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This project by Artisan Pools NC in Kitty Hawk, N.C., earned Silver in the Pool Renovations category in the 2025 Awards of Excellence. Photo courtesy Jimi Smith Photography

NEW WAYS TO GROW POOL RENOVATIONS IN 2026

By Brett Lloyd Abbott

FOR AQUA MAGAZINE'S ANNUAL RENOVATION issue, I'd like to share some new ideas about how to make more money and profit in this highly lucrative slice of the swimming pool industry.

First of all, let's remember that every time someone sells and installs a new inground pool, that's adding yet another future prospect to the pool renovations business. And every year, every inground pool gets closer to needing a renovation.

That's been happening for over 100 years now (thank you, Wagner Pools and Claffey Pools). Best estimates suggest there are more than six million inground pools in the United States alone, and every year, we add more. Even when year-to-year new pool sales are flat or down (as in much of the United States right now), the number of swimming pools that will need renovation continues to rise.

So it's a lucrative, growing business, just by sheer volume. But what excites me even more is all the new ways we can upgrade and renovate these old pools. Not just plaster, tile and coping, because that's a given for any pool more than 10 years old.

The excitement happens when you visualize a pool built back in 1985. Or 1975. Or 1965. Do you see a cutting-edge beauty, with all the latest features? More likely, you see a stark relic from the past, looking woefully out-of-date and out-of-place next to a home that may be old, but has likely been updated to modern times.



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In fact, let's consider how homeowners keep their 40-, 50- or 60-year-old homes looking modern and contemporary. Like replastering a pool, repainting a house is a given. It helps a home look well kept, but it doesn't make it feel modern. So eventually, repainting alone is simply not enough.

The most popular way to modernize a home is to completely gut the kitchen, and install all new cabinets and appliances, to the tune of \$100,000 or more. The bathrooms will be next, similarly completely gutted and reconfigured to look completely updated. You might also knock down some walls, widen some doorways, add some skylights, and do any number of other major modifications to help your home keep up with the times.

The same is true with a swimming pool. A 40-year-old swimming pool probably doesn't have a vanishing edge, or beach entry, or perimeter overflow, or tanning ledge, or deck jets, or sheer descent waterfalls, or

LED lighting, or many other features we now take for granted. Or maybe it's an old freeform, lagoon-style pool, and the homeowner would prefer something more linear and modern.

And looking beyond the pool, it probably doesn't have an outdoor kitchen, or a sports bar, or a "Ladies Lair," or pizza oven, or sport court, or putting green. Nor a bathhouse, or a guesthouse for friends and family to spend the night.

These are options that could potentially delight the homeowner to no end, options they probably never considered because they didn't know they were possible. And that's because most renovators would balk at suggesting such high-dollar items, for fear they would get laughed out of the running for the job.

And while it's true, some homeowners would never consider spending six figures renovating a pool that only cost them four or five figures brand new. But every year, some homeowners do consider it, and do spend that money.

It comes down to having the courage to talk about the possibilities. If you're a little shy in this arena, let me suggest a line that can easily open up the conversation without scaring away the homeowner.

I would say, "I'll be happy to quote you a price for the basic renovation here, which would be the interior finish, the tile, the coping, and maybe the deck. But if you want to have a little fun, I can also share with you some other ideas that you may have never considered. Maybe you didn't even know they were possible. If you're game, we can talk about what it would take to make your pool look like it was built in 2026, instead of 1976.

"Would you like to hear a few wild and crazy ideas?"

Rare is the pool owner who doesn't want to at least hear a few interesting ideas to make their old swimming pool look more modern. We're not suggesting they should buy these ideas. We're just throwing some ideas out there for brainstorming, and a little bit of fun.

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Now once you've broken that ice, and had a little fun talking possibilities, they may find a wild and crazy idea they actually fall in love with. And before you know it, you've sold a six-figure project to a homeowner who is on cloud nine because of the amazing transformation you've offered them.

After all, who doesn't want a transformation? Especially if it's a 40-year-old pool they've considered an eyesore for years.

And don't worry, if "transforming the backyard" doesn't resonate with them, there's a pretty good chance they're still interested in transforming themselves. A 2025 survey says that 83% of post-pandemic Americans are interested in investing in health and wellness features, products and appliances. In fact, that niche is growing at an impressive 8.3% annual growth rate, and now exceeds \$2 trillion a year in spending.

Odds are your pool owner is one of those 83% of people who are interested in features and appliances for their improved health and wellness. So even

if you aren't currently a dealer, it might still make sense to have conversations about saunas, hot tubs, swim spas, cold plunges, massage chairs, and other healthy appliances.

In fact, sometimes simply upgrading an older swimming pool (and the area around it) can give a forlorn pool owner all the inspiration and motivation they need to fall in love with their pool again and rediscover the health benefits inherent in every swimming pool.

Now let's talk about another curious slice of the market that may be good prospects for swimming pool renovations. In addition to the millions of old swimming pools out there, there is a shockingly large number of new pandemic-era inground swimming pools that were — as we all know — designed and purchased in a panicked-rush from anyone who had a shovel and a truck.

I won't get into the technical challenges that may be in store for some of these rush-job swimming pools bought and built during the pandemic. But I think we can all agree

that on average, the decision-making process for the panicked homeowner at that time was not nearly as rigorous as it might have been pre- or post-pandemic.

That means many homeowners may be sitting on relatively new swimming pools that look good, but aren't really what they want or need today. Some of these pool owners may be ripe for some new ideas and enhancements to their pool and pool area, even if the pool itself isn't ready for new plaster, tile or coping.

Everyone loves health and wellness, and most people love sitting in their backyard, enjoying their swimming pool and backyard haven. So it's our duty, as experienced pool contractors, to help these pool owners upgrade these spaces to, once again, be the backyard of their dreams. ~

Brett Lloyd Abbott is the founder and CEO of Pool Builder Marketing LLC, a marketing agency that works exclusively with swimming pool builders, pool service companies and high-end landscape professionals throughout the world.

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