

# Fewer pooling their resources

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Picture: SIMON O'DWYER

By GABRIELLE COSTA

No longer an asset, the once-prized backyard in-ground pool is fast disappearing beneath landscaped gardens.

Mr Peter Burns, who set up Reverse Pools two years ago, has made a healthy business, not building pools, but filling them in. People were paying as much as \$1500 a year to maintain pools and for the same price or more (up to \$4000) Reverse Pools would get rid of them, he said.

Once a prized status symbol, pools, it seems, are now passe, a symbol, to some, of ostentation..

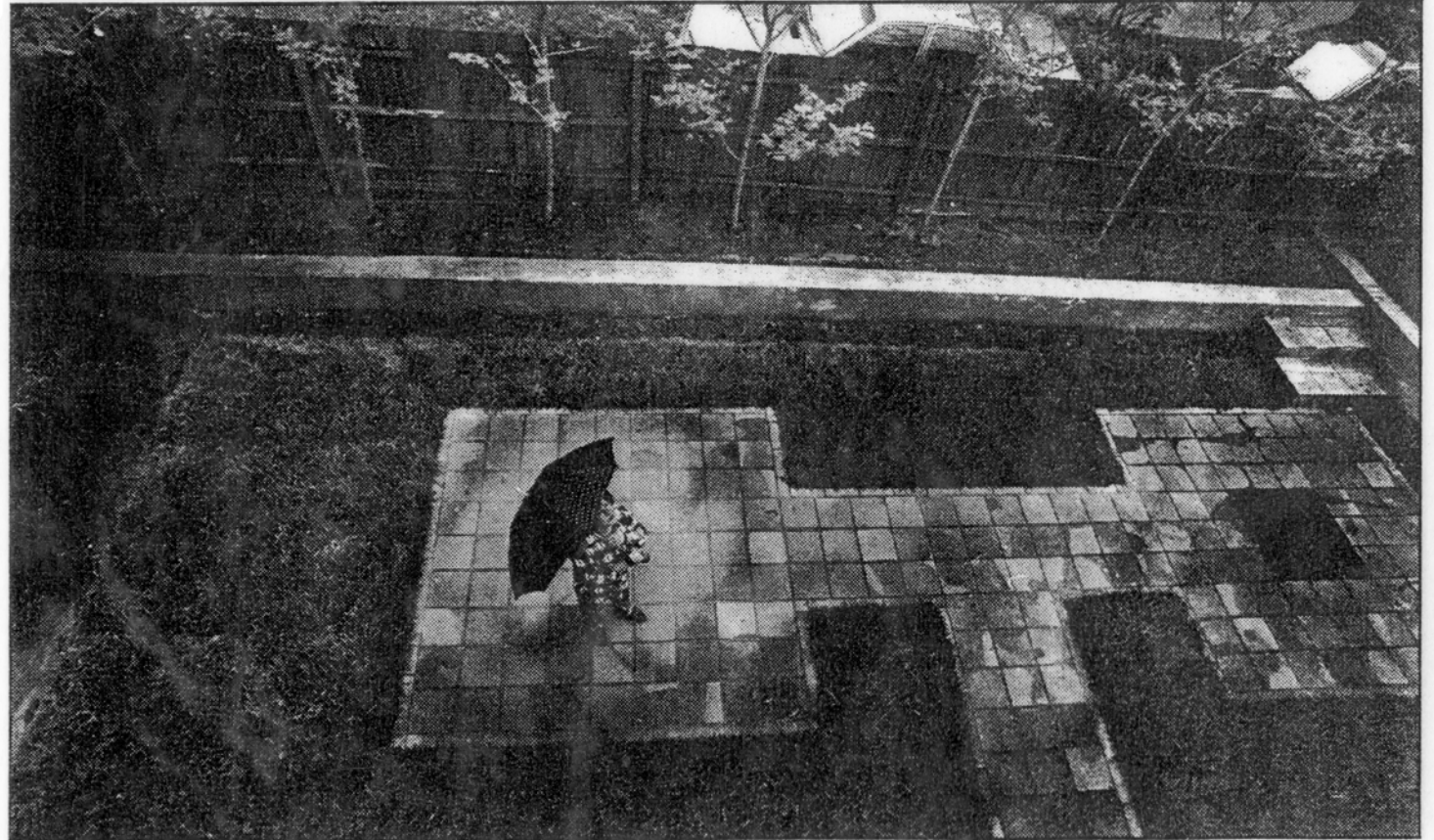
Mr Burns said a change in house and garden fashions and a growing aversion to the costs of owning a pool had contributed to the growth of his business. Many people, he said, did not like pools because they took up too much of what could be an attractive backyard.

Then there was Melbourne's unpredictable weather, safety considerations, and the constant need to keep the pool free of slime and algae.

It takes Mr Burns four or five days to get rid of the concrete shell and to level it.

Pool installations have been declining over the years. In 1988, more than 3000 pool permits were issued. Last year, there were only 1458, up slightly from the 1994 count.

Mr Burns has owned and operated a landscaping business for 25 years and saw Reverse Pools as a



*Once it was a little-used family pool thanks to Melbourne's weather, but now it is a paved area.*

profitable business. "They have nothing in the phone book for people who refill pools," he said. "Only pool construction and maintenance."

A number of upmarket real estate agents were not surprised to hear yesterday of Mr Burns's successful business.

Mr Richard Earle, an associate with Jellis Craig, agreed that pools could be a mixed blessing. While great for teenage children, they

were also a lot of hard work.

"The pool is not seen as being a major asset because buyers won't necessarily add it to the value of the property, especially when they have been shoe-horned in and dominate the back garden," Mr Earle said.

"I wouldn't say there's a lot (of people) having them filled in," said Mr Neale Burgess, the chairman of the estate agents Woodards. "But they are not the attrac-

tion they were some years ago. I don't believe they add any value to houses but they are attractive for people with a huge amount of money."

But Mr Chris Bell, the sales director at Fletcher and Parker, said people should consider other options — like decking the top of the pool or using it as a fish pond — before spending more money on what was an expensive, luxury purchase in the first place.