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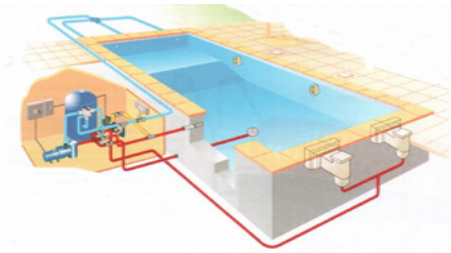
The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to Buying a Pool

Please note that much of the following applies to private pools only. If your pool is deemed to be 'public' (e.g. used in a Gîte complex) different rules apply.

It is not uncommon for most major purchases to be preceded by an expert's report, particularly when the item concerned isn't brand new and not covered by a warranty. Particularly things like houses. But rarely does anyone think to have a pool surveyed. After all, it's just a hole in the ground filled with water, isn't it? Whilst the mandatory survey in the house buying process looks at pool security, it does not provide any information about the pool itself.

If the pool you've just acquired is a shop-bought monocoque etc, you're probably fairly safe, but you can never be certain. If it's concrete and either painted or tiled, then buyer beware. Particularly if a liner has been fitted, it could be hiding problems such as cracks. Not that the seller need be aware of problems, and there isn't always any malice aforethought.



Concrete pools suffer a disproportionately high number of issues, with bad design and bad installation being the major failings.

The conventional layout of a pool is to the have the main drain (*bonde de fonde)* half way across at the deep end; the skimmer(s) also at the deep end; the vacuum (*balai*) point halfway along one side; and the blowers or returns at the shallow end. There is good reason for this. When all the water is taken from one end, then filtered and returned to the other end it's an efficient way of filtering all the water in the least amount of time. Repeatedly I see concrete pools, obviously home made, with the blowers directly above the main drain; no vacuum point fitted; skimmers at opposite and/or wrong end of the pool; and frequently no main drain at all.

The plumbing is critical in two ways. Most home made pools use rigid pipework underground instead of the industry standard flexi pipe. Rigid pipes are less resilient to the ingress of roots, and any subsidence is liable to crack or split the pipes. Blowers and skimmers need to plumbed in not in series, but in parallel to ensure equality of operation. Sadly, this is rarely found with the DiY pools.

Pools installed on hillsides present another potential for damage especially if drained then refilled. Suddenly removing fifty tonnes or more of water from the pool will quite obviously present an opportunity for the ground to move. And with rigid pipes in place, you potentially have an instant disaster.

Repairing underground leaks doesn't necessarily involve digging up the terrace etc. Pipes can be sleeved *in situ*. If a leak is suspected, tracing it and fixing it is a job for the experts. But these things can be done with minimal disruption and delay.

The pump and sand filter need to be balanced to the capacity of the pool. All three need to be in harmony if problems are to be avoided. If the pump is too weak and/or the sand-filter too small, the water cannot be processed quickly enough. If the pump is too powerful for the filter, the system will run at too high pressure and damage can result.

With the potential for so many issues post-purchase, consider a survey of the pool.

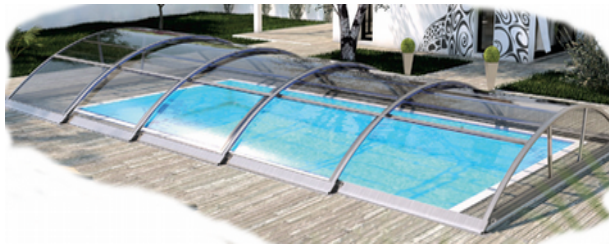
If you're buying a new pool to have installed, any of the major suppliers can do a decent job. Shop around for the best specification/price. There are basically only two different systems available; sand filter and filter bags. The former is good for all applications and is a proven filtration method. The latter, which is perfectly good, needs more attention. That's why the capital cost is lower, and that's all the salesman will tell you – that it's less expensive. If you are unlikely to be in residence for much of the pool season, view this option with considerable caution.

In addition to the cost of the pool and its' installation, you will need an **electrical supply** for the pump, and **somewhere to house the pump and filter.** (In the filter bag system, the pump/filter is integral to the pool, so you only need an electrical supply.) Unless there's a suitable building reasonably close to the proposed site for the pool, you may need to build a pump room. Planning permission isn't usually an issue, as it can be built small enough to not need full permission. But be careful to follow procedures! Avoid using a 'pump-pit' with a plastic lid. They are rarely waterproof despite manufacturers' claims, and having an electric pump and control box underground quite obviously prone to problems. When having the electric cable installed, give

some thought to the possibility of adding a pool heater at a later date.

Safety is an important issue, and you must adhere to the regulations. If buying a house with a pool, the safety measures will be surveyed. Take note of what is reported. The fine for failing to comply is up to 45,000€ - that's not a typo, it's forty-five thousand Euros. ***(Loi n° 2003-9 du 3 janvier 2003 relative à la Sécurité des piscines (1) refers.*** **View online at http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr)** The permissible safety measures are -

1. An alarm
2. A safety cover (roll-up type). Your bubble-wrap summer cover will not do!
3. A safety fence that conforms to NF P90 306. Chicken wire and wooden posts will not do!
4. An infra-red 'fence'
5. An 'abris' cover



All have pros and cons. The alarm is the least expensive but also the least effective. A safety cover not only prevents unauthorised entry of people, but also helps keep the pool clean, but if manually operated can be difficult. The safety fence is the easiest to operate, but strict rules govern where it may be used – the position of your pool may make this option impossible. The infra-red fence is probably the least intrusive – but doesn't prevent access as it merely rings bells after someone has entered the pool. The abris is probably the best option as it's totally secure, keeps the pool clean, and acts as a heater as well – but hideously expensive!

Depending on your budget, you should consider more than one option and take expert advice on which safety measure is best for you.

There are various **sanitation systems** to choose from – but they nearly all depend on chlorine in one form or another. The least expensive is an entirely manual system. Chemicals are added to the skimmer after checking the chlorine level and pH. It's easy to do, and usually only needs doing once per week.

Automatic systems add to the capital cost, but remove much of the worry about whether or not the chemicals are right. A saline system simply requires adding some salt at the start of the season, then allowing the electrolysis unit to convert the salt into the sanitising agent. Automatic pH dispensers are needed with all automated systems, and these require little maintenance. There are also UV systems available that utilise (expensive) UV bulbs to kill unwanted bacteria etc.

So there you have most of the basics. Don't be frightened by the prospect of having a pool. The maintenance of it isn't rocket science. Running costs will depend on a variety of factors, not least the size of the pool. Its' lifespan should be twenty years or more, with the liner good for at least ten.