



A stunning waterside infinity pool at Whale Beach by Wrights Pools

He and his staff would detail all the factors required for the project and itemise costs to arrive at a project total. It was a laborious task open to the occasional human error such as transposed or mis-keyed figures.

Eventually Wright decided it was time for a faster, more tailored solution. Rather than using generic spreadsheets he wanted a dedicated estimating software solution – one that would provide customisable

templates and automatically carry out the calculations required.

“We were looking for something that would automate the estimating process. Our old methods were becoming too time-consuming and the risk of error was growing,” he says.

He decided to deploy Sage Timberline, an enterprise resource planning software package that had proven to be particularly suited to companies in the construction, real estate and property management industries.

“It’d come across it years earlier when I first started out and was in general construction,” Wright says.

The benefit of Timberline’s estimating module is that it offers a simple on-screen question-and-answer format that steps users through all the elements required for each project. From this information and a built-in database of costs, customisable formulae are applied to automatically calculate the costs for each line item or portion of the project. It was an ideal solution to Wright Pools needs.

With help from the solution provider, Enabling, the estimating software was installed on Wright Pools’ computer system as a stand-alone solution.

“We don’t need a great deal of complexity so we haven’t integrated it with Excel or with our accounting system,” Wright says.

“We simply use it to create an estimate so that we have a price point to work from. We take the figures from Timberline and work them into our own documents. Then, when we are awarded the contract, we print off the estimate and it contains all the costs for the job.”

### Halving the time

It’s a couple of years now since Wright adopted the software solution, but he still remembers his first impressions.

“When I first saw it, Timberline seemed a bit daunting but like all things, once you start using it, you get used to it. Now I don’t find it the least bit difficult. We do around ten to twenty estimates a week, week in and week out and have become fairly proficient in its use. I can play it like a piano,” he says.

Since the introduction of the software, accuracy of estimates has improved noticeably. One reason for this is Timberline’s process of testing formulae. Whenever a new formula is added or an existing one changed, Wright performs a manual check to come up with an answer to the calculation. He then runs the test in Timberline. If the two answers are the same, he knows

*“We do around ten to twenty estimates a week, week in and week out and have become fairly proficient in its use. I can play it like a piano.”*


the calculation has been written correctly and that it works. If the answers differ, he begins his search to find the mistake. It’s a deceptively simple process but one that wasn’t automatically an option when using spreadsheets. “I’d say that Timberline is not so much saving us money through better estimating, but it’s not costing us money,” Wright says.

Periodically Wright has turned to Enabling for support and assistance. He’s developed a close relationship with the consultants there, but has come to know enough about the program that he rarely needs help. “The only time we really need help is if there’s a bug or we need to install the software on another machine,” he says.

“If I were to benchmark what we were doing with the spreadsheets compared to what we are doing with Timberline, we have a far more accurate and far quicker set up now. We’re saving around fifty percent of the time that used to be spent on creating an estimate.”


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# Storyboards for business

By Steve Smith

Planning for the new financial year? All the top result-producers I know always have extensive “to do” lists and are almost fanatical about creating them. It’s what can make the difference between a fast start compared to a slow start of a day, a week or a year.

It’s one thing to have a vision of what you want to do in your head, but it’s another thing to have it in a form that’s easy to share with other people and actually help move your business forward.

It’s the same theory behind why movie directors create storyboards before filming their movie. Because time is short, resources are expensive and they have to make sure that all their production staff is on the same page. They paint out a graphical picture so the team that makes the sets has a basic idea what they should look like, and the camera and lighting teams have an idea of what angles and

shots are needed. It’s not comprehensive, but provides a visual cue.

And it’s not just there, in sport when the coach is planning plays or with architects creating blueprints, there is a picture of the future already drawn.

So what is the picture for your business this year? What will your business look like?

Get started using these simple but powerful points:

**Step one: Move away from the computer and phone.**

Nothing great has ever been created with constant interruption. If you don’t get time to gather your thoughts then you won’t put the real time into your future that you need to.

**Step two: Grab a piece of paper and some coloured pens.**

Although digital seems to be the rage, analogue works. It makes it easier to avoid the interruptions of emails and messages as well.

