



Consumer Guide To Buying A Swimspa

How to get the most for your money.

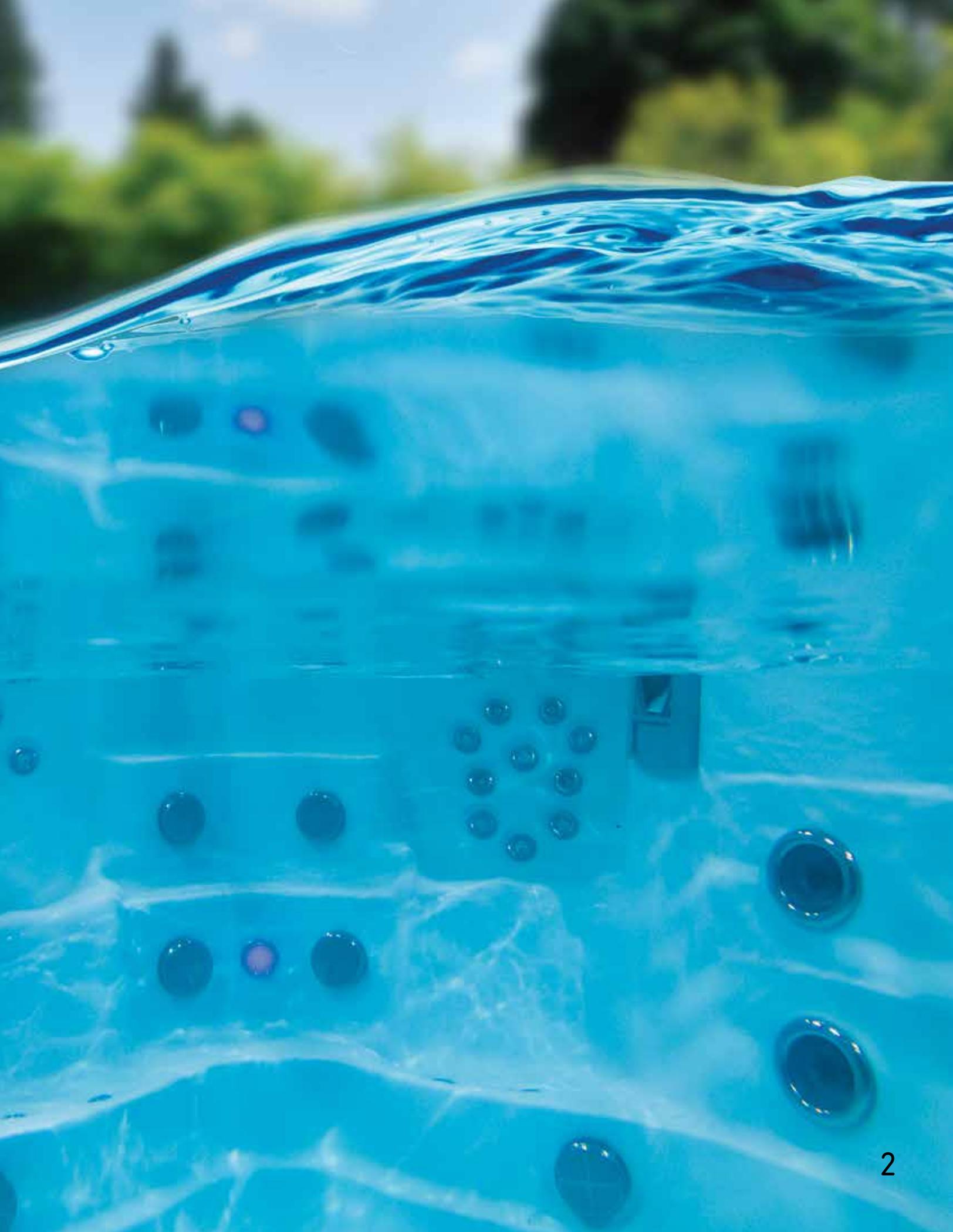


For centuries, people have flocked to public pools to take advantage of the health benefits of swimming. Today, people around the world continue to agree that there is nothing that can give the same exercise value as swimming. The fact that it is a no impact activity that uses every muscle, swimming is still looked at as being the number one activity for healthy people.

