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POOLS OF PERFECTION

*The award-winning Aqua Pools and Spas
continues to set new standards of excellence*

STORY BY JON WESTMAN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN CHERRY



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AQUA POOLS AND SPAS



This spectacular pool at Keswick Hall in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains just outside Charlottesville, Va. features an innovative 3-side floating, 1-side vanishing construction, providing the illusion that the water miraculously ends at the far edge.



This large pool and hot tub combination in St. Michaels provides the ideal outdoor entertainment environment. The space also incorporates a spacious pool house and grill.



For years, Aqua Pools and Spas has been well known for creating distinguished designs, building world-class swimming pools and offering impeccable customer service. But these phrases and their definitions are more than casual lip service for the company's owner, Dan Bridges. While many companies boast about their abilities, the Aqua family can substantiate their excellence through a host of industry awards and a tradition of satisfied clients. Complacency, however, is not permitted and Bridges insists his team diligently strives to improve upon their industry standing.

Bridges knows the importance of earning the trust of a client through honest, hard work, unwavering dedication and a commitment to be the very best. It was this successful business model that he brought to the company upon purchasing it in 1998.

At that time, Aqua had been a proud partner of Easton area homeowners and businesses for nearly 25 years, building and renovating swimming pools that fulfilled their recreational needs. Yet upon Bridges arrival, many changes were made to enhance the company's framework and public persona.

"We made some dramatic changes and implemented a number of philosophies," Bridges said. "Most important-

ly was the promotion of a team environment. Each member of the Aqua team was empowered to make daily decisions that affected this company and its team members."

Bridges was born and raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a fact he is extremely proud of and one he is cognizant of each and every day he's at work.

"I have lived here all my life and it is my wish to continue to serve this community for the rest of my life," Bridges said. "I take an enormous amount of pride in how my company is presented here."

Aqua opened a new retail location in Easton in 2000, providing consumers with an opportunity to experience the commitment and chemistry that exists among staff members, and recently, the company opened its beautiful, new Salisbury retail center on Route 13.

Two years ago, Aqua streamlined its operations by discontinuing the construction of vinyl pools.

"This has allowed us to focus our efforts on the custom aspects of concrete pools and it has made a tremendous difference," Bridges said.

While the company still renovates and replaces liners on existing vinyl pools, they now concentrate their primary efforts on the creation of custom concrete pools.

Aqua can also satisfy one's desire to slip into a relaxing spa — without leaving the friendly confines of their home. The company is the Eastern Shore's exclusive dealer for HotSpring spas, the world's number one selling brand of portable spas.



Aqua built this unique pool for homeowners in Trappe. It features five fountains that continuously pour water into the rectangular shaped design. The project also called for an in-ground hot tub, above.

“A hot tub can be a special place that brings family and friends closer together or the ideal retreat for quiet moments alone — a place that refreshes the mind and body alike,” said Danny Morris, vice president of the company’s retail and spa divisions. “And it can take place in the convenience and comfort of their own backyard.”

“People buy the HotSpring name because they have confidence in the product,” Bridges said. “They have been innovators in the industry since 1977 and continue to lead the way through technology and quality. A HotSpring spa is easy to maintain and endures over time, making it a pleasure to own.”

HotSpring spas are made in the United States and have been rated a Consumer Digest “Best Buy.” For eight consecutive years, Aqua has received HotSpring’s “Elite Dealer Status” distinction, the highest certification level awarded by the company.

The Aqua team takes enormous pride in their abilities to create “Signature Pools of Distinction.” It’s not only the company’s slogan but their professional passion as well.

Through the incorporation of customization options, such as fountains, waterfalls, tanning shelves, automated cleaning and Saline Watercare systems, to name a few, each Aqua customer can feel confident that their concrete swimming pool is truly one of a kind.

“If there is a limit to our abilities, I haven’t seen it,” Bridges said. “Some of the projects that we have been fortunate enough to be a part of are pretty phenomenal.

