garden never fails to offer inspiration and beauty every day of the year. That is the calendar by which I would like to live my life."
— Kurt Bluemel

"It took me a while to understand my water lilies... Then suddenly I had a revelation and clearly saw these wonders on my pond."

-Claude Monet



One of Monet's famous waterlily paintings on display in France.



(Right) Planting containers developed specifically for aquatic plants. Wide and shallow. - (Center) Lotus petals float like small boats across the water's surface. A good reason to plant lotus stream side. - (Left) My children's uninhibited creative relationship with Lotus taught me.

The Birth of Backyard Ponds

As waterlily interest grew, formal concrete ponds began appearing at botanical gardens, zoos, and grand estates. Homeowners followed suit with basic cement bowls to house goldfish and a few plants. These "flying saucers" had no circulation, turned green quickly, and offered little in terms of longevity.



Waterlily and lotus hybridizers are working on longer lasting flowers for cutting.France.

Innovation in Aquatic Plants

Throughout the 20th century, aquatic plant nurseries existed globally, but few produced container-grown plants for easy transport. That began to shift in the 1980s in the United States, when new growers emerged to meet a rising demand for backyard ponds. Even today, however, plant use in water features remains underutilized. Learn your plants, plan for them, and don't be afraid to get creative.

In the early days, materials were mostly imported from Europe and expensive to ship. Mesh baskets leaked soil, and their loose roots didn't meet American standards for "clean" design. Growers improvised, sometimes closing container holes with duct tape. Tall, narrow pots tipped over in the wind. Even soil and fertilizer presented challenges, as most products were designed for other agricultural uses. Wide, shallow containers without holes eventually became the standard for stability and effectiveness.

Thanks are due to pioneers like Wayne Davis, Ken Landon, and Ed Rosenthal, who developed aquatic fertilizers suited for different regions and growing conditions. Their efforts gave aquatic plants a reliable foundation.

Pond Building Breakthroughs

The introduction of flexible PVC liners, butyl rubber, and EPDM revolutionized pond building. These cost-effective options made backyard ponds attainable for average families. Popular kidney-shaped ponds with shallow shelves and stone coping around the edges dominated early designs. Today, edging techniques have evolved dramatically, creating more natural, seamless aesthetics.

Straight-line streams are out. Industry legends like Anthony Archer-Wills and authors like Rick Bartel have shown us how to create natural-looking streams, even on flat land, using strategic curves, elevation changes, and rock placements. Creativity in water movement is still one of the most underutilized elements in pond building.

Filtration's Evolution

Equipment in the early years had its challenges. Pumps weren't designed for continuous use in debris-heavy environments. Pipe and fittings were inconsistent in size. A graduated fitting was once considered revolutionary. Filtration systems often relied on gravel beds that clogged easily. Maintenance was labor-intensive. Eventually, filter pads helped, and today's new media options simplify the process even further.

In the last 40 years, the industry has blossomed. Container gardens gained popularity and helped spread water gardening nationwide. Misconceptions about mosquitoes created a market for small pumps and fountains that circulated water and kept it healthy. In truth, mosquitoes prefer stagnant puddles, not active ecosystems.

As demand grew, small ponds—4-by-6 feet and 8-by-10 feet—became the norm. Filtration systems improved with foam prefilters and magnetic drive pumps that were energy-efficient and reliable. Then came Joe B. Dekker's revolutionary pond skimmer, featured in Home and Garden Magazine. His design improved surface oxygen exchange and made filter maintenance easier, offering a more enjoyable pond ownership experience.

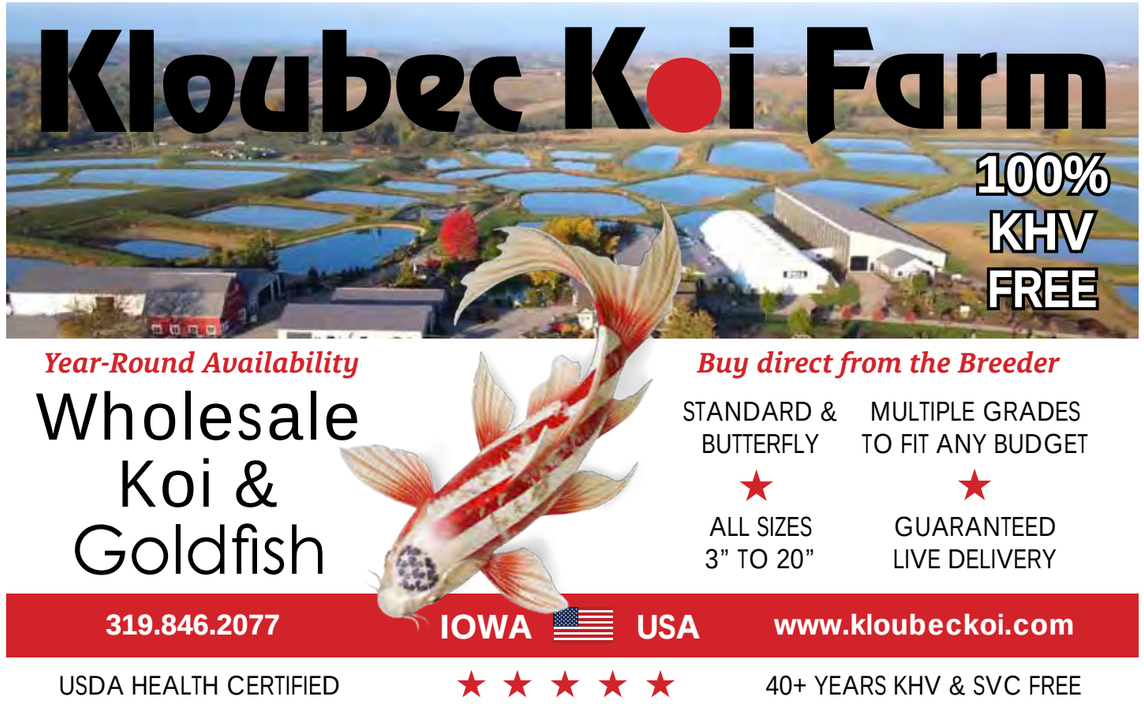
Meanwhile, Dick Schuck introduced the 10% Solution—a separate pool for plants to filter the main pond. This inspired innovations like floating filtration islands and bottom aeration systems, laying the groundwork for modern wetland bog filters. Today, void-filling blocks serve both in filtration systems and decorative disappearing fountains.



2017 Annual IWGS Symposium in PA. The learning never ends!

So many of our solutions began as adaptations from other industries. Innovation has always been about problem-solving. Technology continues to enhance pumps, skimmers, filters and now, water treatments. Major investment is pouring into natural water quality improvement—repairing ecosystems from the bottom up.

One of the best things about working in a young industry is the willingness to share. Ideas, products and improvements come from all corners of the community. A recent natural swim pond build, hosted by the Pond Professionals Alliance, showcased this beautifully. It brought together Helix skimmers from Eric Triplett, bead filters, gravel bogs and Larry Carnes' ozone technology—a masterclass in collaboration.





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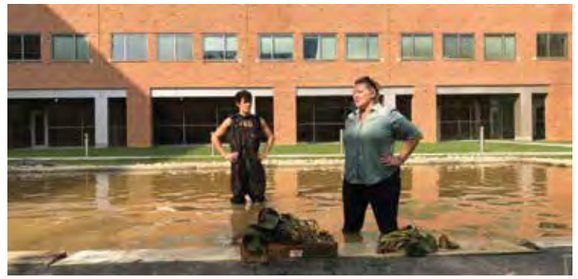
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(Left/Center) The more recent crossing of hardy and tropical waterlilies has resulted in new, vibrant colors in hardy plants. - (Right) Hybridizing efforts have created highly variable and colorful lotus plants, flowers and seed pods.

