


pond  
builders



**Aquascape™**  
*Your Paradise.  
Our Passion.*

**Revised  
Edition**

**bible**

everything aquascape does revealed

We hope you enjoy this book, the fruit of our labor.  
If you do, be our guest to join the Aquascape revolution.

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***Pond Builders Bible***  
*is published by*  
***The Pond Guy Publications™***  
P.O. Box 638  
West Chicago, IL 60186

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*Ed Beaulieu*  
*Aquascape Inc.*  
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I'd like to thank my family. Their understanding and support is the cornerstone for all of my decisions, good or bad.

# dedications

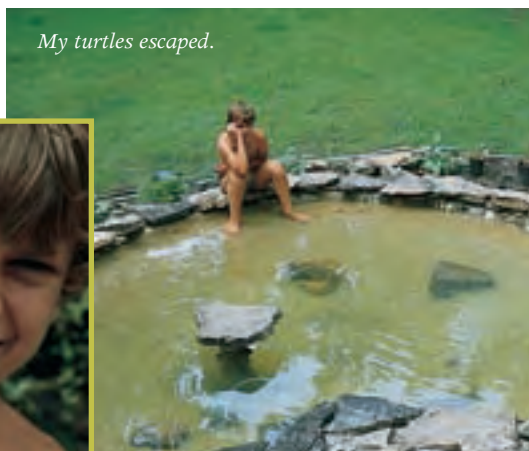
*Dave Kelly*  
*Aquascape Inc.*  
*Vice President of Product Management*

To Jerry McGinn, my father-in-law and friend who taught me to live and enjoy each day to its fullest, because you never know what tomorrow will bring! You're greatly missed.



# aquascape's milestones

## 1982



*by Greg Wittstock  
President & CEO of Aquascape, Inc.*

**1982**

My very own pond! The year was 1982. I had begged my parents to let me build a pond at my new home in Wheaton, Illinois, to replace the lake we had lived on in New Jersey. I even brought my pet turtles with me. I look depressed here because my turtles quickly scaled my flagstone border, which was my feeble attempt to contain them. Every book said to build your pond out of concrete. Little did I know how crazy that advice is!

## 1990

**1990**

In eight years of owning a pond, I had done seven major revisions! MacGyver would be proud of all the contraptions I had experimented with to keep it clean and make it look beautiful. The concrete shell would develop cracks each winter, and leak all summer. Fed up, I cut out the top part of the concrete lip and “paper-machéd” my entire pond in preparation for a new fangled fish-safe EPDM rubber liner. It worked and to this day, the pond has never lost water. Notice the garbage can skimmer. It was inspired by a guy named Joe Decker of Wycoff, New Jersey, who published an article in a home improvement magazine.



1991



The proverbial garage office at my parents home.

My first job...  
\$3,500.



The idea for the name and strategy for Aquascape Designs came in a 30 minute car ride home from work.



1991

My first year in business! Inspired by all the positive comments about my own water garden, I decided to launch a summer business building ponds for other people. I sold this job for \$3,500, including a brick patio! Every contractor's dilemma is that

any kid with a wheelbarrow, shovel and a strong back can be in business. Note the lack of rocks and gravel in the pond? Those didn't debut for another year. I built five ponds that year, \$22,000 in sales, and thought I was rich!



1992

I had sold three jobs the previous summer, to begin working on in the spring. I decided to cut out of school for six months and take both the spring and summer off. I bought a truck, got some workers and built ponds. Hey, where else besides being a lifeguard can you get paid to be outside and get a tan! Anyway, I had built twelve more ponds when SHAZAMM! A press release I had mailed the year before to the Chicago Tribune, landed me a two page story on the cover of the Tempo section. There were 700,000 papers printed, hundreds of phone calls for information, and 82 PONDS SOLD! My having fun and making some money idea was an official business. My parents both began helping me on the administrative side, and I officially got Aquascape Designs incorporated.

One article sold 82 jobs and launched my career!




1992

aquascape  
**milestones** cont...



# 1993



 My one Summer building ponds in Ohio.


