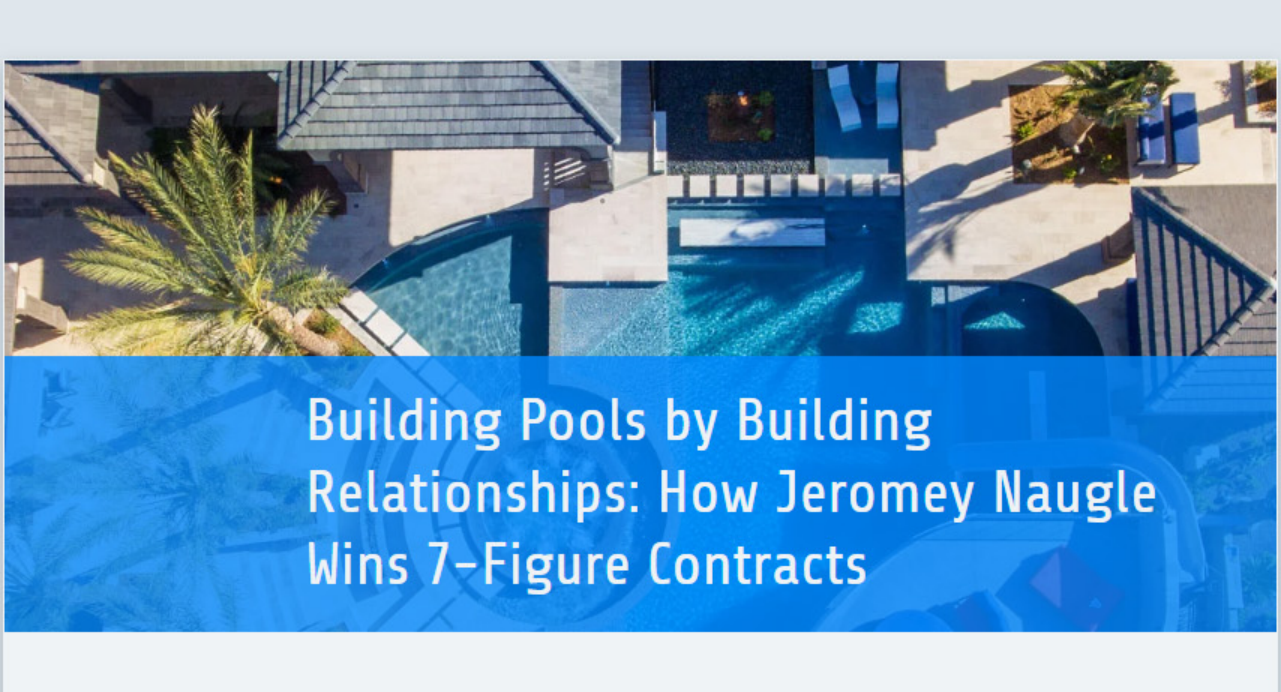


Building Pools by Building Relationships: How Jeromey Naugle Wins 7-Figure Contracts

When Jeromey Naugle joined the pool and landscape industry in 1999, he started out stocking the shelves at a pool store in Gilbert, Arizona. Since then, he has built his own company, Premier Paradise, Inc., to not just earn seven-figure contracts — but to achieve that spectacular growth without even needing to advertise to prospects.

Before he could achieve that success, however, Naugle knew he needed to find ways to do more than just build swimming pools.

After all, his goal wasn't just to earn a living — it was to build a career that would give him the freedom to create for his clients beautiful, innovative pools.

To do that, he needed to find the right tools, and the right team, that would make it possible for him to create truly spectacular results for his clients.

From Stocking Shelves to Designing Award-Winning Pools

Although Naugle started out stocking shelves, he soon began working the service side, then became a construction manager. That background in construction gave him a strong understanding of just what it takes to build a great pool, which he used to transition into designing pools that didn't just look great on paper — his pools were also solving his clients' most perplexing design challenges.

That meant, however, that Naugle was starting to design pools that pushed the limits of what an average construction team could easily build.

While clients loved his designs, and he quickly became one of the top designers at the company where he was then working, the downturn in the economy in 2008 meant that his commissions dried up when the company didn't want to handle high-end projects.

Instead of just waiting to see if things would change, Naugle's wife suggested he see the downturn in the economy as an opportunity. She told him, Naugle says, that "if the company you work for now doesn't want to build high-end custom pools because their construction department can't handle them, then why not just design and build your own pools and do five or six a year working out of the house?"

With that goal in mind, Naugle sought out ways to build great relationships with clients so that he could build with them the innovative pools that he knew they would love.

