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A Pool for the Decades

By Dan Vierria
Sacramento Bee

Pools age, but not so gracefully. Tiles chip and fade, plaster degrades and decking shows wear and tear.



This remodeled pool at Peter Sparre's home in Land Park, Calif., has a new spa in the foreground and fountain and roses along the brick walls. (SHNS photo by Owen Brewer / The Sacramento Bee)

Peter and Alison Sparre of Sacramento, Calif., have renovated their swimming pool twice during the past 20 years, most recently about two years ago.

"I know some people don't use their pools much, but somebody is in our pool every day, all summer long," Alison Sparre said. "If it's not me or my husband, it's our granddaughter or the dogs."

Modern upgrades such as pool water features, attractive finishes and fiber-optic lighting inspire many renovations. Geremia Pools of Sacramento was hired to complete the Sparre project. Landscape architect Bill Andersen drew up the plans and landscape designer Michael Glassman contributed ideas for plantings, which included rose gardens.

An updated appearance was important to the Sparres, but a leaky main drain ultimately motivated the renovation. Cracks caused by the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 had marred the finish, and the pool equipment was outdated and not energy-efficient. Only the original shell remained in the ground after demolition. The entire project spanned an eight-month period.

Mike Geremia of Geremia Pools says there are two levels of

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swimming pool renovation: new tile and plaster or a complete makeover, which often includes new plumbing and equipment. The Sparres chose the complete makeover.

"It's like remodeling your house; eventually you strip it down to the shell," Geremia said.

He estimates that new tile and plaster will cost \$4,000 to \$7,000. A complete renovation will cost much more, he said, as it could entail moving pool equipment, landscaping, entertainment areas, reshaping the pool and other labor-intensive jobs.

"A complete remodel takes it from the backyard pool to the backyard environment," Geremia said. "It becomes an extension of the living area. The idea is to create a pool that you can spend more time enjoying than maintaining."

When the Sparres purchased the home 30 years ago, it already had the rectangular swimming pool that occupies most of the compact back yard. The Sparres removed concrete decking along with the diving board because of concerns about potential injuries and liability.

Also long gone are camphor, hawthorn and Carolina laurel cherry trees, all too messy to plant near pools.

"We even had tree limbs hanging over our pool," Alison Sparre said.

Today, used brick surrounds the pool and nearby circular spa, and peacock slate has been set under the new, wooden patio cover. A fountain next to a street-side wall screened by rose blossoms sends water tumbling down four tiers.

Roses, including a few climbers and weeping tree roses, are the dominant plants around the pool. An area originally used as a dog run has been planted with Japanese maples and sasanqua camellias. Container-grown clematis vines climb decorative supports under the patio cover, and deep-blue Crystal Palace lobelia cascades from containers arranged alongside the pool. The blue theme begins with the pool's decorative tile -- it's cobalt-blue, imported from Portugal.

Diamond Bright, a durable, exposed-aggregate product that is both handsome and resistant to pool chemicals, was chosen to resurface the pool.

The Sparre's three golden retrievers have logged thousands of laps in the pool. Alison Sparre says the old pool stairs were chipped where canine toenails met plaster.

"The new finish is harder than plaster," Sparre said.