

# POOLSIDE

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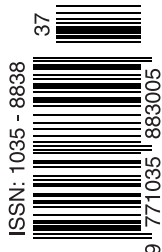
Covers: East Coast Pools

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# A BACKYARD OASIS

A plunge pool is the perfect addition to a smaller backyard

These Rose Bay homeowners, a professional family with two sons in their early 20s, had one main goal in mind when planning their pool: achieving a design in a restricted space while maintaining an area for entertaining as well as a backyard. "A key element of the design brief was achieving balance between the available spaces while still allowing practical use of each," explain Rourke Hartwig and Rob Rooney of Equilibrium Pools, who built this pool.

The family's interests include sport (especially soccer) and they have an affection for dogs, especially Labradors. Their coastal site is just 234sqm, and level except for the rear and one side of the block.

Designed by Regal Design Landscapes, the project features a modern reticulated rectilinear plunge pool with incorporated bench seats, custom water feature spouts, overhanging deck and feature garden beds. "Inspiration was drawn from a need to meet site requirements and conditions, and to create privacy from an apartment building to the rear as well as from other neighbouring properties," say Rourke and Rob.

"As the amount of available space for the pool was limited and given that the clients have adult children, a deep plunge pool was the best option. Trying to achieve a shallow end would have been impractical as the pitch of the bottom of the pool would have been uncomfortably steep."

The level change to the side and rear of the property was dealt with by incorporating retaining walls as part of the 5m-long pool, and this also enabled screen planting to be introduced. To add interest and to help maintain and accentuate an existing Kentia palm (*Howea forsteriana*) to the rear corner, the reticulated retaining wall/planter box was built by Equilibrium Pools to protrude into the pool space to purposefully interact with the rectilinear design. This was also created to interact with a bench seat area to the corner of the pool.

To allow relaxation space in the pool, a second bench seat area was designed to interact with the overhanging deck. This was offset from the bench seat on the opposite side of the pool, which balances the overall design and rectilinear shape. This principle was further enhanced by the introduction of the overhanging deck, which not only adds to the shape and aesthetic of the design, but also introduces softening and contrast to the materials and colour palette.

The deck was also designed to house the pool's filter and equipment underneath it. The deck lifts on gas struts to allow access to the pump room beneath, which was constructed as





part of the pool. As available space on site was limited, this proved an excellent solution.

A key element of this project is its close proximity to the left-hand-side boundary. “Through the approvals process we were able to achieve a boundary offset of only 280mm instead of the standard 1m, which enabled us to maximise the pool area,” say Rourke and Rob.

The soil conditions were also challenging as the soil substrate was pure sand. This made it extremely difficult to excavate without having neighbouring property boundaries collapse.

“Given the location of the pool and its close proximity to three boundaries, and our requirement to excavate in total to depths of 3m on the ‘shallow’ end of the pool and 3.4m to the deep end of the pool, we simply couldn’t allow the sand to slake to 45 degrees as this would mean losing metres of neighbouring land,” continue Rourke and Rob.

“We worked very diligently to overcome this by mechanically excavating as much of the bulk of the pool as the sand collapse would allow and then by hand digging small 1m sections around the border of the pool and shoring/tin forming these areas. By slowly working our way around the pool metre by metre, we were eventually

able to have all sides of the pool shored and then completed the remaining excavation by hand.”

According to Rourke and Rob, the homeowners were very open and friendly throughout the process. “We formed a great relationship with the clients during the build and continue to enjoy a good relationship with them now,” they say.

“The overall design of this project makes it a real standout. Every aspect was carefully designed and customised to meet the site conditions and the clients’ wishes. From the ‘hidden’ pool filter box area under the deck to the incorporated planter boxes/retaining walls, the custom-designed feature spouts, overall layout, depth and deck and bench seats, everything about this project stands out from the rest.

“To us, the principles of good design revolve around three key areas: design aesthetic, which takes into account site conditions and the variables, constraints and opportunities it may present; the client brief and budget, which are essential components of good design principles and help shape and form the design process; and the ability of the project to be practically completed. The design needs to be able to be achieved, so a sound understanding of the

construction requirements and techniques involved is essential. These principles were integral to this project.”

Rourke Hartwig and Rob Rooney started Equilibrium Pools in December 2016 and work on approximately 20 to 30 pools per year. Equilibrium Pools works throughout Sydney but particularly across the North Shore, Northern Beaches, Eastern Suburbs and Hills District.

Creating unique custom-designed concrete pools with very personalised service is the team’s specialty. “We also do a lot of tight-access projects where it’s not possible or practical to gain site access with standard-sized excavation equipment,” say Rourke and Rob.

Initial site meetings with clients are very detailed. “We cover aspects of design, functionality as well as advice such as servicing, equipment, surface finishes and the construction processes in detail,” say Rourke and Rob. “Following our engagement, we work very closely with our clients on all aspect of the project and regularly keep them up to date with the work’s progression. During this time we also liaise with our clients to finalise product selections and final details on any custom-designed components of their project.”

EQUILIBRIUM POOLS

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Get To Know: Rourke Hartwig and Rob Rooney, directors of Equilibrium Pools

What do you love about your job?

**Rob:** I love seeing the realisation of a project. Taking it from the design phase all the way through to completion and seeing the concept come to life is amazing.

**Rourke:** While my area of expertise is broad and encompasses everything from managing and liaising with our clients to designing projects, dealing with councils and project management and construction, my job is first and foremost to understand our clients’ needs and expectations and to bring to life their dreams. Having clients trust us to achieve this is a wonderful thing.

What are your top 5 tips for a great outdoor design?

1. A holistic approach is vital. It’s about understanding the whole project, how the pool space interacts with its surrounds and the clients’ needs.
2. Balance is key. Getting the right balance of space, materials and colour palette makes all the difference.
3. Sometimes less is more. Taking a subtle approach can achieve a better harmonious outcome.
4. Time spent in planning and design allows the full potential of the project to be explored.
5. Undertaking a construction project is a big commitment. A good relationship between builders and clients is so valuable.



Rourke Hartwig, director, Equilibrium Pools



Rob Rooney, director, Equilibrium Pools



“My favourite thing about this project is the connection between space and the small details. From the complex design to the feature spouts and overhanging deck, it all connects to create a seamless backyard.” — Rourke Hartwig, director, Equilibrium Pools.