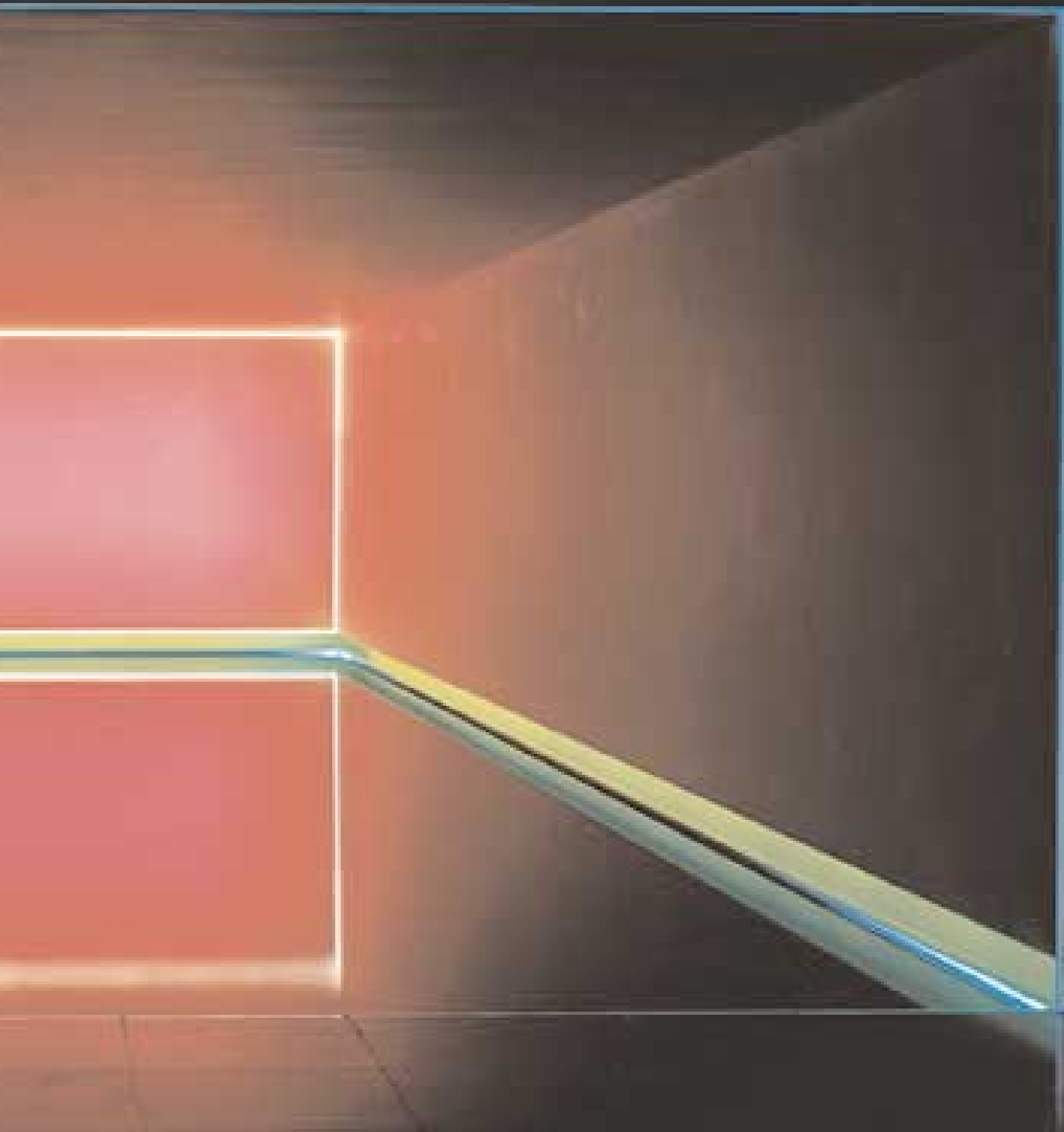


A photograph of a swimming pool installation. The pool is set within a concrete structure. The wall on the left is a light, neutral color. The pool's edge is highlighted with a glowing yellow-green light. The water in the pool is a deep red color. The ceiling is a dark, textured surface. The overall atmosphere is modern and artistic.

water's edge

WHEN IS A SWIMMING POOL MORE THAN A SWIMMING POOL? WHEN IT'S PART OF ARTIST

A view of Turrell's *Baker Pool*, an installation at the Greenwich, Connecticut, estate of Lisa and Richard Baker



*Photographed by Florian Holzherr and Simon Watson*

JAMES TURRELL'S MAGNIFICENT INSTALLATION IN THE BASEMENT OF A CONNECTICUT BARN.