Hand Drawings to 3D Designs

One reason why Naugle became one of the top designers at his former company, and why he knew he had what it would take to attract new clients: he embraced designing in 3D.

"When I was the only guy, years ago," Naugle says of his time using Pool Studio to design at his former company, "I was using simplistic designs against hand drawings, [and] I was killing it."

He was so pleased with his results, in fact, that Naugle was surprised by his colleagues' reluctance to upgrade their design process with him: "when I first came in, I did hand designs for about six months and then I was introduced to JR Rapp," who introduced him to Pool Studio.

The results were immediately clear to Naugle: "I gravitated towards [Pool Studio] immediately."

His designs didn't just stand out because he was the only one there designing in 3D. Even his initial Pool Studio projects — which he describes as "simplistic" — made it incredibly easy for him to "to make [clients] feel like it's theirs when they first see the design."

The results were undeniable.

Earning Clients' Trust

By transitioning from hand drawing to 3D designs, and from a big company to his own small business, Naugle earned his clients' trust, and started building pools that often went far beyond what his clients initially imagined they could have.

"We are growing like crazy and this software really helps," Naugle says, "because I get people that walk through my doors all the time and they start naming off a lot of things that they want. They tell me they have $80,000 to spend, when I know in my own mind that what they are talking about, there is no way it's going to be $80,000. So I design it anyhow."

By designing projects that give his clients their dream space, regardless of the initially stated budget, Naugle is able to focus on finding ways to actually give them everything they want:

"I give them the expectation that it's going to be way over their budget," he says, telling his clients, "I'm doing it on purpose because I want to show you all your options and what all your possibilities are. So even if we don't do them now, we can do it in phases."

While some clients do choose to do projects in stages, more often they choose the complete project: "Typically what ends up happening is, they see it, they pay for it, and they end up buying the whole thing and usually almost double what [the] budgets are on a lot of projects."

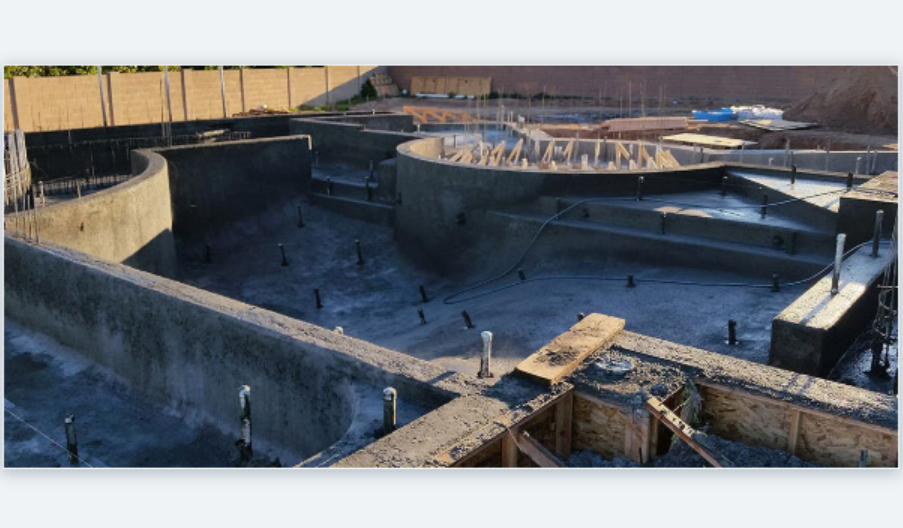
Naugle is able to build those amazing projects for his clients because he starts his process by building strong relationships with his clients.

And establishing trust with his clients also means building a strong relationship with his own team:

"We are trying to take our time and build these things perfect," Naugle says, which means, "We are trying to develop relationships with clients. We want to be on a first-name basis with every employee in the building," too.

As a result, he says, his clients trust him and his team to deliver fantastic results:

"They trust us because they know we have a vision as a designer on what their backyard should be. The one thing I like is just not the day that they get it, but that they want to come home 10 years later and just sit there and stare out the window at their pool. It needs to be timeless and it needs to always be able to reflect them no matter what stage in life they are at."



