

E-book Review

By: Todd Stahl, President, Viking Pools LLC

Book: How to Buy a Pool the Right Way, From the Right Company, at the Right Price.

Author: Marcus Sheridan

Foreword: Right from the start it becomes painfully obvious that this e-book was written by a sixth grade girl or a disgruntled ex-dealer. His lack of experience within the fiberglass pool industry is one thing, but his lack of experience within the entire pool industry becomes glaringly obvious. Viking Pools manufactures more fiberglass swimming pools than anyone else in the industry from our facilities in California, Texas, Florida, and West Virginia. I have personally appeared as an expert witness on multiple court cases involving swimming pools and have arbitrated disputes between homeowners and dealers. I have trained hundreds of dealers across the US & Canada and I personally own and manage a number of swimming pool stores across the country.

The following will be a brief chapter by chapter review:

Chapter 1: What type of pool do I choose?

Marcus Sheridan states "...most of what you have read up to this point is one sided, this will give you the hard facts." He then goes on to compare gunite, vinyl liner, and fiberglass pools; however, his opinion is skewed in favor of fiberglass pools. I believe that fiberglass pools are the best possible pool choice on the market for most consumers today and I sell fiberglass pools. I do not believe that if you are "claiming" to be non-biased and attempting to educate the masses about the true difference between pool types, that you should be biased towards any one type. It's like with non-biased journalism – real journalism. When I watch NBC or CNN news, I don't want to hear the reporter's own personal viewpoints about a topic. I want the cold hard facts so I can make my own decisions. Bottom line, if Marcus Sheridan wants to create a marketing tool to help him sell more fiberglass pools, so be it. If he, however, wants to create a non-biased e-book in which he claims to be an industry expert, he should provide non-biased facts and let the consumer decide which type of pool works best for them.

Chapter 2: The Contractor

Sheridan insinuates that people who start a fiberglass swimming pool company out of their home are uneducated and unsuccessful. He provides the scenario, "Hey Bill, what do ya say that we start us a swimmin pool company? I've seen them shells on the side of the road. It can't be that hard. We already got what we need...." I personally know of dozens of successful swimming pool companies that started out small and worked their way to being some of our best dealers. The fact that Marcus Sheridan insinuates that anyone who decides to start up a business cannot speak properly is absurd. There are hundreds of successful, quality pool contractors in the US regardless of the way they speak. Most pool contractors do a good job. They are hard working, and care about the products they sell as well as the customers they service. This type of blatant arrogance is mind boggling to me.

What's in a name? Sheridan continues to insinuate that a consumer would be a "fool" to do business with a company that chooses to use their name in the company name. He uses examples like "John's Excavating" and "Doug's Hauling". To insinuate that having your family name as part of your business name makes you a bad pool builder is ridiculous. America has a long history of family names: Ford, Hershey, Schwab, J P Morgan, etc. A catchy name or a retail location is nice but it does not guarantee you a good pool.

Screw Ups: Contrary to Sheridan's claims, screw ups are not common with most builders. They typically occur when a builder does not follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Quality manufacturers train their dealers on how to properly install their pools.

Reference List: Sheridan claims to be the only pool builder in existence that provides a list of referrals to new customers. This is nothing more than a sales gimmick. The fact of the matter is that the best builders in the country **rely** on referrals. This is a common business practice in any service-oriented industry.

Chapter 3: Key Questions and Answers

Sheridan uses this section to try to convince consumers that he knows what is best for them. Ironically, his idea of what is best relies solely on what *he* offers. This chapter, much like the entire document, is nothing more than a self-serving sales tool aided at trying to persuade the consumer to purchase what he sells.

Shape: Sheridan claims that a consumer could really only want or need a pool without curves. Could this be because his current manufacturer, Leisure Pools, does not offer a really curvy pool? Our free form models are our most popular selling units, making up about 60% of our sales. I find it hard to believe that everyone has the same taste when it comes to how they want their backyard to look. It is preposterous to discount a consumer's needs or wants based on Mr. Sheridan's current personal portfolio of options.

Depth: Sheridan states that any pool deeper than 5' or 6' is "worthless". Again, I cannot believe this egotistical statement. Don't let a builder that lacks the resources of deeper pools persuade you from what you want. 6'6" to 7' pools are the most popular depth among the Viking brands; this allows a grown man to get his hair wet.

