

Jump In

For homeowners with backyard space to spare, swimming ponds – complete with fish and lots of greenery – are all the rage BY DANIEL DROLET



FORGET THE SWIMMING POOL — even the salt-water pool — as a status symbol. No, the really avant-garde thing right now, if you have a big enough yard, is to own your very own swimming *pond*.

What, exactly, is a swimming pond, you ask? Well, essentially, it's a small artificial lake, complete with fish, that filters water just as a natural lake does. And — bonus — no chlorine! Nicholas Bott has one in the backyard of his Chelsea home, quite literally steps from his back door.

"I've always liked swimming in lakes," says Bott, who owns The Pond Clinic, a Bell's Corners firm that specializes in organic ponds and water gardens. "When we started getting heavily into the water-gardening business, I said to myself, 'I'm going to build a pond big enough to swim in.'" Three years ago, after seeing a one-acre swimming pond at the Chicago home of a pool-building colleague, he did just that.

Now, instead of having to drive to the family cottage 90 minutes away for a swim, he literally walks out the back door and jumps in to take a quick, refreshing dip after work or to go snorkelling with his two daughters. When they're chasing fish, he says, he feels as though he's in the Caribbean.



Water world: Nicholas Bott (left) and his family take a dip in their personal backyard swimming pond. Bott installed it two years ago after seeing a one-acre swimming pond at the Chicago home of a pool-building colleague. Bott says the whole family love putting on their masks and snorkels to explore the pond and chase the fish that call this spot home

Bott's pond is irregularly shaped and about 60 by 40 feet at its widest point. That, he points out, is several times the size of the average backyard pool. But the pond neither looks nor feels nor smells like a pool. It really does resemble a little



Free fall: It takes six hours for the pump to circulate all the water. A small waterfall (above) cascades into the pond at one end, and at the other, the water drains into a filtering area

lake. There's a small beach area at one end, with shallow shelves where all manner of aquatic plants grow. Only the central part of the pond is swimming-pool deep.

The water is moved around by a pump, which circulates the entire 57,000 gallons every six hours or so. A small waterfall cascades into the pond at one end, and at the other, the water drains into a filtering area. The whole idea is to create a self-contained ecosystem using plants, fish, and bacteria that filter the water just the same way a natural wetland does. "It's self-sustaining," says Bott. "The fish that swim around eat the excess plant matter and debris."

It took Bott about three weeks to do the basic construction work for his pond. That included excavating, installing a rubber membrane, and building shelves for the plants. Then the plants were put in and koi introduced. Some of the plants are perennials, while others are tropical and must be restocked each year. The result is a little lake nestled in Bott's forested lot.

Speaking of swimming ponds as a trend, Bott says they have totally caught on in Germany, where they are at least as popular as swimming pools. He says he expects to see more and more of them in Canada in the years ahead. One of the other big pluses of a pond over a pool, he says, is visual. Because the pond is really an aquatic garden, it's visually appealing even when swimming is not an option. "Swimming is from June to September. But we can enjoy the pond from April to November as a garden." **END**