The Future is Flowing

The industry is still small compared to the broader horticultural and landscape markets. Turf, annuals, perennials and trees dominate most landscapes. Water features remain a specialty, but their potential is enormous. From fishing and wildlife ponds to natural swim ponds, there is plenty of room for growth.



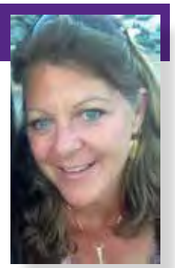


(Top) Planting 586 waterlilies to make magic happen! - (Bottom) Learn everything you can from the best in the industry so you can work with them! Thank you AAW! One of many!

In the 1980s, we didn't have web developers, graphic designers or Google to find plant facts. Today, we have more tools, more data and more support. Yet the pond world still carries a romanticism that other sectors can't quite match. With professionalism, education and a willingness to invest in our people, this corner of the industry will continue to flourish.

If you have a gap in your knowledge, fill it. Hire someone. Learn by doing. Attend trainings. Listen to podcasts. Surround yourself with creative people. Join the Pond Professionals Alliance if you build. Join the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society if you love plants. Use your resources. Fall in love with your work—and let that love make you better.

About the Author



Kelly Billing owns Water Becomes a Garden. She is a grower and consultant with a focus on creative, site appropriate use of aquatic plants for effective display. Attention is given to seasonal interest, nutrient uptake and ecological balance to meet project goals. Steeped in water quality research, she promotes the use of natural processes. Her clients across the country allow her to make a difference on projects through proper planning and planting.



The Healing *Power of Water*

Finding connection, purpose and peace

by Landon Malave,
LCM Waterfalls and Ponds

Some things in life you can plan for. Others, you can't. When I started building water features, I thought I was simply creating beautiful landscapes. I didn't fully understand at the time that I was creating connection between families, between people and nature, and between the past and present.

Over the last 13 years, I've witnessed firsthand how water transforms lives, bringing people closer in ways I never could have imagined. And through it all — through loss, healing and personal discovery — I've found that water has not only connected my customers to something deeper, but it has connected me as well.

More Than Just a Pond: Stories of Connection

I could talk for hours about the technical side of what I do — how to build a proper waterfall, balance an ecosystem or design something that lasts. But those details, while important, aren't what this is really about.



Bob and Terri Workman, retired after 20+ years in business, love relaxing by their firepit with a drink—morning coffee or evening wine.

It's about the grandparents who build a pond in their backyard, not for themselves, but for their grandkids. The pond gives them a reason to come over, to toss food to the fish, to make memories by the water. I've had customers tell me their pond became the one thing that pulled their grandkids away from screens and into the outdoors.

It's about the people who work from home — people who once felt trapped inside, staring at screens all day, until they got a water feature. Now, they start their mornings outside with a cup of coffee, listening to the water. Suddenly, they don't feel so disconnected. They tell me they take work calls outside now, that they feel different, more present, more at peace — all because of the space we created.

It's about the retired business owners who spent years grinding away, always moving, always chasing the next goal only to find themselves, finally, sitting by the pond with a glass of wine, learning how to slow down for the first time in their lives. Or those who are transported back to childhood memories of a ranch with a creek or lake. It's about family gatherings, quiet moments and unexpected impact.

Even in my own life, I had no idea how much a water feature could change things until I built one for my kids. What I thought was just a backyard project turned into something much bigger. It became the place where our family naturally gathered, where friends came over and never wanted to leave, where we spent summer evenings together — just being. No distractions, no rushing — just connection. Real connection.





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Lessons From the Water: What 13 Years Have Taught Me

For more than a decade, I've watched how people interact with water. I've seen it become a source of peace, reflection and joy in ways I never anticipated when I started this journey. And it's made me ask myself, how can I create more of that connection in my own life?

Because the truth is, water isn't just something I build for other people. It's something that has deeply changed me.

Losing my brother changed everything about the way I see life. He was one of my biggest fans always supporting me and always believing in me. When I won Water Artisan of the Year, it should have been one of the biggest moments of my career. But losing him that same year made it feel significantly insignificant. That experience shifted my entire perspective. The things I once thought were important suddenly weren't. I questioned everything and everyone. It forced me to look at my life in a different way.

It made me realize how short and fragile our time is. It made me appreciate every moment I have with my kids, my family and my friends. It made me see that the most important things in life aren't things at all — they're the moments, the people, the experiences that stay with us and water has a way of pulling people into those moments.

I feel honored and humbled to be able to do this for a living — not just because I love building water features, but because I know what they mean to the people who have them. I know what it feels like to find peace by the water. I know what it's like to step outside and just breathe, to let the sound of moving water quiet the noise of the world.

A Purpose Greater Than the Work

If you had asked me years ago why I do what I do, I probably would have said something about my passion for design, my love for the craft or my desire to create something unique. And while all of that is still true, my answer now is much different.

I do this because I've seen what it does for people.

I do this because I've felt it in my own life.



Gatherings by the grotto—BBQs with friends, kids splashing in the swim pond, and quiet moments by the water. Our backyard has become our favorite place to relax and connect.



Our house with the grotto has become a special place where we gather with friends while the kids laugh and play in the swim pond. Through these moments, I have come to realize the joy and connection that surrounds our pond.

I do this because water isn't just an element — it's a connector.

It connects families.

It connects people to nature.

It connects people to themselves.

And every time I build a pond, a waterfall or a stream, I know I'm not just installing a feature. I'm creating a space where life happens. Where kids grow up with memories of catching frogs and feeding fish. Where people find stillness in a world that never stops moving. Where the sound of water becomes the backdrop to their stories, their healing, their connections.

This career has given me something I never expected: a front-row seat to the power of connection.

I get to witness families spending more time together, people rediscovering their love for nature and individuals finding peace in a way they never knew they needed. I get to watch lives change — and I can say, without a doubt, that it has changed mine too.

After 13 years, I can say with absolute certainty:

This isn't just a job to me.

It's my purpose.

It's my passion.

It's my life.

About the Author



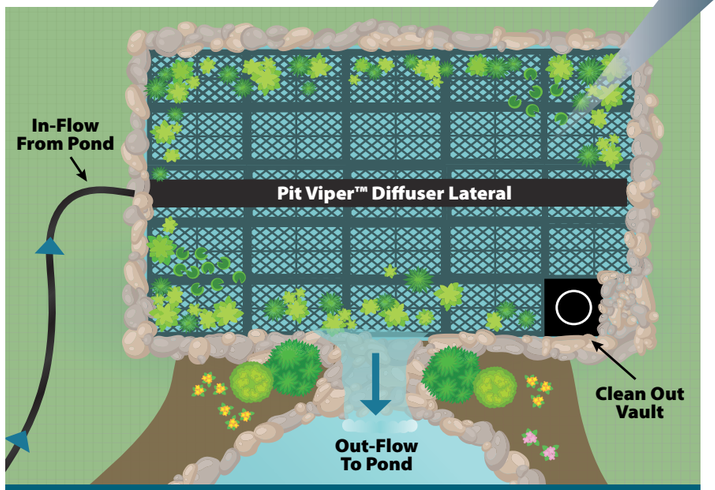
Landon Malave is the owner of LCM Waterfalls & Ponds, previously known as LCM Landscape & Design. Operating out of Elbert, Colorado, he services the front range and is taking his efforts nationwide. He grew up on a farm in Eastern Colorado, earning his associate's degree in horticulture and a certificate in landscape design. He has been in business for more than 10 years and is excited about the future of building multiple businesses, honing in on his skills in the water feature industry. He studied under his mentor and now friend, Rick Pursell, who has 50 years of experience building waterfalls all over the world. Landon lives on a tree farm with his wife and three children.

