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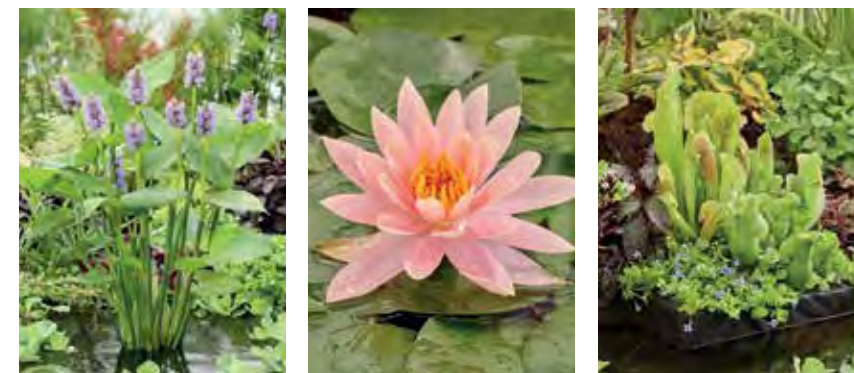


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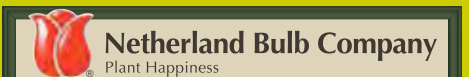
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Upcoming Events

2026

- September 4-6**
Miami Koi Show
The Koi Venue
Miami, FL
www.thekoivenue.com

September 12-13
Aquashella
NJ Convention Center
Edison, NJ
www.aquashella.com/

September 16-18
Pond Professional Alliance Retreat
Stillwater Reserve
Newaygo, MI
www.pondprofessionalalliance.org/events

September 25-27
South Carolina Koi & Goldfish Show
Activity & Senior Center
Simpsonville, SC
www.sckwgs.org

September 26-27
Fresno Koi Show
Woodward Park
Fresno, CA
www.cencalkoi.com/koi-show/

- October 21-23**
Hardscapes North America
Kentucky Exposition Center
Louisville, KY
www.hardscapena.com

November 4-5
Atlantic-Oase Professional Conference
Cambria Hotel
Austin, TX

2027
February 10-12
Water Garden Expo
Grand Casino Resort
Shawnee, OK
www.wgexpo.com

February 27-28
All American Young Koi Show
Miami, FL
www.allamericankoishow.com

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Publisher's Perspective

Built to Evolve



There is something special about seeing what happens after the work is done.

In the pond and water feature industry, we spend a lot of time celebrating the build — the excavation, stonework, engineering and that exciting moment when the water begins to flow. But some of the best stories begin afterward. Ponds mature. Plants establish themselves. Fish grow. Ecosystems find

their balance. And, as professionals, we continue learning and evolving right alongside them.

That idea of growth and evolution runs throughout this issue of POND Trade Magazine.

In “Beyond the Build: One Year Later” (p. 8), Brian Fitzsimmons returns to an extraordinary recreation pond to see how mature plantings, thriving koi and time have transformed the project. Rip Sokol looks to the roots of our industry in “A Pilgrimage to Latour-Marliac” (p. 16), exploring the legendary French water gardens and the plants and people that helped shape water gardening as we know it today.

That same theme takes us in very different directions throughout the issue. Angel Peña explores longevity, recovery and conservation through the remarkable story of the Galapagos tortoise in “Giants of Conservation” (p. 24), while Yvo de Wal takes us “Inside the World’s Largest Koi Collection” (p. 30), where sophisticated filtration and Japanese influence create an environment for world-class koi to thrive.

On the construction and science side, Carl Petite takes readers behind the scenes of “The Eliminator Pond” (p. 38), an ambitious recreational swim pond that demonstrates how engineering and craftsmanship continue to push our industry forward. Carolyn Weise’s “The Importance of Pond Biofilms” (p. 47) reminds us that some of the most important elements of a healthy pond are the ones we cannot see.

And that brings me to an evolution happening right here at POND Trade.

The 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards are officially open and accepting submissions!

Over the past several months, our WATY Committee has

worked to strengthen and expand the program while standardizing judging criteria. Read more about the changes in “WATY: A New Chapter Begins” (p. 53).

I want to thank our committee for the time and expertise they have dedicated to shaping this year’s program, as well as our 2026 WATY judges, whom we are excited to introduce in “WATY: Meet the Judges” (p. 58).

If you have built something you are proud of, submit it. If you know someone who has created something extraordinary, nominate it. Great craftsmanship deserves to be recognized, whether it comes from an emerging professional or someone who has spent a lifetime perfecting the craft.

That is what this issue ultimately reminds me: Great things are built, but the best things continue to evolve.

I cannot wait to see what our industry submits this year.

Lauren Nolan
Publisher
POND Trade Magazine

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Beyond the Build

ONE YEAR LATER

| Built for **Life** |

A year later, a once-
bold vision is alive and
flourishing.

by Brian Fitzsimmons,

Fitz's Fish Ponds

When the last boulder was set and the water first began to move through Sasha Vaynerchuk's newly transformed backyard pond, the scale of the project was impossible to miss. A collaboration among some of the pond industry's most accomplished contractors had turned a chronically muddy body of water into a quarter-million-gallon recreation pond anchored by massive stone, a sweeping waterfall and a carefully engineered wetland filtration system.

But a pond of this kind is never truly finished on the day construction ends. Stone establishes the framework; water begins the process. Plants must root, fish must settle in and the surrounding landscape must gradually soften the edges. Nearly a year after the original build, the pond has entered that next chapter, and in many ways, it is now showing what the project was always intended to become.

The once-new feature has grown into its setting. Greenery now spills between boulders, flowering plants punctuate the shoreline and koi move through water clear enough to reveal fish far below the surface. Even more telling, the pond has supported a successful spawn. Roughly 100 baby koi have been observed darting among the larger fish, finding refuge within rockwork, fish caves, planted margins and the pond's varied shoreline.

What began as an extraordinary construction project has become a living ecosystem.

Planting for Beauty and for the Real World

The planting plan began at Fitz’s Fish Ponds’ Saddle River location, where Emily Lane and Tom Swinarsky met with Sasha in the Hardy Greenhouse. Surrounded by hundreds of marginal pond plants, they worked through dozens of possibilities, considering far more than color alone. Growth habits, mature size and cold hardiness all mattered. Sasha wanted varieties capable of surviving New Jersey winters and returning stronger each summer, allowing the landscape to become fuller and more established with every season.

There was also a less glamorous, but essential, consideration: wildlife. Deer are drawn to the sound and availability of the water, and once they arrive for a drink, lilies and other tender plants can quickly become part of the menu. Geese, koi and other visitors create their own pressures. The planting team therefore had to balance beauty with durability, choosing less appealing varieties where possible and positioning more vulnerable plants where animals would have difficulty reaching them.

The final palette is broad and intentionally layered. Several varieties of water lilies and lotus bring flowers to the open water, while tall marginals give height and structure. Lower-growing plants creep around the edges, helping blur the transition between pond and landscape. The mix includes noninvasive yellow iris, monkeyflower, moneywort, forget-me-nots, hardy water canna, scarlet rose mallow, several rush varieties, four-leaf clover, golden creeping Jenny and reeds. Forget-me-nots appear both in the pond and in the surrounding beds, visually tying the aquatic and terrestrial landscapes together.

Tropical plants were added selectively to extend the bloom



season. These plants provide late-season color but require a different maintenance plan: before winter, they will be lifted and returned to the greenhouses. Hardy varieties will remain in place, where their root systems can continue to establish and return with greater vigor the following year.

The result is more than ornamental. The plants attract pollinators, contribute to natural filtration, help stabilize the pond’s margins and, in certain cases, add oxygen to the water. Together they demonstrate the central idea behind the follow-up phase of the project: beauty and function do not have to compete.



Designing for a Pond That Rises and Falls

One of the original project’s defining challenges remains central to how the pond looks and performs. Its water level is not fixed. The pond is supplied by rainfall and runoff from a nearby stream, so its elevation can change dramatically between wet and dry periods—at times by several feet.

That fluctuation shaped the coping from the beginning. Instead of building an edge that appears finished at only one precise waterline, the team used large stones, gravel, logs and driftwood to create a broad, natural transition. When the water recedes, the exposed shoreline still feels intentional. When it rises, additional stones become submerged and the pond takes on a fuller character without losing the integrity of its edge treatment.

The new plantings reinforce that adaptability. Patches of pickerel rush and water lilies soften the coping, while lotus, canna and horsetail rush occupy different elevations around the pond. As the hardy plants establish themselves in the soil,



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Breathtaking view of the Vaynerchuk pond one year after completion.



Exceptional water clarity offers a striking view of the koi thriving beneath the surface of Sasha Vaynerchuk's pond.

they will be better equipped to tolerate changing moisture conditions. The landscape can respond to a rainy season or a drought without appearing unfinished in either one.

The skimming system required the same kind of flexibility. Because the pond may sit roughly a foot higher or lower than its typical level, the skimmer was installed lower in the feature than it would be in a conventional pond. Its placement and disguise demanded creative engineering, including faux-rock covers that allow the mechanical components to disappear into the natural setting. Atlantic-Oase supplied the products used throughout the build, with team members Demi, Jeff and Tyler contributing hands-on support to help solve these unusual conditions.

Small Changes That Make the Pond More Livable

A year of use has also revealed opportunities to refine how people move through and experience the space. Stepping stones are being added through the lower bog so Sasha can cross the water more comfortably and reach the opposite side. The original stones were spaced too far apart for an easy walk; the added pieces will make the wetland area both more accessible and more interactive.

The bog itself has developed into one of the pond's most engaging zones. Two planted groupings sit near the upper portion and two more anchor the lower area, preserving a clean sightline from the home's front door down through the bog. Water, bits of plant material and small natural food sources—including mosquito larvae—travel over the falls and collect near the base. The koi have learned to gather there, waiting for whatever the current delivers.

That behavior is a small but satisfying sign that the feature is no longer simply a designed landscape. The fish are reading it as habitat.

From Property Stones to a Sense of Place

The maturing plants have also brought renewed attention to the project's most distinctive materials. Nearly every major stone used in the pond was harvested from the woods on the property. During construction, a crew extracted and moved boulders while Sasha—who has lived there for nearly three decades and knows the woods intimately—identified individual stones he wanted incorporated into the design.

Some are the size of small cars. They form the waterfall, retain changes in elevation and give the shoreline a scale appropriate to the pond. Others were used more quietly, creating ledges, hiding areas and natural transitions. Driftwood and logs collected from the property add another layer of authenticity. Nothing feels imported into the setting; the pond appears to have emerged from the land around it.

A newly placed boulder near the lower bog continues that approach. It is another example of the project evolving after the main construction phase—not through a wholesale redesign, but through careful additions that strengthen the original vision.



A Clear Measure of Success

Before the renovation, the existing pond had been an eyesore for years: a muddy, opaque basin described as looking like chocolate milk. Today, the water is clear enough to see 10 to 15 feet down when the sunlight and viewing angle cooperate. Large koi glide across the open areas, while their offspring gather among the rockwork and planted edges.

The baby koi may be the most convincing measure of the

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Left: High-quality Japanese-imported koi from Fitz's Fish Ponds move through the clear water, bringing color and life to the pond's growing ecosystem. - Right: Vibrant pickerel rush blooms rise above the pond, adding a splash of color while enhancing the natural beauty of the mature landscape.

pond's progress. The varied shoreline gives spawning fish multiple types of cover, while fish caves and spaces between rocks provide protection for fry. The bog and plantings contribute to water quality and create a web of small food sources. In a lighthearted sense, Sasha has become a koi farmer—but the successful spawn also indicates that the pond is doing what a well-designed ecosystem should do: supporting life at multiple stages.

The pond continues to serve its other purpose as well. Built as a recreation pond, it invites people into the water in a way a conventional ornamental pond may not. More importantly, it has drawn the family outdoors. Sasha, Gary and their relatives have gathered beside it, watched the fish and enjoyed a part of the property that had previously been a persistent problem.

That may be the most meaningful transformation of all. The waterfall is still the first feature visitors see when they enter the driveway, and the immense boulders still provide an undeniable sense of drama. Yet the pond's success is now found just as much in quieter details: flowers returning for another season, koi waiting below a waterfall, young fish sheltering between stones and a family spending time at the water's edge.

One year later, the project is no longer defined only by how it was built. It is defined by how it lives—and it is just getting started. 



About the Author

Brian Fitzsimmons is the CEO and founder of Fitz's Fish Ponds, which was established in 2008. Today, FFP is a 75+ member team that includes passionate professionals who design, build, and service ponds, waterfalls, and outdoor living spaces across the Tri-State Area. With retail stores in NJ, PA and TN, plus a koi farm in Milford, NJ, FFP offers everything from hand-selected koi to full backyard transformations. The team also travels to Japan three times a year to source top-quality koi and lead immersive KoiTrips for hobbyists. Driven by creativity and innovation, Brian continues to grow FFP into a leader in the koi, pond and outdoor living industry.