While public pools are easy to find, the inconvenience of having to drive to the health center or swimming pool to swim with other people makes it difficult to follow a routine. The modern homeowner can easily bring this experience to their backyards with a swimspa. Buying one however, can be overwhelming given the number of styles and added features available on the market today.

As with many major purchases, perhaps the best way to approach buying a Swimspa is to put together a checklist of the specifications and features you want and then rate the swimspas you see accordingly. Being prepared will help you avoid getting caught up in 'deal of the day' promotions or feel pressured into making a purchase before you're ready.





If you do your homework, you can ensure that you'll buy the best swimspa for your needs.

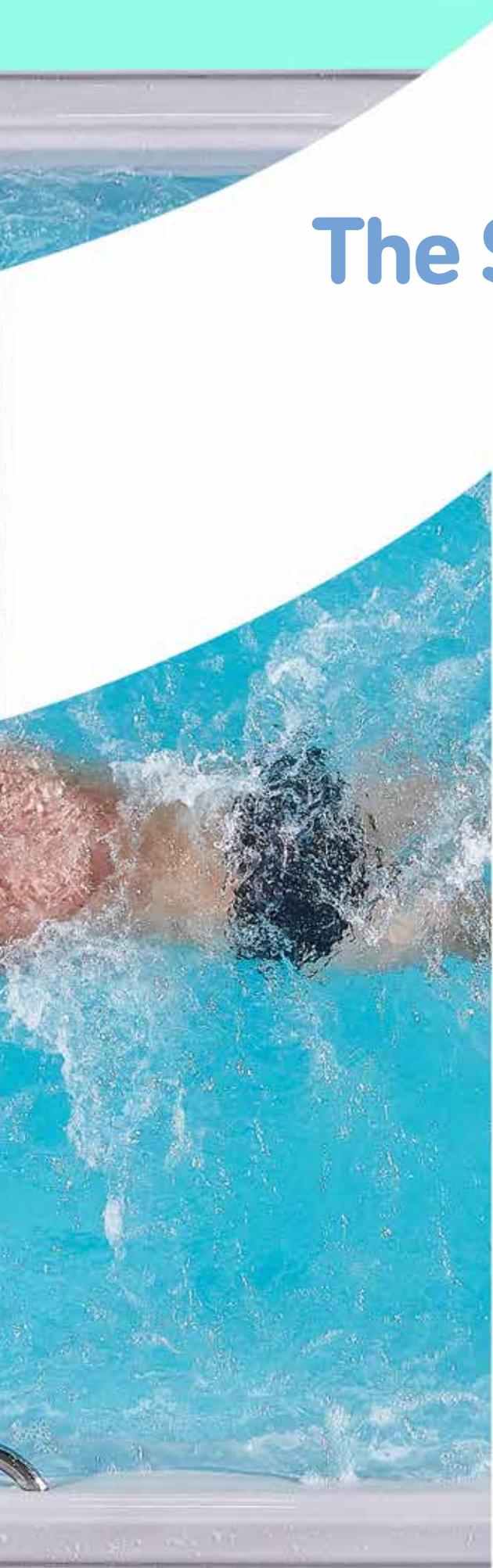
The first rule of swimspa shopping is not to get fooled by the bells and whistles designed to distract you. As a consumer, there are six basic things you should look for when buying a swimspa:

1. The Swim Experience
2. Fun & Fitness
3. Comfort, Design & Massage
4. Reputation
5. Insulation
6. Ease of Maintenance







A photograph of a swimmer in a swim spa. The water is turbulent and blue, with white foam and splashes. The swimmer is wearing a black cap and is partially submerged. The background is a light blue gradient.

The Swim Experience

There are 4 things to look for when researching the swim experience of a swimspa. The first is the pump design, Make sure the system has enough power to achieve the results of the user. Whether you are an every day athlete or a triathlete, the power of the pumping system including the size of the plumbing will help determine your experience. The Second thing to look for is the Swim Jet System. Look for a system that provides a smooth turbulence-free swim current. Make sure that the swim jets have a consistent flow rate that is able to produce a current that is flat, powerful. The third thing is the ability to "Dial In" the resistance. This will allow the swimmer the ability to customize their swim and achieve the desired results. Adjustability of the current is crucial for a high level swimmer as it allows for interval training while at the same time providing a lower level for all other swimmers. The final feature that is crucial to the swim experience is the shell design. Having a wide and deep channel with no protruding steps or seats allows the swimmer an unobstructed swim with a more consistent smooth water flow. Look for the shell to produce little if any back-splash as it will push the swimmer out of the swim lane and disrupt the swim experience. Finally the shell should be designed to keep the swimmer in the swim lane. Look for stabilization jets that push the swimmer to the middle of the swim lane instead of any other type of strap or harness system. Also, make sure the unit has focus points like swim lines or LED lit swim jets to help the swimmer identify their position in the swimspa.