## 1993

I promised my mom I'd finish my degree at Ohio State, and I did in the summer. I had my crews building ponds back home, my parents doing the office stuff and sales, and just for kicks, while I was attending classes, I decided to build ponds in Columbus too! I talked the landscape architect school into supplying me with four interns for the summer in exchange for them getting college credit and \$600 each from me. I worked those boys to the bone! Landscape architects, HA!


I finished classes in September, returned to my business in Chicago, and spent the winter

working on one big idea. I had succeeded in three months, in Columbus, to sell \$44,000 in ponds. I had a unique product and a unique approach. I'd start franchising my idea, and I'd start with making the Columbus Aquascape Designs the first franchise. I spent \$25,000 to prepare a franchise offering and that's the price I put on my business in Columbus. The highest bidder I could find was only willing to pay \$15,000. I trashed the idea of franchises. I was broke, down in the dumps and most of all, I felt like my idea had failed. Failure, however, is the best form of learning.



 I rented space in a landscape building.



 My first home and my own garage!

# 1994



*Aquascape Designs*

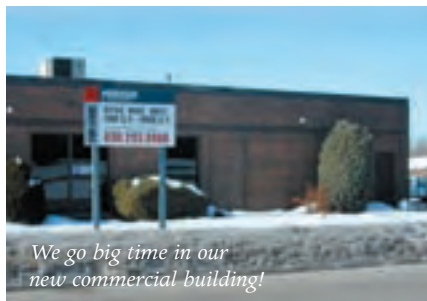
## 1994

My patent for the BIOFALLS® and Skimmer, that I had developed in the trenches, finally came through. I was very proud that starting with a garbage can and cattle trough, I had developed a system that was patentable. Most of all, I did it without any drawings or engineering background.

It simply was documenting the changes I had made over the previous three years to those original products in the field. To this day, as all the engineers and "Johnny Come Lately's" jump into this industry with different designs, we still make all of our improvements to our design by field tests. NEVER EVER by drawings!



# 1995



*We go big time in our new commercial building!*

## 1995

Taking the failure of the franchise idea, and making lemonade, I decided to do something radical! (Imagine that!) I thought if I can't sell people the ideas, I'll give them away! I'll teach



*No one told us a bunch of kids couldn't run a business!*

people everything I've done and how I've done it and then I'll make money off of selling them the products to do it themselves! In April of 1995, I printed 30,000 catalogs, rented names

house to work out of instead of my garage! Construction sales were still the majority of sales with \$424,000 of ponds installed. The writing was on the wall though!

of landscapers, architects and garden centers from Dunn and Bradstreet and mailed 26,000 of them—\$181,000 in sales came from that idea. The coolest thing to me was the fact that I now had a huge 1,800 square foot ware-



## 1996

Mail order revenue quickly surpassed construction. Our huge 1,800 square foot space became way too small. People everywhere were asking for more, more, more information! Seminars were born, so were Build-A-Pond Days and videos. In my mind, the more I could do to educate others on what we were doing in Chicago to build over 100 ponds a year, the more I would be helping them build their businesses. Our motto to this day is ... "Our first goal, as a business, is to

help our customers succeed at building, selling and retailing water features." In my simple thinking, if they grow, we will too. Talk about hitting the bull's eye!



# 1996

# aquascape milestones cont...

## 1997

Skeptics start coming out of the woodwork. Our success was now on a national level not just a local one. Traditional minded water garden industry professionals who had been selling traditional products to filter water gardens, were dismissing our unique construction approaches. They believed they were in the water garden filtration or plant business. We

understood Aquascape Designs was in the water garden “lifestyle” business. So did our customers, so did their customers. When you hit people in their pocketbooks, it hurts. To this day, our detractors say “you can’t do what we do when it comes to building ponds.” My book, that I wrote in a week, which is now being replaced by this book that took a year, made its debut.



# 1998

## 1998

Seminars, Build-A-Pond Days, and anything and everything associated with training and educating. We are on a mission, and nothing is going to get in our way.