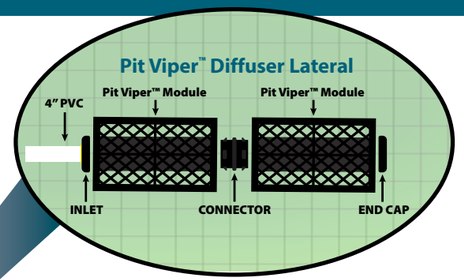
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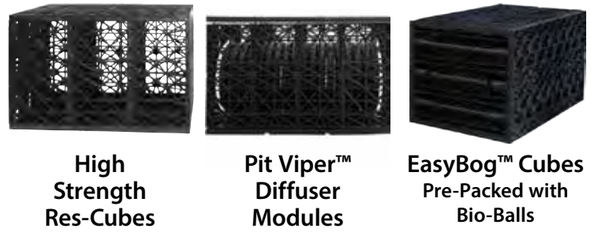
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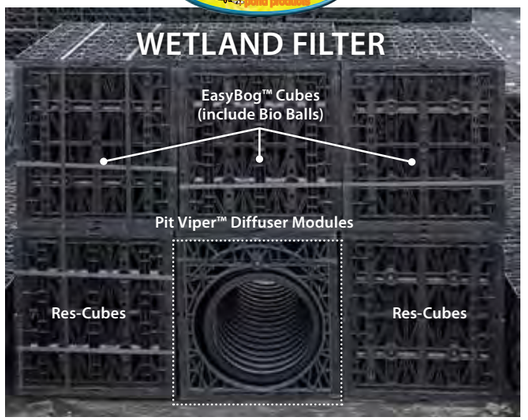


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Heartfelt Thanks

A note of heartfelt thanks to Pond Professionals Alliance for designing, organizing and leading the Group Swim Pond Build at Water Garden Expo 2025. We were proud sponsors and volunteers at this amazing event for a very worthy recipient. Thank you for inviting us!

Haven't seen the build yet? Check out PPA's video of the build here >>

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Life as a Koi Farmer **& Dealer**

A passion-driven profession

by Marlon Ngo,
Tri-Star Koi

The life of a koi farmer and dealer is a demanding yet deeply rewarding journey. It's a profession built on a foundation of passion, precision, and perseverance. From sourcing koi in Japan to caring for them on the farm and showcasing them at events, every day brings a mix of challenges and triumphs. Though the work is rigorous, the joy of connecting people with living jewels that bring beauty and serenity into their lives makes it all worthwhile.

Sourcing Koi: The Art of Selection

Every successful koi business begins with sourcing exceptional fish, and that pursuit of quality always leads back to Japan—the birthplace of koi. Unlike large-scale operations that prioritize volume, boutique dealers take a more selective approach, offering a carefully curated collection each year. This ensures that every fish receives meticulous care while allowing clients to choose from koi of exceptional quality and beauty.

The annual koi hunt begins in early January with a month-long journey across Japan. From the snow-covered hills of Ojiya in Niigata to the mild waters of Hiroshima, each region is home to legendary breeders specializing in distinct varieties. The process is as thrilling as it is meticulous—visiting dozens of farms, inspecting hundreds of tanks, and hand-selecting koi that meet both personal standards and customer preferences.


Moving top Tosai to the grow out tanks.

More than just a buying trip, this sourcing adventure is about matching the right fish to the right home. Whether selecting koi destined for



Marlon of Tri-Star Koi netting Koi for the Atlanta Koi Show.





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(Right) New Tosai growout ponds being dug out for the next years growout stock. - (Center) At the Central California Koi Show in Fresno, California. - (Left) Marlon giving a presentation Koi health to the South Carolina Koi Club at their monthly meeting.

competition ponds, backyard water gardens, or shows, the goal is always the same: to provide customers with koi that inspire pride and joy.

Farm Life: Long Hours, Lasting Rewards

Life on a koi farm is intense and immersive, driven by consistency and care. The days are long, typically starting around 5 a.m. and winding down around 7 p.m., with little downtime. There are no days off—not for weekends or holidays—because koi care is a 24/7 responsibility. Yet, for those who love the work, the long hours feel less like a burden and more like a commitment to the well-being of the fish.

Feeding is the first priority each morning, and it varies with the seasons. During the summer months, koi are fed 8 to 12 times a day to promote growth and enhance their body volume. In the winter, when their metabolism slows, feedings are reduced to 4 to 6 times daily. The type and quantity of food are carefully tailored based on the koi's age, size, and conditioning needs, with some tanks receiving custom-prepared meals to optimize health.

Water quality management is another cornerstone of daily farm life. Feeding koi heavily creates waste, which means regular water changes are essential. On average, 25% to 40% of the water in each tank is replaced daily to maintain optimal conditions. This process removes excess nutrients, waste, and ammonia, preventing harmful bacteria and ensuring the fish remain healthy and vibrant.

Routine health checks are also vital. Each week, roughly 10% of the koi in each tank are scraped and inspected for parasites or early signs of illness. If any issues are detected, the entire tank is treated, and sales are temporarily paused until the koi are fully recovered. This proactive care ensures that customers always receive healthy, high-quality fish.

Though the daily grind can be physically demanding and sometimes exhausting, the farm is also a place of peace and satisfaction. Seeing koi thrive, grow, and eventually bring joy to their new owners makes the hard work deeply fulfilling.





(Left) Handselecting Tosai from Omosako Koi Farm in Hiroshima, Japan. - (Right) Tri-Star Koi Show booth at the Atlanta Koi Show.

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On the Road: Sharing the Passion at Koi Shows

The koi business extends far beyond the farm—it also means hitting the road to attend koi shows across the country, where the passion for these living works of art is shared with enthusiasts and collectors alike.

Show season kicks off in early March, but the preparation begins months in advance. Koi destined for competition or sale are hand-selected as early as November and conditioned to ensure they are in peak form. The lead-up to the shows is filled with meticulous planning—coordinating booth sponsorships, booking flights, and organizing accommodations.

For West Coast shows, the logistics become even more complex. To reduce stress during transport, koi are fasted before shipment, lowering their ammonia output and making travel easier on the fish. On shipping day, the farm buzzes with activity as koi are carefully packed for their journey. The team works with airlines to secure direct routes and minimize travel time, ensuring the koi arrive safely.

Traveling alongside the koi is essential. By catching the first flight out, dealers meet their fish upon arrival, oversee the unloading process, and quickly acclimate them to their new tanks. Once the display is set, the real fun begins—interacting with koi enthusiasts, sharing knowledge, and helping clients find their perfect fish.

While shows are physically demanding and fast-paced, they offer an incredible opportunity to connect with the community, celebrate the beauty of koi, and see firsthand the excitement these fish bring to their new owners.

Personalized Sales: In-Person and Online Experiences

While koi shows offer valuable exposure, on-farm and online sales are equally vital. For local clients, by-appointment farm visits create a more intimate buying experience. Customers can hand-pick their koi in a relaxed setting, receiving personalized guidance on selection, pond conditions, and koi care.

For remote clients, online sales provide accessibility without compromise. High-quality images and detailed descriptions showcase each koi's unique features, allowing buyers to make informed decisions. Each shipment is carefully prepared, with oxygenated bags and insulated boxes ensuring the fish remain healthy and stress-free during transport. Real-time tracking offers clients peace of mind as they await their new koi.

Whether in person or online, the emphasis is always on exceptional service and helping customers find koi they will cherish for years to come.