A Pilgrimage to *Latour-Marliac*

Following the waterlilies through
history, art and imagination

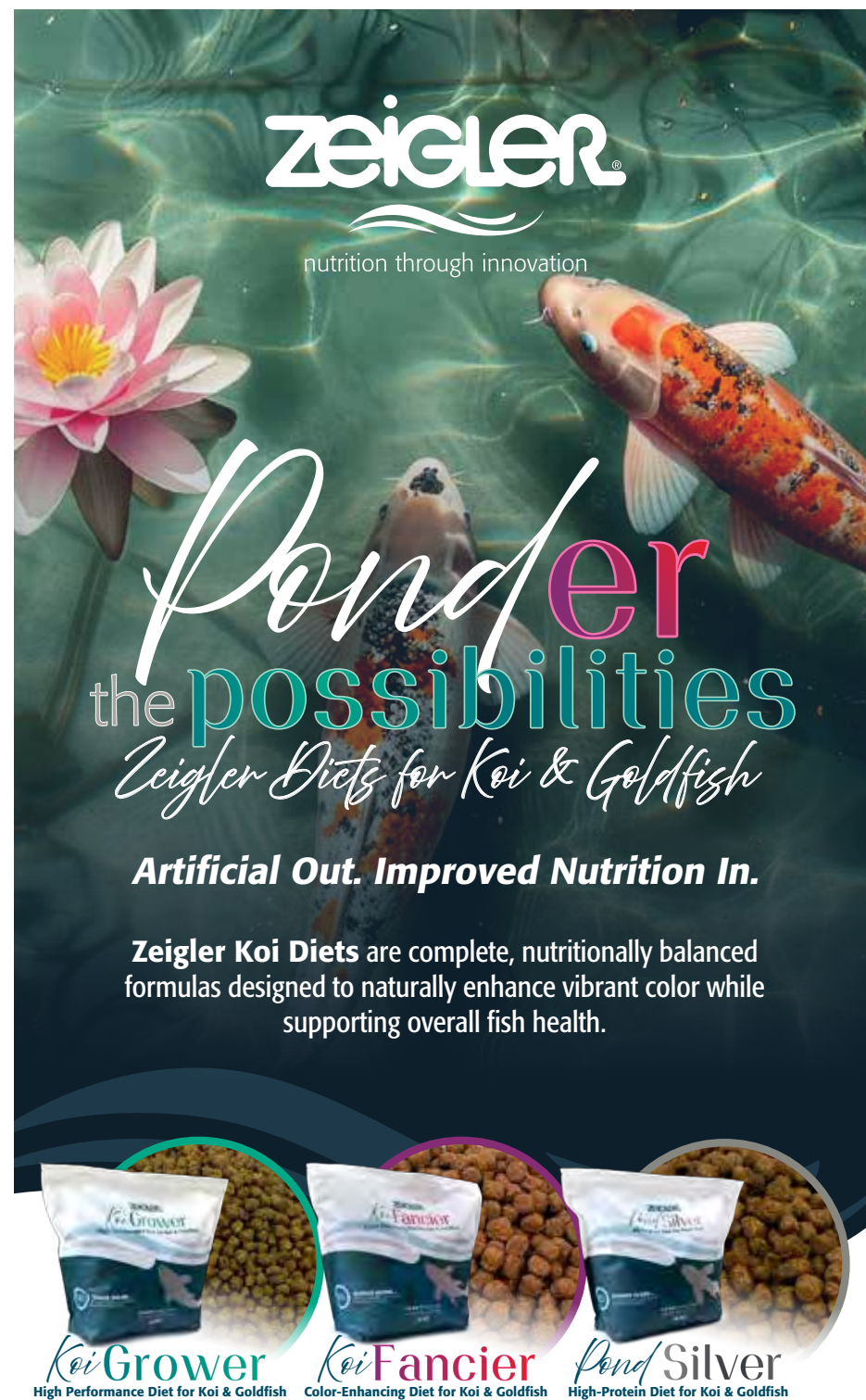
by Rip Sokol,
Fourth Generation Nursery

Winning a silent auction at the 2024 International Waterlily & Water Garden Symposium turned into one of the most memorable horticultural journeys of my career.

The prize was a five-night stay at the guest house at Latour-Marliac in Le Temple-sur-Lot in southern France, a place with deep roots in the history of modern water gardening. A year later, my

wife, Ginger, and I boarded a flight to Paris and began a trip that would connect decades of my own work with the history of water lilies, Claude Monet and the development of the water garden as we know it today.

For a little perspective, I was born into a family florist, greenhouse and nursery business in New Haven, Connecticut. I saw my first pool at age 5, a brick-and-mortar display pond inside a greenhouse planted with tropical water lilies and Cyperus from Tricker's in New Jersey. At age 11, under my



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Rip and Ginger relaxing over dinner during their visit to France.

father's direction, I built my first pond.

College and a horticultural career eventually took me through six states, one province and six decades. For the past 37 years, my focus has been aquatic plant production, teaching and distributing pond equipment and supplies throughout the Northeast. I've been fortunate to make a living doing what I love, and maybe with another 60 years I'll finally get the hang of it.

But back to France.

From the Symposium to France

The story really began in the United Kingdom in 2024, when Ginger and I attended the International Waterlily & Water Garden Symposium in Reading, England.

I've attended roughly 25 symposiums since 1992, and every one of them has expanded my knowledge of water lilies, Nymphaea, water gardens, water features and landscape design.

One of the traditions of the symposium is a silent auction of donated items, with proceeds helping support the organization. Most of us donate something, bid generously or, in many cases, do both.

Among the items that caught my attention that year was a five-night stay at Latour-Marliac. Bidding usually stretches over several days, inching upward until the final flurry of good-natured competition. I started with about a week's pay.

Nobody outbid me.

And just like that, a year of planning began.



Top: A long view of Monet's Japanese-inspired water garden. Its natural appearance was revolutionary at a time when many water features were highly formal, relying on carved stone, walls, statues and architectural coping. - Right: Monet's The Japanese Footbridge, inspired by his water garden at Giverny.

Thanks to our dependable crew, especially our managers Emily and Eve, Ginger and I flew to Paris on July 21, 2025. After an overnight flight from Boston, we arrived at Charles de Gaulle Airport late in the morning, collected our luggage and rental car and were out of Paris by midafternoon.

Our hotel was in the small town of Saint-Cyr-l'École, between Giverny and Versailles. We settled in, enjoyed some French cuisine and wine and slept like logs.

The next morning, we headed for Giverny.

Monet's Garden

Walking into Claude Monet's garden was, in a word, astounding.

We explored the village, the Museum of Impressionism, the cafes and cobblestone streets before entering Monet's property. Within the first few minutes, it became obvious that Monet was not simply a painter who happened to own a garden. He was an accomplished garden designer and plantsman.

The 2.5-acre Clos Normand surrounding his home made that clear. Then we reached the adjacent water garden and lily pond, developed in the early 1890s, and that sealed the deal.

Most people have seen Monet's paintings of his gardens and water lilies, but standing in the place that inspired them creates an entirely different appreciation. His series of water lily paintings, created over decades, helped turn the pond into



something more than a garden feature. It became an artistic subject in its own right.

If you've never taken the time to study Monet's garden paintings closely, do it. Spend a couple of days with a book or two about his gardens and artwork. For anyone who designs landscapes or water features, it can be a valuable way to reset your eye and refresh your artistic instincts.

What struck me most during the visit, however, was not simply Monet's painting ability. It was his influence.

A century before the internet gave us the word "influencer," Monet was already one.

He loved his gardens, and that love is obvious in his paintings. As people saw those paintings, they fell in love with the gardens, the ponds and, especially, the water lilies.

When Water Gardens Changed

Water in the garden was not a new idea in Monet's time. Formal fountain pools and reflecting pools had long been

common throughout Europe. We saw plenty of them at Versailles.

They were grand, symmetrical and appropriate for royalty.

Monet's pond was different.

It was naturalistic, heavily planted and designed as a place where people could connect with nature and find a sense of tranquility. Instead of presenting water as architecture, it presented water as a living landscape.

And then there were the lilies.

The colors were unlike what much of the gardening public had previously seen.

In 1854, French botanist Charles Lemaire asked whether it might someday be possible to create a new race of water lilies by crossing hardy white forms with blue- or red-flowered *Nymphaea*.

At the time, explorers had already collected and identified several hardy species, including white and pale pink forms, along with tropical species in yellow, red, vivid pink and blue-violet.

But hybridization had its limitations. Species within compatible groups could be crossed, while crosses between hardy

and tropical groups were not possible using the methods available at the time. For generations of hybridizers, the dream of a blue hardy water lily became something of a horticultural Holy Grail.

That challenge captured the attention of Joseph Bory Latour-Marliac.

Coming from an agricultural and botanical family, Latour-Marliac began experimenting with aquatic plants and eventually opened a specialty nursery in 1875 focused on water lilies, other aquatic plants and bamboo.

His timing could not have been better.

By 1889, Latour-Marliac was exhibiting colorful new water lily hybrids at the Paris Exposition. Monet's Japanese-inspired water garden followed soon afterward, and many of Latour-Marliac's hybrids eventually found their way into Monet's pond.

The connection between the two men helped change horticulture.

Monet was, in modern terms, an early adopter. His famous paintings of the water lily pond helped establish the lily pond as a desirable element in

garden design. Bright reds, deep pinks, vivid yellows, oranges and tropical blues appeared in his later paintings, accelerating public interest in water lilies and water gardens.

Other influential horticulturists and designers were part of the same broader movement. Gertrude Jekyll, William Robinson, William Tricker and Frederick Law Olmsted were all connected, directly or indirectly, to the horticultural exhibitions and design ideas circulating during this period.

Water gardens began to gain popularity rapidly from the 1890s into the early decades of the 20th century.

They were beautiful, but they were not necessarily accessible.

Creating one required expertise, specialized construction, mail-order plant purchases and, in many cases, a sizable budget.

That would change decades later.

Back to Latour-Marliac

Walking through the gate of the guest house at Latour-Marliac and looking out across the roughly 4-acre nursery felt



The Latour-Marliac nursery, with several acres of pools devoted to aquatic plants.

like stepping back 140 years.

Dozens of concrete-lined pools were filled with hundreds of cultivars and multiple species of hardy *Nymphaea*. Only a small number of pools contained tropical water lilies, lotus or other emergent aquatic plants.

During the day, we watched visitors, customers and staff wander among the pools.

Many were mesmerized by the flowers and foliage. Birds, pollinators and amphibians moved casually through the same landscape.

Some visitors carried cameras. Others had pencil and paper in hand as they planned gardens or placed orders.

Staff members cut,

wrapped and prepared plants for customers to take home to new garden ponds, much as workers might have done generations earlier.

That was one of the things I found so compelling about the nursery.

It is not simply a historical site. It is still functioning.

The plants are still being grown, selected and sold. Customers are still choosing lilies for their own ponds. The same basic passion that drove Monet, Latour-Marliac and generations of water gardeners remains alive.

During the evening, the experience became even more memorable.

Once the visitors had gone, Ginger and I often had the grounds almost entirely to ourselves, aside from the



Left: One of Latour-Marliac's many hybrid red water lilies. - Right: Formal ponds at the Palace of Versailles demonstrate the highly structured approach to water features common in European gardens before the rise of naturalistic water gardens.

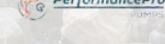
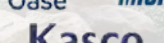
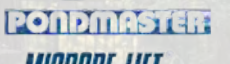
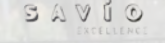
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A plan rendering of Claude Monet's home, gardens and a portion of the village at Giverny.

wildlife.

The last flowers would begin closing. We'd walk through the nursery with a glass of wine in hand, surrounded by the quiet of the gardens.

Dinner in France tends to come later than we are accustomed to at home, which gave us plenty of time to enjoy the nursery before heading out for a meal.

Those evenings gave me time to think, not just about the history in front of us, but about the decades I had spent in the water garden industry.

A Lifetime Perspective

After World War II, homeownership grew dramatically in the United States, but residential landscapes were often sparse and simple.

Ponds were generally associated with grand estates, public gardens or wealthy property owners. You might see them at a Rockefeller or DuPont estate or in a well-funded botanical garden, but they were not yet common in the average backyard.

By the late 1980s, that began to change.

Around the same time we started our current business, roughly a century after Latour-Marliac introduced his colorful hybrids, two developments helped transform the pond industry.

The first was the availability of user-friendly, economical pond liners, pumps and related equipment. Pond construction became simpler and more accessible to homeowners.

The second was the growth of regional sources for established aquatic plants.

Together, those changes helped create a rapidly growing community of garden pond hobbyists.

A decade later, after thousands of classes taught by myself and many others in the industry, landscape contractors increasingly joined the movement. They brought with them

customers who wanted the experience of a water garden but preferred to have someone else design and build it.

Manufacturers and distributors seemed to pop up faster than dandelions in spring.

