

BLUE DIAMOND POOLS & LANDSCAPING

BARRIE BUILDER STRIVES TO DO IT ALL



They sky's the limit for Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping, according to co-owner, Chase Mariano.

Photos courtesy Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping

When it comes to their clients' backyards, there's practically nothing off-limits for Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping.

The Barrie, Ont., company, co-owned by business partners Chase Mariano and Mark Nunn, started as a basic pool builder, expanding to meet the demands of a growing client base.

"We started out just building vinyl pools, but now we offer full design and landscaping services, as well as vinyl, concrete and fibreglass pools," Mariano says. "We also do renovations and work on commercial and infinity-edge pools.

We don't use any subcontractors. We do all the work for a customer's entire backyard."

The company, which was originally called Blue Diamond Pools, was born when Mariano, who had a background in the construction industry, said yes to a simple request.

"A gentleman asked me to build him a pool," he says. Mariano, whose father owned his own U.S.-based pool company several years before, was familiar enough with the industry to give it a shot. "It all sprung from there."

After completing a few projects in his first year and several more in the years that followed, Mariano began noticing how many of his clients were looking for landscaping



Mark Nunn (left) and Chase Mariano, co-owners of Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping.

services to complete their new backyard. After two years of focusing strictly on pools, he decided it was time to add a landscaping element to the business.

"It just made sense. People didn't want to hire us and then have to find their own landscaper. I wanted to offer the complete package."

That's where Nunn came into the picture. Mariano had been referring his pool clients to Nunn, who owned his own company, Bayview Landscaping. Eventually, the two entrepreneurs discussed combining their efforts, which led to a formal partnership and the 2001 merger of their respective companies.

GROWING THE BUSINESS

Though it is now well established in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping grew from rather humble beginnings.

"Our old offices were operated out of a garage," Mariano says. "Now, we have a 111-m² (1,200-sf) showroom, plus additional land for machine storage." The staff has also grown with the company, with six employees joining Mariano and Nunn. The company also has a fleet of six service vehicles.

According to Mariano, the typical Blue Diamond customer ranges in age from 40 to 50 years old, with a higher-end income and children. Though based in Barrie, Blue Diamond has worked with customers from across the GTA, and as far north as the cottage country of Collingwood and Muskoka, Ont. In recent years, Mariano has noticed a general trend towards more nature-inspired designs, with natural slopes and rocks. Budget, however, does tend to correlate with the homeowner's wants. He says clients who spend more money on their pools tend to gravitate to more contemporary designs.

"Since I've been in the industry, I've noticed people either want something very natural or very modern," he says. "In the Barrie area, everybody wants natural; when you go north or south of the city, it's a mix of both. Trendier people who have second homes in Collingwood, for example, seem to like a modern flair, perhaps because they come from the city."

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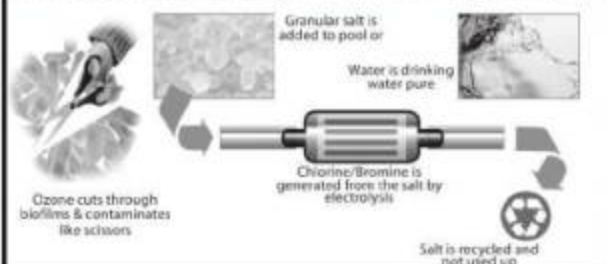


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OUTDOING THE COMPETITION

Competition in the Barrie area is fierce, with more than 15 other pool builders vying for the same customers. Mariano says the key to winning over customers is clear—quality and diversity.

"We do it all, including excavation, which makes us very different than our competition," he says. "At a client's home, we're the only company working in that backyard, aside from the gas man or electrician, which makes the homeowner very comfortable."

Of course, staying true to the bottom line doesn't hurt, either.

"We strive to stay 100 per cent on budget, every time," Mariano says. "Add that to our full design services and we tend to win over customers."

Brand recognition and advertising also helps Blue Diamond stand out in a crowded marketplace. The company's showroom is located on the south end of Barrie, close to major landmarks such as the Molson Centre, which is not only convenient, but adds to the company's local visibility.

"You need to be seen around your community," he says. "Having a prominent office and quite a



Budget tends to correlate with what a homeowner wants in his or her backyard, Mariano says.



Modern designs tend to be popular in larger cities, while rural clients prefer more natural motifs.

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few vehicles out there certainly helps. Every time somebody turns around, they're seeing us. We want to make it seem like we're the only pool builder in Barrie."

While the business has advertised in several different media, including radio, television and newspapers, the co-owners have chosen to place more focus on their online presence in recent years.

"We give our website the most attention and are continually updating it," Mariano says. The site features a photo gallery of past projects (including several side-by-side before-and-after shots), along with information on the company's various services and products. Customers can also apply online for a free estimate.

"I feel we have the best website among our competitors," Mariano says. "In fact, in my opinion, we're the best at branding and advertising."

GOING COMMERCIAL

Though Blue Diamond installs pools from March to December, business inevitably slows in the winter. The company typically closes during these months, prompting Mariano and Nunn to branch out into the indoor pool market.

"In the next year, we plan to expand the business by offering more custom design work and building more commercial pools,"