The Joy and Reality of the Koi Business

There's no sugarcoating it—being a koi farmer and dealer is hard work. The long days, constant care, and year-round demands can be physically and mentally draining. There are no breaks for holidays or weekends. Even during festive seasons, while others relax, koi farmers remain dedicated—feeding, monitoring water quality, and ensuring the fish thrive.

But despite the intensity, the rewards are profound. Seeing the spark of joy in a customer's eyes when they find their dream koi or hearing about how their pond has been transformed makes every long day worth it.

This is more than a job—it's a lifestyle driven by passion. It's about bringing beauty, serenity, and artistry into people's lives through koi. Whether hand-selecting fish in Japan, caring for them on the farm, or showcasing them at events, every moment offers a chance to share that passion with others.

At the heart of it all, being a koi farmer and dealer is about creating connections—between people, nature, and the timeless beauty of koi. And for those willing to put in the work, the rewards are not only measured in successful sales but also in the enduring relationships and shared love for these remarkable fish.



Straightening out the Tosai growout ponds.

About the Author



Marlon Ngo is the president and owner of Tri-Star Koi LLC in Tennessee, has been passionate about koi since age 12. While studying cellular and molecular biology with aspirations in dentistry, he shifted his career to focus on Japanese imported koi. Starting koi sales in college, he built his business into a top provider of award-winning koi. Dedicated to their care and welfare, Marlon actively shares his expertise at shows and seminars, fostering a thriving koi community. www.tri-starkoi.com





(Left) An eye-catching backdrop is a great way to drive attention to your booth.
(Right) Keep plenty of literature on hand - an essential piece of a successful home show exhibit.

Home Shows: Are They Still Worth It?

by Tim Wood,
Aquatic Edge

Home and garden shows. Flower shows. Spring expos. No matter what they're called, these events have long been a go-to for homeowners seeking inspiration for their next big-ticket project. For decades, shows like these have offered a one-stop shop for everything from kitchens and bathrooms to landscaping and roofing. It seems like a no-brainer for a pond contractor to set up a display and promote the beauty and tranquility of backyard water features—right?

Right?

<Insert cricket noises here.>

Well, maybe it's not that simple. Like many things in business, the decision to exhibit at a home show isn't always clear-cut. While shows were once a guaranteed source of leads, their effectiveness in today's market is up for debate. Let's take a closer look at the history, current landscape, and how you can determine whether investing in a home show booth is worth it for your business.

From Poinsettias to Ponds: A Brief History of Home Shows

The first-ever home show in the United States—and the world—was held nearly 200 years ago in Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society launched the Philadelphia Flower Show at the Masonic Hall on Chestnut Street in 1829. Interestingly, that inaugural event is credited with introducing the poinsettia plant to America.

Fast forward about a century, and home shows became one of the most popular ways for companies to showcase new home decor, gardening products, and construction services to local audiences. The Chelsea Flower Show, one of the world's most famous exhibitions, debuted in the United Kingdom in 1912, cementing the home show tradition as a global phenomenon.

For decades, home shows were a staple of home improvement marketing. From the 1950s through the 1990s, they thrived as consumer habits leaned heavily on in-person shopping. But as times changed, so did the appeal of these events. Today, while some shows remain relevant, others have struggled to keep up with shifting consumer behaviors.

Home Shows Today: Are They Still Effective?

In 2025, home shows are no longer the guaranteed goldmine they once were. Some events still draw large crowds and generate meaningful leads, while others have devolved into little more than flea markets filled with aggressive salespeople hawking "as-seen-on-TV" gadgets.

The Pittsburgh Home and Garden Show, for example, still boasts 1,200 exhibits spread across two floors of a massive downtown convention center. Running for 10 consecutive days, it continues to attract steady traffic. On the flip side, many smaller shows struggle with declining attendance and dwindling vendor participation.

Why the shift? The internet, of course. Today's consumers often prefer to research and hire contractors from the comfort of their homes. They rely on social media





Eye catching displays draw customers to your booth.

referrals, online reviews, and sleek websites instead of walking the aisles of a convention center. Additionally, some shows have earned a bad reputation for filling their booths with low-quality vendors peddling gimmicks. As a contractor, being placed across from the knockoff ShamWow guy isn't just irritating—it's bad for business.

Still, while home shows might not be the marketing powerhouse they once were, they can still be worth the investment—with the right approach.

How to Decide if a Show Is Right for You

Before committing to exhibit, do your homework. The best way to assess whether a home show is worth your time and money is to attend it as a consumer first. Create a list of home shows in your region and visit them as a guest. Walk the floor on a high-traffic day, like a Saturday, to gauge the overall energy and attendance. Pay attention to booth traffic. Are vendors actively engaging with consumers, or are they scrolling on their phones? Are the aisles bustling with potential customers, or are you mostly weaving through disinterested stragglers?

Location matters. Notice which booths are in the prime spots. The most valuable locations tend to be near the entrance, alongside complementary high-end vendors, or near popular displays that draw steady crowds. Conversely, avoid areas with gimmicky vendors or aggressive salespeople. Being stationed next to someone selling miracle mops may push potential clients away from your booth entirely.

If possible, attend on a weekday as well. While the foot traffic will be lighter, you'll get a sense of how many meaningful conversations you could expect during slower periods. Fewer people walking the floor means more opportunity for longer, in-depth interactions with serious prospects.

Take note of the show's amenities, too. Consider the practicality of exhibiting there. Are there convenient water and electrical hookups for displays? Is the lighting adequate to showcase your work? Is there ample parking and easy access for loading and unloading? These factors can significantly impact the overall experience.

Weighing the Logistics

If the show seems promising, it's time to consider whether you have the time, resources, and team capacity to participate effectively. Exhibiting at a home show is a larger commitment than it may appear. It requires a significant investment of both labor and logistics.

You'll need to design and construct a professional booth that captures attention. This might mean installing a working fountain, small pond, or water feature to showcase your skills. Beyond setup, you'll also need staff on hand throughout the event to engage with attendees, answer questions, and capture leads.

The time commitment goes beyond the show itself. Setup and teardown can take hours or even days, depending on the complexity of your display. If your team is already stretched thin with existing client work—especially during the spring rush—you'll need to carefully weigh whether you can afford to divert resources to a show.

Is It in the Budget?

Once you've confirmed the logistics, it's time to assess the financial feasibility.



Our entire team contributes to a successful show.

Home shows vary dramatically in cost. Smaller, local events may charge only a few hundred dollars for booth space, while larger shows in major cities could run into the thousands.

Don't overlook the hidden expenses. Booth rental is just the beginning. You'll need to budget for travel, lodging, and meals for your team. Factor in the costs of marketing materials—brochures, business cards, and branded giveaways. If you plan to build a display pond or fountain, you'll also need to cover the cost of materials and labor.



To ease the financial burden, consider reaching out to your distributor. They may be willing to offer display materials at a discount or extend longer payment terms. It never hurts to ask.

Maximizing Your Investment

If you decide to exhibit, make the most of it. Plan meticulously and go in with clear goals. Be prepared to talk to hundreds of people, answer questions about everything from pond construction to fish health, and capture as many leads as possible.

To boost engagement, consider running a giveaway. Raffles with high-value prizes, such as a YETI cooler, pond maintenance kit, or premium fish food, can entice attendees to hand over their contact information. The more sign-ups you collect, the more potential leads you'll have for follow-ups.

After the show, don't let those leads go cold. Add them to your database



and reach out promptly. A personalized follow-up within a week keeps your business fresh in their minds and increases the likelihood of converting them into clients.

The Verdict: Are Home Shows Still Worth It?

So, are home shows still a smart marketing investment for pond contractors? The answer is… maybe.