And the industry grew.

Don't Forget What Started It All

That growth has brought tremendous advances in pond construction, filtration, circulation and maintenance.

Those things matter.

I've seen hundreds of beautifully crafted waterfalls, streams and ponds created by exceptionally talented artisans, and we should continue to celebrate their work.

But there is something worth remembering.

On my first trips with the International Waterlily & Water Gardening Society to the United Kingdom in the 1990s, we saw water features intertwined with mature plantings that were absolutely stunning.

The plants were not an accessory to the pond.

They were part of the composition.

In our modern industry, construction techniques and equipment can sometimes take center stage. Yet it was the beauty of the water lilies, along with the fish, that first captured people's

imagination and helped launch the water garden movement in the first place.

Monet understood that.

Latour-Marliac understood it.

And the best pond designers today understand it, too.

A waterfall can be beautifully constructed. A pond can be technically perfect. The filtration can perform flawlessly.

But if the finished landscape lacks plants, texture, color and seasonal change, something is missing.

The most memorable water gardens are not simply collections of stone, liner, pumps and plumbing. They are living compositions.

Plants soften rockwork, frame views and change the character of a pond throughout the season. Water lilies add color and movement to the surface. Marginal plants connect the pond visually to the surrounding landscape.

Together, they make the water feature feel established rather than installed.

That is a lesson worth carrying forward from Monet's garden and from Latour-Marliac.

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Rip with the statue of Bory Latour-Marliac in the adjacent garden.

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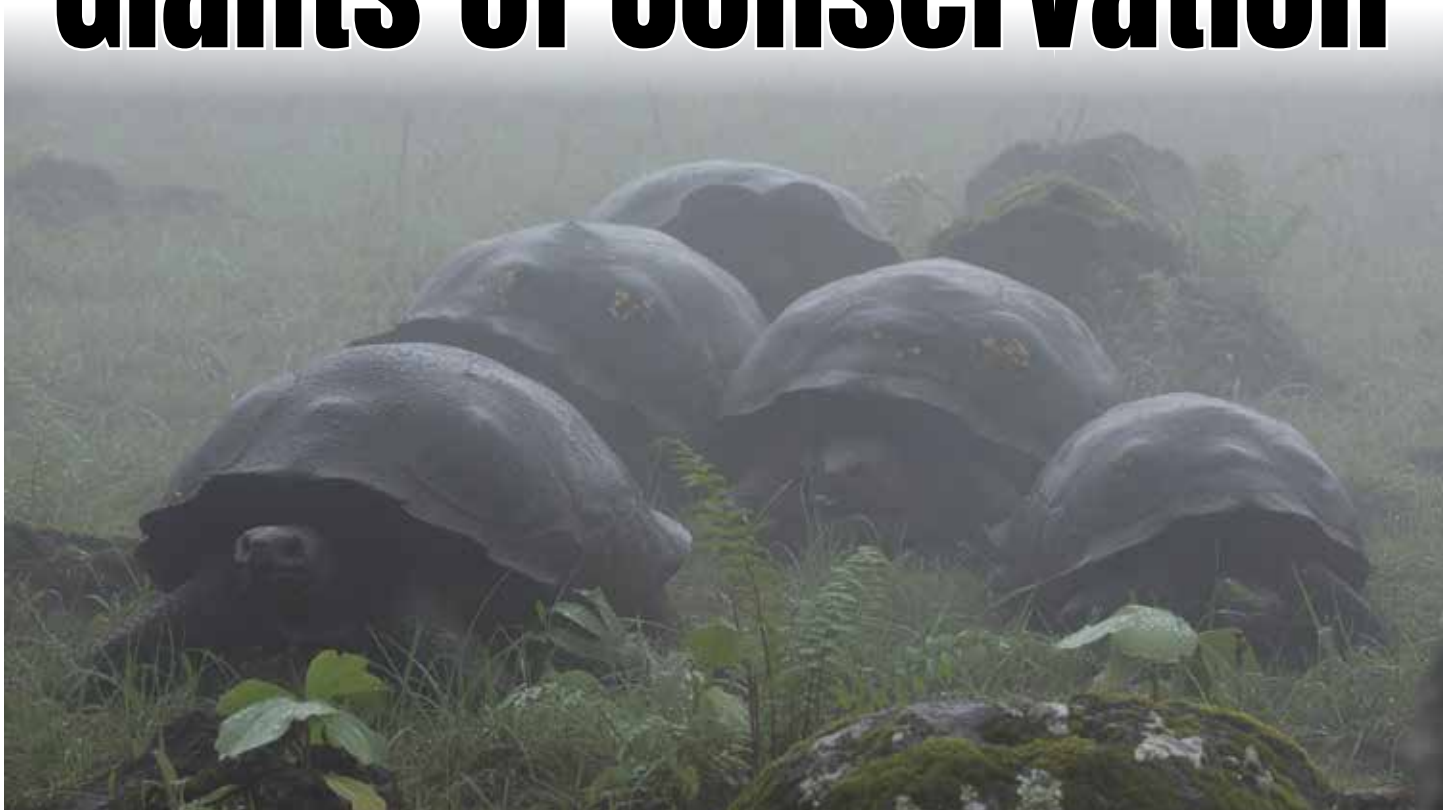
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About the Author

Rip Sokol is the owner of Fourth Generation Nursery and a lifelong horticulturist whose career has spanned six decades, with the past 37 years focused on aquatic plants, water gardening and the pond industry. He built his first pond at age 11 and has since dedicated his career to aquatic plant production, education and the distribution of pond equipment and supplies throughout the Northeast. A self-described "plant geek," Sokol continues to share his extensive knowledge and passion for waterlilies, aquatic plants and beautiful, naturally integrated water gardens.



Giants of Conservation



How Galapagos tortoises inspire visitors and advance wildlife education

by **Angel Peña,**
Nature Writer Wildlife Photographer

Few animals capture visitors' imagination like the Galapagos tortoise. Their immense size, remarkable longevity and connection to one of the world's most celebrated wildlife destinations have made these gentle giants enduring symbols of conservation and environmental education.

Whether encountered in zoological institutions, breeding centers, conservation facilities

or educational exhibits, Galapagos tortoises have a unique ability to engage audiences of all ages. Visitors who may breeze past other exhibits often stop in amazement when they encounter a reptile capable of living for more than a century and weighing hundreds of pounds.

Their impressive appearance is only part of their appeal. Galapagos tortoises represent one of the great conservation success stories of modern wildlife management. Once pushed toward extinction by human activities, many

tortoise populations have rebounded through decades of dedicated conservation work, captive breeding programs, habitat restoration and public education.

Today, these remarkable reptiles serve not only as ambassadors for the Galapagos Islands, but also as living reminders of the importance of protecting biodiversity around the world.

An Animal That Changed Science

The significance of Galapagos tortoises extends far beyond their physical size.

They are closely connected to one of the most important chapters in scientific history. The unique wildlife of the Galapagos Islands played a critical role in shaping Charles Darwin's understanding of evolution during his voyage aboard HMS Beagle in 1835.

Although Darwin observed numerous species during his travels, differences among tortoise populations living on separate islands offered important clues about adaptation and environmental specialization. Over time, scientists discovered that tortoises from different islands developed distinct shell shapes and body characteristics influenced by local environmental conditions.

Those observations helped lay the foundation for modern evolutionary biology.

Today, every Galapagos tortoise exhibit offers an opportunity to connect visitors with that scientific history. By linking living animals to evolutionary discovery, educational institutions can transform a simple wildlife encounter into a lesson about adaptation, ecology and scientific inquiry.

Built to Endure

Galapagos tortoises are among the largest tortoise species on Earth.

Adult males can weigh more than 500 pounds and may live well over 100 years under favorable conditions. Their massive shells provide protection, while their slow metabolism allows them to survive in environments where food and water may be seasonally limited.

These adaptations have helped tortoises thrive on the isolated volcanic islands of the Galapagos archipelago for thousands of years.

Visitors are often surprised by the calm, deliberate nature of these animals. Unlike many active exhibit species, tortoises move slowly and conserve energy. Yet that quiet behavior can encourage



A giant Galápagos tortoise moves through a wet grassy field in the Galápagos highlands, where protected habitats support thriving tortoise populations.



Galápagos tortoises feeding on native vegetation, demonstrating their important role in shaping island ecosystems.



A Galápagos tortoise rests in a freshwater pool, helping regulate body temperature during warm conditions.



Left: A giant Galapagos tortoise crosses a roadway, illustrating the challenges of wildlife conservation in areas shared with human activity. - Right: A Galapagos tortoise shelters beneath a natural lava formation, using volcanic terrain for shade and protection.

guests to spend more time watching them.

Longer observation creates valuable opportunities for interpretation and education. Visitors begin to notice subtle details such as feeding behavior, shell structure, posture and social interaction that might otherwise go overlooked.

In many ways, the tortoise's slow pace becomes an advantage in an educational setting. It encourages visitors to slow down as well and engage more deeply with the animal in front of them.

Creating Lasting Visitor Experiences

One reason Galapagos tortoises are so effective in educational exhibits is their ability to create an immediate emotional connection.

Children are often amazed by their enormous size. Adults are fascinated by their age and evolutionary history. Families may compare the tortoises' lifespans with their own, creating a powerful sense of perspective.

Questions naturally follow.

How old are they? How much do they weigh? What do they eat? How long can they live? Why are they found only in the Galapagos Islands?

Those questions create ideal opportunities for environmental education.

Unlike wildlife exhibits that may require extensive interpretation before attracting attention, Galapagos tortoises generate curiosity almost immediately. Their presence alone

encourages learning.

For institutions focused on conservation outreach, few species provide such an effective platform for communicating complex environmental ideas in an approachable way.

Designing Exhibits That Educate

Successful Galapagos tortoise exhibits must balance animal welfare, visitor engagement and educational value.

Because tortoises are terrestrial reptiles, exhibit design often emphasizes open viewing areas, natural substrates, vegetation, shade structures and acces-

sible educational signage.

The best exhibits allow visitors to observe natural behavior while maintaining environments that support animal health and welfare.

Space is especially important. Large tortoises need room to move, forage and interact with their surroundings. Environmental enrichment can further encourage natural activity while creating additional educational opportunities for visitors.

Naturalistic habitats also help reinforce conservation messages by illustrating the types of environments these animals occupy in the wild.



Adult Galapagos tortoise accompanied by juveniles, highlighting the species' remarkable life cycle and conservation success.

Rather than presenting tortoises as isolated specimens, modern exhibit design can tell a broader ecological story about the Galapagos Islands and the evolutionary processes that shaped their wildlife.

From Decline to Recovery

The history of Galapagos tortoises is closely connected to human activity.

Beginning in the 17th century, sailors, whalers and settlers harvested thousands of tortoises for food. Introduced species such as goats, pigs, rats and dogs created additional pressure by damaging habitat and preying on eggs and hatchlings.

By the 20th century, several tortoise populations had experienced dramatic declines, and some were lost entirely.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, conservation organizations and government agencies launched extensive recovery efforts. Captive breeding programs, habitat restoration, invasive species control and scientific monitoring became central components of tortoise conservation.

Those efforts produced encouraging results.

Numerous tortoise populations began to recover, while breeding programs successfully reintroduced young tortoises into restored habitats. What once appeared to be a conservation tragedy gradually became one of the world's most inspir-



A giant Galapagos tortoise travels across a volcanic landscape, one of the iconic habitats of the Galapagos Islands.

ing wildlife recovery stories.

Today, Galapagos tortoises demonstrate what can be achieved when science, conservation and public support work toward a common goal.

Why Giant Tortoises Inspire

Many species contribute to conservation education, but Galapagos tortoises possess several characteristics that make them especially effective ambassadors.

They are instantly recognizable. Even visitors with limited

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wildlife knowledge are familiar with giant tortoises and their association with the Galapagos Islands.

They also have extraordinary stories to tell. Their connection to evolution, island ecology, conservation biology and wildlife recovery allows educators to explore many subjects through a single species.

Perhaps most importantly, they inspire empathy.

Their slow movements, peaceful demeanor and remarkable longevity often create an emotional response in visitors. People naturally become invested in animals they perceive as ancient, vulnerable and unique.

That connection can transform conservation from an abstract idea into something personal.

Longevity and Public Fascination

Few animals inspire fascination through longevity quite like giant tortoises.

Some individuals have lived long enough to witness multiple generations of human history. That fact alone often becomes one of the most memorable parts of a visitor's experience.

Children may react with amazement when they learn that a tortoise could be older than their grandparents. Adults

often reflect on the passage of time and humanity's responsibility to protect species capable of such



A giant tortoise travels through a rural settlement, demonstrating the close coexistence between wildlife and local communities in the Galápagos.

extraordinary lifespans.

That perspective can leave a lasting impression.

In a world increasingly focused on rapid change, Galapagos tortoises represent patience, resilience and continuity. They remind us that conservation efforts often must be measured not in months or years, but in decades and generations.

