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Edgeless

in Vacationland

We cling to our illusions up here at the end of the world.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

You've got to dig Jackie Tapley, Maine's grand dame of swimming pool excavation. She started Aquatic Development by Tapley 52 years ago. Now, she's on the leading edge of edgelessness.

"Infinity edge, negative edge, vanishing edge—they're called by many names," she says of the design. "After we first brought the beautiful vanishing-edge pools to our clients, word got around. Now, more and more clients are asking for them."

In the dark days before there was such a pool in Maine, "We showed our first customer, a gentleman from Castine, pictures from France" to get the idea across.

When his creation leapt like a blue gem



into the Atlantic, the buzz started and landscape designers started driving slowly by. "Suddenly my son, Lani Tapley," was tapped to design negative-edge pools for celebrity builders from "the Knickerbocker Group in Boothbay and Wright-Ryan Construction in Portland."

BEHIND THE ILLUSION

The trick is, "the water travels over the dam wall and into the catch pool. The overflowing water can be slow (over the invisible edge) or



very fast (sheer sheeting over the dam wall)."

It works best when clients get to see "the areas of the lawn where it *doesn't* vanish" in order to better appreciate where it does." When the magic hits you like a stun gun, "the water looks as if the ocean or lake is touching the pool."

Top: This mid-century modern Rockhouse in Cape Neddick was built in the 1950s and stunningly renovated with the addition of the pool, among other things, in the 21st century. **Below, left:** The infinite view from the Rockhouse pool. **Right:** Penobscot Bay negotiates a clean line with the pool at the Inn at Ocean's Edge in Lincolnville.

FROM TOP: ANNE ERWIN SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY(2); COURTESY AQUATIC DEVELOPMENT BY TAPLEY



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MAINE MYSTIQUE



The cost of sheer elegance starts at “\$129,000, the least expensive project we’ve done,” and rises to “over \$500,000. These numbers are for just the pools, streams, spas, and equipment connected to them.” If a project includes further illusion-reinforcing underpinnings “such as landscaping, rock walls, and underground caves for filters, it could go over a million.”

On Route 88, one of her negative-edge pools surprises with “three waterfalls on one side” as the shimmer renews itself, fountain-like, from the catch pool.

If the occasion presented itself, what sort of edgeless book might Tapley recommend to her clients to read beside their edgeless pools?

“The kind that keeps you reading all night until you finish it.”

IRRESISTIBLE IMPULSE

Psychologist Frank Luongo of Portland is intrigued by what’s behind this flirting with being and nothingness:

“Art of all kinds expresses the spirit of the times in which it is created and symbolizes human yearnings and desires.

“Think of the imposing and stately buildings of the Federal period with their massive and impressive facades...” America was a new country, a bit unsure of itself; what you need to project, you design.

“Think of the ornate buildings and architecture of the Victorian era which communicate a sense of wealth and fanciful artistry.

“Modern designs in architecture reflect yearnings of the human spirit for a unification with the universal, with the infinite, with that which does not restrict or limit us, with that in which there are no boundaries.

“Such yearnings are expressed in different ways throughout history. Religious feelings—of unification with the divine, cosmic consciousness, the loss of individual identity

in the more feverish states of religious experiences including trances and the like—are ways of erasing the painfully limited boundaries of being an individual in the vast universe in which we, with more and more awareness, are briefly alive...

“Infinity pools serve multiple purposes as architectural and experiential art. They are beautiful in their simplicity and a status symbol for the owner. They are, it seems by looking at them, capable of immersing one in an environment where the boundaries are, by design, eliminated and yes, they create an element of danger because they present us with the experiential possibility of going too far, going over the edge. Who doesn’t want to flirt with the infinite? Who doesn’t want to experience endlessness?”

LOST HORIZON

Infamously, Lance Armstrong recently snapped at *New York Times* reporter Juliet Macur, who interviewed him overlooking his pool at his Austin, Texas, estate just before it was sold: It’s a “negative edge pool, not an infinity pool. Get it right.”

Hey, you do what you have to do when you’re staring into the abyss. ■



Top of page: There’s a patio in paradise at the very end of Stornoway Road in Cumberland Foreside. Above: The view of Bar Island and Frenchman Bay is mighty fine from an edgeless edge of the West Street Hotel in Bar Harbor.



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