



# The Importance of ASA's Outstanding Shotcrete Project Awards Program

By Bill Drakeley and Kerri Allmer

If you're anything like me, you have probably asked yourself, "Why bother with award programs?" Most of the time, my company skips these award applications for the simple fact that we have found the judging process for most programs is victim to bias and untrained eyes posing as expert judges. The pool and skatepark industries are full of award programs from a variety of groups, regions, associations, and construction techniques; however, they all seem to have the following in common: the artistic impression, quality of design, and competence of construction practices are left up to judges who may or may not be qualified to judge these elements. For example, there is a disconnect in having a roundtable voting committee made up of pool retailers, liner builders, or manufacturers' representatives when selecting the best quality in-ground shotcrete pool construction. The full scope of this work just isn't in their wheelhouse and would be better judged by qualified shotcrete contractors instead. The intricacies and rigors entailed in the sprayed concrete process are really only known and understood by those doing this type of work.

My unvarnished opinions are based in the thought that our industry does not get the credit it deserves for a quality water feature installation. Specialty plaster, tile color, masonry, fun add-on features, or unsightly faux rocks or volcano imitations belching a pressurized water flume in the air take the credit away from the shotcrete builder who creates the structural core of the pool.

To prove my point, my company entered a three-tiered vanishing-edge pool into a competition down south. The home design mimicked Falling Water by Frank Lloyd Wright, so to complement this, we incorporated three different geometric changes of water flow spanning 25 ft (7.6 m) of elevation change. This multi-pool water flow followed organic architecture design theory, providing a continuation of space and blending into the environment that was already established by the house. We received rave reviews from a slew of people associated with publications such as *Architectural Digest*, *The New Yorker*, and *WaterShapes* magazine, yet we didn't pique the interest of the judging panel. The winning pool was a basic 40 x 20 ft (12 x 6 m) with tiny fiber lighting in the floor and in the ceiling above the

pool. When comparing the difficulty, design theory, and construction techniques required for each project, there should have been no competition between the two pools. Yet, the judging panel's decision proves my point that our industry does not get the credit it deserves when installing a well-thought-out, expertly crafted, liquid-tight, quality water feature that will serve its owner for decades to come.

Since then, we have taken a hard look at promoting our wares to the public. While we recognize that promotion of the product was always helped by some type of outside recognition, we are also keenly aware that the watered-down pool industry version was not really a selling point to the buying public. In my extensive travel around the country performing expert witness services and consulting on construction defect court cases, I have seen a lot of firms' promotional materials. All have plaques and awards of merit from their related associations, as do we. This, however, is not considered "credibility" by the buying public.

The solution to this issue comes from the American Shotcrete Association's awards program and recognition banquet. Our ASA awards program takes into account all the basic recognized elements that deem a project a winner: looks, difficulty, textures, and colors. Where ASA differs from other award programs is the requirement to explain how a project was built. A nice picture of the pool is not the top priority. The priority is the overall process—from concept to final product in-place. Engineering, soil or geotechnical analysis, steel, and concrete placement are all paramount to recognition. Did you use ACI-certified nozzlemen? What was the mixture design and why did you choose this for the installation? The application process makes you really consider the overall quality of the product as the application questions really do make you scrutinize each phase of the construction.

In my opinion, the real credibility of an awards program stems from the judges. The ASA judges are shotcrete-focused experts—they are not "pool people" (except for the occasional Neanderthal like me who barges into the wrong room). The judges are academics, contractors, suppliers, or engineers that represent decades of experience in the shotcrete process. They know the materials, equipment,

placement processes, and construction challenges that must be addressed for a high-quality, durable structure. No one with suspect practices from the pool industry will sneak by this judging panel and that's a good thing! If you are

**2012 Outstanding Pool & Recreational Project: Coastal Maine Negative-Edge Pool by South Shore Gunite Pools & Spas, Inc.**



*Elaborate reinforcing required by the pool design as we start the second phase of shotcrete*



*Deep excavation required for forming and, subsequently, filling with free-draining stone to prevent frost heave. Also seen is the dowel reinforcing bar that was tied into the pool floor in the second phase*



*Completed pool from the beach-entry end*

lucky enough to be considered in the top few securing an honorable mention or the annual winning entry, it means that your product is structurally and functionally worthy of recognized credibility. To us in the pool and recreational industry, it means that we passed the test.