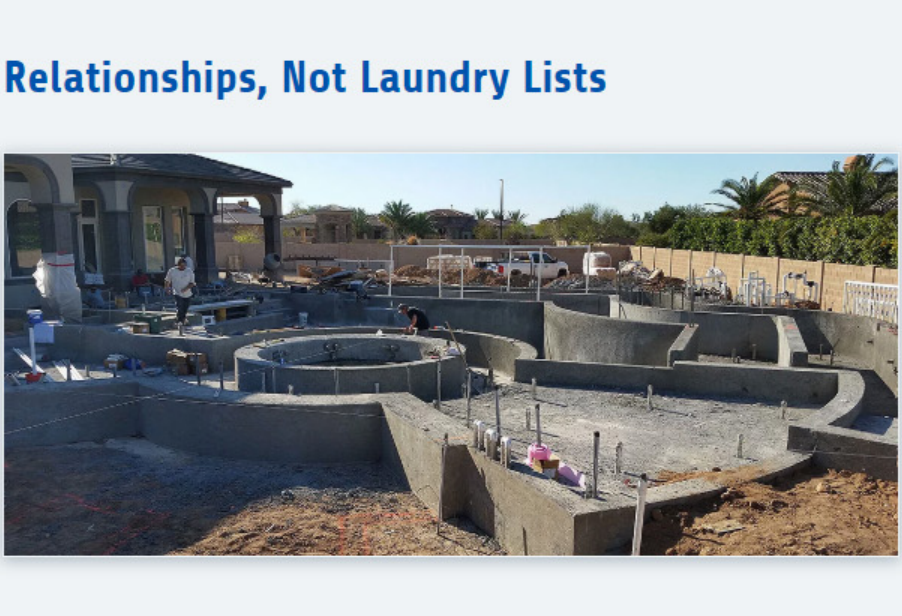
Growing – without Advertising

Naugle's growth has been so spectacular, in fact, that he no longer advertises:

"We stopped advertising three years ago and our business has actually grown," Naugle says. "We did about 40 pools last year with about a $100,000 average. And this year, we have already signed 25 pools and we are at about $200,000 average."

That growth is far more than Naugle imagined he'd see when the downturn in the economy cut his 100% commission salary to zero.

Relationships, Not Laundry Lists



When Naugle switched to designing and building only five or six pools a year out of his home office, he set out to make those client relationships the cornerstone of his business.

He's found that the first meeting with the client is crucial:

"My first meeting, with the customer, isn't like a salesperson walking in taking a laundry list of orders. It's actually getting to know the person and developing a relationship the first time that we see them. And we become a lot more memorable because of that."

Before he starts designing, Naugle makes sure he has a clear understanding of his clients, and what they would like: "We don't do any designs without seeing someone's property first. It's not only to see the property but it's also to experience them and their comfort zone."

That includes far more than just the basics: Naugle considers everything from the artwork in his client's home to what they like to keep on their kitchen counters. In conversation with his clients, he asks about their family, their hobbies, where they like to hang out, what they love.

His questions aren't meant to tick items off on a checklist.

They're how Naugle gets to know his clients personally, so that he can create a beautiful space specifically for them: "I'm not even discussing what the pool is. All I ask is, straight lines, curvy lines, and what type of features do you want to have in the back and what kind of destination areas and that's it." From there, "I just kind of ask what they want and what they like in their personal lives and I design based on that."

By getting to know his clients so personally, Naugle says, "we become a lot more memorable."

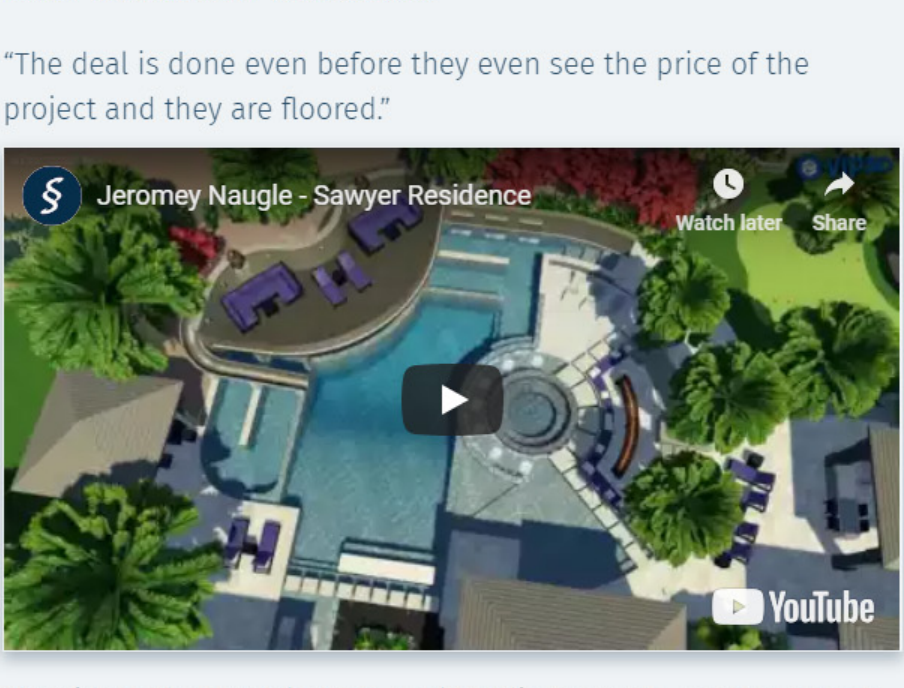
Creating the Most Memorable Designs with Videos

When Naugle first started designing pools with Pool Studio, he immediately realized just how valuable making the switch from hand drawings to 3D software was for his business.