Photography as a Conservation Tool

Photography plays an important role in extending the educational impact of tortoise exhibits.

Images allow visitors to revisit experiences, share discoveries and continue learning long after they leave a facility. Photographs also provide valuable resources for educational materials, outreach programs, publications and conservation campaigns.

The photographs accompanying this article were taken in Ecuador and document the impressive appearance and behavior of Galapagos tortoises in managed environments.

Close-up images reveal details of shell structure, facial features and body proportions that visitors might otherwise overlook. Wider images help

communicate the scale of these extraordinary animals and the environments designed to support them.

When paired with interpretation and storytelling, photography becomes a powerful tool for promoting appreciation and understanding of wildlife.

Inspiring the Next Generation

Perhaps the most important role played by Galapagos tortoises is their ability to inspire future generations.

Many conservation professionals can trace their interest in wildlife to a memorable childhood encounter with an animal at a zoo, aquarium or educational facility. For some, that first spark of curiosity begins with a single species.

Galapagos tortoises are particularly effective at creating those moments.

Their size captures attention. Their history inspires curiosity. Their conservation story offers hope.

A child who learns about tortoise recovery efforts today may become tomorrow's biologist, veterinarian, educator or conservation advocate.

In that way, the value of a tortoise exhibit extends far beyond the animals themselves. Each visitor leaves with the potential to become a stronger supporter of wildlife conservation.

Lessons Beyond the Galapagos

Although Galapagos tortoises are found naturally only on a remote Pacific archipelago, the lessons they teach have global relevance.

Their story demonstrates how human activity can threaten vulnerable species. It also shows how dedicated conservation action can help reverse declines and create opportunities for recovery.

Those lessons apply not only to island ecosystems, but to wildlife conservation efforts worldwide.

Visitors who learn about Galapagos tortoises often leave with a broader understanding of biodiversity, habitat protection, invasive species management and the importance of long-term environmental stewardship.

Few species communicate these ideas as effectively as giant tortoises.

Living Symbols of Conservation

Galapagos tortoises remain among the most iconic reptiles in the world and some of the most effective ambassadors for wildlife

conservation.

Their immense size, extraordinary longevity, scientific significance and inspiring recovery story make them invaluable educational animals in zoological and conservation settings.

Whether introducing visitors to evolutionary biology, illustrating the importance of habitat restoration or inspiring future conservationists, these gentle giants continue to play a vital role in connecting people with the natural world.

For institutions dedicated to conservation education, Galapagos tortoises offer something truly exceptional: the ability to transform curiosity into understanding and admiration into action.

As visitors stand before these ancient reptiles, they encounter more than a remarkable animal. They experience a living symbol of resilience, scientific discovery and hope. In that moment, curiosity can become appreciation, and appreciation can become a deeper commitment to conserving the natural world. ☞

About the Author

Angel Peña is an Ecuadorian wildlife photographer, nature writer, and independent author whose work focuses on freshwater ecosystems, reptiles, fish, birds, and environmental education. Through photography and storytelling, he seeks to promote appreciation for biodiversity, conservation awareness, and the protection of wildlife throughout Ecuador and South America. His articles combine natural history, conservation themes, and educational outreach designed to connect readers with the natural world.



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INSIDE THE WORLD'S LARGEST KOI COLLECTION

by **Yvo de Wal**,
The Koi Partner

Once in a lifetime, you meet someone who changes the way you look at life, at your work or simply at the way you enjoy something you love.

For me, one of those moments began in 2022.

I arrived on a warm day at a remote property somewhere between Nashville and Memphis. After driving through a gate and crossing a flowing river, I came upon a pond site that was still very much under construction.

But this was not a normal construction site. There were animals, concrete, heavy equipment and the unmistakable feeling that something much bigger was taking shape.

Little did I know that this would be the beginning of a very special story.

In the koi world, there are ponds, there are collections and then there are projects that grow into something much greater than anyone first imagined.

Herbert Fritch's koi facility is one of those projects.

When I first visited Herbert in 2022, the site was still a dream in progress. Parts of the facility were unfinished, the vision was still evolving, and many of the ponds were either under construction or waiting to be filled with life.

Even then, one thing was clear. This was never going to be an ordinary private koi collection.

Greenhouse No. 2 pond construction by Fitz's Fish Ponds.

It was being built with a level of passion, scale and dedication rarely seen outside Japan.

Over the past few years, I have had the privilege of following this journey from the beginning. I have watched empty concrete ponds become fully functioning koi systems. I have seen ideas turn into infrastructure. I have watched the property grow from one impressive project into a much larger koi environment with multiple ponds, serious water volume, advanced filtration and a collection of Japanese koi that continues to develop year after year.

But what makes Herbert's story so special is not only the size of the facility.

It is the passion and purpose behind it.

Herbert is not simply building ponds to keep expensive fish. He is creating an environment where koi can truly develop.

His focus has always been on giving the fish space, stability, water quality and time. Those are four things every serious koi keeper understands are essential, but very few are able to provide at this scale.

A Private Facility With a Professional Mindset

The latest evolution of the facility shows just how far the project has come.

What began as a personal passion has developed into one of the most remarkable private koi facilities I have ever filmed.

The ponds are no longer simply indi-

vidual systems. Together, they form a carefully planned environment designed around long-term koi health and development.

Large volumes of water create stability. Strong filtration helps keep the water clean and consistent. The layout allows Herbert to separate koi by size, quality, purpose and future potential.

That is especially important when keeping high-value Japanese koi because their development is never static.

A koi changes with every season. Its body grows. Skin quality may improve or decline. Patterns stretch as the fish matures, and the overall balance of the koi can change dramatically over time.

A facility like this gives Herbert the ability to manage that development properly.

For many hobbyists, one pond is the final dream.

For Herbert, one pond was only the beginning.

And, let's be honest, the result is mind-blowing.

Inspired by Japan

Anyone who knows Herbert understands that his passion for koi goes far beyond the fish themselves.

He has a deep respect for Japanese koi culture, Japanese garden design and the way serious breeders in Japan approach water quality, patience and selection.

That influence is visible throughout the facility.

The ponds are not just functional. They are part of a larger atmosphere. The water, landscaping, Japanese-inspired details and the way the koi are presented all contribute to the feeling that this is not merely a place to keep fish.

It is a place to experience them.

This is something I have seen many times in Japan.

The best koi environments are not only about technology. They are about balance.

The technical side must be correct, but the emotional side matters, too.

A koi pond should invite you to slow down. It should make you observe. It should make you appreciate the fish not



During construction of the first pond, Herb's koi were temporarily housed in a freshwater spring on the property.



New ponds framed by the impressive windows of Greenhouse No. 3.

only as animals, but as living art.

Herbert understands that deeply.

For POND Trade Magazine readers, one of the most interesting aspects of the facility is the technical and visionary thinking behind it.

At this level, water quality is everything.

Large koi create a serious biological load. Feeding high-quality koi for growth often means feeding heavily, and heavy feeding requires powerful mechanical and biological filtration.

The system must remove waste efficiently, maintain stable water parameters and keep oxygen levels high.

This is where the project becomes relevant not only to koi collectors, but also to pond builders, retailers and filtration professionals.

Herbert's facility demonstrates what happens when koi keeping is approached with a professional mindset.

The ponds are designed around the needs of the fish first.

Water volume, turnover, filtration capacity, ease of maintenance and long-term stability are all part of the larger plan.

In many backyard ponds, the pond

is designed first and the koi are added later.

In Herbert's case, the koi are the starting point.

Everything else is built around them.

That is an important lesson for the industry and for any hobbyist just getting started.

From Collector to Contributor

Another part of Herbert's story that deserves attention is his role in supporting the wider koi community.

He is known as a serious collector, but he is also someone who supports the industry around him.

He purchases koi from different dealers, follows developments within the American koi community and has shown a willingness to promote the hobby beyond his own facility.

That matters.

It makes Herbert an important contributor to the industry not only in the United States, but also on a much broader level.

The koi industry needs passionate hobbyists, but it also needs people willing to invest in the future of the

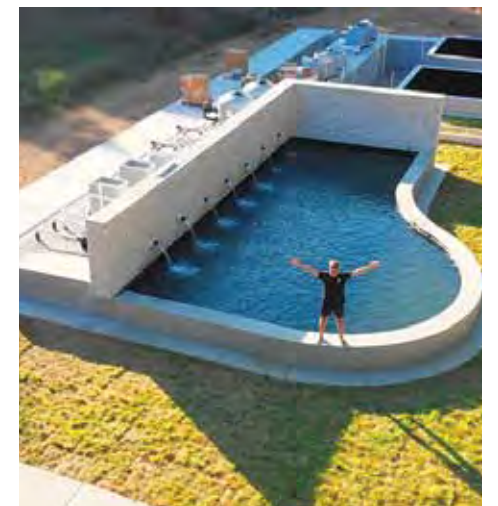
hobby.

Large private facilities like this create attention. They inspire new hobbyists. They show what is possible when koi keeping is taken seriously.

They also help dealers, breeders, pond builders, filtration companies and content creators tell a larger story about the value of high-quality koi keeping.

For me as a content creator, Herbert's support has been a dream.

It has given me the opportunity to share this industry with more people and show what can be achieved when



First water added to the pond, circa 2022.



The main pond inside the botanical greenhouse, also the first pond constructed on the property.

passion, education and investment come together.

That is one of the main reasons I wanted to document Herbert's projects from the beginning.

This is not just another pond tour.

It is a story about what passion can become when someone is willing to build patiently, learn constantly and continue improving.

And yes, Herbert is simply a great person to be around.

A Living Project, Just Like the Koi

One of the most exciting things about Herbert's facility is that it still feels alive as a project.

It is not "finished" in the sense that nothing else can be added or improved.

Quite the opposite.

Every update reveals new progress, new ideas and another level of

refinement.

That is also what makes following the project so interesting.

Koi keeping at this scale is never truly finished.

The fish grow. The ponds mature. Filtration evolves. The collection changes.

New koi arrive. Others develop. Sometimes the entire direction of a pond changes based on the potential of the fish within it.

That is the beauty of koi.

A koi pond is not like a swimming pool or a completed landscape feature.

It is a living system.

It changes with the seasons, with the fish and with the keeper.

Herbert's facility captures that perfectly.

More recently, Herbert has brought in highly respected people from within the koi industry to help refine both his collection and his



An aerial overview of Herb's expansive koi grounds.

knowledge. That becomes increasingly important when managing a collection of this size and quality.

What the Industry Can Learn

For pond professionals, Herbert's facility offers a glimpse into where the high-end koi market is heading.

Today's serious koi keepers are looking for more than a hole in the ground filled with water.

They want systems that are reliable, efficient and designed for the long term.

They want filtration that can handle future growth. They want water clarity, but they also want biological stability. They want ponds that are beautiful, but practical to maintain.

Most importantly, they want results.

A facility like Herbert's demonstrates the difference between simply keeping koi and truly developing them.

The pond industry should pay attention to that distinction because it represents a significant opportunity for the future.

Better pond design can lead to better koi health.

Better filtration can support better growth.

Better planning can prevent problems before they begin.

And better education can help hobbyists understand why these details matter before costly mistakes are made.

That is why projects like this are so valuable.

They demonstrate the highest levels of the hobby, but the lessons apply to almost every serious koi pond.

More Than a Collection

When I look back at the first footage I filmed in 2022 and compare it with the latest update, the transformation is incredible.

What was once a construction site has become a world-class koi environment.

The ponds are full of life. The systems

are running. The koi are developing. And the original vision becomes more visible with every visit.

But beyond the concrete, filtration and water volume, the real story is passion.

Herbert's facility is not impressive only because of its size.

It is impressive because it was built with purpose.

It represents years of dedication, a deep love for Japanese koi and a commitment to creating the best possible environment for the fish.

For me, as someone who has followed this journey from the beginning, that is what makes the project so special.

It is not just a koi facility.

It is a legacy in the making. 

About the Author

Yvo de Wal

is known as "The Koi Partner," a koi enthusiast and documentarian who travels Japan filming the hidden world of koi breeding. Follow his journey on YouTube and Instagram (@thekoipartner) to experience the beauty and craft of koi like never before.



Herb at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena following the inaugural Nashville Koi Show in 2026.

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the ELIMINATOR POND

Engineering the ultimate recreational swim pond

by **Carl Petite,**
Columbia Water Gardens

When a project begins as a simple pondless waterfall and evolves into a massive, 350,000-gallon recreational swim pond, you know you are in for an extraordinary ride.

But nothing quite prepared our team for the sheer scale, logistical hurdles and technical challenges that lay ahead. From managing subterranean groundwater and transporting 250 tons of rock across the country to hand-anchoring stone ceilings overhead and maneuvering colossal timber, building “The Eliminator” proved to be the most demanding engineering challenge of my career — and one of our team’s greatest triumphs.