**Step three: List where you are right now.**

On the left-hand side, write a list from top to bottom of some simple phrases that describe where your business is right now. We don’t need the full story but just the most important things. For example it could be “over stocked”, “patchy quality”, “inconsistent sales”, “over servicing clients”. Keep doing this for every one of your areas of improvement.

**Step four: List where you want to be next year.**

Draw an arrow for each of the points on this list across to the right hand side of the page. Then on the right-hand side, add the words that you want to describe this area next year. For example: “lean stock”, “high quality”, “consistent sales”, “efficient servicing of clients”.

This can then become the focal point for your projects for the next financial year. Get your team involved to find out how they can help you move from where you are now, to where you are aiming to be. These can be the themes for the year and the focus of projects or teams.

But the important part is, at least you have a clear picture of where you are coming from and where you are going to. ■

Steve Smit is a business coach with Reality Consulting. For a free copy of his Business Accelerator Pack visit [www.realityconsulting.com.au](http://www.realityconsulting.com.au).



# ASTOUNDING *surrounds*



**Main:** Lawn is used effectively here, adding a soft green element to balance the formal lines of the pool and surrounds.

**Above right:** This poolcape showcases how vertical tiles can complement the horizontal if the material is well selected.

**Below:** Large format sandstone can create a perfect frame for a beautiful pool, as this Peter Glass design shows



Turkey, Italy and Mexico. The stone material itself is available in a huge range of colours, tones, shapes and sizes. It can be cross-cut or vein-cut. In addition, the finish can be smooth sawn or rough sawn; filled or unfilled; honed, acid-etched, sand-blasted, tumbled, wire-brushed, bush-hammered or polished. Whatever happened to just ‘travertine please?’

Other natural stones include the many forms of sandstone, limestone, quartzite, slate, marble, granite and so on, in their many available variations and finishes.

Glass says that because of the wide variety of choices – not only in material range and finish, but also price – it’s important to set design parameters to help you choose the most suitable material and finish for each specific project. These can be determined by asking a series of pertinent questions (see breakout box on page 58).

“Also, there are the many essentials for ensuring that the selected finish and material is fixed correctly,” says Glass. “This relates to ‘bed’ preparation, adhesive selection, prevention of calcification, pre-sealing and post-sealing of stone etcetra. But that’s a whole other story altogether.”

## Mediterranean travertine

Amber’s pool tile specialist Kate Lane has just returned from the Mediterranean with the news that white is the new black.

She is firmly behind the trend to dispense with the bold and go for soft, subtle and sophisticated hues of stone – in particular, travertine.

**A**s with many others aspects of swimming pool and landscape construction, pool surrounds are becoming much more sophisticated.

While that means the builder is more able to achieve a stunning result for a client, it also means they need to be across a wider variety of material types and specifications.

Landscape architect Peter Glass has been designing swimming pools and gardens for three decades and his award-winning landscape company is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Most of Peter Glass and Associates’ 10 landscape architects and support staff have been trained by him and been with the company for more than a decade.

Glass says that nowadays, he spends more time than ever keeping up on the latest finishes and applying that knowledge to the how the material is intended to be used.

“The choice of material and finish needs to be considered in the very early design stages of a project,” says

Glass. “This is to ensure that the size, thickness, and other characteristics of the material can be taken into consideration when resolving levels and surface drainage.”

Glass says that by “material”, he generally means natural stone tile or paver; ceramic, clay, glass or other form of manmade tile; clay, concrete, reconstituted-stone or other form of paver; timber or composite timber; in-situ concrete; natural or synthetic pebble or fine aggregate.

“It’s not as simple a choice as it may seem,” he says. “Not just because of the large range of materials available but also because of the large range of possible finishes that can be applied to these various materials.

“For example, where in the past, one may have selected a natural stone material such as travertine for a high quality paved area or pool surrounds, you would have had a choice of one or two types or finishes. Today if you want travertine you can select the stone from many different countries, including

*“The finish can be smooth sawn or rough sawn; filled or unfilled; honed, acid-etched, sand-blasted, tumbled, wire-brushed, bush-hammered or polished. Whatever happened to just ‘travertine please?’”*





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Amber stone floor tiles combined with stacked stone wall feature. Both are suitable for indoors and outdoors, seen here leading to an outdoor shower area



"The muted tones of grey and beige are the new look, as they provide a warm and inviting atmosphere in entertaining areas," she says. "The deep browns, reds and oranges of the past are making way for a more simplistic and subtle look. Large format tiles in subtle colours are sweeping through modern properties, with savvy buyers selecting furniture to match."