BY CATHERINE HONG



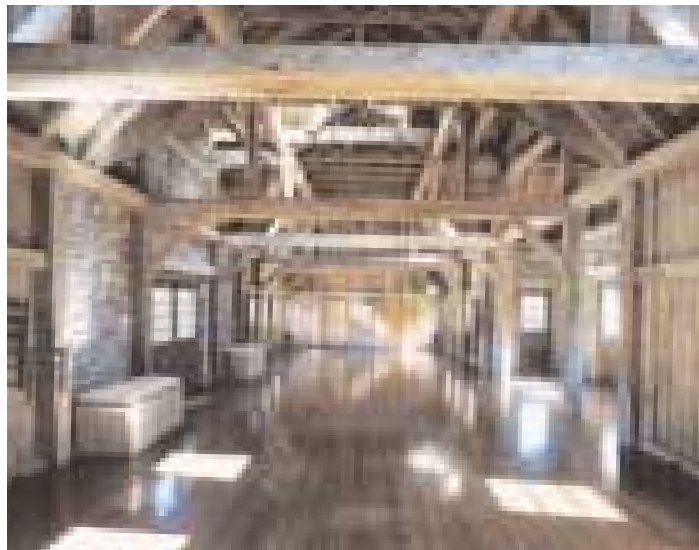
Richard and Lisa Baker and their three children live on a 10-acre estate in Conyers Farm, a private community in Greenwich, Connecticut, that's also home to Ron Howard, Paula Zahn and the Greenwich Polo Club.

It's the kind of neighborhood where the Bakers' enormous house; their all-white formal English garden (with fountain on the way); their Chagalls and Picassos; their framed collection of letters from Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and Abraham Lincoln; and their commissioned family oil portrait (inspired, no less, by Velázquez's *Las Meninas*) are considered perfectly lovely, but hardly worth gawking at. There is, however, one thing the Bakers have that no one else in Connecticut—no one else in America, for that matter—can match: an indoor swimming pool in the basement of their barn designed by artist James Turrell.

"Here we go!" says Richard, leading a visitor down a dark flight of stairs. "Watch your step!"

Belowground the room is pitch-black, save for thin beams of colored lights that form a perfect prism. The lights frame the floor, the ceiling and, at the back of the room, a darkly glimmering horizontal plane that turns out to be the pool. Spatial relations are impossible to gauge, and it seems as if a single step could send one plunging into unknown depths. In fact, at the cocktail party to celebrate the completion of the installation this past April, a guest walked right into the water. The artist himself came to her rescue.

**Above:** A view from the pool. **Right:** The 3,500-square-foot first floor of the Bakers' barn, which the family uses as a play and entertaining space.





"I think we're finally beginning to build with light. It's a large part of architecture now," says Turrell.

A view of the wall opposite the pool. Hundreds of LED circuits are hidden behind the glowing panel, which architect Walter Smith calls "the medicine cabinet."



Above: Exterior of the Bakers' barn. Turrell also installed colored LEDs in the three cupolas, which the Bakers switch on for special events. Opposite: Turrell spent hundreds of hours programming *Baker Pool's* three different light cycles. Each cycle lasts an hour, and can be activated with the push of a button.

“The idea is not so much illusion as trying says the artist....” This expansion of space

Turrell is best known for having spent the past 30 years working on *Roden Crater*, the monumental land-art project outside Flagstaff, Arizona. Using light and indeterminate space, his deeply spiritual work has been the subject of more than 140 solo exhibitions since 1967. In recent years, his ambitious, site-specific installations (in particular his Skyspaces, which are freestanding enclosed structures designed to enhance one's viewing of the heavens) have become status acquisitions for collectors worldwide. When James Turrell designs a pool, then—as he's done only twice before, in France and Japan—it's much more than a nicely tiled hole in the ground.

*Baker Pool*, as the project is officially titled, is actually not the first Turrell piece in town. A few years ago, the artist collaborated with architects Roger Duffy and Walter Smith of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill on a classroom building they designed for the posh local girls' school Greenwich Academy. (Duffy and Smith also designed the Bakers' barn.) At Greenwich Academy, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) cascade down the sloped ceilings, and in the evening, faint lights outline the building's exterior.