Diving Boards: Sheridan boldly states that no one should own a diving board. He states that "diving boards do nothing but add stress to the lives of parents and eliminate play area in a swimming pool." This is yet another arrogant statement. Diving boards are safe and fun when installed and used to the manufacturer's specifications. Once again, don't let a builder that lacks the resources of deep pools discourage you from what your family needs or desires.

Chapter 4: Pool Decking

Sheridan states that no one should have a standard broom finished or colored concrete. He also suggests that anyone wanting flagstone should have stamped concrete instead, since he "loves" stamped concrete. Once again, this reeks of a sales pitch and not an un-biased informative e-book. I would like to think that consumers are smart enough to know what they want and I would hate to think that a supercilious sales person would discourage them from creating the backyard of their dreams.

Decking: I do agree with Sheridan on the different types of decking options; however, I believe it is up to the consumer to choose what is right for them. The decking you choose can make or break the look of your pool and how you view your backyard for years to come. What he does not mention is on-going maintenance. Regardless of which decking option you decide to choose, every pool deck needs to be maintained over the years. It is just a matter of time before all things need spruced up.

Chapter 5: Pool Options

At this point in reviewing Marcus' e-book, it is abundantly clear that he is endorsing those items that he offers and downgrading everything else, and there is no exception with the Pool Options chapter.

Color: Sheridan declares that white pools are ugly. Don't get me wrong, color is great but so is white; white can be very elegant. I offer 3 premium finishes in an unlimited amount of colors and I still love the look of a white pool. He also continues to state that any colored fiberglass pool without Granicoat® cannot be properly repaired. He even goes so far as to name my brands specifically. I don't care what color or finish your pool is, if it needs to be repaired, there is a 99% chance that there will be a difference in the area that is repaired and the area that is not. This includes solid colors like white or light blue. Even if the formula or mixture is 100% the same, the same process is not used to apply the repair material that was used when the pool was originally built. I have seen repairs that are *nearly* invisible; the key word being *nearly*. Once again, I'm sure he is endorsing Granicoat® because it is what he currently offers.

Tile: Sheridan tries to discourage the consumer from getting perimeter tile based on the color pool they get, stating that black and brown pools should not have tile. I personally recommend it, if that is what the consumer wants. There are hundreds of tile selections from a variety of quality manufacturers that will complement the look and feel you are trying to accomplish in your backyard. The important thing to consider about perimeter tile is whether or not you are selecting a standard tile or a custom tile line. Most reputable manufacturers offer a standard tile line for a set cost, because they order it in bulk and only charge extra if they need to special order the tile. We have installed tile on every color pool we offer and tile can add an appealing look to any of them.

Inlay Step Tile: I agree with Sheridan in that inlaid tiles are available to be placed on the steps and seats for aesthetics and safety; however, they can also be installed in swim-outs, along the walls, and even placed on the floor by skilled manufacturers. You are really only limited by your budget and your imagination.

Mosaic Tiles: Mosaics are ceramic or glass tiles that come in shapes like dolphins, fish, and mermaids. Mosaic tiles are a great way to add character and charm to your pool and to give it personality. Over the years we have installed mosaics of logos, sports teams, Snoopy®, sea creatures, butterflies, etc. I would further add to Marcus' comments that mosaics can also be installed on steps, seats, swim-outs, and walls, not just floors. Again, he is promoting what he sells and either ignoring or discounting everything else.

Pool Lighting: There are various types of pool lighting on the market today and they all work well. It all boils down to personal preference.

Water Features: Waterfalls and cascades are nice, but Sheridan failed to mention streams, fountains, grottos, and deck jets. If he's offering all of the options available, I just want to point out that he missed a few.

Inground Hot Tubs: Sheridan lists his idea of the features and benefits of above ground hot tubs and inground spas; however, his information is very biased towards above ground hot tubs. Inground spas are great; not only can they make a gorgeous water feature (spa cascading into the pool) they are very therapeutic and reasonably priced. He states that people use inground spas less because they have to be installed close to the pool. This is just insane. Inground spas can be installed by the back door just as easily as they can be installed by the pool. They can even be installed partially above ground for a raised look. I cannot think of one option that is available in a box spa that is not available in an inground spa; however, I can think of many options that can be installed in an inground spa that are not even available in a box spa. The fact of the matter is the only pool builders that push portable spas have them sitting on their showroom floor. They add no value to your home.