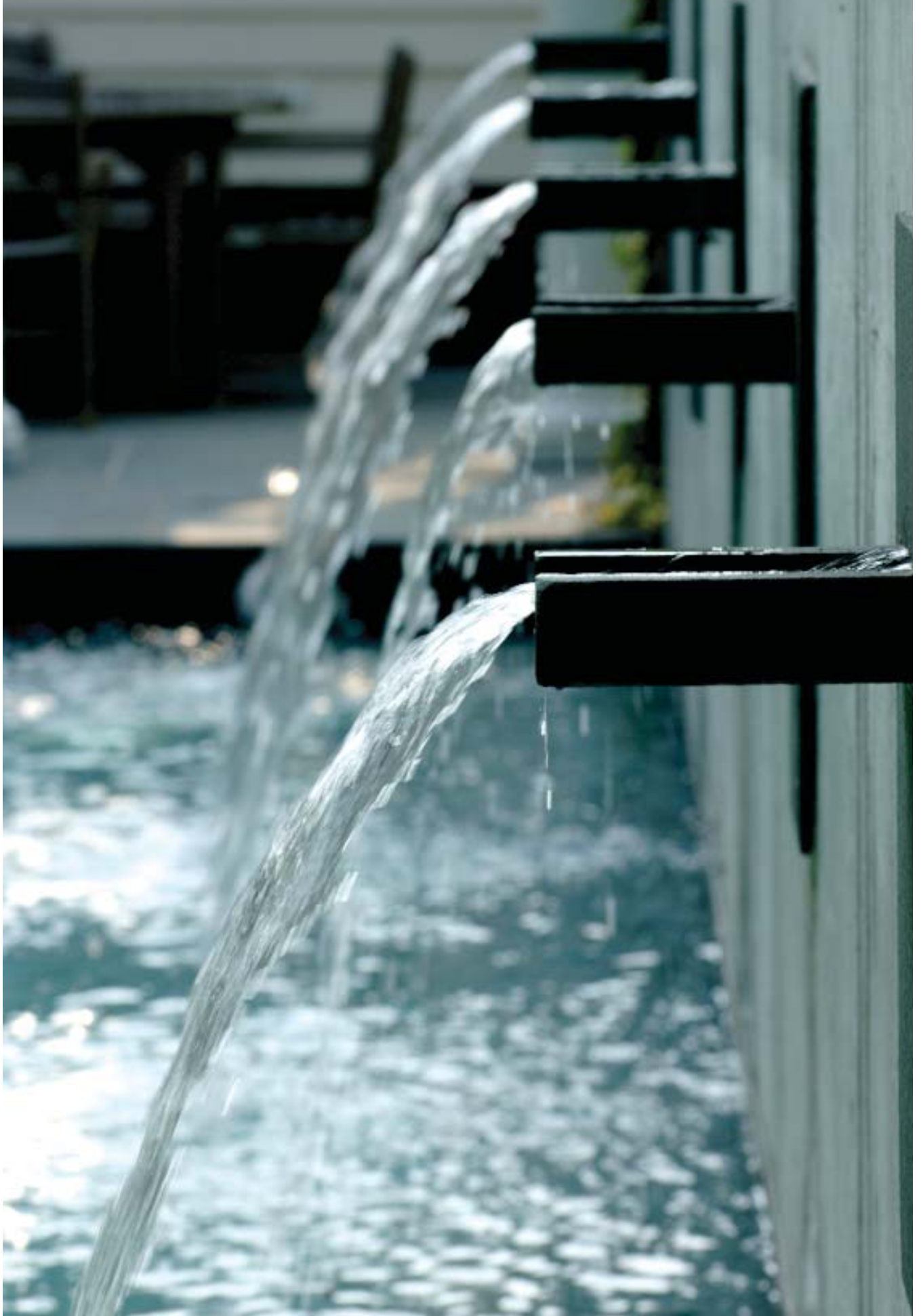
Everyone at Aqua has the talent and ability necessary to succeed. That is pretty rewarding as well. Being as intimate as I am with everything in this business, I am still blown away by the craftsmanship, quality and service of their work. The pride in their work shines through. It is gratifying to experience and fascinating to watch.”

