

My Garden Makeover: First came THE POOL

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My Garden Makeover: The Pool

When I first moved into my little cottage some two years ago, the previous owner had created a wonderful garden full of succulents, cacti and aloes. One of the things that first attracted me to the house was the garden. However, I soon found out that when there are small children running around, prickly aloes and scary spiders that love to spin their webs from the spiky arms of a cactus across the path to the other one during the night, does not a child-friendly garden make. And, so it was that, one day Rory was hopping and skipping up and down the one little path when she fell, narrowly missing a spike going into her eye. By that stage, too, the garden was looking tired and a bit bedraggled and with another hot African summer approaching, I decided to do a garden makeover. Bear in mind that I have been doing up this little cottage on a shoestring budget, so it wasn't a case of getting the landscaper in and giving him or her free rein. I wanted a little pool, just a little one, deep enough, though, to really cool off. With a garden that is only about 35 sq. metres in size, it was never going to be an Olympic-sized pool for swimming and jumping and playing water polo - just something to slip into and float on my back or watch the children splash around. I wanted some grass, some cool grass to lie on after a refreshing swim. I needed shade - the sun on my patio is relentless during the summer - with only an awning that provides some early morning shade. In the afternoon, it is a sun trap.

I first of all thought I could do it on my own, dig the hole, build a concrete shell and fill it up with water. Ha! When you work almost every day and every weekend, the reality is that suddenly your friends disappear when you suggest a pool-digging party, your brother tells you how much effort maintaining a pool is going to cost you, people don't tell you how much it is going to cost to cart away the sand (What! R2,000.00 to cart away a couple of loads of sand). Well, I costed it out and I phoned and spoke to everyone I knew - and then - a wonderful lady, Elize, from Dawn Pools, said she would send a gentleman out to see me to give me some advice on what I could do to achieve my little pool within my price range. She was fab!

Brian duly came out and looked around - I told him what I wanted, a pool about 4 x 2.5 sq. metres - I wanted some depth - I didn't want those martini seats along the sides - I wanted a step or two at the shallow end AND - most importantly of all - I wanted it slightly raised, about 30 cm, out the ground with a low wall around it. See, I had been to Montagu to a guesthouse and there was a tiny little plunge pool in the garden (raised out of the ground) and it was relaxing lying and sitting on the wall around the pool just chatting. I wanted to recreate that.

Les drew my plans and I submitted them to Council. The inspector came out and he said it was fine and my plans went through. No huge hassle there.

Do you remember the wind we had at the start of this summer - in November and early December? It could not have been worse on the day Brian and his guys arrived. What a nightmare we lived through for two days (not to mention my poor neighbours) who bore the brunt of my sand flying into their gardens (this is a little semi-detached cottage), so you get the drift {in more ways than one}. Close neighbours, indeed. I didn't dare show my face for those couple of days - I was so certain I was going to be slapped with a fine or something for sand attack! Brian's guys bravely pulled out those spiky, spiny plants and carefully replanted a lot of them in the public open space behind my back fence and got to work digging.

They worked and worked without stopping for a break and on Day one-and-a-half, by lunchtime, they had finished digging the hole. My house had acquired a new gritty floor texture and I developed muscles from sweeping and vacuuming and mopping. Day Three - the pool shell was delivered and put carefully into the hole. The girls and I were so excited. It was just the very beginning of December now - Brian assured me the pool would be ready for Christmas. In the meantime, he brought through all the gizmos and piping and pump stuff I would need and I stored it in my lounge.

Then the first load of soil and sand was carted away and the rest Brian covered up with a tarp as they would be needing some of that to backfill. Finally, I could stop skulking around and avoiding my neighbours. At the same time, the wind stopped blowing and I could see my garden taking shape in my mind's eye. At that stage, I hadn't decided what to do with the rest of it.

Slowly, slowly, they started to backfill the pool to get it stable and sort out the levels. As the first bunch of sand went in, so we started to fill the pool with some water. This is essential, apparently, as you do not want the fibreglass shell to buckle or bend with the weight of the sand from the outside. At the end of the third day with a only about 60 cm of water in, we wanted to swim!

Thereafter, it only took another couple of days to backfill, sort out the levels and get the pool to where the concrete wall was going to be built around it. Brian and his guys, Emile and the crew, worked tirelessly. They cleaned up after them every day and I was super-impressed with the way they operated. We had a couple of days break then so that the sand could settle, we kept wetting it to make sure it was well-compacted.

On the Monday of the start of Week 3, Brian arrived and he was majorly sick. It seemed he had a clot on the brain! For heaven's sake - the guy still came to finish my pool. He was really ill - but he was determined to oversee his crew - they put in the piping and electricity and they made sure everything was sorted out - so at least we could swim in the pool for Christmas. The wall wasn't built yet, but we could use the pool. This was unforeseen, but under the circumstances, it didn't faze me one bit - we could still swim and have fun with our pool. I was just worried about Brian's condition. Where in the world do you get find such work ethic!

Well, as you know, Christmas Day was crazy hot and the pool was just everything I had envisaged for us. From then on the temperatures soared and it was wind-free day after wind-free day. We've had the best time ever. And I love waking up in the early morning and gazing around. Water has that calming effect on me. I watch the changing light over it first thing in the morning and as dusk draws near.

I kept in touch with Brian over this period and his condition started to improve and just after New Year - he was back on the job, building the low wall. Nobody else had wanted to do that wall for me - or should I say - in most cases I was told it would cost quite a bit extra or you couldn't do that with a fibreglass shell. Well, we did it, and here's THE POOL. This was before the actual garden-garden makeover. As you can see, we covered a lot of the sandy areas with bits and bobs and paving slabs and bricks to try and keep some of the sand down. It worked really well. I still need to paint the pool wall but I wanted to do the garden first before I decide the colour. I kind of like the cement look - but I suppose I do need to do something with it. Ah well, all part of the pleasure of doing this - the anticipation. You will see the pool in all its glory (painted I hope) once the rest of the garden makeover is complete.

At the end of the day, I really did pay about R10K less than the lowest quote I had obtained from anyone else. And, I got my "raised pool with a wall". I felt that the two years I had spent saving this money was worth every missed meal out and takeaway.

You can read the next instalment in a day or so about my new beautiful garden, resplendent with plants, and flowers and shrubs and all things beautiful.

For myself, Elize and the gang from Dawn Pools were brilliant. You can contact Elize on:

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