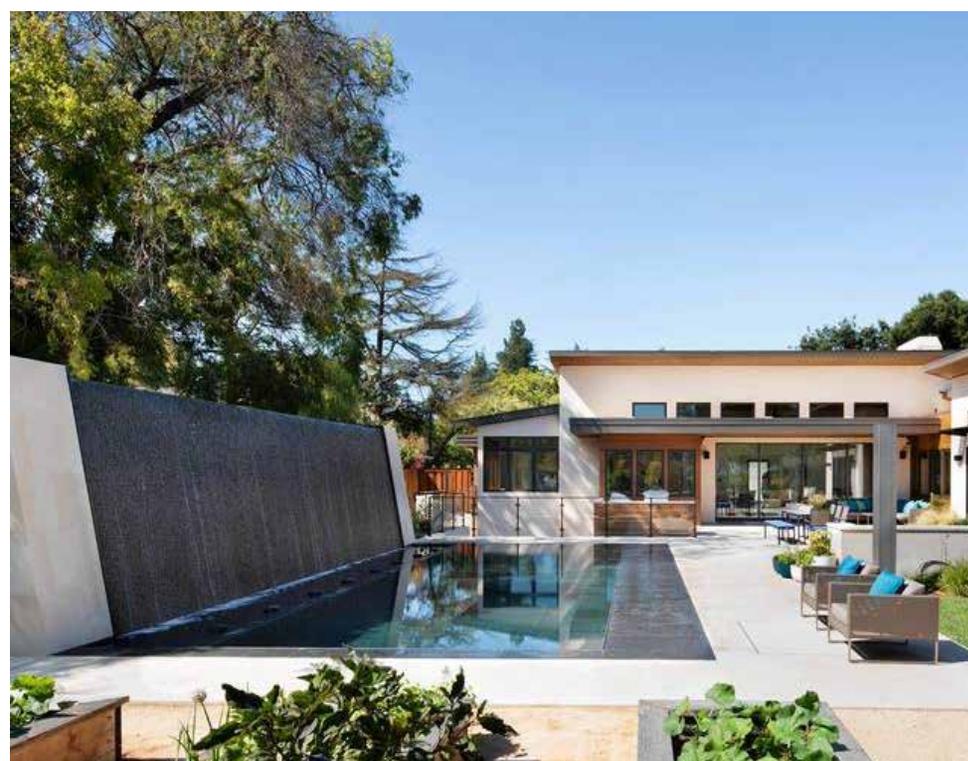


MANSSION

ELEMENTS

The Super-Cool Hidden Pool

A new technology can turn a patio into a swimming pool in 10 minutes, but the price tag is steep: the seven-figure backyard



SOLID GROUND A technology executive with two children recently installed a hidden pool at his Palo Alto, Calif. home. When the floor is up, the children use the area to ride their scooters.

SWIMMING HOLE When the floor lowers, a 442-square-foot pool is revealed. An installation similar to this would cost about \$2 million, including at least \$300,000 for the movable floor.

BY LEIGH KAMPING-CARDER

It is straight out of James Bond: Push a button, and the backyard patio begins to sink. Water rushes in. In less than 10 minutes, you're staring at your secret swimming spot.

Designed for commercial settings, the system behind the hidden pool, known as a movable floor, is now being adapted for residential use by a handful of manufacturers. Though super pricey—the system alone costs hundreds of thousands of dollars—the disappearing pool is starting to appear in high-end homes in London, Tel Aviv, Monaco and, in the past year or two, the U.S.

The floor literally floats on the water. When it is up and locked into place, it can support anywhere from about 20 to 60

pounds a square foot—enough to support a car, patio furniture or a gaggle of party guests, manufacturers say.

When it is time to swim, the hydraulic system lowers the floor—could be a patio, could be a basement—turning it into the pool's bottom. The floor can adjust to any depth, from a wading pool for the children to a lap pool for the adults. Maintenance, manufacturers and installers say, is confined to an occasional checkup.

Alan Crownover, head of San Francisco area-based Paradise Pools and Gardens, installed his first movable floor about a year ago in Palo Alto, Calif. "It's like buying a Ferrari," said Mr. Crownover, who estimates that a pool installation similar to the Palo Alto design would run about \$2 million, including at least \$300,000 for the movable floor.

His client, a technology executive with two children, was largely attracted by the space-saving capabilities and safety features. His 442-square-foot pool takes up almost a quarter of the yard. The floor is often up, and the children use the area to ride their scooters. Mr. Crownover said he has three more movable floors in the works.

Jordan Scott, head of Connecticut-based Glen Gate Company, is installing his first floor for a client in Westchester, N.Y. with a 1,000-square-foot backyard. The 288-square-foot pool will have a waterfall, LED lights and a porcelain-tile floor, Mr. Scott said. When the floor is up, it will be the main seating area of the yard, which is designed to have a "Zen-like spa feeling," he said.

While it is possible to retrofit an existing pool, most movable floors are commissioned as part

of new installations. The pool cavity must be up to several feet deeper than normal to accommodate the equipment, and the floors are all custom-made.

Prices for the movable floor range from \$300 to \$550 a square foot. The pool itself is additional, and can run into the seven-figure range. Given the cost, movable-floor proponents acknowledge the niche size of the market.

"There are a few hundred now in the U.S., and we think it could [grow to] anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 once it gets developed," said Jack Gottlieb, a spokesman for AGOR Creative Engineering, a Tel Aviv-based maker of movable floors. AGOR is planning a marketing push in the U.S. in coming months, he said.

The maker of Belgium's Hydro-floors brand has also ramped up efforts stateside, said Ron Plompen, chief business development officer. The company has 15 projects completed or planned in places like Kiawah Island, S.C.; Avalon, N.J. and Gallatin, Tenn.

Hidden pools might catch on if homeowners see them as a way to reclaim square footage or solve pool-related safety concerns, said Jonathan Miller, a New York appraiser, noting that they may not be cost-prohibitive for \$10 million-plus homes.

"With amenities in general," he said, "if it makes sense and you're early in the curve, buyers seek things like this out."