As he began to learn what he could do with 3D, he saw the opportunity to do more than just create beautiful images.

After he gets to know his clients, Naugle says, he uses what he has learned in his design process to create videos of his designs: "we take that and put it into 3D and then we send them these videos," which he creates in Pool Studio.

"The deal is done even before they even see the price of the project and they are floored."



The videos that Naugle uses Pool Studio to create are one reason why he believes his clients are so committed to his designs:

"Pool Studio allows you to do so much and go into so much detail that the client feels like they are in their own backyard instead of just looking at a picture. And that's where we benefit the most and we spend an extra 30 minutes to an hour on a design to ensure that it's going to blow them away."

Naugle is so pleased with the results he sees from sharing videos with his clients that he often advises other designers to create them for their own clients: If they don't, he tells them, "they are not getting the value out of Pool Studio that they really could get. You spend an extra 5 minutes making a movie and spend an additional 15 minutes getting into details," and clients feel like the design is truly their own.

Building a Solid Foundation for Innovative Pools

Naugle's gorgeous videos and stunning designs are as beautiful as they are because he puts in the extra time and attention to add rich details.

By "paying attention to all the little details," Naugle shows his clients that he truly understands what's important to them: "If they have a dog, I'm putting in a dog or whatever they have. I'm going to implement it into the project to make it feel like it's theirs when they first see the design."

Those personal details help his clients embrace projects with pools and features that are often unlike any they've encountered before.

In fact, Naugle's award-winning pools, which have been featured on television and in the press, stand out because he continues to further his own education in order to push his own limits — and create visually intriguing designs.

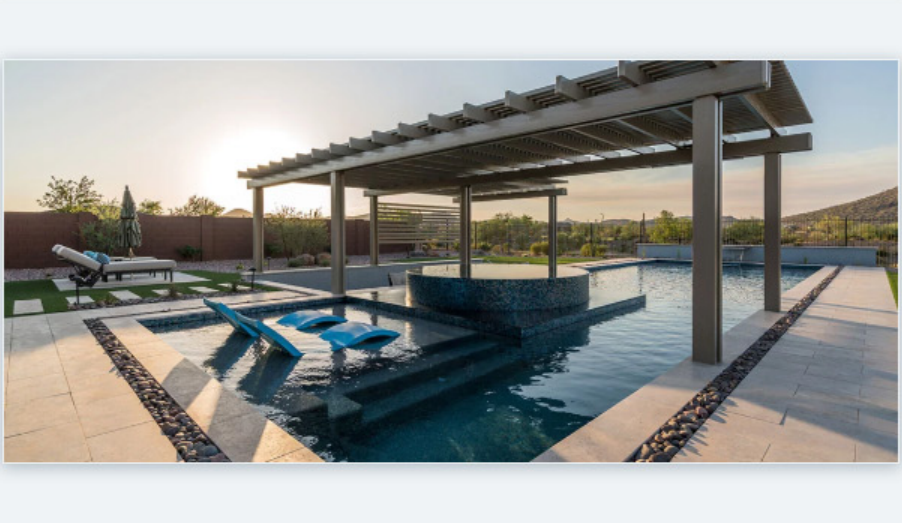
Understanding Balance and Flow to Create Timeless Designs

When his fellow designers ask for his advice, Naugle emphasizes the importance of studying architecture and design. "Getting into the pool business, if you've never done it before, you are going to be doing your customers and yourself a disservice by just starting to draw circles, and straight lines and selling it to a client," he says.

"If you don't understand architecture and you don't understand the balance, you don't understand design, flow, all these different important factors of design, you're never going to know how to make a customer's backyard function properly. You're never going to be able to push the limits of what you're able to do."

For Naugle, developing his own understanding of design and architecture helped him grow significantly: "As soon as I started doing that, all my designs went from $50-60,000 pools to a quarter of a million plus swimming pools."

