



Photo contributed
One of the beautiful vanishing edge pools created for a local Okanagan home.

Cascading beauty of pools

By Terry Edwards

Money was no object for movie star Leonardo DiCaprio when he built a swimming pool on his property, but he chose to use recycled glass tiles.

"He's heavily into environmental issues," explained Skip Phillips, whose company, Questar Pools and Spas of Escondido, Calif., designed the pool. "Those tiles probably cost more than Italian marble."

Phillips, who has teamed with Valley Pool and Spa in Kelowna to construct local swimming pools, is considered by many experts to be the world's best pool designer. Although some of his clients are world famous like DiCaprio, most aren't.

"Most of the big players are going to be business people, not entertainers or celebrities," said Phillips during a recent visit to the Okanagan, where he has four pools in progress and two more slated for future construction.

"I come here right now once a month, ever since I got my work permit in January. It's kind of a collective investment. Both Gene (Brown, owner of Valley Pool) and I feel strongly it's a great market for us. The opportunity to do projects that are architecturally significant is always exciting."

Many of Phillips' designs, which are created to complement and enhance a property's natural assets, won't appear in any photographic resume. Some clients, such as one in Kelowna, won't even allow him to divulge their names.

"I'm working with a high-profile Canadian," he said. "Part of the contract states I can't use the name and can't photograph the property."

Still, Phillips' resume is impressive. His designs appear in the pages of such publications as *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Millionaire*, *Barnes & Nobles Dream Pools*, *Custom*

Builder and Décor and Style. *The World's Finest*, a book that pays tribute to the best companies in the world, named him as the world's best pool designer for the fourth time.

Luxury Pools states: "He boldly innovates by combining vision with proven engineering techniques to create dynamic aquatic treasures that have earned him an international reputation for excellence, ingenuity and originality."

One of his most spectacular designs, featured in *Water Shapes* magazine, is a project called Jade Mountain on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. The resort features 25 luxury suites, terraced on six levels on the side of a mountain, and each suite has its own vanishing edge pool.

"For starters, it stands as perhaps the most extensive and spectacular all-time use of the vanishing edge — ever, anywhere — all set in one of the most unusual buildings ever imagined for a resort property in a location that is almost indescribably beautiful," he wrote in a magazine article.

A founding partner of Genesis 3, an international waterscape design company, Phillips specializes in vanishing or infinity edge pools, a waterscape illusion that employs water cascading over at least one edge of the pool.

"I would characterize it (infinity edge) as water in transit," he said. "Water is breaking out of its vessel in some way. There is a lot of opportunity for water-to-water views here. The topography of this area lends itself to the type of design I'm used to doing. All the projects we're doing are the vanishing edge applications. That's the hardest type of vessel to do effectively."

Phillips said there is a common misconception that pools are strictly for summer use.

"There's an assumption that all vessels should be utilitarian, to use for a few months in the summer



TERRY EDWARDS/eVentLife photo
Gene Brown, left, of Valley Pool and Spas in Kelowna, has teamed with world-renowned pool designer Skip Phillips of California to offer innovative waterscape designs.

and cover in the winter. You negate 95 per cent of the value of owning a vessel like that. If it doesn't have visual and auditory appeal, I think it misses the boat."

Phillips said his understanding of design discipline and engineering is what sets his creations apart.

"If I go into a mansion in Mississippi, it resonates that style. It reflects what's around it. It doesn't stand out. Most pools don't do that."

Although Phillips' services don't come cheaply, he said many of his clients, including those in Kelowna, use solar and geo-thermal systems to reduce operating costs and environmental impact.

Does he have a favourite project?

"If I was to look at the projects that stand out, it doesn't have to do with the vessel that stands out, it is the relationship between us and our clients," he replied.