While they may no longer guarantee the same return on investment as they did in the past, they can still be valu-



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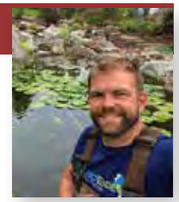
Small water features are easy for attendees to visualize in their own yard.

able—if you choose the right events and approach them strategically. The key is to do your research. Pick shows with strong attendance and a relevant vendor mix. Prioritize events that attract your ideal clientele, and avoid those dominated by gimmicky sales booths.

Finally, remember that the value of a home show goes beyond lead generation. The networking potential with fellow contractors can be just as valuable. A meaningful connection made at the show could lead to collaborations, partnerships, or referrals that extend far beyond the event itself.

Good luck this season—and see you at the show!

About the Author



Tim Wood started Aquatic Edge in 2010 and has over 20 years of experience in the pond industry. Tim and his team are Master Certified Aquascape Contractors, 2016, 2017 and 2021 Water Artisans of the Year Award recipients, and 2020 Aquascape Inc. Artist of the Year. Aquatic Edge is a full service water garden design, repair and installation company located in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area that specializes in creating ecosystem style ponds and water features that are low maintenance and naturally inspired. In his spare time Tim enjoys coaching youth sports, fishing, and spending quality time with his wife and two children.

The Two Most Important Days
in a Business Owner's Journey



by Frank Congilose,CFP, CLU, ChFC
C&A Financial Group

When asked about the most important day in a business owner's life, the initial response might be the day they open their business. However, seasoned entrepreneurs often argue there are two pivotal days: the day they start their business and the day they exit it. These milestones define the trajectory of any entrepreneurial journey, especially when long-term planning is involved.

The Difference Between a Great Career and a Great Business

As an advisor specializing in Exit Planning, I've observed that there's a crucial distinction between having a great career and building a great business.



A great career often revolves around the owner's direct involvement—success depends on their presence. While this can generate substantial income, it limits the business's value for potential buyers.

On the other hand, a great business is one that thrives independently of its owner. If your business can operate seamlessly without you, its value increases significantly. This independence is key to attracting buyers and achieving a lucrative exit.

The "Four P's" of Maximizing Business Value

To ensure your business is positioned for success and maximum value at exit, focus on the following four pillars:

- Product - A valuable product or service is non-negotiable. If what you offer doesn't solve problems or meet customer needs effectively, no one will pay for it.
- Process - A repeatable and efficient process enhances client experiences and ensures consistency. Processes that can be trained and replicated add significant value to a business.
- People - Hiring and retaining skilled employees who can run the business independently of you is critical. A strong team ensures continuity and boosts your business's attractiveness to buyers.
- Profitability - Ultimately, profitability determines the worth of your business. The higher your profits, the greater your valuation when it's time to exit.

Planning for Your Exit: Why It Matters

Every business owner will exit their venture eventually—whether through sale, succession, or closure. Planning well in advance is essential for securing the best outcome. Entrepreneurs who begin with an endgame in mind are better equipped to build businesses that serve them financially while also creating lasting legacies.

Key Takeaways for Entrepreneurs:

- Build your business to run independently of you.
- Focus on product quality, efficient processes, strong teams, and profitability.
- Start planning your exit strategy early to maximize value and minimize stress.

By keeping these principles in mind, you'll not only enjoy success during your entrepreneurial journey but also ensure a smooth transition when it's time to step away from your business.

About the Author



Frank Congilose is Frank Congilose is the Managing Partner and CEO of C&A Financial Group and a veteran, mentor and innovator of the financial services industry since 1981. He leads a team of over 40 advisors serving 10,000+ clients nationwide. An author of four books and founder of The Institute of Responsible Wealth, a financial resource center. Frank is a frequent speaker on wealth-building and has been recognized as a "Leadership Hero" by the GAMA Foundation. He lives at the Jersey Shore with his wife, Diane, and enjoys time with his children and grandchildren.









PPA Pond Professionals Alliance

PPA POND BUILDERS' SUMMER RETREAT AT
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Thursday, July 31 - Sunday, August 3, 2025

Community Building, Business Coaching, Relaxation, Inspiration, EasyPro Facilities Tour

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- Get inspired with leadership coaching from industry experts!
- Tour the EasyPro facilities and learn about how EasyPro can best support your water feature business.
- Relax on the peaceful grounds of Stillwater Reserver and build community with other PPA members.

Whether you're looking to enhance your business, streamline operations or simply recharge, this retreat is designed with you in mind.

Details

Date: Thursday, July 31 (evening arrival) through Sunday, August 3 (morning departure)

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Cost: $475.00 per person. $900 per couple. Includes lodging, food and activities.

Airport Destination: Gerald R. Ford International (GRR) Grand Rapids, MI

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2025 Water Garden Expo *Round-Up!*

A celebration of education, innovation, and industry legacy

by Lauren Nolan,
Publisher of POND Trade Magazine

The 2025 Water Garden Expo (WGE) in Shawnee, Oklahoma, was nothing short of exceptional. Spanning from March 5 to March 7, this year's event brought together pond and water feature professionals from across the country for a dynamic blend of educational seminars, hands-on workshops, and powerful networking opportunities. From business growth strategies to cutting-edge construction techniques, the Expo once again proved itself as a cornerstone event for the industry.

Empowering Education and Expert Insights

One of the most impactful presentations came from Steve Rozenberg, who opened the Expo with his seminar, "You May Be the Problem in Your Business." With a captivating delivery, Steve challenged attendees to examine the self-imposed obstacles that often hinder business growth. His practical strategies for





boosting profitability while working smarter—not harder—offered attendees valuable takeaways to implement in their own operations.

Later, Steve returned with "Close the Deal: Mastering Objection Handling," a powerful session focused on refining sales techniques. He shared expert insights on customer behavior, offering practical tips to overcome objections and convert more leads into loyal clients. The session resonated with pond professionals seeking to elevate their sales game.

Rick Weidman also delivered a standout presentation with "Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions by Pond & Lake Owners." His session addressed common challenges and misconceptions faced by industry professionals, equipping them with clear, practical solutions to better serve their clients.

In a two-part seminar, Stacy Pruitt explored the nuances of working with Elevate PondGard EPDM liners. Covering everything from proper installation methods to troubleshooting potential pitfalls, Stacy's expertise provided attendees with valuable technical knowledge to help them avoid costly mistakes and improve project outcomes.

An Inspiring Fireside Chat on Growth and Self-Awareness

A true highlight of the Expo was the fireside chat between Brian Fitzsimmons, CEO and owner of Fitz's Fish Ponds, and industry icon Eric Triplett. In front of a packed room, the two conducted a live podcast that peeled back the curtain on the realities of business growth.











Brian shared candid insights from his own journey, underscoring that "the way I am doing it may not be right for you." His message emphasized the importance of self-awareness in business—knowing your strengths, identifying your weaknesses, and surrounding yourself with team members who complement your skill set. His honesty and humility struck a chord with fellow business owners, offering a refreshing perspective on scaling a company sustainably.

PPA's Impact and the Power of Collaboration

The Pond Professionals Alliance (PPA) also took center stage at this year's Expo. Craig McBride and Ana Arntson introduced attendees to the organization, outlining its mission to empower and support industry professionals through education, networking, and collaboration. Their presentation highlighted how PPA fosters growth by bringing together pond builders, suppliers, and service providers to share knowledge and resources.

The event also featured the PPA Build Recap, where Larry Carnes and Craig McBride reflected on the impressive water feature project the organization completed just before the Expo. Their detailed breakdown of the build process showcased the skill, creativity, and teamwork that defined the project, inspiring others to take on their own ambitious installations.