## 1999

*Inc.* Magazine honors us by recognizing Aquascape Designs as the 116th fastest-growing privately held company in America! I was blown away. What had started out as a place to hold turtles, became a summer job to make money, had now turned into

one of the country’s fastest growing businesses. And, by the way, we were doing it in a construction-related business. We were surrounded by dot-coms and technology companies! Our new home is 36,000 square feet. I see its limitations before we move in.



*Every time we move into a new place, it seemed huge (for a few weeks)!*



*36,000 square feet.  
We're having fun!*

# 1999

# aquascape milestones cont...

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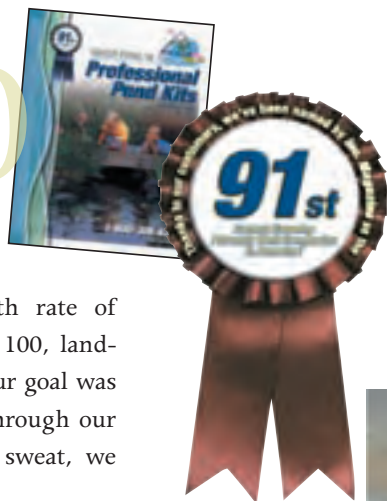
*36,000 square feet.  
We're having fun!*

# 1999

2000

## 2000

With a five-year growth rate of 2,221%, we crack the top 100, landing at 91 on the *Inc.* list. Our goal was to be in the top 100 and through our blood and our customers' sweat, we made it. Thank you!



## 2001

Number 230 on the *Inc.* list. Hey, it's still good! We move into a 103,000 square foot palace we designed and had built for one purpose—to ship water garden kits fast, efficient and friendly. Our company has grown to 80 unique individuals

2001

with the average age being 30. We're humming, and most importantly of all, having fun.



2002

## 2002

Dealers. Just like in 1995 when we debuted the mail order business, our company is changing again. Our focus has been to provide the best products, at the best value, with the best service. One problem—we are in Chicago and you're not. Local dealers change that. They become the

Aquascapes in your area, providing you with knowledgeable local support. Dealers are our future, and if you're an installer or retailer who has one in your area, you're blessed. Same products, same prices and faster delivery. We are still just a phone call or question away, but in more and more areas, you'll have a dealer only a drive away.



# aquascape milestones cont...

## NurseryPro 2003

### 2003

Growth and opportunity! The acquisition of Water Creations, our largest competitor, provided Aquascape with entry-level penetration in the do-it-yourself and retail markets. Since the average homeowner upgrades their pond approximately three times, we wanted to ensure pond lovers were moving up into Aquascape ecosystems. What better way than to also pro-

vide customers with entry-level products in the water gardening industry?

With growth comes the need for bigger digs – office space that is. Our Canadian location is the first to move to a larger dwelling space. By the end of 2003, a new warehouse and office are constructed to provide more efficient and comfortable surroundings to our staff in Brampton.



## 2004

### 2004

As time marched on, we quickly realized our Canadian employees were not the only ones who needed more space. Aquascape ramps up planning and visioning for a workplace utopia dubbed Aqualand, designed in part by

employees and professionals alike. The official groundbreaking for Aqualand took place during Pondemonium®. Complete with gold shovels, hard hats, and a resident deacon, the land was blessed and broken.



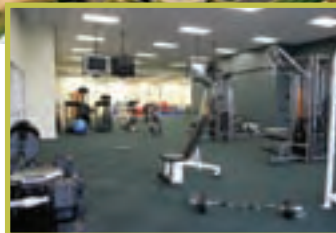
*Aqualand artist rendering.*





## 2005

Lots of positive changes occurred in 2005. Most notably, our physical move in December to Aqualand – a workplace utopia of 256,000 square feet. Aqualand sports the largest sloping green roof in North America, and uses sustainable materials throughout. The building's interior reflects the surrounding prairie, and is chock-full of employee-friendly amenities such as a 5000 square foot fitness center, spa area, sport courts, full service kitchen with expansive dining facility, and more.



