

# POOL & SPA NEWS

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## LED Manufacturers Settle Patent Lawsuits

**By Rebecca Robledo** Color Kinetics Inc. and Super Vision International have reached a settlement on their various patent lawsuits, ending an episode that at one time caused

a rift in the LED industry.

In 2002, Orlando, Fla.-based Super Vision filed against Color Kinetics, seeking to invalidate some of its patents. Super Vision claimed

that four technologies — including one pool and spa application — were produced by others well before Color Kinetics received its patents. Boston-based Color Kinetics



quickly filed a countersuit for patent infringement.

The issue had the LED *continued on page 28*



## APSP Sees Staff Changes

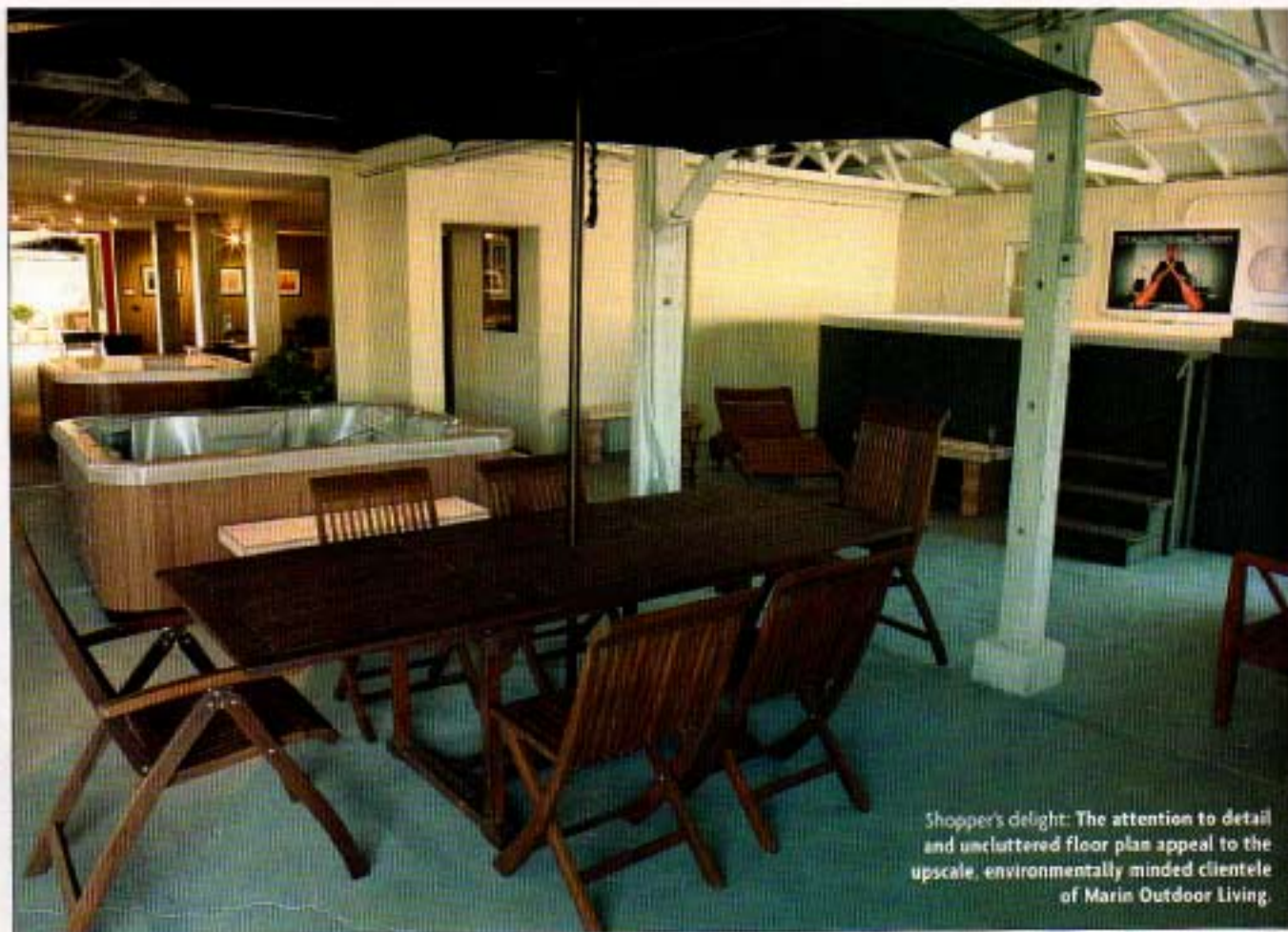
**By Rebecca Robledo** The Association of Pool & Spa Professionals has undergone some staff changes at its Alexandria, Va., office that reflect what its leader calls "a changing of the guard."