Lane says there is a definite trend away from bright and showy tiles with astute builders moving towards pastels and muted tones.

"Amber Tiles has some fantastic natural stone tiles in line with the new trend, but we also have some excellent budget options like the Volcanic series, which provides a fantastic look at a great price," she says.

Lane says their Trojan Edge travertine is suitable for around pools and has a lovely aged patina, while their Honed travertine is also suitable around swimming pools and gives a contemporary look to outdoor areas.

"Travertine stays relatively cool to walk on even in direct sunlight and there are many different formats to choose, from 305mm x 305mm up to 900mm x 600mm and the giant French pattern."

She says that travertine also comes in bullnosed options and has good slip resistance.

### The popularity of porosity

Kane Jensen from architectural tile company, Living Tiles, says that when choosing tiles – either for pool surrounds or for use in the pool itself – you need to carefully consider the porosity of the material.

"Without a doubt, the buzz word from customers regarding tiles is these days is 'porosity'. I even get more questions about porosity than cost," he says.

"I have two theories as to why this is: first, functionality and performance is critical these days with form and design taking a backseat. Most Australians want a product that is easily cleaned and won't stain like other flooring surfaces they've had in the past.

"Second, with advancements in technology comes awareness of the pitfalls of superseded products or production methods."

Jensen's clients are far more aware of the benefits and limitations of flooring products nowadays because of the information readily available on the internet. This also stimulates interest in porosity.

"The vast majority of porcelain tiles we import are vitrified porcelain which is baked to a higher temperature than standard porcelain which increases the strength of the tile and decreases porosity," he says.

"I personally love stone and many people in our business – including the owners – have stone in their homes inside and out. But we accept the limitations and the reality of having stone – namely, it will stain."

Jensen says he spends hours trying to educate his clients by giving them the no-holds-barred

Below: The subtle, soft tones of Amber travertine flowing from the indoors to the poolside

Bottom: French pattern travertine tiling from Amber



*"Large format tiles in subtle colours are sweeping through modern properties."*





Amber's Manhattan Limestone Acid Wash paving

truth about stone, so they are able to make informed decisions when selecting it.

"If you travel to Italy you will see stone that has been there for thousands of years and still looks great; to us it is the wear-and-tear that makes it beautiful. However, Australians want consistency. Fortunately the market has responded and we now have ranges that look exactly like stone but are a vitrified porcelain and have extremely low porosity."

The ability of tiles to emulate stone has developed greatly, and now some manufacturers even use digital printing technology that produces a finish that means no two pieces of tile are the same.

"This allows our customers to achieve the look of stone without the increased costs associated with sealing, installation and the need to re-seal or grind back to prevent stains."

Not only do these tiles resemble stone in look but also in texture, and come in several surface finishes.

"The other trend we see in the market is for larger tiles. We market a tile called Laminam. It is the world's largest and thinnest tile at 1000mm x 3000mm but only 3.5mm thick."

Jensen says this large slab gives his clients the ability to have maximum coverage with minimal grout, which is often the area that needs most attention in wet areas.

Laminam is less than 0.05 per cent porosity and therefore is ideal for use in indoor and outdoor pools. It is available in 71 colours in 11 finishes including an external finish that achieves a commercial slip rating for pools.

"The aesthetic achieved with the large panels is striking in its simplicity," says Jensen.

But he has another product that is even more striking in appearance – literally glowing with luminescence.

"If there is a boy's toy in pool tiles, then for me it is our range of glow-in-the-dark glass mosaics. After a full day of sun these can light up for up to eight hours and achieve amazing luminescence."

There are several patterns available or you can create custom-made designs, including for the glow-in-the-dark series.

"The ability to add a bespoke design to your pool tiles is a great way to personalise the area and not be a slave to the stock standard public pool blue," he says.

## A question of selection

By answering these questions before you start, Peter Glass says you will have the best chance of making the correct material selection for the project in hand.



Landscape architect Peter Glass, whose design company Peter Glass and Associates is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

Q. What is the proposed method of water sanitation and will it prove corrosive to some stone, clay and other materials? Glass advises to not even consider using materials around a salt-chlorinated pool if the manufacturer and/or supplier will not confirm in writing that those materials are suitable for use in such environments.

