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Stuart Chesson

Owner, Koizilla Monster Ponds - aquaculture, water features and custom pond design

By Victoria Hecht
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IT'S HARD TO miss the truck: big, blue and with a robotic-age fish splashed across the side. A monster of the road. Stuart Chesson likes it that way. And it's not just the Ford F350 that has him riding high.

Chesson, the owner of Koizilla Monster Ponds, said he's happier now bringing backyard relaxation to clients than he was in the corporate world.

The Virginia Beach resident and former advertising agency owner launched Koizilla seven years ago, fulfilling a lifelong love of aquaculture and a desire to share its soothing benefits with others.

Business or not, it's still just a plain good time for him, too.

"Everybody in the koi pond business is so serious, but I like to have fun," he said. "I think it's time somebody breaks that mold."

That explains the logo, a spiky-finned, techno-teasing hybrid fish of the future that looks like it could battle Godzilla - or any other Japanese movie monster - and stand a good chance of winning. Chesson's big on those creature flicks and saw an opportunity to incorporate their daring in his venture.

"I wanted to do something cutting edge, with the latest in technology and information. I needed an image that was consistent with that," he explained.

But koi - the calm-inducing creatures of Chesson's profession - remain the driving force behind his custom pond-design business.

"The thing that makes Stuart different and which really separates him apart is his passion for the fish," said wife Carolyn, who also works in the business. "Not just creating a beautiful pond, but engineering a living environment for the fish where they can thrive and possibly outlive us."

Chesson - whose own property is home to an 8,000-gal-



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lon koi pond, a smaller goldfish pond and a frog pond - earned his koi health management certification from the University of Georgia School of Veterinary Medicine and has studied with enthusiasts on the West Coast.

There, Carolyn said, koi keeping is a "flourishing hobby." Chesson has kept koi personally for 17 years and also owns King Koi Farms.

The fish, he said, have personalities - some playful, some mellow, some more domineering. They'll play with a pond's plants and small toys, and enjoy treats like other pets.

Chesson, whose company also provides maintenance contracts, frequently dons snorkeling gear to clean and care for clients' koi ponds and water gardens.

"Hands on?" Carolyn said,

laughing. "He's completely immersed!"

What attracted you to custom pond design?

I've been an avid aquarist since the age of 9. I have kept fish from all over the world. Also, our community was not getting accurate information on the distinctions between a koi pond and water garden/water feature.

These magnificent animals are not disposable - to be replaced from one year to the next. The oldest koi of record was determined to be more than 200 years old in Japan, proving that - given the right diet and water quality - these fish can outlive their owners.

Koi are very social and community-oriented and respond affectionately to their owners

and care providers. Because of their beautiful color combinations and patterns, they are described as living jewels.

What are the hot trends in your industry?

Complete outdoor living spaces with gardens and ponds, creating a home oasis.

How simple or elaborate can folks go in their design?

The design is dependent on the vision of the customer, whether they want an interesting water feature, a small ornamental pond or an elaborate koi environment.

What should one consider when planning a pond?

The type of pond they want, the appearance (such as natural or formal, tropical or oriental), the time they will have available for maintenance, the right design and equipment to minimize maintenance chores.

If there will be fish in the pond, remember that we're creating and providing the environment where the fish will live. We are responsible for their care. The environment should be designed and engineered for koi's health and well-being.

What's the best part about creating a custom pond?

Helping to bring clients' dreams to reality. And aquaculture filtration engineering systems, which will function well for them.

Have a favorite pond project?

The 25,000-gallon koi pond with show-quality koi and a smaller "sister" goldfish/frog pond that we did in Virginia Beach. Absolutely magnificent!

What's your favorite thing about your own home?

Watching the fish and frogs every day. It's an ongoing creation of a relaxing, tranquil "paradise" at home. I love to spend time relaxing outside and drinking it all in.

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