While some of the turnover has been due to natural attrition, much of the new hiring has been geared toward increasing the trade group's effectiveness in membership services and communications, said Bill Weber, APSP president/CEO.

"This is designed to *continued on page 30*

## Annual Retailing Issue

*Pool & Spa News* takes you inside an actual sales negotiation at a spa store and profiles a green-minded retailer in a high-concept setting. See page 52



Shopper's delight: The attention to detail and uncluttered floor plan appeal to the upscale, environmentally minded clientele of Marin Outdoor Living.

**By Katherine Wang** When customers enter Marin Outdoor Living, they immediately notice a vibrant display of color.

Bright patio umbrellas hang from above to form an enormous canopy over flueless fireplaces, backyard furniture, hot tubs and swim spas. The spas are accented with rich wall color. The low lighting is warm and ambient.

The 3,500-square-foot showroom in the Greenbrae, Calif., store winds like a museum. There's thought in every detail, from the elegantly framed nature photography on the walls to the sleek, steel-wrapped beam supports around the room.

These scenes guide visitors toward the rear of the store into a dark mood room. "The showroom is about having a vision," says Michael Galica, president/CEO of MOL, which opened last year.

Today's customers have more sophisticated tastes when it comes to buying a spa, and Galica recognized that a backyard retailer has to be much more than a hot tub business. To compete with the big-box stores, he needed to offer a higher-end product.

"We're definitely not selling patio furniture," he says. "We're creating an outdoor luxury living space."

But even with a smart-looking showroom and cutting-edge products, Galica

decided to create a theme concept of luxury and healthy living. Thus, everything in his store is green-minded, lasts longer and requires less maintenance. "I fit a niche," Galica says. "I found something that didn't exist before."

## People are attracted to the ecologically sound hot tubs.

He attributes the success of his business to good problem-solving and knowing the market. Armed with these skills, Galica was able to create a marketplace for environmentally conscious products, build up the customization arm of his firm and plan for the future by becoming a distributor who sells to other green-friendly stores such as his own.

### Going green

Marin County has one of the most affluent demographics in the nation. But it's also rich in natural diversity, from coastal areas to clusters of redwoods and pines. Within its boundaries are acres of parks and

two water districts devoted to recreation.

"I live in an educated area where the clientele wants products that are a step above what is normally offered," Galica says. "They want something better than Pottery Barn."

MOL espouses green living in a location where residents spend a lot of time outdoors. In fact, Galica was surprised that an area with such breathtaking geography and weather did not have a retailer dedicated to creating what he calls "beautiful and inviting outdoor spaces."

Galica says his customers are attracted to the ecologically sound character of his hot tubs and furniture. The locals already buy organic food and sustainable goods. And nearby wineries and upscale restaurants serve as potential clients for him to sell his furniture and umbrellas.

"When I first began, the bigger name hot tub companies did not have a green story behind them," Galica says. "The [spas] were all made of chemicals and bad materials."

Now Galica has a store stocked with environmentally conscious spas and accessories. Recently, he came across a citrus-based filtration system that is entirely free of chemicals.

When he attended the West Coast Green Show in San Francisco last September, MOL drew the attention of "Eye of the Bay." The



Signature style: There's no mistaking this retailer's distinctive look. From the smartly framed artwork on the walls to the artistically arranged merchandise, this store stands out from the pack.



it means deconstructing the rest of the house. "The selling and backyard design go hand in hand," he says. "When a customer shows interest, we offer to take a look at their property and decking. We help them with the [aesthetics]."

Galica once sold a portable spa to a customer who owned a large house on a small piece of property. Local codes mandate that spas be placed within 10 feet of neighboring property lines. Because there was no way the spa could fit within these parameters, Galica ended up removing an outdoor flight of stairs, which led to the second story of the home, to place the hot tub. He then built a new set of stairs and decking to match the same Ipe wood used on the furniture inside the home.

He says the backyard customization process is difficult and time-consuming, but the payoff is worth it. "I want the spas and other products I carry to become essentials in outdoor living," Galica says.