“Make It Bigger”

What started as a modest water feature quickly expanded into a sprawling, 90-by-85-foot paradise reaching 10 feet deep and designed for daily swimming.

The installation features a 60-foot custom grotto tucked beneath cascading waterfalls, multiple high-efficiency wetland filters combined with ozone treatment and an undergravel suction system spanning the entire pond floor and powered completely by airlifts.

The result is crystal-clear water with an incredible 90 feet of underwater visibility.

Taming the Subsurface

Our first major hurdle came early in the excavation phase. At a depth of just 4 feet, we struck an active natural spring. Because the design called for safe jumping from the rock ledges into the waterfall area, we needed a minimum depth of 10 feet.

Rather than attempting to cap or fight the spring using traditional methods, we turned the obstacle into an asset.

We engineered and constructed a false floor beneath the entire footprint of the pond. Beneath this elevated floor, an intake line collects the continuous groundwater flow and pumps it 300 feet away to feed an elevated waterfall and stream. Any excess water overflows across a negative-edge spillway and feeds into a nearby natural creek.

By harnessing the site’s natural hydrology, we transformed a potential groundwater nightmare into a continuous, functional water source for the surrounding ecosystem.

Defending Against the 100-Year Flood

True craftspeople don’t just build for present conditions; they anticipate the future.

The project site is situated near Scandia Creek, a waterway with a documented history of severe flooding. While a catastrophic 100-year flood event might be statistically unlikely, leaving an investment of this magnitude vulnerable was out of the question.

To safeguard the pond, we engineered a heavy-duty flood defense wall measuring 3 feet wide, 4 feet tall and 100 feet long. Built using Verti-Block to mirror the grotto’s structural aesthetic, the wall acts as a protective barrier designed to deflect and steer rushing floodwaters safely away from the pond system during a major storm.

This type of proactive engineering and long-term risk mitigation is essential when constructing a project designed to last for generations.

Moving 500,000 Pounds of Limestone

Creating a naturalistic aesthetic at this scale required stone with genuine character. We selected nearly half a million pounds of weathered limestone sourced directly from Missouri.

Moving 250 tons of rock halfway across the country was a

massive logistical undertaking.

The limestone was loaded into 50,000-pound shipping containers, transported by rail to the port in San Pedro, California, and then trucked inland to our job site in Temecula.

Once on site, our crew had to work swiftly and safely, unloading each container in less than two hours using a telehandler and heavy-duty rigging chains.

Engineering the Grotto

Creating a 60-foot cave structure isn’t just landscaping. At this scale, it becomes heavy civil engineering.

To build a grotto capable of supporting tons of overhead earth, water and foot traffic, we combined precast retaining systems with custom concrete and masonry techniques.

For the primary structural walls, we used Verti-Block interlocking concrete units. These heavy-duty blocks provided the mass and structural integrity needed to retain the surrounding earth and anchor the overhead structure.

To unify the walls into a single monolithic mass, we tied the hollow block cores together with heavy steel reinforcement and poured nine full transit-mix truckloads of concrete directly into the cores and over the top deck.

The result was a solid, continuous concrete shell that locked the entire 60-foot cavern in place.

Hanging the Ceiling

The greatest technical and safety challenge was creating a natural, weathered limestone ceiling inside the cave.

You cannot simply stack heavy stone overhead and hope gravity behaves.

Every piece of Missouri limestone suspended from the grotto ceiling had to be mechanically anchored directly into the structural concrete. Each overhead limestone block was custom-fitted, drilled and pinned using heavy-duty rebar. We set the rebar pins into the stone using high-grade structural epoxy, creating a permanent bond between the steel and limestone.

The exposed ends of those rebar pins were then tied directly into the steel rebar cage of the ceiling slab before we poured the overhead concrete deck.

When the concrete set, the limestone ceiling was no longer simply attached to the structure. It became an integral, permanently embedded part of the reinforced concrete deck itself.

Racing the Clock

We broke ground in October with a hard, nonnegotiable target date: The pond had to be fully swimmable before June.

Every year, the homeowner hosts a massive annual campout on the property for his twin grandchildren, and



missing that date was not an option.

To an outsider, an eight-month window might sound generous. Factor in major engineering hurdles, continuous site adaptations, formal change orders and the sheer volume of material moving through the site, however, and it quickly became an intense race against the clock.

Despite every challenge thrown our way, our team met the deadline.

Just under 100 campers gathered for the annual event and swam in crystal-clear water before we even began the final grotto expansion.

As summer approached, those hard-charging workweeks also came with a fantastic reward.

Every Wednesday over lunch, I brought my four grandchildren — Audree, Allison, Zander and Cole — to the site to swim and play with the homeowner’s grandchildren.

In the middle of an intense, high-stakes build, those Wednesday afternoon breaks became a priceless reminder of exactly why we build these living spaces in the first place.

The Science Behind the Water

Building a recreational swim pond of this scale requires far more than earthmoving and heavy masonry. It demands a deep, practical foundation in science.

You simply cannot construct a 350,000-gallon living ecosystem without understanding biology, chemistry and microbiology. Long before the first excavator hits the site, a builder must be able to predict water conditions, anticipate chemical shifts and engineer biological solutions into the system’s baseline design.

Ponds are very much like wineries.

Just as world-class wine isn’t merely about the grape, but the terroir — the soil, climate and surrounding ecosystem — a successful water feature depends on understanding its environment. When we design and build a pond, we evaluate the immediate surrounding ecosystem and the environmental impacts that will act upon the water.

For contractors looking to elevate their craft, I strongly encourage taking entry-level courses in introductory biology, general chemistry and microbiology at a local community college.

Understanding concepts such as nitrifying bacteria cycles, pH buffering, dissolved oxygen dynamics and microbial biofilm development changes the way you build. It equips you to diagnose issues before they happen, design smarter biological filtration and deliver crystal-clear, safe water to your clients.

Investing in scientific education will expand your capabilities, build your confidence and elevate the level of service you offer your clients.

A 14,000-Pound Anchor

To give the entrance of the grotto an aged, ancient aesthetic, we integrated a massive, 14,000-pound tree stump and log



directly into the opening.

Measuring more than 30 feet long with a 6-foot base, setting a piece of timber of this magnitude required serious machinery, pinpoint control and absolute precision.

Executing a maneuver this delicate also takes trusted industry partners.

We brought in Matt Griffin of Prime Lawns, who spent a full week on site working shoulder to shoulder with our team during this phase. Matt has been a key collaborative partner with us on several landmark builds over the years, from the “Avenger Pond” and “Mega Pond to the Water Wall at the “Avenger Pond”.

Setting the stump became a master class in rigging. It took two heavy machines working in perfect synchronization for four intense hours to maneuver and lock the 7-ton log into its final resting place at the grotto entrance.

The Grand Reveal

When it came time to strip the concrete forms from the grotto ceiling and reveal the suspended limestone interior for the first time, the excitement drew brothers in the trade from across the country.

Jeff Michaels of Pondering Waters flew from Michigan to help remove the forms and witness the final reveal firsthand



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with our team.

When Matt heard we were reaching this milestone, he jumped on a plane and flew out for a second time, volunteering his hands and expertise simply to be part of stripping the forms and experiencing that unbelievable reveal.

These are the moments that remind you how special this industry can be. Competition has its place, but when people who share a passion for the craft come together to build something that has never been done before, everyone gets better.

Work Hard, Play Hard

After the dust settled and the grotto stood as a fully realized masterpiece, it was time to celebrate the camaraderie that helped build it.

We treated the crew, Jeff and Matt to a trip to Lake Havasu to see real, high-performance Eliminator boats in action on the water.

Between boating, recreation, good cigars and a few well-earned drinks, it was the perfect end to a legendary phase of the build — a celebration of hard work, engineering triumphs and lifelong friendships forged in the trade.

What Comes Next

While the current installation stands as a massive achievement in hydraulic and structural engineering, the vision for this property is far from complete.

Future plans call for an enchanting, two-story Airbnb designed to resemble a fairy-tale castle and seamlessly



integrated into the water feature's ecosystem.

The stream, fed by the continuous underground spring water pulled from beneath the pond, will turn a fully functional water wheel embedded in the castle's facade.

The lower level will house a kitchen opening directly onto a future outdoor living space, making it ideal for entertaining. Upstairs, guests will have a dedicated living area, bedroom, full bathroom and elevated deck offering sweeping views of the entire swim pond and grotto.

By pairing raw engineering power with imaginative architecture, the site will continue evolving from an extraordinary backyard water feature into an immersive destination.

The Eliminator Legacy

Building a project with this level of structural complexity, hydraulic engineering and heavy installation pushed our crew to its limits.

When unexpected job-site conditions tested our resolve, we leaned into a philosophy famously articulated by President Theodore Roosevelt:

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

Through grit, creative problem-solving and sheer determination, our team executed every detail without compromising the vision.

We ultimately named the creation "The Eliminator Pond."

The name nods to a shared passion for high-performance Eliminator boats, but it also carries a deeper meaning for our

team. A project of this magnitude and technical difficulty would have eliminated almost anyone else who attempted it.

Today, the homeowner enjoys daily swims in pristine water, surrounded by dramatic rockwork, custom timber and cascading falls.

For us, "The Eliminator Pond" stands as a lasting testament to what can be achieved when ambitious vision, engineering, craftsmanship and unyielding perseverance combine. 

About the Author

Carl Petite owns Columbia Water Gardens in California. Known for innovative solutions, he collaborates with other contractors nationwide as well as runs a full service construction and maintenance business. With numerous industry awards, Carl has a passion for teaching, problem solving and community. Check out his YouTube channel that is filled with helpful videos and presently over 24,000 subscribers.





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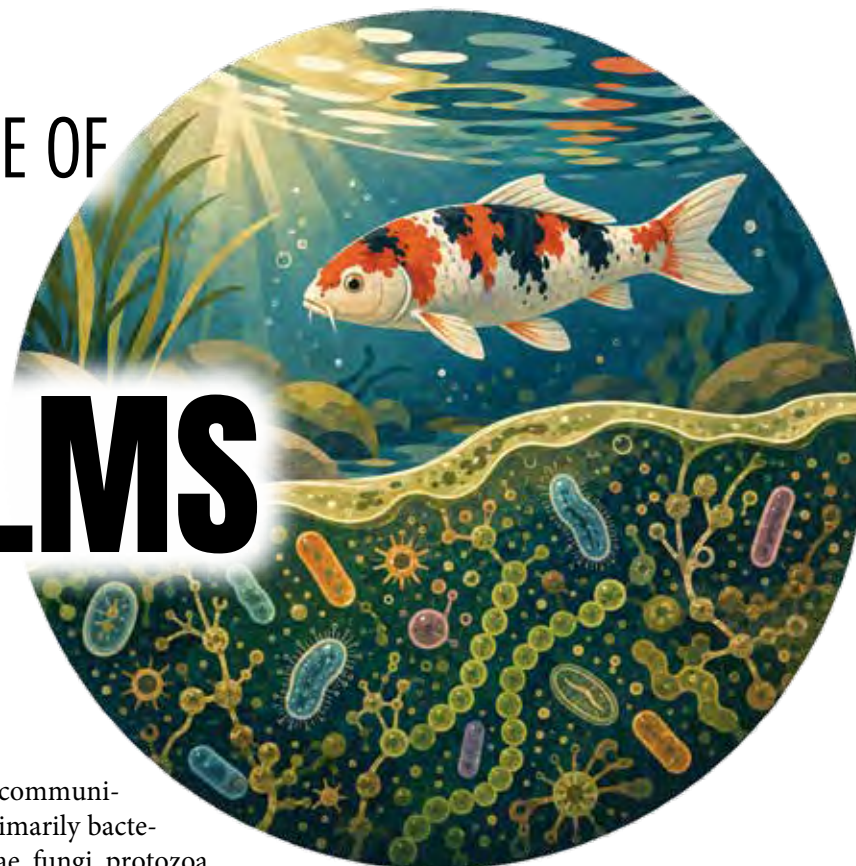
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THE IMPORTANCE OF POND BIOFILMS



by Carolyn Weise,
Ecological Labs, Inc

Pond biofilms are complex communities of microorganisms (primarily bacteria, but also containing algae, fungi, protozoa and other microbes) embedded in a protective extracellular polymeric substance matrix, often appearing as slimy films, scums or mats on surfaces in and around ponds. One of the benefits is the water clarifiers, rotifers and nematodes take residence among the algae in the biofilm, along with heterotrophic and nitrifying bacteria.

They form on submerged substrates (rocks, plants and sediments; known as periphyton or benthic biofilms), at the air-water interface and even on artificial structures. While surface scum-type "biofilms" in managed ponds are often a nuisance (accumulations of dead organic matter, pollen, lipids and bacteria when decomposition lags behind die-off), true microbial biofilms play vital ecological roles in natural aquatic systems.

