

Last month I mentioned that the format of this column was going to shift. I was very pleased at the large and immediate response that I received from builders around the country, both by letter and e-mail.

Below, you'll find three of these questions and my answers

I attended the seminar you gave at the Atlantic City, N.J., NSPI show about vanishing-edge pools. You seemed to have recall of a number of formulas regarding hydraulics. Is there any place these types of formulas are in print?

First of all, thanks for the compliment about my recall abilities. It comes with practice.

As for where you can get your hands on some of the hydraulic formulas I mentioned, many that would be applicable to pool builders are printed in equipment manufacturers' catalogs.

It is far better to lose a job because you are too expensive than to get a job because you are too cheap.

I also know of a great book that contains every imaginable hydraulic formula, as well more than 500 pages of useful tables and formulas on every other conceivable subject.

The title of this book is *Pocket Ref* by Thomas J. Glover, and you can order it through Sequoia Publishing, P.O. Box 620820, Dept. 101, Littleton, CO 80162-0820; tel. (303) 972-4167.

As you'll find, the book is a small paperback that will be used by every member of your staff.

Every year I look at the award-winning pools that are printed in the various pool publications, and there are always a few that have spectacular components that make the

Doing the math

projects special.

I think of myself as a very competent pool builder but I am worried about some of these different features, especially with regard to pricing. How in the world do I know what to charge on an item I am unfamiliar with? As an example, your last article contained a small photo of a rock bridged across an opening. It appears that the water was falling out of the rock. I can imagine how to do this but what does it cost?

Each time any of us venture into unknown waters, there is potential for financial catastrophe. So I always advise taking baby steps.

Let's assume you've been building fairly basic pools for years — and been

complex jobs. In part, this is because we use the same margin system on all our jobs. And when there is a large apparent price disparity on similar designs, invariably the low bidder is unfamiliar with the complexity involved.

As your prospective jobs get more complex, you will see that competitive pressure will tempt you to try somehow to lower your costs in order to reduce your price. Let me share a few words of caution: You will never be the cheapest and the best. So you must decide which you want to be.

With regard to the waterfeature you asked about, the actual cost was \$2,200, which included the cost of the rock, cutting a notch for the spillway, equipment to set rock and plumbing.

Our firm is 25 years old and has always had a reputation as a high-quality builder. We have generally built simple but good-quality pools. However, over the past few years our market share has been declining slowly. Any ideas?

Looking back, most of the smaller cities in the country have had one outstanding builder. As communities grow and additional pool companies come into a market, however, changes are inevitable. It seems that the new companies coming in are either high-level custom builders or low-budget, low-quality builders. And in these circumstances, the guy in the middle — you — gets squeezed.

I suggest that you pick one of the other two directions to move toward or be willing to accept your ever-shrinking market share.

doing a good job. There may be some temptation to take on some more difficult projects. I would caution against jumping into a 50-foot, out-of-ground extravaganza with a paper-faced, all-tile interior including murals.

Rather, increase the difficulty level of your custom features a little bit at a time. This way, you can control your downside risk in case you incorrectly estimate the actual cost.

Anytime you are building an unfamiliar specification, it is always better to err on the side of safety with regard to pricing. It is far better to lose a job because you are too expensive than to get a job because you are too cheap.

From personal experience, our company is often priced substantially above competitors on extremely

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