

Polishing Paradise



A beautiful aquatic setting deserves equally dazzling water, explains water-quality specialist, Steve Kenny. That universal truth can lead anywhere, he says, including this project that is nestled in the heart of a tropical paradise, where he rescued a

gorgeous pool from the murky depths of an inadequate treatment system.

By Steve Kenny

While it's always better to prevent problems before they arise, it can be satisfying to fix things after they've gone wrong—to come to the rescue, so to speak.

The frustrating irony in our case at SRK Pools is that every problem we see, almost without exception, could have been easily avoided had we, or someone else who knows their way around water treatment, been involved when the project was originally designed and built.

Fact is, when you look at the way the pool industry at large does things, there's usually a better way. The problem is that most people don't even realize that the formula for perfect water quality is available. As a result they are often forced into compromises they don't even know they're making.

To illustrate my point, here's a great story of failure and redemption.

TO THE BAHAMAS

I was attending a cocktail party at a national pool convention when I met a landscape architect who looked like he had just lost his best friend. He was distraught over an oceanfront project he had designed on Paradise Island in the Bahamas.

The swimming pool, a gorgeous vanishing edge affair that was a central feature in a truly beautiful property, had completely fallen apart in a year and a half post-construction.

The owner was livid. The situation was so bad, the landscape architect had come to the pool show looking for help. He described a host of familiar problems that we deal with all the time: terrible water quality, failing finish materials, and all sorts of confusing maintenance nightmares.

I told this highly-talented yet forlorn landscape architect that we'd be happy to help!

The pool was using a saltwater chlorination system and cartridge filters – both extremely popular options that I have come to believe are at the heart of many common water treatment problems.

There are many people in the industry — qualified professionals among them — who advocate salt systems and cartridge filtration. I don't agree, and this project was a perfect example why. The water chemistry was wildly out of balance, with high calcium and pH but alkalinity of almost zero. There was a beautiful coral material used inside the pool, which is rather famously at home in saltwater, but was practically falling apart right before our eyes.

The cartridge filters were loading up at light speed; and, on top of all that, the source water on the island was extremely aggressive at certain times. The island water is treated by way of reverse osmosis (RO), which requires adding calcium after its filtered, otherwise the water is so aggressive it destroys almost everything it touches.

The problem on Paradise Island is they don't always balance the RO water and it can flip water balance very quickly when add as fill water. Unfortunately, the existing pool did not have any kind of automated chemical balance technology, so the system had no way to adjust to fluctuating water chemistry conditions. Even when the water was clear, there was no way of ensuring it was actually safe.



Suffice it to say, although one of the more aesthetically beautiful pools and settings I've ever seen, functionally speaking it was a nightmare. I'll admit I was disturbed to learn that the system had been designed by a highly reputable and well-known aquatic consultant.

A FRESH START



The client was so inspired by the water quality, she decided to build an entire new building just to house the equipment.

A FRESH START

I'm not entirely sure if the problems were due to the original design and specification, or if it was the original builder who didn't follow the plans. My hunch is it was some of both, but the end result was a system that was catastrophically inadequate.

The owner, a woman of considerable means, was not particularly concerned with what it would cost. She just wanted it fixed so she could fully enjoy the experience of swimming in her beautiful pool. Unable to correct the existing system, we immediately got to work gutting the whole thing and starting over.

We replaced the inadequate cartridge filters with large sand unit, which I've come to believe is the best filtration medium for pools. This point of view put me at odds with others in the industry. However, the results I achieve using sand are so superior that it's never an issue once installed.

The saltwater in the pool was drained and the interior coral surface was replaced, forever erasing the bad memories. We replaced the water treatment system with our own combination of ozone, UV and tightly controlled low doses of chlorine. We added water balance monitors and a CO2 injection system. We reconfigured the plumbing and set everything up exactly per our usual specifications.



When the client saw the water and then got in it, she practically flipped. On one hand she was beyond thrilled with the water quality having what could only be described as a powerful emotional reaction to the way it looked and felt. On the other hand, she was absolutely livid at her project team for not bringing to her attention the fact that this type of treatment system was even available.

I believe there's an object lesson here, especially for the pool and spa industry. Don't be afraid to offer clients the best. Yes, our systems are comparatively expensive. The system here described costs around \$300,000 — a hefty sum for most people. But I've always believed we should present the best and let the client decide whether or not it's too costly.

In this situation, the client could easily afford the best and had been demanding the only the best; but, the people in the pool industry she was working with didn't know any better. They gave her a salt system and a bank of cartridge filters, a poorly designed hydraulic system and in the end, a pool that just didn't work. When she finally experienced what was possible, she realized that she had, in effect, been badly underserved, if not actually betrayed.

SET FOR SUCCESS

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After we installed the system, we made sure her property management and maintenance staff had all the information they needed to maintain the system. The training is actually relatively easy because the system's mostly automated and there's never any kind of water quality issue that damages anything. It just hums along ensuring perfect water quality all the time, every time.



The water quality speaks for itself, adding a perfect luxurious indulgence on the shores of paradise.

By giving this client the option to invest in the best system money can buy, she had an opportunity to become inspired and ultimately very proud of the choice she made. About a year or so after we completed our work recreating her system, she built an entire outbuilding to house the equipment. This was no shed or typical equipment vault; it was of a beautiful architectural design, climate controlled, ventilated, well lit, spacious, and 100% devoted to the pool equipment.

That's how much she fell in love with the water quality! To her, it was worth giving the equipment a home, right there in the heart of paradise.

Steve Kenny is founder of SRK Pool Services, a pool design/build and service company based in Wainscott, N.Y. He has more than 25 years' experience studying and finetuning water chemistry in an effort to generate the best possible experience for his customers. He is passionate about and devoted to the science, methods and art of ensuring impeccable water-quality condition. He is a lifetime sailing enthusiast, published author and photographer.



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