"It's basically [my administrative and sales manager] David Theriault and me, and a great handful of contractors who work with us on design, woodworking, concrete and technical aspects," he adds.

With such a small staff, Galica relies heavily on a community of architects and designers that he has built up from working on housing projects over the years.

"I'm a good communicator," he says, noting that he has formed close ties with the same vendors and designers throughout various collaborations. "I have people I use all the time and friends who help me out," he adds.

He describes his relationships with landscape professionals as an ongoing process with an end goal in mind. "At the rate I'm going with this network of builders, designers and architects, I plan on becoming directly linked to their projects," Galica says. "I want to be the person to go to for designing backyards."

#### Trend-setter

Galica senses that he is starting a trend as a green-minded spa retailer. In fact, many mainstream home-improvement stores such as The Home Depot, Lowe's and Friedman's now carry sustainable products. Thus, he'd like to take MOL to the next level.

local TV show asked to feature the store's 100 percent clean-burning fireplace and some of its eco-friendly furniture.

Though MOL has secured a local presence, Galica says, "We're setting the stage [for change]."

Even in this ideal location, MOL still ran into a problem. Unlike the cities of Fresno and Sacramento, Marin County isn't largely known as a developing community, so Galica couldn't always count on selling spas to new homes. Instead, he discovered there are a lot of people who want to redesign their backyards or enhance their property values with hot tubs.

"I contacted landscape architects and designers to understand what was going on in makeovers," Galica says. He quickly shifted gears and focused on customization to fulfill the needs of people who want to put fresh faces on old yards.

#### Customizing pays off

Most days, Galica is in and out of the office. When he's not at the store, he's likely to be on site at a customer's home, figuring out the installation of an umbrella or placing a new hot tub.

Frequently, he goes out of his way to customize the spa for the client even when

Prior to his current store, Galica spent 10 years in Costa Rica, where he once worked on reforestation projects for the Forest Stewardship Council. The experience gave him valuable connections to FSC-certified forest suppliers who provide wood for most of his products. "We're going to get a full line of furniture designed, perhaps by spring," Galica says.

"I'm definitely interested in becoming a distributor to eco-directed stores," he adds. "Manufacturing and distributing my own wood furniture will be difficult to get started, but that's the next direction."

Several furniture companies are already looking to him for alternatives to plastic and teakwood patio wares. Plus, Dimension One wants MOL to be the flagship store for its green spas.

Galica's also negotiating with other sustainable living stores in his area that sell eco-friendly building supplies. He's looking for viable candidates to carry his umbrellas, furniture and other outdoor furnishings. By becoming a distributor, he can get the word out about environmentally conscious spa stores such as his own.

Because Galica opened MOL with a clear vision, he's trying his best to stay true

## Thank-you goodies

A spa customer recently sent a letter to Marin Outdoor Living, thanking the Greenbrae, Calif., store for the delicious gift.

She had bought a \$40,000 swim spa to participate in post-pregnancy exercise — and subsequently received a box of chocolates. It's something President/CEO Michael Galica and administrative and sales manager David Theriault send to customers after each high-ticket sale.

Along with the sweets go purchaser surveys. The feedback helps the store enhance its brand name and customer relations.

Theriault says the swim-spa customer enjoyed her shopping experience and appreciated the thoughtful gesture. "She said, 'It's an extra touch of class,'" he reports.

He believes the chocolates are an extension of what his store already offers. In other words, Theriault says, "We try to provide good customer service."

He and Galica are trying various ways to boost the consumer appeal of the store with other goodies. They want to align themselves with companies that sell gift baskets with the same environmentally conscious attitude as MOL. "We're looking at [ecoexpress.com](http://ecoexpress.com) as an option," Theriault says. "It's consistent with our store as a green business."

"Customers will respond because they see we care about green [products]. It's also a nice gift to send to people," he adds.

— K.W.

to it. Even the low-wattage spotlights in his showroom adhere to green-minded requirements.

"It's not your regular hot tub store, where it's just a lineup of tubs," Galica says. "You turn the corner, it's a different scenario. In the testing rooms, customers get to smell the clean,

odorless water and enjoy the hydrotherapy."

When Galica stands and looks around the store, he notices the multicolored umbrellas, flueless fireplaces and hot tubs. He sees products that are sustainable and luxurious. "It's a gallery of beautiful things," he says. ■