During the summer of 2005, the Water Garden Excellence program was officially launched with 100 new members joining the program the day of its announcement at Pondemonium®. Since that time, statistics have shown that Water Garden Excellence participants have grown the sales of their businesses by 10% or more, outpacing customers who've yet to join the program.

Also in 2005, The Best Bosses Award, sponsored by Fortune Small Business and Winning Workplaces was awarded to The Pond Guy™. The Best Boss award is given to small business owners nominated nationwide.

## 2006



### 2006

Not to be outdone by previous years, 2006 made a memorable mark during the month of January when Aquascape acquired PondSweep Manufacturing. PondSweep helped round out the Aquascape product line with a focus on irrigation products. Most notably, the owner of PondSweep was Gary Wittstock – father to The Pond Guy™ himself! The acquisition ended a decade-long silence between father and son, so this is a personal milestone as well as a business milestone.

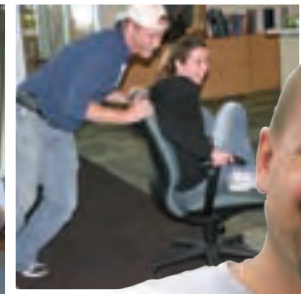
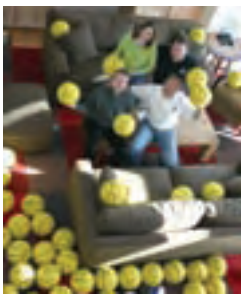
Another notable event in 2006 was the new branding implemented by Aquascape. Included in the branding initiative were a name change and logo changes. All products were categorized as either Aquascape (retail) or AquascapePRO™ (professional grade products).

With new branding came new distribution channels, as Aquascape expanded its distributor network to provide faster, efficient service to customers from coast to coast. Now called Authorized AquascapePRO™ Distributors, these passionate pond suppliers provide contractors and retailers with the utmost service and professionalism.



# the people of aquascape







The image features a central portrait of a man's face, which is overlaid with a colorful, cracked map of the United States. The map uses shades of red, green, and blue. The background consists of a collage of other faces, some of which are also overlaid with the map pattern. The overall style is digital and artistic.

the  
pond  
guy

Revealed

# Find the Way It's Done Conventionally, & Throw It Out the Window!

By Greg Wittstock

This is the book they said should never be written. Every outside business consultant who heard we were going to publish a book chronicling everything we've learned about constructing ponds, said we're crazy! "Why tell everyone all your secrets to success?" they said. After all, they reasoned, "You learned everything through trial and error, how can you put a price on the value of 11 years of practical experience?" Our answer... "You can't, but 50 bucks sounds reasonable." "Nuts," they said, "nuts!"

## Convention Goes Out the Window

That, in a nutshell (pun intended), is how we started this journey over a year ago. We set out to write this book much the way we set out to do business. Find the way it's conventionally done and throw it out the window. That's the way we started doing business in 1991, and it's still the way we are doing things in 2002.

To set a stage for reading this book, you need to understand the Aquascape way of doing things. Nordstrom's we ain't, but from day one, much like Nordstrom's, we've strived to be the best at what we do. And what we do is ponds! Ponds being the generic term for water gardens, waterfalls, and streams. It's a hippie thing—back to nature, babbling water, and soothing stuff we create with our own two hands. Very gratifying! It's also science—water chemistry, ecology, bacteria, and functioning ecosystems. And let's not forget engineering—pumps and head pressure, plumbing, mechanical filters, and so on. But then, how could you talk about water gardens and not talk botany? The king of water gardening is the ever-popular lily, with many off-

shoots including marginal plants like cattail and arrowhead, and floating plants like water hyacinth and water lettuce.

If you want to build ponds, you've got to have a rudimentary understanding of all of the above. That's the key right there. RUDIMENTARY UNDERSTANDING!

## The So-called Experts

If you try and learn it all fully, you'll be paralyzed by your own brain. Become a PhD in any of the aforementioned specialties, and more likely than not, you'll be paralyzed by conventional wisdom. Why? I don't know, maybe you get too smart for your own britches. It's also because I've never seen the so-called "experts" slinging rocks and creating killer, work-of-art waterfalls. Maybe they reason that suit and ties are not good for working in!