“I think we're finally beginning to build with light. It's a large part of architecture now,” says Turrell on the phone from Wilmington, Delaware, where he's working on a commission for the Delaware Art Museum. Along with his ongoing work on *Roden Crater*, Turrell, 62, currently has more than 20 commissions worldwide, including private projects for Michael Ovitz and Henry Kravis. He's also preparing for a show opening July 14 at New York's PaceWildenstein gallery featuring some of his light projections from the

Sixties and his 2005 Hologram works. Despite this hectic schedule, Turrell, who's collaborated with Duffy on various projects over the past 12 years, says he jumped at the chance to do the Baker barn.

“I love light in situations around water,” he says. “I hadn't done [a pool] in this country at all, and it's something I've been hoping to do more of. Light into water is something very beautiful. The volume of the water holds the light.”

Turrell has worked with almost every kind of artificial light, including neon, fiber optics, fluorescents and lasers, but has recently become enamored of cutting-edge LED technology because the lights are programmable and allow the mixing of colors within a very small space. “I grew up in the time of the space race and its spirit of optimism,” he says. “I really believed we were going to have this ability to work with light as we now have it.”

An observant Quaker, Turrell has a long white beard and is usually dressed in a black suit and a black hat. (“He looks strikingly like God in the great Renaissance paintings,” says Smith.) His wedding this past April, to artist Kyung-Lim Lee, was held in a Quaker meeting house in Easton, Maryland. Though a spiritual man, Turrell also has a fabulous side. He was delivered to *Baker Pool's* opening party in Henry Kravis's helicopter.

Turrell's work has been described as one of optical illusion, but the artist hesitates to see it as just that. “The idea is not so much illusion as trying to create another reality. A daydream,” he says. “It's a little bit like what happens when you read or listen to music: this expansion of space into these realms of dream space, this idea of how we superimpose this dream state upon the conscious reality.”



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Richard Baker, 39, a real-estate developer who builds shopping malls with his father, Robert C. Baker (a Guggenheim Foundation trustee), is the first to admit that he had no idea what he was getting into when he commissioned the pool. “It all started because Lisa here wanted a tennis court,” he says. “A simple request, right? But instead of doing the normal thing and hiding the court with a row of trees, I thought, Maybe I can build a little old rickety barn.

“So Roger and Walter came, and we moved the driveway and came up with plans for an old barn,” Richard continues. “Lisa wanted a swimming pool in the basement, and I said I’m never putting a pool in there, it’s ridiculous! But just to shut her up, I dug the hole. Then Roger took pictures of the basement and sent the pictures to James Turrell without telling me.”

Standing on the glossy, sunlit floors of the barn’s main level, Richard gestures up at the 30-foot-high rafters. “The frame is all first-cut timbers from an old barn in Pennsylvania,” he says. “The big stones came from a church in Bridgeport.” Other bells and whistles include comfortable guest rooms, caretaker’s quarters and a pair of two-car garages. “The kids skateboard, play hockey and ride their bikes here. Then we just mop up the floor and we can have dinner for 100!”

While Turrell describes the pool project as “relatively simple,” Richard offers his own perspective.

In order for the 50-foot-long pool to properly reflect the light, Turrell needed the water to lie perfectly still. “They tell me this is the most precise and complicated pool in North America,” Richard says. “The pool is laser flat. They don’t build pools laser flat!” The standard dehumidification equipment had to be

hidden, which meant digging a trench through the barn’s already completed foundation. The pool even required a special German-made automated cover, which called for a tunnel to house the engine for the hydraulic lift.

“I’m in the business of building large-scale projects within budget,” Richard says, “million-square-foot shopping centers. This cost about five times what I had anticipated. It would destroy my reputation to tell you how much this cost.”

Still, the Bakers say they couldn’t be more pleased. They’ve set up all their Cybex equipment right next to the pool, and the couple regularly work out to a light cycle programmed specifically by the artist for exercising. (There are also “Turrell Day” and “Turrell Night” cycles.) Their kids have had swimming parties there, and Richard and Lisa use the space to entertain. Richard became so inspired by Turrell’s artistic vision that he decorated his most recent mall, in Middletown, New York, with thousands of colored LEDs.

The Bakers are more than happy to share their pool with Turrell’s many devotees. “We get calls asking to arrange visits every single week,” says Richard. This past February, Brooke de Ocampo of London’s Albion Gallery, which represents the artist in England, took her friend and client Anne Hearst to visit the Bakers’ pool. “It’s simply amazing, like walking into a living Rothko painting, but instead of paint, it’s light,” raves de Ocampo. “It lifts you, it moves you. We stayed there for an hour, not speaking, just mesmerized by the power of the work.”

They were so moved, in fact, that they whipped off their clothes and went for a swim—despite the fact that they hadn’t brought bathing suits. Says de Ocampo: “It was the best skinny-dip I’ve had in my life.” ●