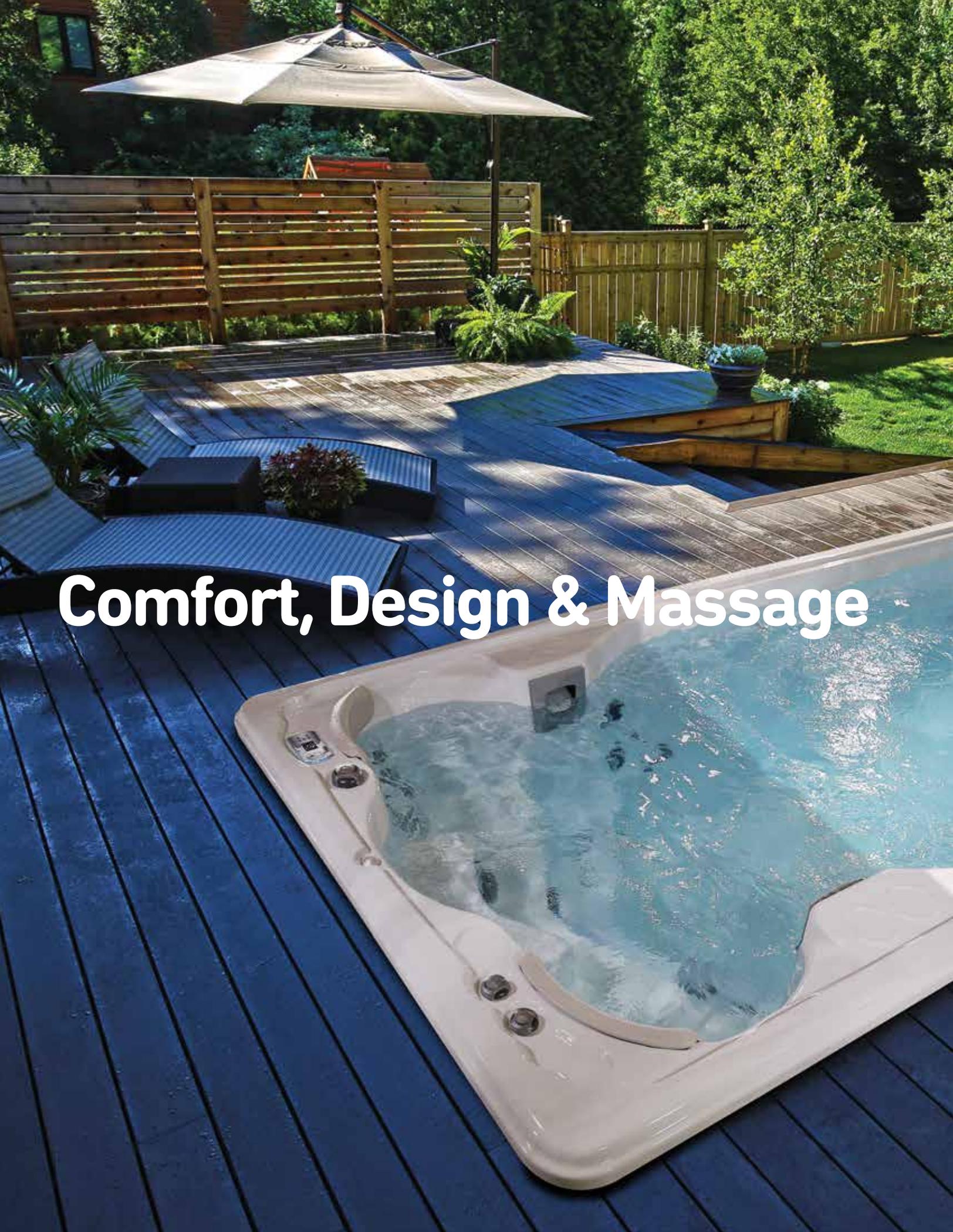
One of the most overlooked areas in a swimspa is the ability of the unit to provide benefits outside the swim and massage. Although the swimming aspect is important, today's customers are looking for an aquatic center in the backyard that can provide hours of entertainment for the whole family. Some of the features to look for in a swimspa that can provide this type of an experience are fitness related.