Practical experience beats theoretical any day, and no one can argue about what Aquascape has been able to create in a little over a decade. For three years running, we've been on the *Inc.* Magazine list of the fastest growing, privately held companies in America, and even cracked the top 100 in 1999. We did it all doing things our way, the Aquascape way. And what should be reassuring to you is, we did it all with only a rudimentary understanding of all the elements of successful pond building and company building. No PhD's work here and no MBAs either, well, not until 2001 when we hired Mike and Tim, two MBA brainiacs. They better watch out though because if they get too smart, we will just have to send them over to the competition.

## K.I.S.S.

My point? We are not PhD's or MBAs, we are Pond Guys and Gals, and we've been phenomenally successful in business because of one thing—we do everything we can think of to make our customers phenomenally successful with their business. This is rocket science stuff to PhD's, but to us it's just plain simple. Our motto in business... Keep It Simple

Photo by Servantez



Stupid. Why make something that's complicated—Mother Nature—more complicated by messing with it?

Our philosophy on creating killer work-of-art water features that function beautifully is to Keep It Simple Stupid! That means we don't fight Mother Nature, rather we embrace her and work with her to create mini-paradises. This is the exact opposite approach that traditionalists take in creating water features. It's also the reason traditionally built water features always fail in the end. You can only beat Mother Nature into submission for so long before she bites back. And when she does, your pond turns pea soup green, your nitrite levels go off the charts, and your fish, the ones that have been named from birth, go belly-up. Why? Because you approached water feature construction as a science and not the beautiful art it is.

### Change the Way the World Builds Ponds

Changing the way the world builds ponds. That's our little goal driving this growing fish in a small pond forward. Each year, we swallow up more of the conventional pond wisdom, as the facts about the Aquascape way of doing things get harder and harder to scientifically discredit. After all, it's scientifically proven by a guy named Murphy that catastrophic power failures only happen when you're not home!

### The Revolution

It's also scientifically proven that over 32,000 customers have discovered the Aquascape way of keeping things simple and working with Mother Nature and not against her. They are the reason this book was written – for them and all the future members of the Aquascape Revolution. That means you too! Reading this book is a step in the right direction. In it you will find a blueprint for guaranteed success with water features and business. It's up to you to join, or not to join—to do things the revolutionary way we do them, or to follow traditional ways of creating water features. Or, you could be adventurous and do things your own way, neither traditionally nor the Aquascape Way.

Everyday people choose a way to go, either by choice or ignorance that another way exists. Know this. Nothing discussed in this book is theory. We built the largest water garden construction company in America following a 20-step installation guide and a keep it simple, Mother Nature is our friend approach.

### Theory vs. Facts

You follow it and you will get success 100% of the time with how your water features function. Period. Don't give me that "every pond is different" baloney. The system works, and it works because it's a system! It works in Chicago and in Florida. We've got hundreds of ponds in Texas, and thousands in Canada too. Those are the facts, and anyone who tells you differently about the Aquascape way of doing things ain't speaking facts, they are speaking theory. And that's a fact you can take to the bank!

The choice of how to build ponds and build a business is yours. Perhaps you'll be the one who thrives on big projects, searching out developers for your next large aquatic adventure. Or maybe you'll stick with the smaller pond and larger profit margins. Maybe you'll go from being the grunt in the field to the decision-maker for the business, trusting your guys to get the job done. Either way, we want to make sure that you have a passion for what you do and that pond water runs through your veins!

### The Top Dog

So, without further adieu, be my guest to learn about everything we did, and will continue to do as we swim forward towards our goal of Changing the Way the World Builds Ponds. We hope you choose to swim along with us. Consultants be damned.

So to Mother Nature, killer waterfalls, happy fish, ecstatic customers, suntans, profits, and top-dogs everywhere.

Here's to your success!

*The Pond Guy™*