The entire process begins with an initial conversation between an Aqua representative and the potential customer. Bridges and his staff highly recommend that the team visit the proposed site for the swimming pool prior to a formal presentation being made by the company.

“At this point, we discuss the customers’ needs and learn how the pool will be used,” Bridges said. “Whether it’s a social pool, an activity pool or a therapeutic pool.”

The next step is the design phase, one where Aqua showcases its most creative talents, then the proposal phase, and if accepted by the customer, the computerized drawings and permitting process are the next orders of business. After all permits have been approved, excavation begins, which normally takes one day. Plumbing is then incorporated into the space, followed by the pneumatic application of concrete. Craftsmen then hand shape unique elements of the pool, such as benches and water features, and the necessary tiling and coping is added.

The interior finish is applied next and there’s a number of options to choose from, including plaster, acrylic and a Pebble Tech surface. The pool is then filled with water while the curing process of the interior finish solidifies.





Attention to detail is one of Aqua's trademarks, as evidenced by the Ocean City pool of Peck and Patti Miller. The attractive tile facade and diamond shaped inlay are visually stunning.

Once complete, the pool is ready for swimming, at which time the customer's options for decking are explored through Aqua or an outside contractor. The time table for the process from concept to completion is normally eight weeks, but depending on the magnitude of the pool, the process could last between two and 12 weeks, or longer.

"Our customers can be assured that they are getting the highest quality custom concrete pool in the market," Bridges said. "We by no means cut any corners when it comes to the construction and finish of our pools. We only use the finest techniques and products and it is our commitment to excellence that seems to be setting us apart."

"A really strong point about Aqua is that once the pool is built, we have dedicated full service and renovations departments, as well as a complete retail team, to address any and all needs a customer may have," Morris said. "It provides our customers with peace of mind knowing that we have a service department with 275 combined years of experience. We will be there for them for the life of that pool or spa. That's how we back our world-class pools and spas — with world-class service."

"The owners are a part of the Aqua pool family," Bridges said. "We take that responsibility very seriously."

Aqua pool owners feel the same and have mailed countless letters and cards expressing their appreciation for the job performed by the company's team members during their pool or spa purchasing experience.

"From the timeliness of response from design to construction, to the quality of product and follow-up service, Aqua is unsurpassed," said William Bryan of Trappe. "Dan Bridges and his team should be highly commended for their efforts. I've put in a number of pools in the past 35 years, but no one has come close to what Aqua has done. I couldn't be more pleased."

"We love it. It's like having our own little vacation right in our own backyard," said Deborah Hathaway of Easton.

"It's wonderful for my back and it's relaxing, and great for spending time with my friends and grandkids," said Bert Heimert of Royal Oak.

"In the 18 years we've been married, it's the best money we've ever invested. We are in our spa every night," said Dewey Reed of Trappe.

"I am writing to express my extreme satisfaction with the service provided by Aqua pools," said Ed Kavanaugh of Royal Oak.

"I want to express our sincere appreciation for the outstanding job Aqua has done for us," said Don Andrew of Cambridge.

Serving the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Sussex County, Delaware, Aqua builds between 50 and 100 pools annually, depending on the size and magnitude of the projects. The average size of a swimming pool is 600 to 700 square feet, and they have crafted residential pools as large as 2,000 square feet and commercial pools as large as 4,000 square feet. Aqua is a full service, custom concrete pool manufacturer and has constructed thousands of swimming pools — from small Key West-style garden pools in the \$30,000 range to extravagant \$500,000 com-





When it comes to water features, Aqua's talent shines, as was the case with this infinity pool.



mercial pools, and everything imaginable in between.

"We are an all encompassing pool and spa company," Morris said. "We take a lot of pride in offering a wide array of products and services and customize them to each individual based upon their lifestyle and their budget."

"Our commitment to quality is unparalleled," Bridges said. "I would much rather explain why we might or might not be more expensive than a competitor than apologize for the quality of one of our pools. It is easy to get into a price war or to cut quality in order to lessen the price, but that will never happen here. We make customers for life and quality is paramount in our relationship with them."

Aqua currently operates two retail locations, in Easton and Salisbury, and is actively examining opportunities for expansion in the greater Ocean City area.