Entering ASA's award application process helped our company not only get national recognition but also helped our construction process down the line. The application process and the questions asked are a true learning process. The first time I read an award application I decided against submission. We would have had to answer "no" for too many questions. Today, things like curing, strength gain, porosity, and bond planes are all part of our building approach and to be honest, some of it started with the careful introspection of our business that came from completing ASA award submissions.

I wanted to highlight a few past award-winning projects submitted by ASA members that really deserve recognition. I also included one of ours, just because I can.

As you can see, these structures are extremely involved. The judging panel is looking at the internal structure and its

**2016 Outstanding Pool & Recreational Project: Covleigh Club in Rye, NY by South Shore Gunite Pools & Spas, Inc.**



*50 tons (45 metric tons) of reinforcing bar being installed*



*Completed pool*

## | POOL & RECREATIONAL SHOTCRETE CORNER

2017 Outstanding Pool & Recreational Project: The Scheinberg Residence in Bridgewater, CT  
by Drakeley Pool Company



Although intricate forming was required for this out-of-ground pool construction, the use of sustainable shotcrete resulted in a material savings of 50% due to needing only one-sided forming



Reinforcing bars, non-vibrating rigid forming, and a roughened SSD bond plane were installed to connect the cast concrete foundation and the shotcreted portions of the pool structures



Beautiful reflection of clouds

2018 Outstanding Pool & Recreational Project: City of Frisco Texas Northeast Community Skate Park  
by SPA Skateparks



ACI-Certified Nozzleman and blow pipe operator. Stucco lathe placed between reinforcement curtains. Shotcrete pump and equipment in background



Second (final) concrete layer with Class A steel-trowelled finish. Over-vertical concrete capsule protected from overspray



Over-vertical, cantilevered concrete wave feature in foreground

ability to withstand forces—not the final coating of texture. Backfill, hydrostatic, and thermal loads must be successfully carried throughout the pool's lifetime. Through quality shotcrete placement, we create pools and recreational facilities that easily meet the compressive and tensile forces that we must account and build for to create a durable concrete structure, and these are the criteria that projects are judged on for this competition. These winners are judged for their contribution to the future of the industry, not just the present pretty picture.

The past ASA Outstanding Shotcrete Project Award winners in the pool and recreational industry exemplify how substantially we've evolved from the rectangular concrete pond in the ground to the creative masterpieces we can create today. Hopefully, with increased awareness of the judging process and its criteria, the ASA's Outstanding Shotcrete Project Awards can provide the real credibility we as pool and skatepark builders are looking to present to our clients.



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on behalf of ASA, 2016 President of ASA, an ASA Technical Adviser, a Genesis 3 Platinum member, and a member of the Society of Watershape Designers as well as Chairman of its Advisory Board. Drakeley teaches courses on shotcrete applications at the Genesis 3 Construction School, World of Concrete, and numerous other trade shows. He is a contributor to Shotcrete magazine and other industry publications. Drakeley is a member of the ASA Pool & Recreational Shotcrete and Underground Committees.



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service firm in Bethlehem, CT. Allmer has developed and produced educational materials on pool shotcrete construction for multiple pool trade associations including NSPF/Genesis and NESPA. She has also partnered with Bill Drakeley on technical presentations given to the architectural and landscape architectural industries. Allmer received her bachelor's degree from Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT, and her master's degree from West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. She is currently a student of Genesis 3 University, pursuing membership in the Society of Watershape Designers.