Water Artisans of the Year: Celebrating the Industry's Best

One of the most anticipated moments of the Expo was the announcement of the 2025 Water Artisans of the Year. This year, Eric Arntson of Stonebridge Landscape made history by securing his third win, earning him a place in the prestigious Triple Crown Club—a distinction reserved for elite water feature builders. Eric's achievement was met with enthusiastic applause, celebrating his remarkable creativity, craftsmanship, and dedication to the industry.

A Bittersweet Farewell and an Exciting New Chapter

A particularly emotional moment came with the announcement of Lora Lee Gelles' retirement. As the longtime publisher of POND Trade Magazine, Lora Lee has been a pillar of the pond and water feature industry for years. Her unwavering dedication and passion have helped elevate the industry, giving professionals a platform to share their expertise and celebrate their artistry.

More Than an Expo—A Community of Connection

Beyond the exceptional seminars and major announcements, the Water Garden Expo once again proved itself to be more than just an educational event—it was a celebration of community. The connections made during these few days will have a lasting impact, fostering partnerships, friendships, and future collaborations.

For anyone in the pond and water feature industry—whether a seasoned professional or an emerging contractor—WGE is an event that should not be missed. The insights gained, the skills learned, and the relationships built at this Expo have the power to reshape and strengthen any business in the field.

As I reflect on this year's Expo, I am filled with excitement for the future of the industry and the role POND Trade Magazine will continue to play in sharing the stories, innovations, and triumphs of water feature professionals. Here's to the next chapter—and to seeing you at WGE 2026!











We Bid You Adieu, **Too**

A heartfelt thankyou from the pond community

From all of us in the POND Trade Community, thank you for your many years of service.



Wow, I'm gonna miss you Lora Lee! You have been an exceptional steward of the POND Trade Magazine as well as a good friend. Your thoughtful approach and warm hearted nature made writing for you completely delightful! I will miss our late night back and forth getting things done! Keep up your great artwork! I am sure you will enjoy the extra time! Enjoy your retirement!!! Xoxo

- Kelly Billings

This amazing woman will be missed dearly! I always smile when I think about how she really chopped it up with contractors like a boss lady, sipping bourbon and smoking cigars while talking business and the pond industry after hours at conventions! I'll always have mad respect for Mrs. Lora Lee!

Life is Short, Enjoy Koi

- Triplett

Lora Lee, Thank you for all your hard work promoting and informing our industry! You have always included great information about everything ponds and water features and kept us up to date on happenings with pond professionals all over. It's been great to see you include perspectives from all across our industry! Best wishes and happy retirement!

- Chris Ostrander

Best wishes and blessings on your new journey, Lora Lee. It has truly been a pleasure to contribute to a wonderful magazine and work with you throughout the years. Your impact and dedication to our industry through POND Trade Magazine, has been nothing short of honorable. Thank you for your vision and impact on the pond world.

All the very best,

- Dean Pipito

It's been great having you as part of our little niche industry! Always enjoyed seeing you at events and sharing cocktails and stories! I hope you and your husband have some awesome retirement adventures planned! Cheers!

- Paul Holderman

Thank you Lora Lee, for the hours you have spent creating an amazing publication for our industry. You've helped to make us all better!

- Tim Wood

Lora has been wonderful to work with over the last few years. She was so patient with me as I navigated the opportunities she presented to DreamScapes to have our work in POND Trade Magazine. I remember having a great conversation with Lora at Pondemonium last year and am a little sad she is leaving. Blessings on the next chapters of Lora Lee Gelles' life moving forward, and much gratitude for all of her help over the years!

- James Seamys Hiestand

Thank you, Lora Lee, for your amazing work through the years helping create such a wonderful publication. It was a joy to work with you on article writing. Our company has really enjoyed the wonderful content you created during your tenure. AWM Water Features wishes you well in your future endeavors!

- Mike Muyskens

It was nice knowing you Lora Lee, I hope our paths cross again. I always enjoy seeing you in person. I hope you will still come around some of the industry events, albeit socially and more relaxed. You are a delightful person to be around. I have enjoyed riding tour buses with you and getting to know you. Enjoy your retirement. Paint. Do all the fun bucket list stuff, have fun. God bless. You have made the magazine great, when magazines and newspapers are dying. Thank you. I hope to see you again. This transition surprised me. Make it a great next chapter.

- Kevin Soergel

It has been a pleasure to share our passion with POND Trade Magazine on multiple occasions. Throughout this journey, Lora Lee Gelles has guided us with her signature flair, ensuring each piece became a compelling read. Like a true diplomat, she navigated the editorial process with grace-sometimes stepping on our shiny new shoes without leaving a scratch. Lora Lee has been an absolute joy to work with, and we will deeply miss her. Wishing you a well-earned and wonderful retirement, my friend. Enjoy every moment!

- Tom Dieck

Lora Lee was a great ambassador for the water garden industry. Always making sure to attend industry events and to promote the water garden marketplace. She will be missed by all of us who call her a friend.

- Jeff Weemhoff

Doesn't it feel good to do good. That was a guiding principle that fueled Lora Lee. Lora Lee took over the magazine during a very contentious time within the industry and became a uniter. Articles were manufacturer's info advertisements for their products, and each manufacturer considered anyone not in their camp as the enemy. Lora Lee gave authorship back to the individual contractors doing the work - thus placing them in the spotlight instead of a brand name. This change of focus created more of a brotherhood of ponders and installers, while contributing to the advancement of installation techniques. What she accomplished was no easy task. It was her positive leadership and the delivery of a quality publication that the whole industry benefited from.

- Rick Smith

I met Lora Lee at an IPPCA event just prior to her buying the magazine. She was on pins and needles with excitement and a little apprehension. She did not even know how to spell Koi! However, her growth and dedication turned a good magazine into a great force to encourage construction knowledge, water dynamics, and business building concepts. Lora Lee's idea and promotion of the industry wide Water Artisans of The Year actually help promote unity among different manufacturers. This was huge. Personally, you would never find Lora Lee without a smile on her face and encouragement in her heart. She will be dearly missed by so many. My best to you, Lora Lee! Enjoy these following years you have earned.

- Max Taylor

It's been an incredible journey watching Lora Lee turn POND Trade Magazine into the powerhouse it is today. Under her leadership, the magazine has blossomed into a dynamic, in-depth resource for contractors, distributors, and manufacturers alike. POND Trade Magazine has truly become the pulse of the waterscape industry, all thanks to Lora Lee's vision. I'll never forget when Lora Lee first approached me at the 2013 Water Garden Expo, asking me to write an article for the upcoming issue. Despite it being one of the busiest times of the year for me, I managed to hit the deadline on the last day. Over the next few years, I got to know Lora Lee even better, and I had the privilege of joining the POND Trade Magazine editorial committee. It's been an amazing ride, collaborating with Lora Lee for the past 12 years. I even have the honor of being the first contractor to teach Lora Lee how to operate an excavator—a memory I'll always treasure. One trip that stands out was when Lora Lee, Max Taylor, Mike White, Mark Gibson, and I headed to the Louisville Hardscape Show to see the latest in the waterscape/hardscape world. While the trade show was fantastic, it was the time we spent on the Bourbon Trail that really stole the show. We enjoyed great food, sipped bourbon, and shared laughs with a cigar or two. Yes, Lora Lee is a fan of a good cigar! There are countless moments—both work-related and just for fun—that I'll always cherish. So, all that's left to say is smile, smile, smile. We love you, Lora Lee!

- Ben Timmermans









Mike about to strangle Triplett from a polyurethane argument. Mike was right as usual!

Mike White 1951-2025

From Mentor to Memory, Rest in Peace Pond Wizard

By Eric Triplett, The Pond Digger

The pond world has lost it's wizard, Mike White, the man, the myth, the legend that shared so generously of himself, his time, his knowledge, and anything else he had to give. He was warm, sincere, and ALWAYS smiling. He was happy to talk about ponds whenever you were ready, and I personally will deeply miss this great man, who's influence helped to shape my business and passion for learning.