"The resort corridor is a rapidly growing area and demand is very high for pools or spas from owners of condos and single family homes there," Bridges said. "We have had discussions about opening a new retail location in that area and are very excited about the opportunity to do so, but we will be very deliberate about making that move. We must make sure we have all of the necessary information to make that decision."

Construction is well underway on Aqua's new world headquarters in Easton. The 15,000 square foot facility, which according to Bridges is just "Phase One," will provide an all-inclusive showcase of the company's diverse talents and products. Among the many highlights will be an extraordinary commercial demonstration pool and a





PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AQUA POOLS AND SPAS



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Aqua can also add elements of interest to recreational swimming pools, such as the waterfall in this Easton pool.

retail showroom that is three-times the size of their current Easton storefront.

"This will showcase for what we can do," Bridges said. "It will highlight the ability of our design team, and locally, will certainly be one of the most unique and informative centers in the pool and spa business."

The facility is scheduled for completion by year's end.

The pool that has become Aqua's signature pool was a project at Keswick Hall located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains just outside Charlottesville, Va. The team's collaborative effort produced a visually stunning masterpiece ideally suited for the prestigious Orient Express Hotel. It features a 3-side floating, 1-side vanishing construction that provides the illusion to hotel guests that the water is "vanishing" over the edge of a mountain. The pool contained "every amenity imaginable," Bridges said, including underwater audio speakers.

"That pool demonstrated our limitlessness," Bridges said. "It is not the easiest pool to build, but our team pulled it off seamlessly. It demonstrated our ability to handle some pretty phenomenal projects. That pool was a turning point for the commercial side of our business." Aqua has built upon the momentum generated from the Keswick Hall masterpiece to acquire the design and installation of many notable commercial projects on the Eastern Shore, including the Pocomoke and Dorchester YMCA pools and the George Murphy Community Pool.

Bridges and his team members were offered the opportunity to bid on the Keswick Hall project thanks to





The creative visions of homeowners and Aqua team members evolve into reality through communication and hard work. In this Quantico pool, four pedestals provide front row seating at the bar on a hot summer day.

their efforts on the property's sister hotel, the Inn at Perry Cabin, in St. Michaels.

Aqua's 50 employees are highly trained in every aspect of their respective jobs — through their attendance at specific manufacturing seminars to their participation in individual workshops in a classroom setting. These experiences provide each Aqua team member with advanced degrees of industry knowledge, market awareness and ground breaking technologies that fuel their professionalism on a daily basis.


"As people get to know us, I believe that they are impressed with our capability and knowledge to handle everything that our work encompasses. We take a lot of pride in that," Bridges said. "Our team members are extremely well versed in their respective fields. Our supervisors and employees go through a lot of training and are able to answer just about any question a customer may have. If they cannot answer a question, they can make a phone call to someone on our team who can. It is very difficult to stump us."

Aqua employees have even been known to surpass the customer relations expectations of the boss, and in Bridges' case, that is a very tall order.

"They also recognize past clients and the services we performed for them. I see it on a daily basis and it blows me away," Bridges said. "They can remember a particular customer from the thousands of pools that we installed, and then they go a step further and can discuss their individual needs with them. It's incredible."

Bridges credits Eastern Shore native Jim Penuel, Aqua's Salisbury store manager, with achieving fantastic results at their newest location — which plays a vital role in the company's ability to expand toward Ocean City.

"He is the face of our Salisbury store and the gentleman forging lasting relationships with our customers in that area," Bridges said. "He is doing a wonderful job."

The company's talent and commitment to excellence has been recognized internationally through a host of industry awards, including 16 International "Pool of Distinction" awards from the National Pool and Spa Institute, the 1993 Gordon W. Rudd Pool of the Year Award, NSPI's highest award, as well as the 1998 NSPI International Design Award, making Aqua the Eastern Shore's only recipient of this prestigious award. In 2005, the company received the HotSpring Retail Excellence Award for Marketing and Promotions, an honor presented exclusively to Morris and Aqua from more than 500 dealers worldwide. 

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