

Pools with personality

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Landscape architect and pool designer Jan Johnsen designed this pool which overlooks the Hudson River. 'There is an innate personality to each site – something I call, 'the power of place.' / Joe Larese/The Journal News

More pools to love

- **Four Chimneys:** (shown on page 1) This zero-edge pool is the centerpiece of Four Chimneys, a gracious McKim Mead and White estate on New Rochelle's Lake Sheldrake.
- **Lyn Peterson's Scarsdale pool:** The pool and guest cottage at Peterson and Karl Friberg's 9-bedroom house in Scarsdale is traditional in every sense of the word.
- **Armonk beauty:** The Olympic-sized pool has a gorgeous view and a circular Adirondack-style wood-paneled pool house.

Just like people, pools, too, have personality — if they're lucky. Landscape designer Jan Johnsen, who studied and worked in Japan and Hawaii, has designed many over the last 40 years, and she believes every one of them has its own persona.

"There is an innate personality to each site — something I call, 'the power of place.' It refers to the overall appearance and feeling of a place," she says. "My approach is to marry the site to the design so it makes sense on a visceral level."

Of course, Johnsen's plans also take into account the owner's vision and personal tastes, but the site's personality traits have to be considered.

"I look at the view, the native trees and shrubs, the geology, the orientation, the sun/ shade patterns and more," she says. For instance, if the site has tall mature trees, you don't clear cut; you blend them into the design. Working in concert with the site means that the finished layout will be more serene, she says. "I strive to create the feeling of calm."

In northern Westchester, one of her projects incorporates a pool that has a breathtaking view of the Hudson River and Tappan Zee Bridge. Overlooking Croton Point Park, this hillside site was challenging, but Johnsen's specialty is tackling the tough jobs. She needed to find ways to terrace and plant the property using the different spaces in a way that whispers serenity.

"The view was the show," says Johnsen, who also teaches graduate classes in landscape design at Columbia University. Ultimately, she designed the space with flowing and connected outdoor rooms, with the reward for the visitor being the surprise vista at each change in elevation. You are intuitively drawn to the finale, which is the view of the pool and river. "The view

is so perfect, the pool had to be perfect,” she says.

“I connect with the Earth through design — it’s a form of grounding. People need a sense of relaxation and renewal.”

Creating a sense of serenity is the big thing in landscape design, and there are ways to elicit this response, even in a small space. Her blog — [serenityinthegarden](#) — offers tips. Look for her book due out in fall.

Here, we profile a few pools that all whisper serenity. Make a date with any one of them, and your dreams may come true.

At the **Willows** in Pound Ridge, the hidden driveway to the residence hints at the wish for privacy. There, on a 13-acre estate, you’ll find a pool that loves the great outdoors. With the house serenely overlooking the heated stone-edged pool and spa, water flows over a fountain, and all blends naturally in to the landscape, creating a true retreat from the outside world.

A short walk on shaded stepping stones through moss and ferns takes you from the elegant cedar and glass house to the sunny pool and pond area below.

The clear pool shares a sandy beach with a natural spring-fed pond, and is adjacent to a pitch-and-putt golf course. Across the pond, a meditation pavilion can be seen, reflecting the estate’s Asian-influenced details.

“I have not seen a setting like this in all my years in the business,” says listing agent Mary Anne Condon, Pound Ridge resident for 37 years with 18 of those in real estate.

“If you are seeking tranquility, you’ll find it here.” At once both rustic and elegant, this is an oasis designed by landscape architect Kaneji Domoto.

Stoneleigh in Armonk calls to family and friends. The pool and spa are the life force of the recently built residence that sits on three private acres framed by a mature apple orchard. Custom-designed with four fountains and a vanishing edge, the pool is a focal point situated just outside the main living area whose grand proportions welcome family and guests with open arms.

The 20- by 40-foot heated pool shares patio space with a stone fireplace and wisteria-covered pergola that seats eight to 10 comfortably, and has plenty of space left over for dancing to the music that streams from outdoor speakers. With its expansive stone patio, the pool is a wide-open entertainment center situated under a vast horizon and surrounded by manicured lawns and flowering plantings. “The family uses the space well into the fall,” says listing agent Judy Tarter. “The pool is really part of the house. It’s a gathering place.”

Villa Amore has a name that says it all — almost. Yes, the Mount Holly property in Katonah is in every way romantic, but it also incorporates elements of feng shui that make spaces flow from one to the next. Listing agent Caroline Shepherd says that the owner, an interior designer, was instrumental in the design of the house and landscape when it was built 15 years ago.

“The house and space were designed on principles of harmony,” she says. The saltwater pool/spa, while easily seen from the family room, is a short path away from the outdoor dining pavilion, just outside the living space. The stone steps are so naturally placed, they could have been born there.

But this is only one way to approach the classic Roman pool. Guests access the pool through the lower level with its own spa/bath that services the pool for changing, towels, a quick shower. The residents have their own path to the pool from the master bedroom that has a private outdoor spa.

The pool, designed by Armand Benedict, is framed by hedges on one side and mature plantings on the other that include fragrant gardenias and other flora that scent the air and promote a feeling of serenity. Adding to the sensual ambiance, there’s the trickle of the waterfall from the spa to the pool, and music coming from speakers hidden in the rocks. Of course, the saltwater of the pool is the cap to the luxurious experience. Softer on the skin and hair, “It is like a warm ocean dip,” said Shepherd.

Balder Brae in Wesley Hills comes with a pedigree and a pool that is the focal point. Built in 1910, the property was designed by horticulturist Louise Bebe Wilder and her husband, Robert Wilder, architect, with McKim, Meade and White, the foremost architectural firm of the period. David Easton, the renowned interior designer, bought the estate in 1980 and transformed it from cottage and garden to old-style stone home in the Anglo-American tradition.

There is a sense of reserve and formality to the setting with a clock tower, masonry columns in arbors, and original urns and fountains. “The pool at Balder Brae stands out like a jewel in the home’s large enclosed courtyard, surrounded by old 8-foot stone walls, symmetrical pergolas on each side, and antique urns and pots,” says Richard Ellis, listing agent. “Together these elements create a feeling of order and calm with nature and the seamless integration of the home’s design.”

The heated pool shares space with the formal gardens by California landscape designer Nancy Goslee Power, who studied Wilder’s work and replanted the beds and borders to replicate much of the original plan.

Adjacent to thousands of acres of parkland, the nearly six-acre property is private, quiet and most serene.