Rowing machines, tethered swim cords or in wall stair climbers and provide the customer with a home gym that is both convenient and versatile.

Some of the fun features to look for in a swimspa that can increase the family's enjoyment in the backyard can be as easy as adding some LED waterfall fountains that the kids can swim under, or a stereo to increase the fun.

Some swimspas even have a built in wave pool feature that allows the kids both young and old, to enjoy hours of fun using a tethered boogie board to simulate riding a wave in open water.

Fun & Fitness

A white hot tub is the central focus, situated on a blue-painted wooden deck. The hot tub is filled with bubbling water and has several jets visible. In the background, a wooden fence with horizontal slats runs across the yard. A large, light-colored patio umbrella stands on the deck. The scene is set in a lush, green backyard with trees and plants. The text "Comfort, Design & Massage" is overlaid in white on the lower part of the image.

Comfort, Design & Massage



There are many contributing design factors that can make a swimspa more or less comfortable for bathers. Make sure to see if the swimspa seats are ergonomically designed to fit your body's natural curves. It's important to make sure you fit comfortably into the seats in order to get the best possible soaking and massage experience. Don't be afraid to climb in and test out the seats yourself. What's even better, ask to do a 'wet test,' in which you sit in a fully operational version of the swimspa. For example, is there multi-level seating so all body types are able to sit in it? Does the swimspa have a large enough foot well to accommodate multiple bathers? Are there safety steps to enter the swimspa, or are you forced to step on a seat when climbing in?



An area that can help with your installation is to inquire whether the swimspa can be sold with or without a cabinet. In other words does the cabinet support the swimspa or does it have a self-supporting cradle, that allows the customer to install the swimspa without a cabinet.



Check to see if there is a place to put an ice bucket or place drinks. No detail is too insignificant. One of the most appealing element of a swimspa is its massage capabilities. When added to the soothing feel of hot water, it can truly make or break your swim spa experience. As such, it is important to learn as much as you can about this aspect before buying. The jets are the most vital variable of the massage equation. Look for jets that do not have any bearings in them, as these can corrode quickly. Also, look for a model with optimized hydraulics to ensure an even flow of water is provided to each jet for a smooth, comfortable massage.

Look for a swimspa manufacturers that has been in business for a while and has a proven record of reliability. The Internet is a great place to start. Check out the company's website and do a quick search for independent reviews of their products. You can also ask friends or family members with hot tubs or swimspas about their experiences with particular models.

Also, investigate whether the products they offer are covered by a reasonable warranty. Be careful of the small print as many warranties are pro-rated in the industry. A good warranty should consist of a 10 year structural warranty, 5 year acrylic surface and 3 year parts and labour warranty. When it comes to swimspa retailers, many of the same criteria applies. Investigate how long the store has been in business and whether it is a member of any professional associations. Research the company online to determine its reputation, including a search for customer reviews, referrals or complaints. Of course, visiting the store on a fact-finding mission can also be helpful. Speak with a salesperson to see if they take the time to determine what swimspas would best suit your particular needs, or just push products on you without asking questions.



Reputation

Check to see if the store has an onsite water testing lab an inhouse or outsourced service department for ongoing maintenance support. If you decide to buy from a sales representative at a home show, parking lot sale or other type of one-off event, be sure to ask whether the seller has a bricks-and-mortar retailer location that can support you with a warranty and service department.



Insulation

This factor is significant because of its link to energy efficiency. First and foremost, look for a hot tub that is approved by the California Energy Commission (CEC), a North American body that addresses regional environmental concerns, helps prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts and promotes the effective enforcement of environmental law. Investigate how long it takes for the hot tub to filter 100 percent of its water. The less time this takes the more energy-efficient the hot tub will be. Also look for models that use low-amperage filtration pumps.