While his early work was still impressive enough to earn him great clients, Naugle says that studying design, and participating in programs like the Genesis 3 Design Group School for elite WaterShape builders where he is currently enrolled, has helped him create those seven-figure pools: "they all make sense and they all flow. Nothing is pulling your brain one way and another way. It all just flows and makes sense. You've got to understand master planning and how everything affects everything in the backyard," in order to build the most beautiful and timeless designs Naugle knows his clients want.

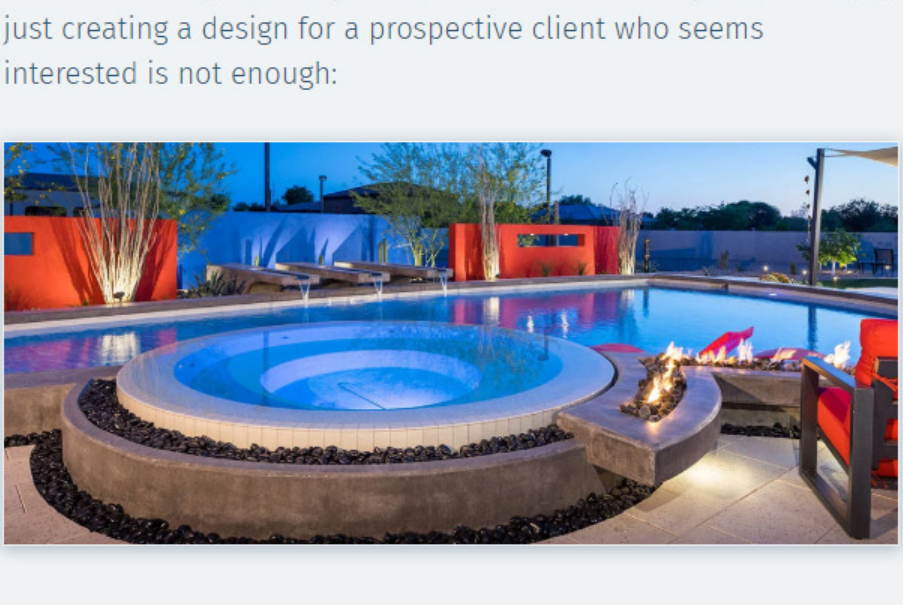


Choosing His Customers

Building those spectacular pools that his clients love just as much years later as the first day they see his video presentation is how Naugle has built a thriving company.

One so popular, in fact, that Naugle has developed thoughtful strategies for making sure that he and his clients are both right for each other.

"You have to start choosing your customers, not letting your clients choose you," Naugle emphasizes. "In the long run," he says, just creating a design for a prospective client who seems interested is not enough:



"I'm bringing value to [their] backyard. It's a personal touch that we have here. And that's something we explain to clients right off the bat. If that's not something that is important to them, we don't want to work with them anyhow."

Even when Naugle's projects might be more expensive than other options in town, his clients still choose him. The reason, he says, is clear: "We took the time to educate ourselves and go through programs and understand architecture, understand designs, and build relationships with our clients."

Communicating Open-Book Pricing

What Naugle has learnt, in his years in the business, is that designers are sometimes reluctant to charge for their design work. That, he says, is a losing strategy.

In order to plan the perfect project for his clients, Naugle charges clients for his designs — and discusses the pricing with them instead of just sending them an upfront number.

"I'll never do upfront pricing just because if I go all out on a design that I know is way over their budget, and I send them a price at the exact same time, I'll probably never hear from them."

For projects worth more than $100,000, Naugle charges a flat $2500 design fee. "That way, they are already invested in me and if they decide to the project, I take the $2500 off the cost of the project. If not, they can take my design and I got paid for my work."

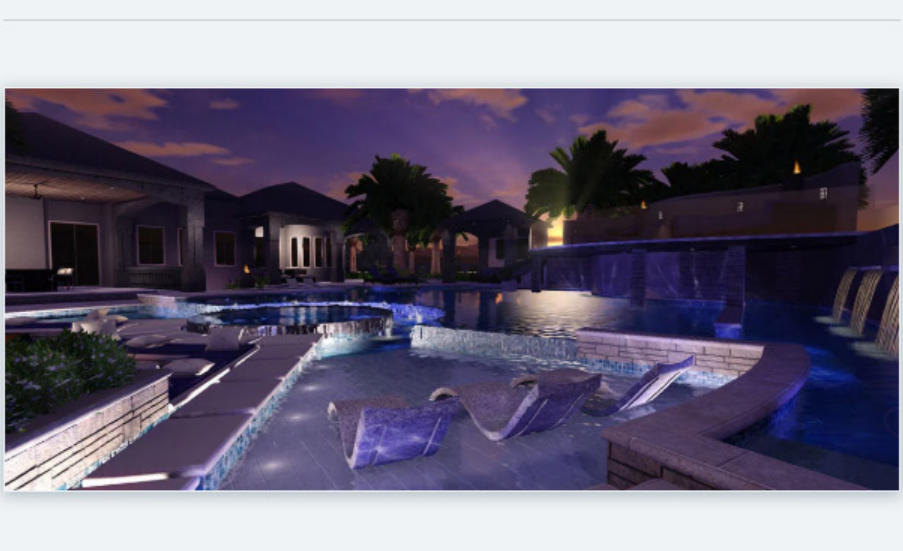
For projects over $200,000, Naugle negotiates with his clients and does a cost-plus project.

