

## **The Vanishing Act:**

# **Lew Akins Helped Pioneer The Art Of The Vanishing-Edge Pool**

Pool & Spa News, July 11, 2003 by AmyJo Brown

After his father sold the family pool business years ago, David Akins went looking for a job. Nobody was hiring--until David told them his last name.

"Then they'd go, 'Whoa, whoa, we're interested,'" David said. "It was all about the name because I hadn't done anything at that point. I was one of the few people who didn't realize how well-known [my father] was."

There's little doubt that those who don't recognize David's father's name--Lew Akins--are hard to find.

A pioneer of the vanishing-edge pool, Lew Akins founded one of the most successful pool-building businesses in the country. He has been awarded more than 150 NSPI national and regional design awards, was a columnist for Pool & Spa News for eight years and is a much sought after speaker at the annual International Pool & Spa Expo.

As many success stories go, Akins' career got its start by accident. He left his hometown of Arcadia, Calif. (where he had a 20-by-40-foot, broom-finished concrete, rectangular pool complete with diving board) at the very beginning of the Vietnam War to volunteer for the Navy. Eleven years later, Akins left the military and began selling solar heating equipment.

Then, just six months into the job, after a successful sales pitch to a pool builder, Akins was told he had a job as a pool salesman. He jumped at the offer, working at the job for 10 years and, in the process, migrating from California to Texas.

In 1983 Akins finished his first pool masterpiece in his own backyard. The vanishing edge was an optical illusion effect based on work he had seen in France.

The structure revolutionized the design of high-end pools and launched Akins into industry fame. The following year, Akins founded Ocean Quest Pools Inc. in Austin, Texas, which averaged \$5 million in sales in 2002.

Despite his seemingly magic touch with pool design, Akins is modest about his work. He calls his creations art, but doesn't consider himself the least bit artistic.

"I don't think [being a good pool designer] ... has anything to do with artistic talent or drawing talent or anything like that," he said. "I think it has to do more with seeing the space and envisioning what can go there, and then communicating that to the customer."

That approach has been so successful that clients wouldn't allow Akins to retire. After selling Ocean Quest Pools in 1998, Akins' reputation quickly led him back to the water.

"I had a builder call me and say, 'I need a pool, and I hear you're a good builder. Will you build me one?'" Akins said. "So I built him a pool and he started to give me a couple jobs and then I started to get referrals."

"So I called my son (David), who was working in California, and told him to get his butt out here. I bought two acres of land on the Interstate here (Belton, Texas), and I'm just finishing a 7,200-square-foot building."

Sounding at least halfway serious, Akins added, "As my wife says, I'm going to build another empire."

David, now a salesman for Ocean Quest Pools By Lew Akins, is primed to carry on his father's business when--and if-- he retires. When that time comes, David foresees his father showing much more of his true, laid-back nature.

"Most people see him in a coat and tie because wherever he goes, that's the way he is," David said. "But that is not the way he is in real life.

"He's a poolguy. Come on."

### **ShowTime**

Who: **Lew Akins.**

What: "**Vanishing-Edge Pools: Design Magic and Construction Secrets!**" seminar

Where: **2003 International Pool & Spa Expo, New Orleans.**

When: **Thursday, Nov. 6, 3:30-5:30 p.m.**

Akins returns to the Expo as a seminar leader, presenting construction and engineering techniques for vanishing-edge pools. Attendees will learn how to determine proper catch-pool sizing and operating level, calculate hydraulics and train customers to operate their pools.

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