

Experimental architect Stefan Beese converts a steel refuse container into a backyard pool



By **Doug MacCash, The Times-Picayune**

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Experimental architect Stefan Beese has brought "dumpster diving" to his own backyard by converting a 22-foot-long, steel refuse container into a small, but elegant, swimming pool. The 7-foot-wide pool is perfect for New Orleans' narrow shotgun-style lots, Beese said, and, if his family ever moves to a new house, the pool can be drained and trucked to the new location.



Enlarge Brett Duke, Nola.com | The Times-Picayune

For the pool's shell, Stefan Beese acquired a used 30-cubic-yard container from a company in Harahan -- exactly the same as those seen at construction sites everywhere.

[Stefan Beese's refuse-container pool gallery \(15 photos\)](#)



Beese, who was born in Flensburg, Germany, first made his mark on New Orleans in 2007, when he was the executive producer of the startlingly pink tent city that Brad Pitt erected in the flood-ruined Lower 9th Ward neighborhood to herald the beginning of his altruistic Make It Right architectural development.

Beese, 42, was living in Los Angeles at the time, but soon relocated to the Crescent City. Since then, he's busied himself producing the dramatic festival

design for the annual Voodoo Music Experience in City Park and the spectacular stage sets for the annual Essence Music Festival in the Superdome.

Beese said the stroke of inspiration for a pool made from a trash container came from more than once source. In 2008, he used stacked cargo containers to create an industrial-chic grandstand for the Voodoo Fest, so he was aware of the practicality of repurposing prefabricated steel shells.

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Sometime later, he heard of a funky pop-up pool party that took place in a refuse container. Beese liked the idea of a ready-made pool, but he wasn't interested in the tongue-in-cheek tawdriness of swimming in a raw refuse bin. His pool would be a much "slicker" design, as he puts it.

"I wanted it to be a contemporary modern component in the garden," Beese said of the design. "I liked the concept of how a dumpster could be hidden. I like the idea that people would ask, 'Is that fiberglass? What is that?' I like the surprise."

Step by step

Beese consulted with several Louisiana waste management experts and eventually acquired a used 30-cubic-yard container from a company in Harahan -- exactly the same as those seen at construction sites everywhere. It was important, he said, that the container have minimal rust and be free of large dents, which would be apparent in the final product.



Trash container converted to swimming pool by architect Stefan Beese
Watch as New Orleans architect Stefan Beese describes the family swimming pool he made from an industrial container. In 2007 Beese was the executive producer of the temporary neighborhood of pink tent houses in the Lower 9th Ward that preceded Brad Pitt's Make It Right development. He is also the production designer of the annual Voodoo Music Experience and Essence Festival.

[Watch video](#)

A metal container is ideal for the purpose, he said, because it minimizes the effort of creating a sturdy pool shell that can also be used as the basis for a handsome outdoor structure.

A container, he said, "has structural integrity and mounting points already." Plus, "there are so many available."

Step one in converting the container into a pool, Beese said, was to protect the cleaned steel box with anti-corrosion paint. To level the steel box on his slanting side yard, Beese

had the container dug into the earth a few inches. To protect the soil beneath the pool, he first spread a layer of limestone.

He then lined the container with half-inch high-density foam insulation to provide some toe padding. Finally, he sent away for a custom-fit flexible pool liner similar to the pale blue skin inside any above-ground pool.

One of the beauties of the sturdy steel container, Beese said, is that it requires no outside buttresses like some above-ground pools, so it has an inherently smaller footprint.

Most trash containers, Bees pointed out, have an indentation on one end to allow the box to be winched onto a flatbed truck. Instead of causing a design problem, the indentation presented an opportunity.

By building a rectangular shelf over the indentation, Beese provided swimmers with a place to conveniently lower themselves into the 5-foot-deep water, making a ladder unnecessary.

Wooden cladding

Inspired by Japanese bath design, Beese created wooden walls and decks from pressure-treated pine boards to encase the pool. The horizontal boards harmonized with the clapboards on the house and the wooden fence.

The wooden covering is modular and can be easily removed for transport, Beese said. One of the wooden walls swings away to expose the concealed salt-water filtration system.

When finished, Beese's backyard pool looked much more like something out of the IKEA catalog than a waste receptacle off of a dusty construction site. He's reminded of the transformation every day, since there's a rusty, graffiti-scrawled 30-yard trash container parked in the empty lot across the street from his Lakeview house.

Beese said that a used container in good condition will cost potential pool builders between \$1,500 and \$2,500. Overall, he said, the project set him back between \$5,000 and \$7,000. It would have cost less, he said, if he'd had time to do more of the work himself.

Beese said it takes him five strokes to swim the length of the pool. His wife, who was once a competitive swimmer, takes just three. And Beese's 4-year-old son, he said, has learned to swim in the converted container.

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