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# LUXURY POOLS

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A feature-rich Florida poolscape by Ike's Carter Pool Companies, Inc.

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Photograph by Jimi Smith Photography



Designed by Farley Pool Designs and constructed by Claffey Pools, this award-winning lazy river has a tropical theme.

# LAZY RIVERS BRING THE RESORT TO THE BACKYARD

The ultimate staycation, they're designed for family fun, fun, fun.

BY NANCY A. RUHLING

➔ Once the trademark of luxury resorts and tony theme parks, the lazy river increasingly is becoming a key element in high-end residential poolscapes that emulate the exclusive experience of five-star vacation resorts.

By definition, a lazy river is a shallow pool that features currents that flow like a river to allow people to float leisurely along on rafts, inner tubes or pool noodles or shoot the rapids for a wild ride, but that description bears little resemblance to the spectacular designs that are being produced.

Typically, lazy rivers feature not only a swimming pool but also an amenity-

For a client in Tampa, Florida, Ryan Hughes Design/Build created an over-the-top 200-foot-long lazy river that's designed for family fun and entertaining for up to 500 guests.



packed island—the elements are linked by a bridge. Regardless of the size or styles, from waterslides to swim-up bars, lazy rivers have the ability to engage and entertain the entire family.

“They are extremely popular,” says Mike Farley, SWD, ASLA, whose eponymous pool-design firm is based in Southlake, Texas, and who gets a couple

of inquiries a week about lazy rivers. “It’s a unique type of pool, and it has unique requirements. And most people don’t realize that it’s not building one pool but three pools so it’s three times the cost.”

Ryan Hughes, whose namesake pool design-build company is based in Tampa, Florida, says that “a lazy river adds to the functionality of an outdoor space. There’s

a desire to add a very exotic element to sophisticated or artistic backyards while also adding a more playful vibe. These are for clients who want the adventure, and typically there are kids involved.”

For one such client, who has two young children, Hughes created an uber lazy river for \$1.5 million that starts right outside the Tampa home’s back door.

It's designed not only for the family's enjoyment but also for entertaining events that host up to 500 guests.

Flowing for more than 200 feet, the 6-foot-wide river that's lined with pebble-finish glass tile passes fire pots and fire features, sunken spas, and several spaces for gathering and relaxation, including a private patio with lounge seating and a spa.

Its island has a circular fire pit and a custom-built grotto with a spa; a circular splash pad adds an entertainment element, and the entire space is landscaped with tropical plantings that complement the Mediterranean-style residence.

The swimming pool, whose edges are lined with fire pots, is equally opulent: It's dressed in hand-cut glass tile from Mexico and features decorative detailing. Its deck is clad in travertine tile. Hughes likens the design to "a string of pearls—each place along the way glistens with innovation and experiential style."

Farley, who was considered a pioneer when he designed his first residential lazy river a decade ago, describes them as "kid magnets. Parents and grandparents want something to attract kids. They are being used for entertainment and family."

Homeowners have a choice of three main styles of lazy rivers.

In the style with the smallest footprint, the river simply runs around the pool in its entirety. In the most common version, the river runs off the side of the pool like the handle of a coffee cup. And in the most elaborate design, the river is separate from the pool and has an opening of at least six feet that leads from one element to the other.

Farley notes that the form's greatest asset is its versatility. "It can fit into any design style," he says. "It doesn't have to be organic in appearance."

Hughes' lazy rivers start at 200 feet long—enough to allow for a large destination island for adults as well as a functional play areas for the kids.



A design/build collaboration between Watershape Consulting and Red Rock Contractors



For one client, he is building a 300-foot-long lazy river and a large island that features a pavilion, a swim-up bar, a catering kitchen, and various corporate entertaining elements. In other projects, he's incorporated rain-wall pergolas, island-side sunken fire pits, grottos, and splash pads.

A large part of the appeal of lazy rivers lies in their ability to transport you into a different world, according to David Peterson, P.E., IWI, who is the president and CEO of Watershape Consulting, a pool planning, engineering, and design firm that has offices in California and Florida. "You don't feel like you're in your backyard, and you can get there without getting in your car or putting on a mask," he says, adding that once you're on the island there's no incentive to so much as answer a ringing phone. "People want to replicate an experience they've had on vacation or what they've seen in a magazine, but they want to do it at home with their friends."

He points to a lazy river he collaborated on with Rick Chafey, co-owner of Arizona-based Red Rock Contractors, that literally brings the resort experience home. In addition to the basics, the project features two bridges, a water wall with cantilevers, a sunken fire area, a sunken bar, and a floating bed. It is shaded by towering, mature live palm trees.

Lazy rivers are as much about technology as they are about aesthetics. To assure that the current literally is up to speed, designers work in close collaboration with hydrology experts, such as Peter Davidson, the owner of Current Systems, the Ventura, California-based company that manufactures the Riverflow Pump variable speed control propulsion system.

"Riverflow's variable frequency drive allows the user full speed control," Davidson says, adding that his pumps, designed for residential and commercial use, power the currents at Typhoon



Houston's Club Westside, designed by Counsilman-Hunsaker & Associates and built by Progressive Commercial Aquatics, has Riverflow Pumps.

Texas Waterpark as well as at theme parks around the world, including in Dubai, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Macau.

"With a single pump, a lazy river can have many personalities—so you can do everything from float on an inner tube without spilling a martini to going on a rapid ride," he says.

Davidson, who patented the Riverflow Pump in the late 1980s, says that such consultations sometimes lead to modified designs to achieve the desired result. "We make the river

perform better and that can mean decreasing the number of pumps from say five to three," he says.

Farley notes that the island presents other technological and engineering issues. "You have to figure out how to get everything on and off it, and if you have plants, you have to worry about drainage and irrigation, which is why some clients pave it," he says.

Lazy rivers, he adds, will remain popular staycation choices for years to come. "The pandemic has changed the pool industry and the demand for the creative backyard resort, he says. "Lazy rivers are part of that trend."

[current-systems.com](http://current-systems.com), [buildredrock.com](http://buildredrock.com), [ryanhughesdesign.com](http://ryanhughesdesign.com), [watershape.com](http://watershape.com) 