By sharing his pricing strategy with his clients, Naugle builds solid relationships, helping his clients feel more confident.

"We have an open-book policy with all of our clients," Naugle says. Typically, "for a flat estimate, we are between 30% to 35% markup and when it comes to doing a cost plus we are anywhere between to 22% to 27.5%."

If his clients building pools worth more than $200,000 choose to go with a flat fee instead of a cost-plus project, Naugle helps them understand in advance that "they are the ones that are rolling the dice how it's priced out and how it's done."

"Even if they decide to do a flat fee/flat estimate and they want to see what we made on the job, I'll show them what we've made," Naugle says, because he believes in the value of being open with clients about pricing.

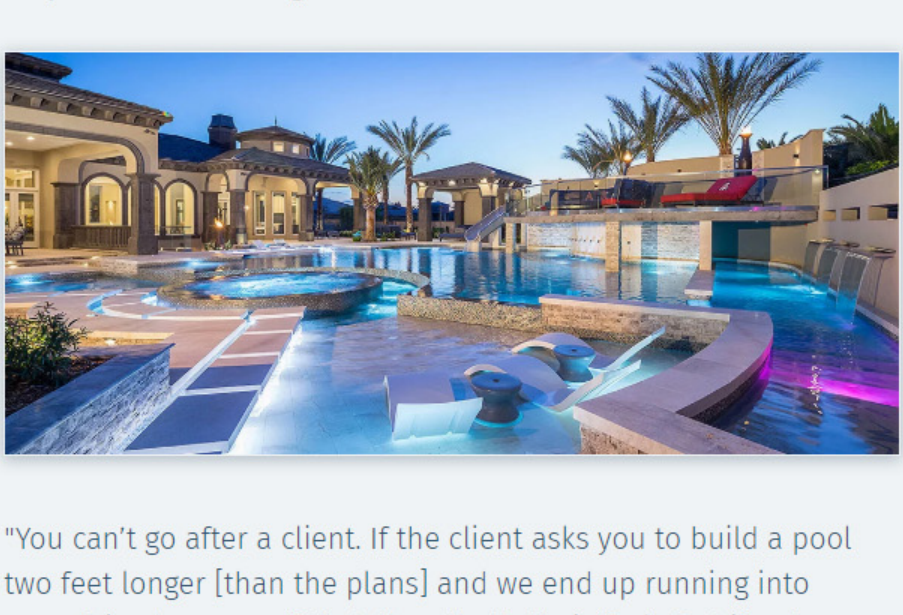


Avoiding Unexpected Costs by Designing in 3D

Naugle's pricing strategy works so effectively in part because he uses Pool Studio to make sure he is pricing his estimates correctly:

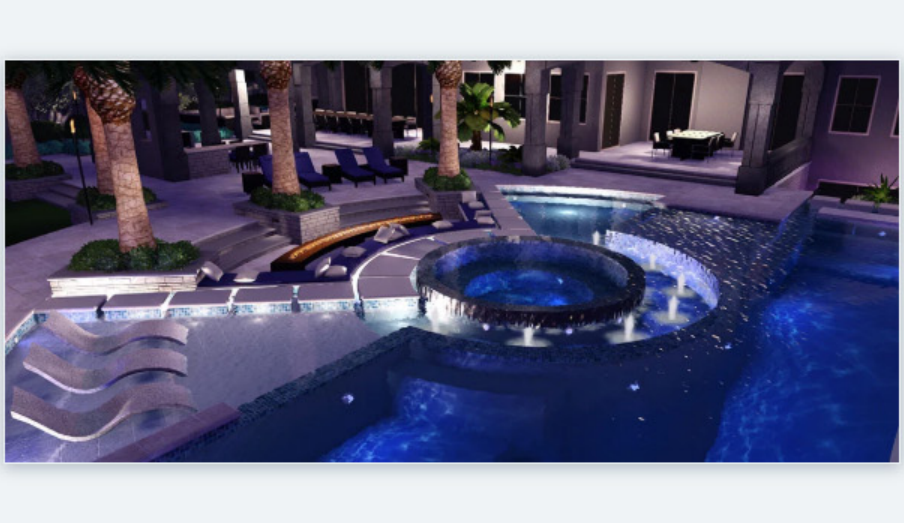
"That's the important thing that Pool Studios helps us with because when we are drawing stuff up, and you go into 3D, it shows you what will work and what won't work for certain terrains, elevations and everything and that really helps you know that your design is going to work and so when you price it out. You just have to price it out correctly."

