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### Backyard Environments in 2016

Pools and spas are the foundation for many backyard landscapes in Florida. Homeowners construct pools and spas for many reasons, including their entertainment value, the exercise they can provide, and for the aesthetic improvement of an empty yard into a vacation-like tropical zone. To achieve such a design, however, more than just the pool or spa itself is often considered. Thus, especially in recent years, an emphasis has been placed on the unique ways a homeowner can embellish their backyard pool with extra features like lighting and foliage. In our technology-driven world, there is also demand for innovations in how pools are decorated, maintained, and kept safe. Therefore, the industry in Florida has to integrate the creation of “back-to-nature” backyard environments with the goal of making pools and spas tech-friendly. In order to keep up with what clients want for their backyards, the FSPA plays a key role in staying on top of trends and coming up with their own innovations, as well as helping member companies anticipate and respond to what clients desire by making education of employees a priority.

Industry trends can change rapidly, and those of the pool and spa industry in Florida are no exception. While a clean, safe pool or spa is the key to a pleasant backyard, other aspects are important as well. Books such as Donegan and Short’s *Pools and Spas* point out that a pool or spa is “only one element in the overall design of your outdoor living space,” going on to mention decks, patios, lighting, landscaping, and sheds (12). This desire to place a pool within the larger context of a unique backyard environment comes from the idea that one shouldn’t have to leave his or her own home to experience a sort of soothing, tropical vacation. According to an article entitled “Pools: A History of Innovation” in *Aqua Magazine*: “The concept of the stay-at-home

vacation or ‘stay-cation’ prompted designers to think beyond the water's edge. Outdoor kitchens, entertaining areas, fire features, sound systems and increasingly complex landscape designs took hold, resulting in a new era of creative design expansion.”

Such innovations in backyard decoration have been around for several years now, and they continue to be important. However, more recent trends have come about to bring technology to the backyard, and to make pool design even more unique for the individual homeowner. *Aqua Magazine* goes on to discuss that “evermore-sophisticated electronic controls became standard on a growing percentage of installations.” When asked about such advancements, Daniel Rankin, an employee of Abundant Energy, talked about a few of the new developments: “Some current trends are automation of pool systems, and water and lighting features. Also, something new is wireless technology that can control functions of the pool and backyard, like lighting, on a tablet or phone. They’re even introducing a projector that can project images or movies into the bottom of a pool.”

According to the article “High-tech Innovations to Make Your Pool Safer” on American Home Shield’s website, another aspect of the backyard environment that is becoming common is the integration of technology for pool safety and maintenance. For example, there is an app called Insta-Link Home, which aids in the testing of a pool’s chlorine and pH levels using a phone’s camera. Other examples are the Wahoo Swim Monitoring System, a set of sensors that a swimmer can attach to themselves that will alert someone if they have been underwater too long, and alarms that will go off if someone falls into the pool.

Because new technologies become available every day, the industry has to be attentive to constant updates on relevant equipment and innovations. Therefore, many recent pool and spa trends, like apps, safety measures, computerization of maintenance systems, and digitized design

features, affect the industry by requiring pool and spa professionals to take the initiative to make sure clients have access to the best of what is currently available. Understanding what is outdated, discovering what is new and innovative, and anticipating what is soon to come are all essential to making the most of the current digital age. New backyard trends thus affect the Florida pool and spa industry by requiring constant improvements in how work is done and continual shifts in recommendations for clients. Additionally, the integration of technology undoubtedly makes the Florida pool and spa industry more inviting to the younger generation. In an article called “Reaching the next generation,” the June 2016 issue of the monthly newsletter Florida Pool Pro discusses the importance of attempts to get young people interested in jobs in the pool industry. Because this industry is evolving and is forward-looking in its embrace of technology, gaining driven young workers will be easier.

The FSPA plays a key role in making sure member companies, employees of these companies, and the clients they serve are all aware of the innovations that can be taken advantage of to make backyard environments the best they can be. As Daniel Rankin noted, “Ongoing education of employees is one way the FSPA can assist members with clients’ pool and backyard needs.” Continuing and expanding upon seminars and course offerings that are free for employees and company owners to attend and encouraging communication on all levels of the association are the best ways to make sure clients are satisfied, the industry evolves, and companies build good relationships between clients and employees.

## Works Cited

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