A good hardcover can also provide added insulation and energy efficiency. The industry standard is a 50 to 76-mm (2 to 3-in.) tapered cover; however, a tapered 76 to 101-mm (3 to 4-in.) cover will more effectively retain heat. Adjustable venting of the cabinet is another factor to consider.

Any hot tub that uses a Thermal Shield Technology which uses the motor's waste heat to warm up the hot tub water during colder months then is able to release some of the heat in the warmer months.





No matter what swimspa you choose, you need to make sure it is easy to service. The last thing you want to do is pull the swimspa out of a deck and flip it on its side every time service is required. Ask the salesperson to show you where technicians can access vital systems (and keep these details in mind when considering where to place the swimspa in your backyard).

When it comes to swimspa maintenance, there are two primary factors you need to address—filtration and disinfection.

Filtration

In a swimspa, dirt can only do two things. It is either light enough to float on the surface or heavy enough to drop to the bottom.

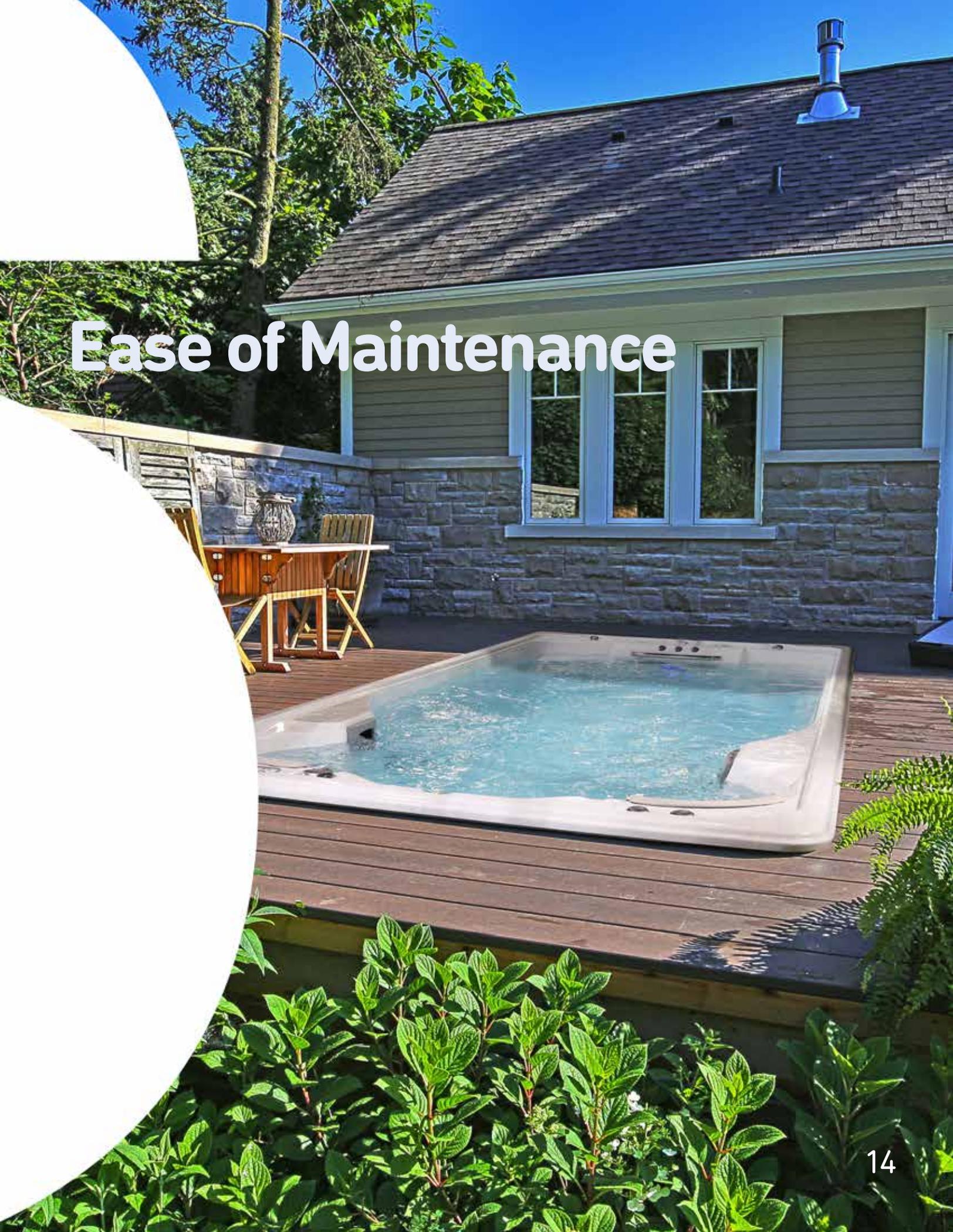
When assessing a swimspa's filtration capabilities be sure to ask how long it takes to filter 100 percent of the water. Also check to ensure the skimmer is sufficient. Does it provide enough filtration to remove debris and does it have a floating door to skim the surface of the water? Also ask the salesperson whether the swimspa has a suction side filter or pressure side filter. The suction side filter offers less expensive filtration, but is not as effective; it will only filter 50 percent of the swimspa water.

