

MASTERING THE ART OF GUNITE

ONE COMPANY'S JOURNEY INTO HIGH-END POOL AND SPA WORK



Master Pools by Dominion Gunite provides design, construction, restoration and ongoing care for commercial and residential pools and spas.

Photos courtesy Master Pools by Dominion Gunite

When the company that would become Master Pools by Dominion Gunite was first established 56 years ago, pools were not even on the radar. What a difference a few decades can make.

At present, the company, which offers design, construction, restoration and ongoing care for commercial and residential pools and spas, is enjoying its success during this latest phase of its evolution.

THE COMPANY'S ORIGINS

Originally founded in 1955 as Dominion Gunite, the company that would one day become known for its custom pool work

started out specializing in shotcrete (gunite) for tunnels and retaining walls.

"Since shotcrete is such a specialized process, the company often got requests for pools," explains current owner Eric Drolet. "So, in 1964, Dominion Gunite officially entered the aquatics industry and became a member of the Master Pools Guild." Master Pools by Dominion Gunite Calgary Ltd., was established in 1990.

"When the company originally started, there was only a small handful of employees. Now, we employ 10 to 20 staff members, half of which would be considered permanent full-time positions."

Today, Master Pools focuses on providing design, construction and general sales, specifically to the pool industry, from hotels,

MASTER POOLS FOCUSES ON PROVIDING DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND GENERAL SALES, SPECIFICALLY TO THE POOL INDUSTRY.

resorts and campgrounds to municipalities, clubs and residential clients.

"The primary focus of Master Pools has always been on new pool construction with concrete/shotcrete basins, customized interior finishes and unique designs," Drolet says.

TAKING OVER

Drolet took on the role of president in 2010, after working with the company as a project manager for seven years. He spent the previous 12 years as a general contractor, specializing in concrete construction, decorative concrete and landscaping.

Working alongside Drolet is his business partner, Scott Lineker, a 25-year veteran of the pool industry with a background in building management. Lineker took on several different roles within Master Pools, from customer service representative to project manager, eventually stepping up to a leadership role in 1992.



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Master Pools employs anywhere from 10 to 20 staff members, a far cry from the handful of employees it started out with.

Much of the company's commercial work includes additions such as spray features and waterslides, which are becoming more commonplace.

"Water chemistry, heating systems, filtration, hydraulics, design, client services—they were all part of my regular duties running the day-to-day operations and managing the company," Lineker explains.

When Master Pools underwent an ownership restructuring in 2010, Drolet and Lineker, both minority partners in the business at the time, bought out the majority partner. They continue to operate the company to this day.

"We have instilled a new and positive focus on growth, quality construction and customer service," Drolet says.

The partners work closely with Fred Baker, who joined Master Pools as senior manager of sales, marketing, design and development in 2007. Baker previously operated his own aquatic design and construction company in Calgary from 1990 to 2007.

"Fred has a wealth of knowledge and experience in the aquatic industry," Drolet says. "He is dedicated to the planning and design of numerous aquatic facilities, and is influential in many projects including high-end residential projects, resort spas, athletic and fitness centres and waterparks, to name a few."

Among Baker's notable projects are the Fairmont Willow Stream Spa in Banff, Alta., the Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa in Asheville, N.C., and the Mohonk Mountain House Spa in New Paltz, N.Y.

"Joining forces with a renowned pool designer like Fred has been instrumental in the diversity of services provided by our company," Drolet adds.

A DIVERSE MARKETPLACE

Located in Calgary, an urban centre approaching one million residents, Drolet says there is plenty of business to be had by the company, both in the commercial and residential sectors.

"As we have two distinct market segments there are significant differences in our customer base," he says. "We find the commercial customers are progressive developers who understand the value of creating a unique water environment for their facilities."

In addition to projects in the Calgary area, Master Pools also does commercial work in all four western provinces; the company's residential work is limited to Alberta, with the majority of the work taking place in either Edmonton or Calgary.

About five years ago, the Master Pools team noticed an increase in residential opportunities, and decided to grow its design team in order to meet the challenge. Today the company employs three people dedicated to design, giving Master Pools the advantage of having in-house expertise at hand when working with architects, engineers and designers.

"Our typical residential customer is upwardly mobile and well-tuned to their desire to create a unique water environment to satisfy their needs," Lineker says. "Many of our projects begin as a part of new home construction, where we are often engaged early in the home planning stage and work closely with the designers and architects. Our customers range in age from early 30s to late 60s."