So certain is Naugle of his accuracy with Pool Studio, which he uses alongside his own 1000 line item price sheet, that he eats the cost on a flat estimate if he and his team miss something that they should have caught in advance:



"You can't go after a client. If the client asks you to build a pool two feet longer [than the plans] and we end up running into something because of that, then that's their fault. But if we're building an exact design I promised our client we're going to build and we screwed up by not catching something, we eat it every time and the customer never has to hear about it."

His accurate 3D drawings, and his detailed price list, mean that he can make sure his estimates are right on target: "We don't ever put cost to a client that we should've caught ourselves prior to even designing it."

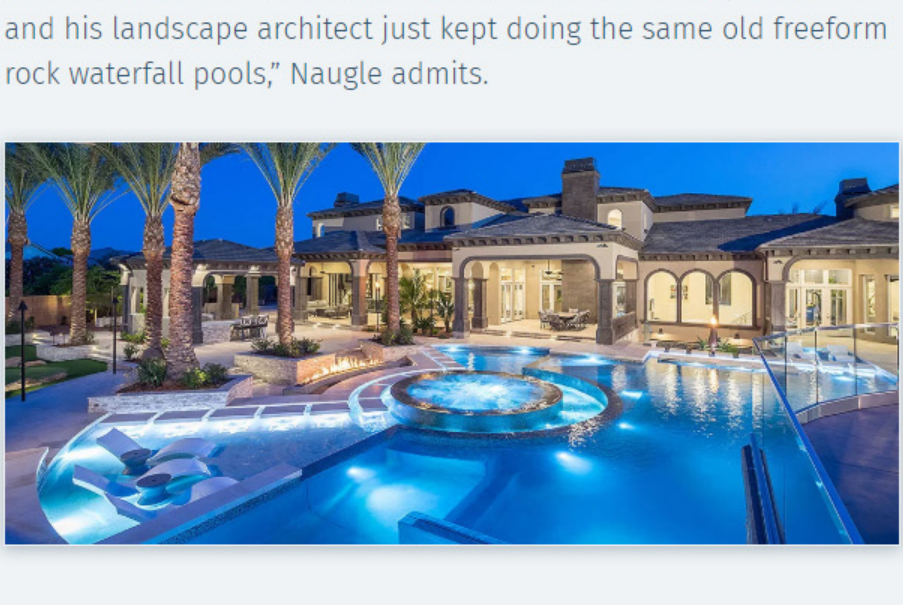


Jaw-dropping Designs, in Just Three Hours

Naugle has been so successful at building strong relationships with his clients that they trust him to tackle their very biggest projects.

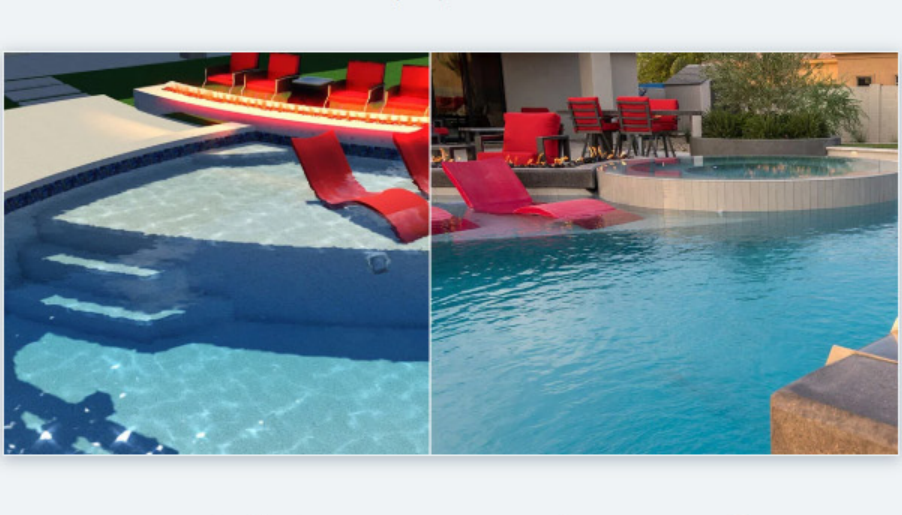
One of those spectacularly innovative projects: a $1.85M residential swimming pool that Naugle designed with Pool Studio in just three hours: "I already had it in my mind what I wanted to do for him and I knocked it out in 3 hours."