Key Ecological Importance

1. **Nutrient Cycling and Water Purification:**
Biofilms are powerhouse decomposers. Bacteria and other microbes break down organic matter (leaves, dead plants/ animals and pollutants), recycling nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. They drive processes such as denitrification (conversion of excess nitrogen to gas) and help mitigate eutrophication. In balanced systems, they act as a “microbial skin” that buffers nutrients, preventing harmful algal blooms by competing for resources and producing allelochemicals that inhibit cyanobacteria.
2. **Primary Production and Food Web Foundation:**
Photosynthetic components (i.e., diatoms, green algae and cyanobacteria) in periphyton biofilms contribute significantly to primary production, especially in shallow or clear ponds, which is the primary desire of every pond owner. They form the base of the food web, grazed by invertebrates, tadpoles, fish and other organisms. In nutrient-poor (oligo-trophic) systems, they can be the dominant energy source.
3. **Bioremediation and Pollutant Removal:**
Biofilms adsorb and biodegrade toxins, heavy metals, pesticides and organic pollutants. They help remove excess nutrients from runoff, improving overall water quality. This makes them useful in natural treatment systems, floating wetlands or constructed ponds.
4. **Sediment Stabilization and Habitat Provision:**
They bind sediments, reducing erosion, and create micro-habitats for diverse microbes and small invertebrates. This supports biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.
5. **Resilience and Indicators of Ecosystem Health:**
Biofilms respond quickly to environmental changes (nutrients, pH, toxins and oxygen levels) due to short generation times, making them excellent bioindicators for monitoring pond/lake health. Healthy biofilms promote stability; imbalances (i.e., excess nutrients or stagnation) can shift them toward problematic states.



Context in Managed Ponds Versus Natural Systems

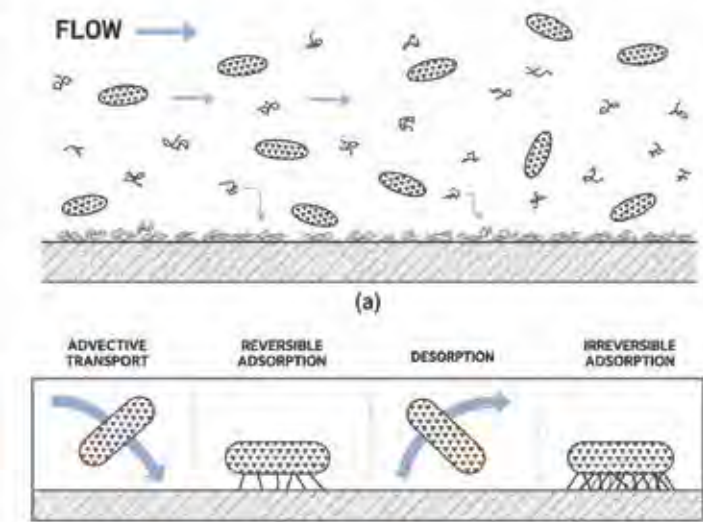
In natural or well-balanced ponds, biofilms are beneficial and normal (i.e., the slippery coating on rocks in swimming ponds aids in the nitrogen cycle and serves as a food source). Surface “biofilm scums” (often whitish, grayish, iridescent or brownish films) in ornamental or recreational ponds are typically a symptom of imbalance: excess organic loading, poor circulation, low oxygen, high temperatures (less than 76 F/24 C) or low pH leading to incomplete decomposition. These are not usually directly harmful but can reduce aesthetics, block light, clog filters and signal broader water-quality issues.

Positive applications: Pond managers harness biofilms on substrates as “biofilm reactors” to combat green water and eutrophication by boosting beneficial microbial activity.

Management Implications

- To support beneficial biofilms while minimizing nuisance surface films:
- **Enhance aeration and circulation** — boosts oxygen for aerobic decomposition.
 - **Reduce organic inputs** — limit leaves, excess feed and runoff entering the pond.
 - **Use beneficial bacteria/enzymes** — accelerates break-down.
 - **Monitor pH and nutrients** — adjustments and water changes can help.
 - **Physical removal or clarifying agents** — i.e., alum, algaecide, flocculent, pH adjuster, KH booster or defoamer — for severe cases.

Overall, pond biofilms underscore the importance of microbial life in aquatic ecosystems. They are essential for healthy nutrient dynamics and biodiversity but require balance to avoid becoming unsightly or indicative of problems. For specific pond issues, water testing is recommended to address



root causes.

In the context of pond biofilms, beneficial bacteria help prevent problematic surface scums by accelerating decomposition of dead matter before it floats and accumulates. They promote healthy substrate biofilms (periphyton) that aid nutrient cycling and natural filtration.

They are not a “quick fix” for severe imbalances (test water for ammonia, nitrites, nitrates, phosphorus, pH, KH and oxygen). Overreliance without addressing root causes (i.e., overstocking fish or poor circulation) may yield limited results.

For large ponds/lakes, professional-grade or higher-volume treatments may be needed. Consult local pond suppliers or extension services for region-specific advice.

Using beneficial bacteria is an eco-friendly way to maintain a healthy, low-maintenance pond ecosystem. If you have details about your pond size, issues (i.e., algae, muck or biofilms) or setup, you can get more tailored suggestions. Ponds naturally develop these communities in time, but adding targeted beneficial bacteria helps establish or reinforce them, especially in new ponds, after cleanouts or during high-load seasons.

If You Call Someone for Help, You Need to Tell Them:

1. If the pond is new (less than 1 year old).
 2. How many fish and what size. Have any died recently? Spawned recently?
 3. If you added any new fish recently. Added new plants recently?
 4. How often you do partial water changes. Topping off to compensate for evaporation is not a water change.
 5. Water temperature, KH and the other parameters.
 6. What you have used in the pond so far.
 7. And, send pictures. A picture is worth 1,000 words.
 8. Have you scrubbed the sides of your pond? If so, you may have removed the very important denitrifying biofilm.
- When designing and building a new pond for your customer, the first thought is the design, but the second should

be, “How is this going to work for them in the long haul?”

An elderly couple or busy newlyweds holding down two to three jobs each want a koi pond. They have a new home, spacious land and a clean slate to work with. Yes, they have dreams and plans. They would appreciate a pond that doesn’t require a lot of water changes. They also are into the Green Movement, so they don’t believe in waste. They have called you because you are the expert; you are the best in the business!

Wastewater plants solved the problem of removing organic pollutants and ammonia cost-effectively using biological processes, leading the way to bigger and better technologies. The next thing they targeted was nutrients, primarily nitrates, for their propensity to encourage unwanted algal growth, which had the capacity to impede the pumps and produce noxious odors.

To accomplish this, the next step they employed was denitrification — another biological process where, under anoxic conditions, certain bacteria will utilize the oxygen tied up in oxygen-bearing inorganic compounds (such as nitrate) and chemically reduce them. In the case of nitrates, they are reduced to nitrogen gas. The nitrogen gas is then released harmlessly into the atmosphere, which is naturally comprised of 78% nitrogen gas.

Nitrates were once considered harmless in ponds, but now we realize there is a big impact on aquatic life. It impacts a fish’s immune response, reproduction and reduces metabolic processes. Eventually, it can result in death.

For too long, we have relied on the addition of plants, sometimes crowding the fish out of their pond in order to balance the nutrient levels, or doing constant water changes. Nitrate buildup is one of the main reasons for doing these water changes.

Many pond builders are already taking advantage of the various types of anoxic filtration to reduce nitrates as a means of saving water and labor for their customers. Doing this allows the pond owner to reduce the frequency of water changes while still maintaining water in their ponds that is healthy and aesthetically pleasing.

In discussing the technology behind this nitrate reduction, it is important to clarify between anoxic and anaerobic conditions, since there are other factors affecting your customer’s ponds ... and the success or failure of their filtration systems.

Anoxic conditions exist when there is no elemental oxygen, usually in the form of dissolved oxygen, but there is oxygen in the form of oxygen-bearing inorganic compounds, like nitrates (NO-) or sulfates (SO4-). Rather than support fish life, this oxygen can be used in the oxidation of organics in the pond. As in most oxidation-reduction reactions, when one species is oxidized, another has to be reduced. Kind of a zero-sum game.

In order to establish an anoxic or anaerobic environment, there are two factors that have to be addressed — oxygen transfer rate and oxygen utilization rate (OUR). This is true whether you are looking to achieve the anoxic condition in a liquid medium or a biofilm. Oxygen can be transferred

passively through the air-water interface, or actively through the use of aerators, waterfalls, fountains, etc.

The oxygen consumption rate will be related to the organic load:

- 1. How many fish will this pond hold and how many can the bio-exchange really support?
- 2. How much work will the new owner have to do to maintain the pond?
- 3. How easily cleaned is this system?
- 4. Will the mechanical filter remove sufficient waste to allow the bio-reaction to occur naturally?

The organic load creates oxygen demand and the bacteria convert it to carbon dioxide, water and (additional) bacterial cells.

In most cases, in a pond filter it is most desirable to have anoxic rather than true anaerobic activity. The reason for this is that many anaerobic metabolites are malodorous and, in

some extreme cases, can be toxic. Even becoming “too anoxic,” as measured by something called oxidation-reduction potential (ORP), can become an issue when sulfates are reduced chemically to hydrogen sulfide, giving that rotten egg smell. If this occurs in the pond in high enough concentrations, it could be harmful to the fish.

Fortunately, it is relatively easy to get into the “sweet spot” where you are anoxic enough to reduce nitrates, and not so anoxic that you get hydrogen sulfide generation, or true anaerobic metabolism where a lot of foul-smelling, possibly toxic byproducts like butyric acid can be produced.

For most anaerobic biofilters for ponds, the biomass grows on a fixed film on the media in the filter. While this biofilm may seem just like a slimy layer on the media, even a thin biofilm contains millions of bacteria per square inch, many layers deep.

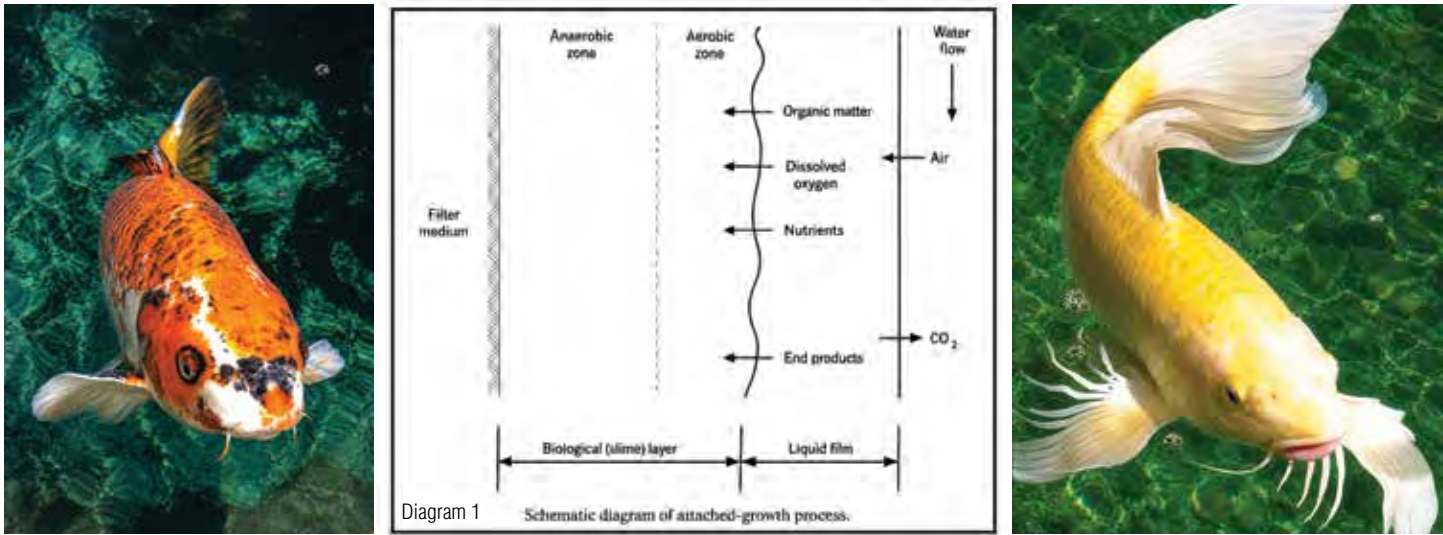
The biofilm is an often misunder-

stood or a vaguely accepted terminology in pond lore. In a biofilm (see Diagram 1), you will generally have a thin film of water that clings to the outside of the biofilm due to the adhesive and cohesive properties of water. It is these same properties of water that provide for capillary action in plants and help water get to the top of the tallest of trees.

Soluble organics, and some inorganics, like ammonia, diffuse into the biofilm through this layer of water. In the first layer of the biofilm, there is an aerobic zone. What determines the depth of the aerobic zone is the strength of the water in terms of oxygen demand and loading per unit area of the media, and the dissolved oxygen content in the water.

As the oxygen is consumed as it diffuses through the biofilm, and organic and inorganic compounds are still present, an anoxic section develops.