Chapter 6: Salt Chlorine Generators

Sheridan implies that chlorine and salt are the only methods available to treat your pool and that salt is the only logical method. Again, I must point out that he is providing biased personal information. Sheridan claims to have written a comprehensive guide for buying a swimming pool, yet has once again left out important information. The fact of the matter is there are many ways to treat your pool: salt to chlorine generators, chlorine & bromine chemicals, ozone generators, mineral or catalytic cartridge systems, biguanide chemical products, and ionization systems. There are pros and cons to each; my point is simply that salt and chlorine are not the only options available. This is just another example of how Sheridan's e-book is nothing more than an overzealous sales pitch.

Chapter 7: Pool Covers

There are many different types of pool covers that, based on your needs, will work well for your pool. Sheridan's views on pool covers are based on his experience in central Virginia, not the entire US and Canada. The point is, do your homework and based on where you live and what your weather conditions are like, purchase a cover that is right for you.

Chapter 8: Pool Heaters

Sheridan reviews the differences between natural gas heaters, heat pumps, and solar heat. Each has their advantages and disadvantages. Again, I would recommend that you do your homework and select one that works for your budget and your climate.

Chapter 9: Fiberglass Pool Manufacturers

Let me just start by saying, WOW! What a joke. Sheridan uses this part of his e-book to provide a letter grade to some fiberglass manufacturers. I say some, because he doesn't even list all of them. It is apparent to me, after reading this section thoroughly several times, that Sheridan has a personal vendetta with several fiberglass manufacturers. I have worked in the fiberglass industry for most of my adult life and have a strong knowledge of the industry. Many of the manufacturers that Sheridan either rates poorly or neglects altogether, have a long history of manufacturing a quality product and good customer service practices. Most of them have thousands of satisfied homeowners all across the United States, Canada, and elsewhere. I am not saying that everyone is perfect; simply that Sheridan's information is grossly inaccurate. It is apparent that he gives a good rating to manufacturers whose products he currently sells; the rest he makes unfounded allegations against. This is yet again another one of Sheridan's ploys to sway the consumer's perception towards the products he is selling - again, a sales tactic, not accurate non-bias data.

Chapter 10: More Questions and Answers

This chapter just continues to highlight Sheridan's ignorance. A builder should always follow the manufacturer's specifications, period! The manufacturer is the one who has done the research to ensure that their product is installed and maintained properly, not Marcus Sheridan. The fact of the matter is that in most situations gravel is not the correct material to be placed around your pool. It is difficult to compact and is typically only used because it is inexpensive. Furthermore, most fiberglass manufacturers indicate that sand should be used to comply with their installation standards in their ICC reports, including the brands that Sheridan currently offers. Following Sheridan's recommendations here could lead to your product not being covered under the manufacturer's warranty. Please do not allow a pool salesman from a small local area in central Virginia dictate how you purchase and maintain any element of your backyard. Always check the manufacturer's specifications to ensure that your pool builder is following the proper guidelines. I'm sure if Marcus Sheridan installed your pool to *his* specifications and there was a problem down the road, he would blame someone else.

Chapter 11: The Next Step: Professional Consultation = Serious Stress and Money Savings

The concluding chapter of Marcus Sheridan's e-book is the grand finale – the *real* reason he wrote this piece – what he is trying to *sell* you. Sheridan offers his "expert" services to you for \$300. For \$300 he will review what your pool builder provides to you and point out anything he sees that doesn't look quite right.

Conclusion: The formatting of this e-book leaves much to be desired. Pages are not centered, improper formatting is used, and there are numerous grammatical errors. It is apparent that he needs not only a lesson in the pool industry, but a lesson in document formatting or desktop publishing. It is obvious to me, and you by now I'm sure, that Marcus Sheridan from River Pools in Tappahannock, Virginia, is nothing more than a disgruntled pool dealer angry at manufacturers who have chosen to part ways with them. In my opinion he is behaving like a spoiled child that did not get his way. The bottom line is this: do your homework. There are many companies aligned with professional dealers offering quality pool products and services. Choose the one that best suits your needs and your budget.