In 2006, while searching out new techniques, ideas, and construction philosophies in the pond industry, I heard whispers of a man that had so much knowledge and creativity that he was practically a mythical figure. I made a pilgrimage to Illinois to meet this legend, and was surprised to find an amazing friend. He was always there for me, any time, night or day, if I needed him.

Mike challenged me, my beliefs, my methods—not to prove a point but to make me better. He questioned my construction techniques, my philosophies, and practices with thoughtful, caring, scientific questions to help me understand more. He was a mentor in the truest sense of the word.

He was instrumental in the beginning design phase of Helix pond filtration equipment. Mike's mind was a vault of calculations, measurements, capacities, and flow rates, all of which he could recite off of the top of his head, effortlessly. In the time before google, Mike could tell you in an instant how much air could flow through four hundred three eighths inch holes. His friends and peers called him Gandalf the Pond Wizard, and rightfully so.

Beyond science, beyond the mentorship, there



Mike White 1951-2025



Well respected by pond professionals far and wide.



Measuring a massive hyacinth probably for scientific data.

was the man—one of integrity, dedication, and friendship. I'll never forget the night we slowed down long enough to teach me how to make homemade pizza from scratch, a rare moment of relaxation in a life devoted to building, teaching, and problem solving.

Mike's memory was staggering, his craftsmanship was masterful, and his presence will be missed by all that were blessed to know him.

In honor of Mike, I will do as he did; share my experiences, my knowledge, my successes and failures with the next generation of pond builders. Because that is what Mike stood for—helping others, pushing the industry forward, and leaving things better than he found them. Rest easy my dear friend, the wisdom you shared with everyone will ripple through this industry for many generations to come.

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Registration for the 2025 IWGS Symposium is Open!

The International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society will host its 2025 symposium Aug. 12–16 in New York City, featuring tours, educational events and exclusive garden access.

The main symposium includes visits to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Botanical Garden, Aquascapes Unlimited, Fitz's Fish Ponds and Waterford Gardens (now FFP Saddle River). The event will conclude with Education Day and a closing banquet at Wave Hill Botanic Garden.

Attendees may also join optional pre- and post-symposium tours. The pre-symposium tour on Aug. 12 includes a day exploring Central Park, with stops at Little Island, the Tulip Garden, Conservatory Garden and a private tour at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The post-symposium tour on Aug. 16 offers a visit to the newly reimagined Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, showcasing new glasshouses, gardens, landscapes and dining experiences.

Space is limited for tours, and early booking is recommended. The symposium offers a unique opportunity to connect with fellow water garden enthusiasts and professionals.

To register or learn more, visit iwgs.org/2025-symposium-nwyork.

Matala Announces New EZClear UV Clarifiers

Matala now offers the EZClear UV Clarifier with a 2-inch inlet and outlet featuring a half union for Schedule 40 PVC pipe connections. The original EZClear UV Clarifier with 1.5-inch water inlet and outlet and a multi-barb adapter for flexible hose connections also remains available.

Customers now have more options to meet their filtration needs.

Key features include:

- T5 Philips UV lamps, available in 16-watt, 25-watt, 40-watt, 75-watt, and special-order 145-watt options.
- 2-inch half union connection for rigid Schedule 40 PVC.
- EPA-registered device (EPA Est. No. 98547-TWN-1).

For more information contact:
Matala USA
949-273-8888
info@MatalaUSA.com
support@MatalaUSA.com





Aquascape Introduces Fountain Bowls and Fountain Bowl Biological Filter Kits

Aquascape, North America's leading innovator in the water gardening industry, has announced the release of its new Fountain Bowls and Fountain Bowl Biological Filter Kits, designed to bring beauty, versatility and functionality to any outdoor space.

The durable, easy-to-install Fountain Bowls are ideal for creating elegant container water gardens, standalone fountains or decorative pond features.

"Fountain Bowls are simple to set up and transform almost any space into a tranquil oasis," said Dave Kelly, vice president of product development. "Add plants, guppies and a fountain spitter to create a complete, miniature ecosystem. Or integrate the bowls into existing ponds and waterfalls for added aeration and interest."

Optional Fountain Bowl Hanging Planters and Shelves allow for customizable planting options around and within the bowl. For added functionality, the Fountain Bowl Biological Filter Kit easily converts the bowls into effective biological filters, capable of filtering ponds and waterfalls up to 3,500 gallons.

This affordable solution promotes clean, clear water with minimal maintenance while enhancing the visual and ecological value of any water feature.

The new products are available through Aquascape distributors, retailers and online. For more information, visit aquascapeinc.com or call 866-877-6637.

EasyPro is Excited to Sponsor this PPA Pond Builders Retreat!

This is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to relax, connect, learn and grow with fellow professionals in the pond industry.

- Workshop with Clayton Graba of Kaeru CX to learn about automations that will make your life easier.
- Get inspired with leadership coaching from industry experts.
- Tour the EasyPro facilities and learn about how EasyPro can best support your water feature business.
- Relax on the peaceful grounds of Stillwater Reserve and build community with other PPA members.

Whether you're looking to enhance your business, streamline operations or simply recharge, this retreat is designed with you in mind.

Reserve Your Spot Today!

Visit www.pondprofessionalsalliance.org/events





New Pulse 6 Aquarius Eco Premium Pumps!

They're here! Oase Pulse 6 technology has arrived in the new Aquarius Eco Premium line of synchronous fountain pumps.

This advanced motor technology features more magnets, reducing vibration and making the pumps 50% more efficient. With Dynamic Flow Control and compatibility with the Oase Control app, users can customize water patterns, adjust flow and create stunning fountain effects—right from their smartphone.

The pumps are built for both submersible and in-line water feature applications and are engineered to operate in a variety of environments, including fresh, salt and chlorinated water.

Learn more at atlantic-oase.com/products/categories/pump/aquarius-eco-premium

Fitz's Fish Ponds Announces Koi Fest 2025: A Premier Event for Koi Enthusiasts

Fitz's Fish Ponds will host its fourth annual Koi Fest on Saturday, Aug. 23, 2025, at its Milford, New Jersey location. This event celebrates koi, culture and community, welcoming enthusiasts of all experience levels.

Highlights include the Tri-State ZNA Koi Show, featuring some of the region's top koi, and a Japanese-style koi auction offering unique specimens for bidding. Leading vendors in pond construction, maintenance and aquascaping will showcase their products and services throughout the day.

Family-friendly activities include hot air balloon rides, a bounce house, face painting and art stations, while food trucks and live entertainment round out the day's events.

A Special Access Day will be held Friday, Aug. 22, offering early admission, a private guided koi buying tour and a welcome dinner with sushi and hibachi. VIP and Special Access tickets include exclusive perks, while general admission is free with pre-registration.

To learn more or to become a vendor or sponsor, visit fitzfishponds.com/koi-fest-event-2025 or email koifest@fitzfishponds.com.





Save the Date - KC Water Garden Society 2025 Tour

Dive into enchantment at the 32nd annual Greater Kansas City Water Garden Society Tour, themed "Aquatic Frolic." This summer's events span five Saturdays in June, July and August, celebrating the wonders of water gardening throughout the metro area. Plein-air artists will once again display their unique work at each site.

Tickets for all five Saturdays are $15 and will be available on Eventbrite beginning May 1—just in time for Mother's Day giving. Physical copies of the tour book and tickets will be available at garden centers starting June 1.

"Aquatic Frolic" offers visitors a whimsical adventure featuring lush aquatic blooms, playful koi and cascading waterfalls—reflected in the event logo of a fairy at play beside a koi-filled water garden. Whether you encounter gardens that are formal and symmetrical, natural and serene, or creative and rustic, each space reflects the owners' dreams and creativity in their own unique landscape.