In this section, any oxygen-bearing



Center: Diagram 1 — Process dynamics of diffusion and biological activity in a biofilm

compounds will be utilized as what is called “electron acceptors,” providing a means to oxidize the organic compounds to carbon dioxide, while reducing the oxygen-bearing inorganic compounds to nitrogen gas (from nitrates) and hydrogen sulfide (from sulfates). Fortunately, the utilization of nitrate is preferred over the utilization of sulfate, and most pond water will have more nitrate than sulfate.

The key to getting the correct dynamics in the anaerobic or anoxic filter is proper sizing of the filter with respect to loading: If a filter is oversized, and the loading is too light per unit area of surface area, there will not be enough oxygen demand to create an anoxic zone. However, if the loading per unit of surface area is too great, the film may grow too thick and have a true anaerobic zone, which can lead to undesirable results.

So, the filter being oversized as well as undersized may give less than the desired results. In our experience, more people err on the side of the filter being undersized to try to save money.

It is fairly easy to track the efficiency of your ponds’ anaerobic filters simply by monitoring the nitrate levels.

A well-functioning anaerobic filter should keep your nitrate levels below 20 mg/L nitrate. If you find that the nitrate levels are not going down, or even going up if you have installed an anoxic filter, it may be helpful to add a bacterial product that contains effective denitrifiers to quickly establish the population.

We have had customers report going from 160 mg/L of nitrate to less than 20 mg/L nitrate after applying a bacterial denitrifying product.

While anoxic/anaerobic filtration is relatively new in the U.S. market, it has been popular in Europe for over 30 years. One of the main reasons for this is that it is generally much more expensive to do water changes in Europe. It is even costly in some parts of the U.S. And large-area ponds rarely, if ever, do water exchanges, simply because it is too much water to replace.

One thing to keep in mind is that in addition to doing water

changes to lower nitrates, there are other criteria for doing water changes as well. These include phosphate levels and total dissolved solids (TDS) levels, as both can affect water quality and the health of aquatic life.

There are limits to how much phosphate can be removed biologically. The same applies to TDS levels, which at some concentration can affect the osmoregulatory systems of the aquatic life in your pond.

Phosphate can also be lowered by phosphate-binding water treatments, as well as vegetation, and through water changes. Lowering TDS levels requires either water changes to dilute out the dissolved solids, usually salts, or more sophisticated treatment technologies like reverse osmosis (RO) or ultrafiltration.

You are the specialist that will know the right size filter for your customer’s size pond, recirculation rate and fish load, for a clear water and healthy pond. Now, you have more information to give you the optimal outcome every time! 🐡

About the Author

Carolyn Weise is a Master Gardener Volunteer and has been keeping and showing koi since the 1990’s. She moved from Long Island, NY to Cape Coral, FL in 2006 where she first joined the Friends of Wildlife. She is still employed by Ecological Labs, Inc. in the Cape as Customer Service for Ponds and Fish. She has been there for over 20 years and has many followers around the USA and Canada. She has a 4,500-gallon koi pond and elaborate Florida Friendly native Yard. She is a published author.



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"At POND Trade Magazine, we value educational resources that elevate the industry and help hobbyists and professionals better understand the living ecosystems they create. This book not only provides practical guidance, but also encourages readers to see their ponds through a more thoughtful and informed lens. Whether you are new to koi keeping or have years of experience, Secrets for Happy Koi offers insights that will strengthen your understanding and appreciation of the hobby."

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A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS

Introducing the reimagined Water Artisan of the Year awards

For over a decade, the Water Artisan of the Year Awards have celebrated the creativity, craftsmanship and innovation that define the pond and water feature industry. As the profession has evolved, so too has the awards program.

Following months of collaboration with industry leaders and feedback from professionals across the globe, POND Trade Magazine is proud to introduce the reimagined Water Artisan of the Year Awards for 2026.

The updated program represents the most significant evolution in the awards' history, featuring new project categories, expanded recognition opportunities, a more transparent judging process and a renewed commitment to recognizing professionals at every stage of their careers.

Built by the Industry, for the Industry

The redesign began with a simple question: How can the Water Artisan of the Year Awards better represent today's industry while encouraging greater participation across the industry at large?

To answer that question, POND Trade Magazine assembled the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Committee, bringing together respected professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise from across the water feature industry.

The committee includes:

- Mark Wilson - *The Pond Advisor*
- Shane Hemphill - *Art of the Yard*
- Dave Duensing - *Aquatic Construction Services*

ENTER OR NOMINATE A PROJECT



The 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards Are Now Open!

The industry's premier awards program is back—and there's more than one way to participate.

SUBMIT YOUR BEST WORK

Have you completed a project showcasing exceptional craftsmanship, creativity and technical excellence? Pond builders and water feature professionals of all experience levels are invited to enter their best work for recognition among the industry's finest.

NOMINATE AN OUTSTANDING PROJECT

Know an incredible pond or water feature that deserves recognition? New for 2026, anyone can nominate a project!

Contractors, manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, homeowners and industry professionals can submit nominations. POND Trade Magazine will then invite the project's builder to complete an official award submission.

2026 Project Excellence Categories:

- Most Naturalistic Pond
- Best Pondless Water Feature
- Fountains & Formal Features
- Best Recreational & Swim Pond
- Special Recognition Awards
- Best Overall Project
- Best Collaboration Project
- Best Matured Pond
- Photo of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award (Public nominations accepted.)

Scan to Get Started!

Use the QR code to:

- » Submit a project
- » Nominate an outstanding project
- » View category descriptions
- » Review judging criteria
- » Learn about eligibility and deadlines



Whether you're showcasing your own work or recognizing someone else's, help us celebrate the creativity, craftsmanship and passion that continue to elevate the pond and water feature industry.

- Brian Fitzsimmons - *Fitz's Fish Ponds*
- Bradley Blocksom - *Pondscapes of Charlotte*
- Jason Lenox - *Ponds Inc of Illinois*

Over the course of several months, committee members dedicated countless volunteer hours to evaluating the awards program from the ground up. Together, they reviewed existing categories, discussed judging philosophies, refined submission requirements, developed standardized scoring rubrics and explored new ways to recognize excellence throughout the profession.

The committee's work was complemented by feedback from the industry at large. Between March and July 2026, POND Trade Magazine invited pond builders, designers and water feature professionals to participate in a survey focused on the future of the awards program. Those responses helped validate the committee's recommendations and played an important role in determining the final Project Excellence categories.

The result is an awards program shaped not only by experienced industry leaders, but also by the collective voice of the professionals it was created to serve.

Four Project Excellence Categories

The Water Artisan of the Year Awards will recognize outstanding projects in four Project Excellence categories:

- Best Naturalistic Pond
- Best Pondless Water Feature
- Best Formal Water Feature
- Best Recreational/ Swim Pond

These categories were selected to reflect the core disciplines of today's pond and water feature industry while providing opportunities for a broad range of professionals to participate.

Each category features detailed eligibility requirements and standardized judging rubrics designed to create a fair, transparent and consistent evaluation process. Projects will be evaluated using clearly defined criteria, including design, craftsmanship, technical execution, natural integration, and overall visual impact.

Expanding Recognition

The committee recognized that excellence within the industry extends far beyond individual projects.

Equally important was creating an awards program that encourages participation from pond builders throughout every stage of their careers. Whether entering a first professionally completed project or submitting work backed by decades of experience, every entrant should feel there is a place within the program to showcase outstanding craftsmanship.

To better recognize the many ways professionals

contribute to the industry, the committee introduced five Special Recognition Awards.

Best Overall Project will honor the highest-scoring project submitted across all Project Excellence categories, recognizing the year's most exceptional achievement in water feature construction.

Best Collaboration Project celebrates projects completed through outstanding teamwork between multiple companies or professionals, recognizing that some of the industry's finest work is accomplished through collaboration.

Best Matured Pond recognizes ponds and water features that have stood the test of time. Rather than focusing on newly completed installations, this award celebrates projects that continue to thrive years after construction, demonstrating lasting craftsmanship, thoughtful design, ecological balance and long-term beauty.

Photo of the Year honors exceptional photography that captures the artistry and emotion of water features. Winning images may feature ponds, waterfalls, koi, aquatic plants, wildlife or the landscapes that surround them, highlighting the visual storytelling that inspires the industry.

Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual whose career has made a lasting impact on the pond and water feature profession through leadership, innovation, mentorship and service. Unlike the other awards, this honor will be determined through a public nomination process followed by committee deliberation.

Together, these awards celebrate not only extraordinary projects, but also collaboration, longevity, artistry and the individuals whose dedication continues to move the industry forward.

A New Way to Recognize Excellence: Project Nominations

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the Year Awards will introduce Project Nominations, giving the entire water feature community an opportunity to recognize outstanding work.

Industry professionals, manufacturers, suppliers, distributors and even homeowners are invited to nominate projects they believe deserve recognition. While a nomination does not constitute an official award entry, it serves as an invitation for the project's builder to participate in the competition.

The goal is simple: ensure exceptional work doesn't go unnoticed.

Many remarkable projects are never submitted for awards—not because they aren't deserving, but because builders are busy serving clients or simply don't think to enter. The Project Nominations initiative helps shine a light on those projects and encourages more professionals to showcase the craftsmanship and creativity that continue to elevate the industry.

Once a nomination is received, POND Trade Magazine will contact the builder with an invitation to complete an official submission. Final judging will be based only on completed entries that meet the published submission requirements.

By opening the nomination process to the broader industry, the committee hopes to expand participation, celebrate more outstanding work and ensure the Water Artisan of the

Year Awards continue to recognize the very best our profession has to offer.

A Stronger Judging Process

Transparency and consistency were recurring themes throughout the committee's discussions.

To strengthen the integrity of the awards, each category now includes a standardized scoring rubric that provides judges with clearly defined evaluation criteria while giving entrants a better understanding of how projects will be assessed.

In addition, judges will have the opportunity to advance a limited number of exceptional entries into consideration for Best Overall Project, ensuring remarkable work receives additional recognition regardless of category.

The committee believes these enhancements will create a judging process that is more objective, more consistent and more representative of the industry's highest standards.

Looking Ahead

While the 2026 program marks a major milestone, committee members view these changes as the beginning of an ongoing process rather than a finished product.

As the industry continues to evolve, so too will the Water Artisan of the Year Awards. Future refinements will be guided by continued collaboration with industry professionals, ensuring the program remains relevant, respected and representative of the people it honors.

More importantly, the committee hopes the redesigned awards inspire greater participation throughout the profession. Whether a builder is entering for the first time or has spent decades creating exceptional water features, the Water Artisan of the Year Awards are intended to celebrate craftsmanship, encourage professional growth and recognize the passion that unites the industry.

Thank You

POND Trade Magazine extends its sincere appreciation to Mark Wilson, Shane Hemphill, Dave Duensing, Brian Fitzsimmons, Bradley Blocksom and Jason Lenox for their dedication, thoughtful leadership and countless volunteer hours devoted to shaping the future of the Water Artisan of the Year Awards.

The magazine also thanks the many industry professionals who participated in surveys and shared their perspectives throughout the spring and summer. Their feedback helped ensure the program reflects the priorities, values and aspirations of the industry as a whole.

Together, the committee and the broader water feature community have laid the foundation for a stronger, more inclusive Water Artisan of the Year Awards program—one that celebrates not only exceptional projects, but also the people whose creativity, craftsmanship and commitment continue to elevate the profession.

POND Trade Magazine looks forward to opening submissions for the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards and celebrating another year of extraordinary work from across the water feature industry. 



The 2025 Water Artisan of the Year winners. Top Left: Recreational Ponds - Thomas VanAmerongen. Top Right: Fountains and Formal Features - Erik Santana. Bottom Left: Best Pondless - Bradley Blocksom. Bottom Right: Most Naturalistic - Diego Asturias and Dan Peterson.



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MEET THE JUDGES

Meet the distinguished industry professionals selected to judge the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards, bringing decades of experience, craftsmanship and expertise to this year's competition.



Diego Asturias, co-founder and co-owner of Fontana Ponds & Water Features in British Columbia, Canada, joins the Water Artisans of the Year judging panel as a two-time WATY winner.

Since transitioning from traditional landscaping to specialized water-feature construction, Asturias and his team have built a strong reputation in the pond industry. His experience as both an accomplished water-feature artist and multiple-time WATY winner gives him a valuable perspective on the design, craftsmanship and execution required of award-winning projects.



Ana Arntson, co-founder of the Pond Professional Alliance, joins the Water Artisans of the Year judging panel, bringing a unique perspective rooted in business leadership, communication and community building. A homeschooling mother of four, Ana has also played an integral role in helping transform Stonebridge Pond and Waterfall Co. into the successful water-feature company it is today.

Her ability to build meaningful relationships, foster communication and strengthen connections throughout the pond industry brings an important perspective to the WATY judging process. POND Trade is proud to welcome Ana to the WATY judging panel, where her experience as an industry advocate and community builder will help recognize not only exceptional projects, but the people and craftsmanship behind them.