Baker says the majority of the company's residential clients are detail-oriented—and often know exactly what they want.

"In our market, more clients have a greater sense of what they are looking for in a pool environment," he explains. "Many of these



homeowners are well travelled and have seen certain forms and functions in vacation pools that they wish to bring into their own projects.”

FOLLOWING THE TRENDS

On the commercial side, Lineker says hotel and condominium pools comprise a large portion of Master Pools’ client base.

“These projects typically include a pool and whirlpool and are usually constructed indoors,” he says. “There is a move to multi-use pools for this market. Often, there are shallow areas with spray features and other curiosities to help engage the users, as well as water slides to enhance the bathing experience for both young and old.”

Thanks to climate trends in the Calgary area, which is dominated by cool summers and downright frigid winters, Baker says this indoor trend has also expanded to the residential market.

“There are a significant number of high-end residential pools and spas in the Calgary area that are constructed



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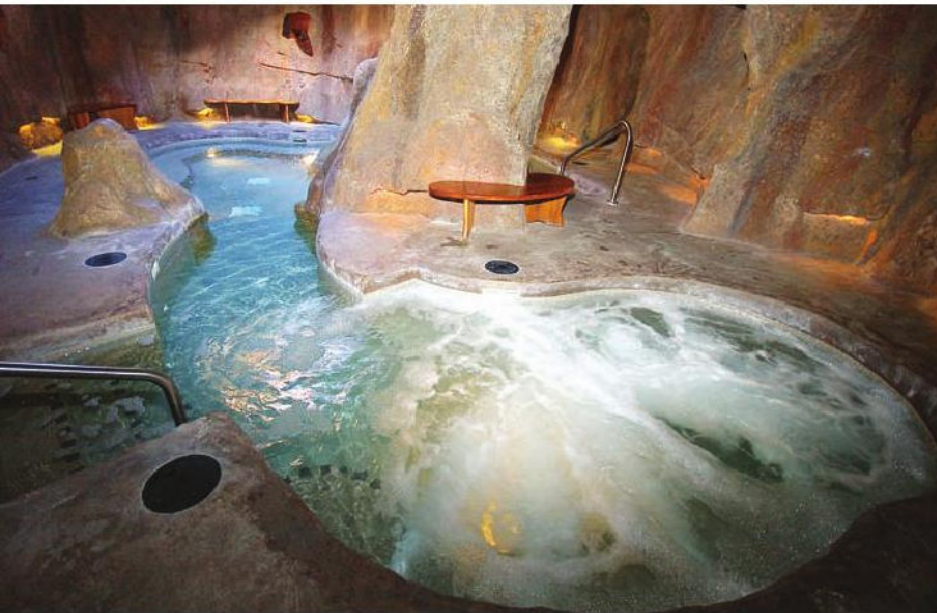


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Given Calgary's often harsh climate, indoor pools have become more popular, even among the company's residential clients.



The residential indoor pool market has continued to increase over the last five years, a trend the company is looking to capitalize on.

indoors," he explains. "The enclosures that house the pools are generally of the same quality as the home construction, with complete dehumidification systems, and are suitable for year-round enjoyment."

The market has continued to increase over the last five years, a trend the company is looking to capitalize on by expanding its product and service offering and reaching out to new clients.

PROMOTING THE BUSINESS

Master Pools promotes through trade shows, magazine ads, social media and e-mail campaigns, all of which have been quite successful.

"In the last year, we started putting more emphasis on our website with positive results," Drolet says. "We update information regularly and focus on search engine optimization (SEO) to ensure we are listed at the top of any search engine results. We have also recently started giving more attention to our Facebook page to connect with both industry professionals and customers."

When it comes to competition, Drolet says the market for concrete pools in Calgary is fairly small compared to other Canadian cities with warmer climates. That said, he says Master Pools tries to stay a step ahead by providing quality craftsmanship and customer service.

"We strive to establish lasting relationships with our clients," he says. "Our team has more than 125 years combined experience in the aquatic industry. Also, as a member of the Master Pools Guild, we have access to a wealth of resources and information."

In addition to design and construction, Master Pools also offers a variety of after-sales services. These include pool and plaster resurfacing, tile replacement and repair, waterfall integration, installation of automatic pool cleaning and chemical control systems, lighting, safety and energy-efficiency upgrades, pool and hot tub opening and closing services and supplies and chemicals. The constant—commitment to ensuring a job well done.

"Our success is due to our dedication and believing in what we build," Baker says. "We strive to provide the highest quality of craftsmanship and attention to detail. ♦"