Q. What materials and finishes will the project budget allow you to select from? Is the slip resistance (coefficient of friction when wet) of the material or the specific finish satisfactory for use around a pool or spa, and does it meet applicable Australian Standards?

Q. Similarly, is the material and/or finish too smooth, making it a dangerous slip hazard; or too rough and therefore dangerous or

uncomfortable underfoot?

Q. If a stone material, will it require pre-sealing and post-sealing, and if so how frequently will the latter be required and what impact will this have on the overall cost?

Q. Is the poolside area exposed to full sun, and if so will a dark coloured material absorb too much heat and as a result become too hot to walk on?

Q. Is the poolside area exposed to full sun, and if so will a light coloured material reflect too much light and as a result create too much glare?

Q. Is the poolside area in a lot of shade or adjacent to tall trees, and if so will this create problems relating to staining, discolouration and algal growth on some of the less dense natural stones and other

light-coloured non-ceramic tiles and pavers?

Q. If timber is being considered, will it be maintained in the long term, and if not will this create a problem with regard to cracking, rotting and splintering, with resultant impact on the appearance, safety and longevity of the material?

Q. What pattern is preferred and what materials are available in the appropriate sizes that will enable the desired pattern to be achieved?

Q. How readily available is the material and finish, and if not in stock will it be guaranteed available so as to not risk delaying the project?

Q. Will the supplied material and finish be guaranteed to match the sample, and if not has the client been made aware of this in writing?

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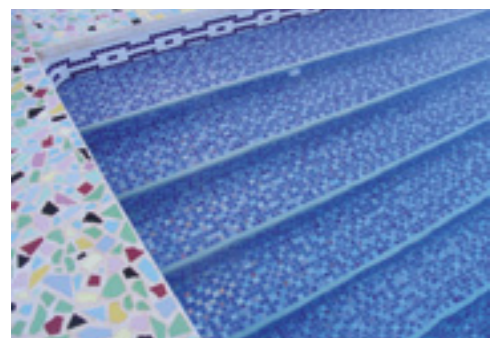
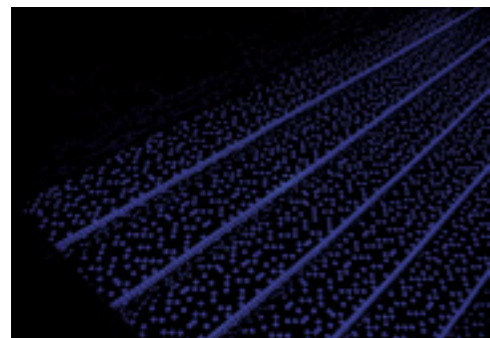






Living Tiles 25mm luminescent mosaics demonstrated here with the lights on and off

This time the glow-in-the-dark tiles are shown on an actual swimming pool, clearly showing the evening effect



### Real artificial grass

One “soft landscaping” option for surrounding swimming pools is grass – or more specifically, lawn.

But lawn has its drawbacks – “burning” from salty or chemical-laden pool water, poor growth and “patching” if sun coverage is less than perfect, and possibly the least favourite of all – lawn clippings in the swimming pool.

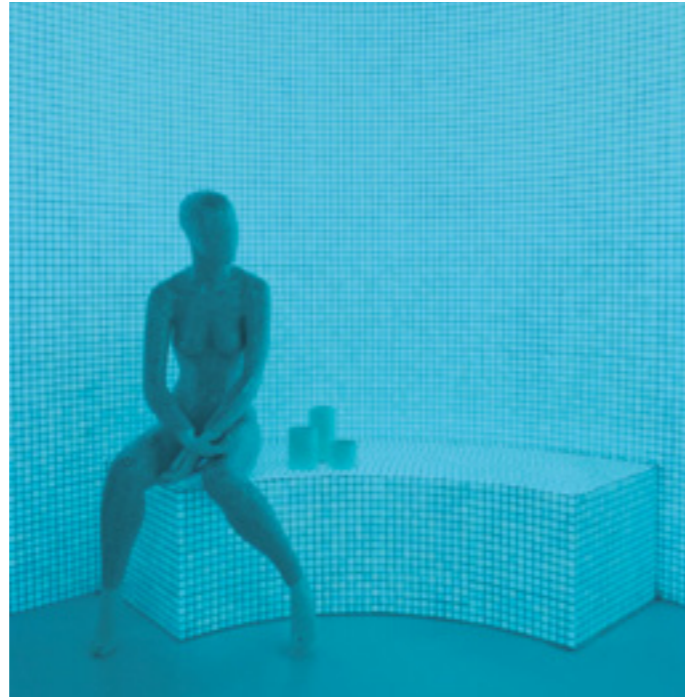
One option is artificial grass. While an entire lawn area of artificial grass might not seem appealing, its judicious use can enhance a poolscape – especially if the grass selection has a realistic appearance.