Dave Duensing of Aquatic Construction Services has more than three decades of experience in the water feature and watershape industry. He is a recognized leader in the design and construction of natural stone formations and living water features throughout the Americas, Caribbean, and beyond.

A passionate educator, Dave has presented and provided training for leading professional organizations, including the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), National Association of Pond Professionals (NAPP), and Association of Pool & Spa Professionals (APSP).

Dave's extensive industry knowledge, design expertise, and commitment to craftsmanship make him a distinguished judge for the Water Artisan of the Year Awards.



Yvo de Wal is the founder of The Koi Partner, one of the world's leading online platforms dedicated to koi and the pond industry. Since 2012, he has documented Japanese koi, ponds, and gardens around the globe, building an audience of hundreds of thousands through educational and behind-the-scenes content. A former police officer turned full-time entrepreneur, Yvo is passionate about promoting the industry, connecting professionals, and showcasing excellence in koi keeping and water feature design making him a valued member of the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year judging panel.



Matt Meachum is the Director of Sales at EasyPro Pond Products, where he leads sales strategy, strengthens customer relationships, and supports continued growth across the water feature and lake management industries. With more than 25 years of experience in sales leadership, Matt brings a wealth of industry knowledge and a passion for helping contractors and distributors succeed. His commitment to innovation, customer service, and advancing the water gardening industry makes him a valuable member of the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year judging panel.



Kyle Weemhoff is a Regional Sales Manager at Atlantic-Oase, where he works closely with contractors and distributors to advance innovative water feature solutions and support industry growth. With extensive experience in pond construction, filtration, and water quality, Kyle is a respected educator and frequent presenter at industry conferences, sharing his expertise on water feature design, pond management, and best practices. His technical knowledge and commitment to helping professionals succeed make him a valued member of the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year judging panel.

Pond Magic Expands Fall Product Line with NEW Fish Food!

Pond Magic is expanding its seasonal product offerings with the addition of Fall Fish Food to its existing fall product line, giving retailers, contractors and pond owners another solution for preparing ponds and fish for cooler temperatures.

The new Fall Fish Food joins Pond Magic's seasonal lineup of De-icers, Cover Netting and Air Pumps, creating a more complete fall and winter pond care program.

"Fall is one of the most important times of the year for pond owners, and having the right products can make all the difference heading into winter," said JR Nixon, national sales manager for Pond Magic. "Adding a dedicated fall food to our seasonal lineup allows us to support not only the pond itself, but also the health and changing nutritional needs of the fish."

Pond Magic Fall Fish Food is an easily digestible, cool-water formula designed to support koi and pond fish as water temperatures decline and their metabolism begins to slow.

The food complements Pond Magic's existing seasonal products, including Cover Netting to help keep leaves and organic debris out of ponds, Air Pumps for dependable aeration and circulation, and Deicers that maintain an opening in winter ice to allow harmful gases to escape.

The addition of Fall Fish Food further expands Pond Magic's commitment to providing dependable, practical seasonal solutions for water garden retailers, professional contractors and pond enthusiasts. The Pond Magic fall product line is available through authorized dealers and distributors.

For inquiries reach out to info@pond-magic.com.



H2O Designs Announces Contractor Training Summit Ahead of HNA

H2O Designs will host the H2O Designs Contractor Training Summit on Oct. 20, 2026, at the H2O Designs Outdoor Living & Design Center in Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Hosted in partnership with Dan Preston of Hardscape Mentor, the one-day educational event will bring together contractors from throughout Central Kentucky, as well as industry professionals traveling to the Hardscape North America (HNA) Show in Louisville later that week.

The summit is designed to help contractors strengthen their businesses, expand their service offerings and gain hands-on experience with products and techniques across the outdoor living industry.

Programming will include hands-on hardscape training led by Preston, along with sessions focused on sales, business development, marketing and lead generation. Educational seminars will also explore opportunities for contractors to expand into complementary services, including water features, outdoor kitchens, pergolas, pavilions and outdoor lighting.

Industry manufacturers and suppliers are invited to participate

as vendors and showcase their products and services throughout the day. There is no cost to exhibit, and lunch will be provided to vendors and attendees. A networking cocktail hour will follow the day's educational programming.

Participating vendors are asked to contribute promotional materials or product samples for attendee welcome bags in lieu of an exhibitor fee. A limited number of opportunities will also be available for vendors interested in presenting educational content or introducing products and services during the summit.

Vendor booth space and presentation opportunities are limited and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

The H2O Designs Contractor Training Summit will take place Tuesday, Oct. 20, at the H2O Designs Outdoor Living & Design Center, 250 North Plaza Drive, Nicholasville, KY 40356.



Water Garden Expo Introduces New Brand Identity Ahead of 2027 Event

Water Garden Expo is the premier educational conference and trade show dedicated to the water gardening industry.

Bringing together professionals from across North America, WGE provides expert education, hands-on training, and opportunities to connect with the manufacturers, suppliers, and leaders shaping the future of the industry.

This year, Water Garden Expo (WGE), has unveiled a new brand identity and logo, signaling an exciting new chapter for one of the industry's leading educational events. The refreshed logo features a clean, contemporary design centered around the WGE name, representing the continued evolution of the Expo and its mission to connect, educate, and inspire water gardening professionals.

"For years, Water Garden Expo has brought together contractors, retailers, manufacturers, and industry leaders to share knowledge

and strengthen our profession," said Randy Stewart, of Pondliner Wholesale. "This new brand reflects the energy and momentum of today's industry while positioning WGE for the future."

The rebrand comes as organizers prepare for Water Garden Expo 2027, taking place February 10–12, 2027.

The three-day event will feature educational seminars, hands-on demonstrations, networking opportunities, and an exhibit hall showcasing the latest products and innovations from across the water gardening industry. It will also feature the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards presented by POND Trade Magazine.

Designed exclusively for industry professionals, Water Garden Expo provides attendees with practical education, valuable business insights, and opportunities to build lasting relationships with peers and suppliers.

Additional information on registration, educational sessions, exhibitors, and event programming will be announced in the coming months.



Water Artisan of the Year Awards Open for 2026

POND Trade Magazine has opened submissions and nominations for the 2026 Water Artisan of the Year Awards, with an expanded program designed to recognize outstanding craftsmanship, creativity and innovation throughout the pond and water feature industry.

For the first time, industry professionals and the public may nominate deserving projects for consideration. Contractors, manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, homeowners and fellow industry professionals are invited to nominate exceptional ponds and water features. Following a nomination, POND Trade will contact the project's builder and invite them to complete an official submission.

Pond builders and water feature professionals may also submit their own work directly, with participation encouraged from professionals at all stages of their careers.

The 2026 Project Excellence categories include Most Naturalistic Pond, Best Pondless Water Feature, Fountains & Formal Features, and Best Recreational & Swim Pond.

Expanded Special Recognition Awards include Best Overall Project, Best Collaboration Project, Best Matured Pond, Photo of the Year and Lifetime Achievement Award.

Entries and nominations are now being accepted. Visit POND Trade Magazine online for category descriptions, judging criteria, eligibility requirements, deadlines and submission information.



New Book Offers Practical Guide to Successful Koi Keeping



Five Crow Press has reFive Crow Press has released Secrets for Happy Koi: A Definitive Guide for New Koi and Pond Owners by Rajat Agarwal, a practical resource designed to help new and aspiring pond owners build healthy, thriving koi ponds.

Drawing on more than a decade of hands-on experience, Agarwal presents science-based guidance in an easy-to-understand format. The book covers water quality, pond design, filtration, feeding, seasonal maintenance and common troubleshooting techniques, making complex topics accessible for hobbyists of all experience levels.

“I wrote this book to take the guesswork out of koi keeping,” Agarwal said. “Anyone can enjoy a thriving pond with the right foundation and a little consistency.”

The full-color guide includes photographs, charts, checklists and practical maintenance tips intended to help readers establish and maintain balanced pond ecosystems. Rather than focusing

solely on individual problems as they arise, the book emphasizes understanding how the different components of a koi pond work together to support fish health and water quality.

Agarwal also addresses some of the common challenges that can overwhelm new pond owners, providing readers with a foundation for recognizing potential problems and responding appropriately. By explaining the relationship among water chemistry, filtration, feeding and routine maintenance, the guide aims to help hobbyists make more informed decisions and develop consistent pond-care practices.

Seasonal pond management is another area of focus, helping readers understand how the needs of koi and their aquatic environment change throughout the year. Practical guidance gives pond owners a framework for adjusting maintenance and feeding routines as conditions change while maintaining a stable environment for their fish.

Designed as both an introduction for first-time koi keepers and a reference that pond owners can return to as questions arise, Secrets for Happy Koi combines technical information with practical advice that can be applied to backyard ponds of varying sizes and designs.

Secrets for Happy Koi is available in paperback and eBook formats through ATX Koi, Five Crow Press, Barnes & Noble and Amazon. Wholesale and bulk-order pricing is also available.

Atlantic-Oase Contractor Trainings

The 2026–2027 Atlantic-Oase Contractor Training schedule is now live, giving contractors the opportunity to sharpen their skills through immersive, hands-on education. Hosted at Atlantic-Oase headquarters in Aurora, Ohio, these three-day sessions put attendees in the field building water features, installing products, troubleshooting real-world scenarios and learning proven techniques from experienced professionals.

Designed for contractors looking to expand their services or refine their craft, the small-group trainings combine practical instruction with opportunities to connect with fellow industry professionals. Attendees gain firsthand experience with Atlantic-Oase products and systems while learning installation techniques and best practices they can apply directly to future projects.

For more information and the complete training schedule, visit the Atlantic-Oase Contractor Trainings page at:

<https://www.oase.com/en-US/pond-and-water-garden/contractor/contractor-trainings>



Hardscape North America Brings Technical Education to Louisville

Hardscape North America will bring contractors and industry experts together Oct. 21-23 in Louisville, Kentucky, for technical education focused on practical installation techniques, emerging technologies and profitable service opportunities.

Produced by the Concrete Masonry & Hardscapes Association, HNA’s 2026 education program will cover topics including natural stone, fire and water features, retaining walls, permeable pavements, manufactured stone veneer and site preparation.

“One of the greatest values of HNA is learning directly from professionals who have spent years solving the same challenges contractors face every day,” said Bob Thomas, president and CEO of CMHA. “These sessions go beyond theory. They’re built around practical experience, proven techniques and lessons that can immediately improve the quality and profitability of projects.”

Among the featured sessions, Bill Hylton will discuss the design, installation and sales opportunities associated with gas fire pits, fireplaces and fire-and-water features. Reid Johnston and Dacia Woodworth will explore the use of natural stone in outdoor kitchens, fireplaces, water features and seating areas.

Additional education will address segmental retaining wall design and construction, maintenance of permeable interlocking concrete pavements, mortar technology for manufactured stone veneer and proper subgrade and aggregate preparation for high-end hardscape installations.

Education will also extend beyond the classroom with six interactive Hardscape Demos presented by Local Roots Landscaping. Installation professionals will demonstrate techniques involving retaining walls, pavers, outdoor kitchens, lighting, water and fire features, and digital tools.

CMHA Installer Courses will be offered Oct. 20-21 at the Hyatt Regency Louisville, providing classroom instruction, training materials and optional certification exams.

HNA is co-located with Equip Expo, giving attendees access to both shows with one badge and more than 1,000 exhibits, outdoor demonstration areas and networking opportunities.

Trade show registration is \$30 through Sept. 3, with education and VIP packages available separately. Additional information and registration are available at HardscapeNA.com.



EasyPro Pond Products to Exhibit at Hardscape North America 2026

EasyPro Pond Products, a leading manufacturer of pond, water feature, and water garden equipment will exhibit at Hardscape North America (HNA) 2026, taking place October 21–23 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

Attendees can find EasyPro at Booth 21010, where the company's team will be on hand to discuss its line of pumps, aeration systems, filtration, rec pond kits, wetland filtration

components and water features. HNA is co-located with Equip Exposition and draws thousands of hardscape, landscape, and outdoor living professionals from across North America each year. EasyPro invites contractors, dealers, and distributors attending the show to stop by Booth 21010 to see their products firsthand and speak with the team.

www.easypro.com 800-448-3873



Evolution Aqua USA Highlights Continued Evolution of UV Technology

Evolution Aqua USA is highlighting the continued development of Evolution Aqua’s ultraviolet water treatment technology, a product category that has grown significantly since the company introduced its first range of UV systems in 2010.

Originally developed for aquatic hobbyists, retail applications and domestic and commercial swimming pools, the UV range marked an important expansion of Evolution Aqua’s manufacturing capabilities and water treatment expertise. The systems were designed to improve water clarity and performance across a variety of aquatic applications.

Over the years, Evolution Aqua has continued to advance the line with enhanced safety features and the introduction of its Titanium UV range.

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