Getting to that point, however, meant building a reputation his client could trust: "The owner commented his landscape architect and his landscape architect just kept doing the same old freeform rock waterfall pools," Naugle admits.



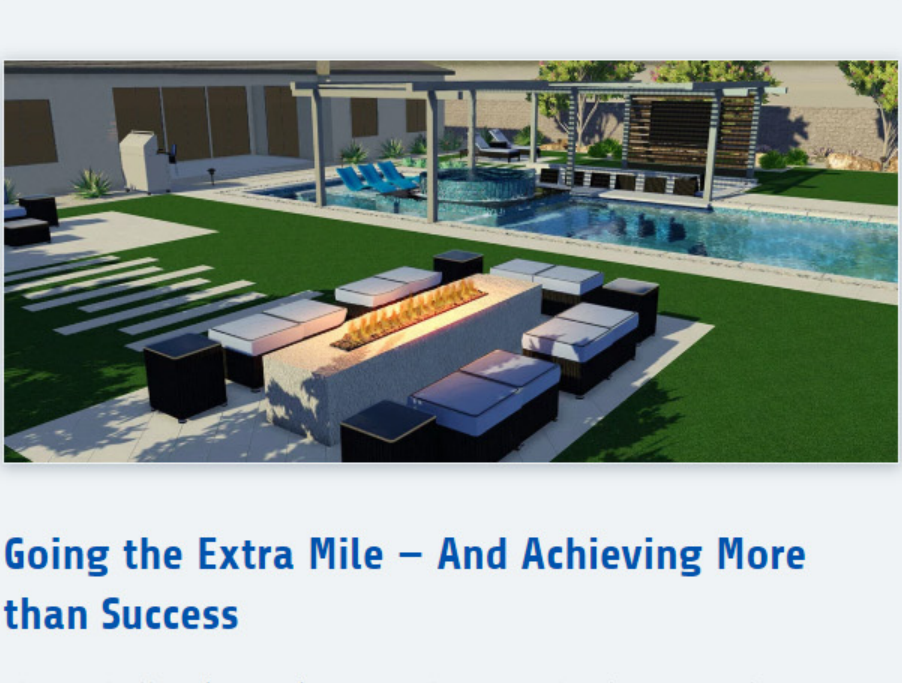
The homeowner knew what he really wanted: "the owner said to me, 'Jeromey, I want something that when people walk in my front door, their jaws drop."

To create that jaw-dropping swimming pool, Naugle turned to Pool Studio and created an entire project that his client loved.



"We have never built the same concept twice for any client," Naugle says. "In order to see flow, balance and everything with a difficult backyard, that's where Premier Paradise thrives. We want to always build on unusual terrain." And because his clients "are constantly seeing innovation, constantly seeing something new," Naugle is able to promise them that "They are not going to have something that they have at their neighbor's house."

For example, on another recent project, Naugle and his team had to figure out how to get materials up 40 steps on a flight of stairs for a project on Camelback Mountain: "We're building a spa that's built on steel beams it's hanging off the side of the mountain so the customer can walk out to it." Carrying supplies up by buckets and wheelbarrows is worth it for the sake of the spectacular view: "they see nothing surrounding them but the views of the whole entire town."



Going the Extra Mile – And Achieving More than Success

Those challenging projects are the ones that keep Naugle passionate about his work: "The challenging outdoor [projects], like when you have a lot of elevation changes, for me, those are easier for me to design because it gets my brain spinning, firing all cylinders. . . and that's when innovation starts happening and that's what I like."

For designers who want to create stunning, client-amazing projects of their own, Naugle suggests learning more about architecture and design and then using Pool Studio to "go for it":

"Don't sell yourself short," he says. "Don't be afraid to go that extra mile with your customer. I'd rather have my customer say no than for me not to ask them at all. Just go for it, push the envelope, better the industry, and know what your worth. If this is done, we'd have a lot more successful pool builders out there."

Imagine the 3D videos and designs you could create for your own clients — try Pool Studio and see just how easy it is to impress your clients, the way Naugle has impressed his.