Conversely, pressure side filters are more expensive, but since 100 percent of the water passes through the filter, all of the water can be cleaned quicker and more efficiently.

Disinfection

To keep your swimspa safe and pleasant to use, you will also need to disinfect the water regularly. Ideally, look for a swimspa that has an in-line chemical feeder as opposed to a floating dispenser. While floating dispensers work well, they also need to be removed every time someone enters the swimspa. If you choose to use an ozone system, which is designed to reduce your overall chemical requirements, look for a model that uses an injection system. This technology reduces off-gassing and increases the ozone's saturation and killing power. Adding a mineral based sanitization system will give you a natural way of purifying the swimspa's water. Silver and copper are natural algaecides and zinc is a fantastic skin softener. Ultimately if you add a system like this, it will dramatically reduce the need for chemicals in your swimspas.





Ease of Maintenance



Go Forth and Shop

Although looking for a swimspa can be confusing at times, you can make the process less complicated by narrowing down your search criteria to the above five areas. By finding a retailer you trust and walking in armed with this knowledge, you can surely find the swimspa of your dreams.

The Hidden Costs of Swimspas

There are two hidden costs to buying a swimspa that most retailers won't discuss - installation and electrical hook-ups. It is vital that you understand the costs of these two expenses.



Installation

If you are going above ground, you should budget between \$1000 and \$2,000, depending on where you are going to place your swimspa and whether you will be using a concrete pad or patio stones to support it.

The non-cabinet style of installation is very common in high end projects either inside or outside as it allows the designer the ability to finish the swimspa the way they envisioned it; in ground, in a floor etc. Even minor features should not be ignored. When deciding where to install the swimspa, consider the following questions:

- 1) Will the location provide you and your guests with enough privacy?
- 2) Does the location provide the proper support for the swimspa?
- 3) Will it be easy for the retailer to deliver the swimspa?
- 4) Can the swimspa be easily serviced if something goes wrong?
- 5) Is there a place nearby to put a hard cover when it is removed?
- 6) What view will bathers have when sitting in this location? Check the powerlines in the area for delivery.
- 7) Does the location make it easy to get in and out of the swimspa?
- 8) Is the swimspa close enough to an electrical source to ensure an easy hook up?





Other Things To Consider Are...

Electrical Hook-up

On average, this second hidden expense will cost you roughly \$1,200. However, this can vary quite drastically, especially if you require any upgrade to the electrical panel. Keep this in mind when figuring out your budget. To get a better idea of the overall amount, ask the salesperson about the swimspas electrical requirements and compare them to what your panel can provide.

An Abundance of Options

While there are certain basics by which to guide your swimspa search, there are also some unique add-ons to consider when comparing models. These are just a few of the more popular upgrades on the market today.

1) Automatic Swim Jet Variable Speed Option.

This will allow the customer at the touch of a button to increase or decrease the flow rate of the jets.

2) Water Features: These add-ons (e.g. waterfalls, streams, etc.) can add both esthetic and therapeutic benefits to your swimspa.

3) Lights: Colour therapy can be a beneficial addition to the massage and wellness experience. All swimspas have a standard number of lights; it is up to you whether you add more lights to add to the experience.

Buyer's Notes & Thoughts...







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