All proceeds from the tour support the society's ongoing mission to build and maintain water features for schools and other nonprofits. Children under 14 attend for free, and the $15 ticket covers all five Saturday tours. With more than 50 water gardens on display, you'll want to mark your calendar and let the "Aquatic Frolic" inspire you.

Tour Dates:
Tour #1 – June 28: Kansas South, I-70 to Louisburg
Tour #2 – July 12: Kansas and Missouri north of I-70
Tour #3 – July 19: Lawrence, Kansas; Franklin and Douglas counties
Tour #4 – Aug. 2: Jackson County, Missouri, south of I-70
Tour #5 – Aug. 9: Cass County

For more info: www.kcwatergardens.com



American Fire Products Celebrates 20 Years with a Bold New Rebrand!

To mark 20 years of innovation and growth, American Fire Glass has rebranded as American Fire Products, reflecting its evolution into a full-service manufacturer and distributor of fire pit burners, electronic ignition systems and fire pit accessories.

"Fire glass was where we started, but today, we are so much more than that," said Founder and CEO Matt Doll. "Our new name better represents the full range of high-quality fire products we offer."

Founded in 2005 from a garage operation by Doll and his wife, Kelly, the company has grown into a national leader in outdoor fire solutions. The rebrand includes a new website and improved dealer experience, simplifying access to its comprehensive line of products.

American Fire Products remains a family-run business, with several generations and longtime employees forming the backbone of its team. The company's mission continues to focus on delivering innovative, reliable products that elevate outdoor living spaces.

"We've grown far beyond just fire glass," Doll said. "Our customers can expect the same great service and a stronger commitment to innovation for the next 20 years."

Learn more at AmericanFireProducts.com, or contact Mike Montembeau, vice president of marketing, at pr@americanfireproducts.com or 888-264-1017, ext. 815.



HNA Registration Now Open!



Registration is now open for Hardscape North America, the premier event for hardscape professionals, taking place Oct. 22–24 at the Kentucky Exposition Center. Attendees can register by May 31 for just $25 at HardscapeNA.com.

Produced by the Concrete Masonry & Hardscapes Association and endorsed by the Brick Industry Association and the Natural Stone Institute, HNA offers hands-on demonstrations, cutting-edge product displays, top-tier education and exclusive networking events. CMHA, BIA and NSI members can save up to 30% on education for their entire teams.

New in 2025 is a CDL driver info session. Returning favorites include the Hardscape House demo pavilion, the National Installer Championship (with more than $38,000 in prizes), and the VIP Pass, which includes 15 education sessions and two workshops.

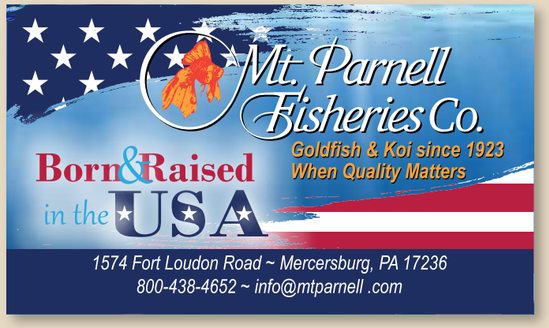
Registration also includes access to Equip Exposition, featuring the 30-acre Outdoor Demo Yard and a keynote by Savannah Bananas founder Jesse Cole. Attendees can also enjoy a Thursday night concert with Big & Rich and Gretchen Wilson, along with events like the Women's Leadership Reception, Drone Zone and 4th Street Live! party.

Hotel booking is now open at the Hyatt Regency Louisville, the show's headquarters hotel.

Prices increase after May 31. Learn more and register at HardscapeNA.com



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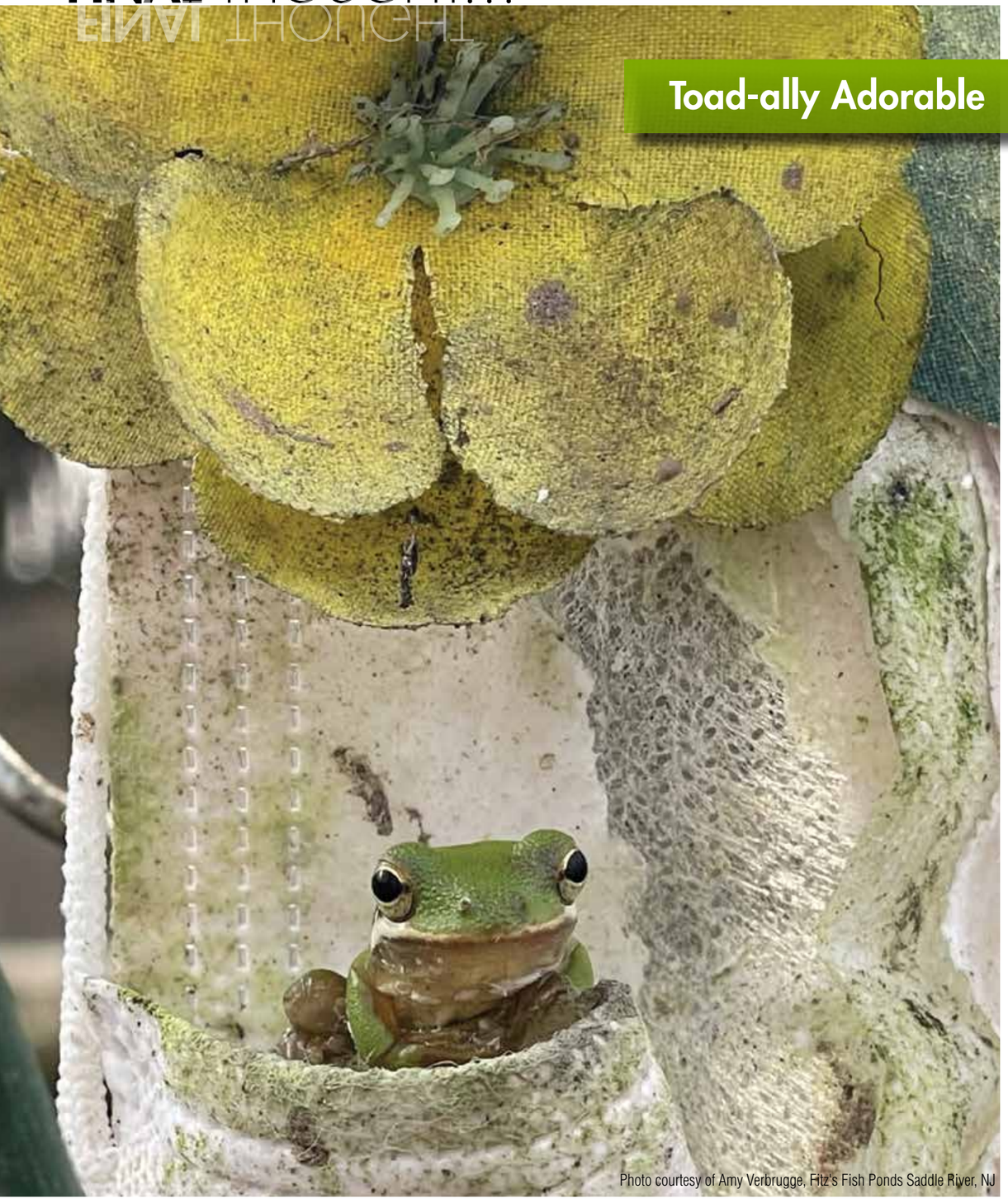


Photo courtesy of Amy Verbrugge, Fitz's Fish Ponds Saddle River, NJ







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