



Natural Pool
Press Release 04A/2007

Interview Peter Petrich

The Inventor of the Natural Pool

The Austrian Peter Petrich is considered to be the pioneer of the natural pool movement. In 1985 his company Biotop Landschaftsgestaltung GmbH built the first natural pool. In the past ten years he has built up a network of partner companies, which annually build roughly 200 natural pools within the scope of a license agreement. With its almost 3,000 natural pools across Europe the Biotop Natural Pool Group is one of the market leaders. From 2007 on the Biotop Natural Pool is also represented on the UK market.

Question:

Natural pools have been built in Austria for over two decades. When did this idea start to spread to other countries?

Peter Petrich:

In the second half of the 1980's natural pools were almost exclusively built in Austria, primarily by Biotop. Only after Biotop had had years of success, was I able to convince a few firms in southern Germany in 1994 to offer natural pools according to our system. In the next decade we were able to increase our partner network to all of Germany and to Switzerland, because demand for this new alternative to the classic swimming pool was rising sharply.

Why has the natural pool movement only begun to gain ground recently in Great Britain?

I think that the main reason is the weather. As there is relatively more rain in Great Britain than on the continent, there are fewer pools, and for this reason demand for natural pools was also lower. But what was not considered was that the water in natural pools is warmer, because the shallow water zones work like solar panels. And the water can be heated additionally with a solar energy system.

Were there no queries from Great Britain in this period?

There were queries from individuals, particularly when U.S. magazines took up the topic and published articles about natural pools. We reached Britain the long way around via the USA.

There was no interest from English gardening firms?

The only one who showed interest was the landscape designer Michael Littlewood, who is considered the natural pool expert in England today. He recognized the fact that throughout the year the natural pool is an attractive design element for the garden, which can then also be used for swimming. Michael got the better part of his knowledge from his visits to Biotop. We even concluded a cooperation agreement with him, which unfortunately didn't work out, as our license system is based on cooperation with landscaping companies and not with planners, who have to hire sub-contractors to implement their ideas. Unfortunately, cooperation in 2001/2002 with a small English landscaping firm was not successful, because the firm did not have a strong enough economic basis.

In the meantime, isn't the know-how about building natural pools – due in part to the Internet – available to anyone?
On the surface that may seem to be true, but in practice the situation is different. It is much more difficult to build a natural pool than many gardening firms assume. Just excavating a hole, putting in a liner, planting a few water plants, filling it with water and adding some decking is not enough. Biotop is constantly faced with cases like this and having to get them to work. These are not only pools that garden owners have built themselves, but also those built by “professional” gardening operations. 20 years of experience cannot simply be downloaded from the Internet. Gardening firms that now offer natural pools without a system will make the same mistakes that we made 20 years ago.

What is the secret to the Biotop Natural Pool system?

The secret lies in the knowledge of the complex relationships in natural water and the perfected details. Whether it is the animal-friendly skimmer, the optimized shoreline construction or the carbonator – the Biotop Natural Pool system has developed enormously in the past 20 years.

How did you make contact with Will Woodhouse?

In 2005 we were approached by Will, because he had two orders to build natural pools and wanted to be sure that they would work once they were finished. Biotop planned the pools together with him. During construction we sent one of our staff to England to supervise the installation of Biotop's natural pool components, and to assure that all quality standards were fulfilled. These projects showed that we could work well together.

So well, in fact, that Will Woodhouse has now become not only a license partner of Biotop, but has also acquired a master license. Woodhouse Landscape Ltd. is now our main partner in Great Britain, which means it is the point of contact for all firms in the U.K. that are interested in the Biotop Natural Pool system.

What distinguishes Woodhouse Landscape Ltd. for you to give it such a central role in your business with the U.K.?

Primarily its sense of quality consciousness. Biotop has had numerous long-distance planning projects abroad, but to go to the expense of flying in an expert is not something that everyone does. In our first talks Will demonstrated that he wanted to be more than just a partner. He immediately had ideas how to make natural pools more attractive particularly to the English consumer.

How quickly will Great Britain have a partner network?

You had better ask Will personally. He is very ambitious. But here, as well, quality before quantity is the maxim. Biotop built up its partner network in Germany within four years and I paid great attention on the quality of the firms. For me it is also important that the owners of the firms are ecologically minded.

How much do you intend to involve yourself in Great Britain?

In the first years I will hold all the training courses myself, to be able to convey to the new natural pool partners where they should pay particular attention in planning and construction. Building natural pools is not only a great task but also one that is very satisfying.

All your thoughts and activities seem to revolve around natural pools. What would you do if there were no natural pools in your life?

I would have to invent them.

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Digital Photos:



Image A1



Image A2



Image A3

Captions:

Image A1: Peter Petrich, managing director of Biotop and inventor of Biotop Natural Pool

Image A2: Peter Petrich at one of the demonstration pools at headquarters of Biotop

Image A3: Biotop Natural Pools headquarters in the middle of the Vienna Woods in Austria