One type of artificial grass to concentrate on the “real” look is Regal Grass. The manufacturer says it was designed especially for its aesthetic value, with a great deal

of attention paid to the height and density of the grass blades to make sure they are carefully matched. It even includes small “dead” grass underneath, as you would find in a real lawn. This enhances its ability to fool the eye into believing it is indeed a natural lawn.

The manufacturer says that while soft to the touch, Regal Grass is extremely resilient, easily being able to take kids playing on it and even pets.

To make it even more comfortable, Regal Grass also has the option to enhance that natural feel of walking on springy grass, by adding comfort foam. This is a foam layer applied directly underneath the synthetic lawn, a bit like underlay for carpet, which makes the experience much more enjoyable and realistic.



### A burst of wall colour

One element of a landscape design can be the brick wall. It may be a short wall separating parts of a garden, parterre style; a garden bed; a boundary fence; retaining wall or even one of the external walls of the home turned into a feature.

But there is no reason the wall has to be made from stock-standard bricks.

PGH Bricks has unveiled a new collection that can add stunning colour to any new wall or some paving projects.

The Vibrant Collection was designed with their colour forecasting experts, Colourways. The eye-popping colours definitely change the old perception that bricks are boring, and the fun and funky colours are finished with a full ceramic glaze for internal or external use.

The collection consists of seven colours: Cosmic (plum), Fizz (yellow), Paris (pink), Wasabi (green), Rhapsody (blue), Tango (orange) and Watermelon (red).

### A wall of plants

Traditionally, walls are vertical and gardens are horizontal. This concept may be turned on its head thanks to new research funded by the Australian Government.

A Rural Industries R&D Corporation (RIRDC) research project that has identified a number of hardy native plants that can readily grow on the walls and roofs of buildings.

Dubbed “vertical gardens”, the concept involves setting up slim-line growing beds on building walls and also on rooftops, where the plants grow in specialised soil and are watered using a drip irrigation system.

The research project found that there were social, environmental and economic benefits to be had by growing plants on walls and rooftops.

One of the project’s chief researchers, Dr Melinda Perkins from the University of Queensland says that the greatest benefit of a vertical garden is its ability to block heat.

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Above: The Vibrant Collection from PGH

Right: Artificial grass can be a great alternative where real grass can't grow

Below: Close up of Regal Grass, showing the realistic yellowed blades



"Apart from being attractive, these gardens can reduce the need for air conditioning in warm weather by shading and buffering buildings from heat," Perkins says.

Temperature reductions of up to 17 degrees Celsius were achieved.

"In the built environment this can lead to very significant reductions in energy demand for air conditioners. The technology used to grow the plants is widely adopted in Europe, particularly Germany, and is becoming more popular in the USA and Singapore," she says.

The research project identified six native plant species for green roofs and seven for green walls that displayed traits suited to Australia's harsh sub-tropical environment.

To be suitable the plants need to have a strong, shallow root system, provide good vegetation cover, be pest and

disease hardy, and be tolerant of wind, drought and high temperatures.

On the other hand, species prone to become a weed problem or which display aggressive growth rates were avoided. And, of course, poisonous plants were wisely rejected.

In terms of performance, the natives Creeping Myoporum and Winter Apple, and the exotic Tasteless Stonecrop displayed good survival and coverage as an extensive green roof species.

For green walls, Bulbine Lily, Cockspur Flower and Silver Plectranthus performed well in terms of their growth and survival.

Future research may look into how green roofs and walls could be included in building sustainability incentive schemes, such as the Green Building Council's Green Star rating. The Living Wall and Green Roof Plants report is available from the RIRDC website. ■



Right: An RIRDC scientist experimenting with new plant varieties for their vertical garden concept

#### Contacts

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