



ELEMENTS

water & features Fountains

During the New York city drought of 1964, when New Yorkers were forced to use water from the Hudson River, Tiffany's window designer Gene Moore, unveiled a fountain in one of the store's windows. The fountain was hung with diamonds and, what was even more exuberant, it ran with what looked like water. A note, however, written on a Tiffany's card sat in the corner of the window and read: "This is not New York's precious water. This is gin."

The difficulty with water features is that the time of year when they are most desirable and are needed to be fully functional is also the time of year when water becomes a scarce commodity and their practicality becomes cause for debate. Public fountains in Barcelona were turned off last summer as Spain experienced its worst drought in 60 years and as Britain faces what the Environment Agency claims "could be one of the most serious droughts to affect the south east of England in the last 100 years", water features look set to be the first taps turned off.

KEEP OUT OF THE WATER

The public, however, are as reluctant to forego their access to water in public squares and parks as they are to put away their hoses. In an urban setting, people will always interact with water features as the heat of summer rises. The fountains in Trafalgar Square, although intended as decorative works, have acted as an oasis in the urban desert for many years, attracting crowds of paddlers. Last

Faced with a water shortage the fountain or ornamental water feature might seem to be facing a bleak summer, but as **Laura Fountain** discovers, the industry is already anticipating the effect that climate change will have on these animating elements of the public realm

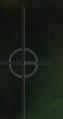
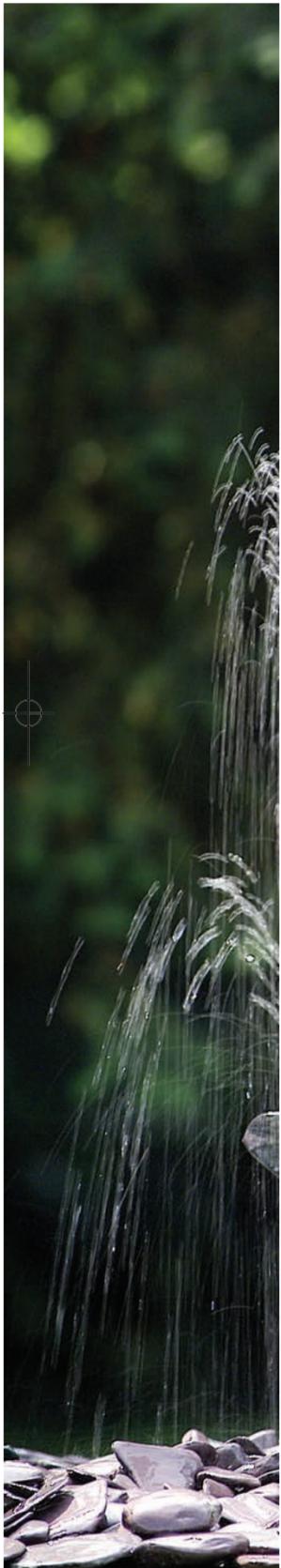
summer the Greater London Authority put a stop to this tradition. Signs were put up warning people not to bathe and wardens patrolled the site enforcing the message.

The Greater London Authority argued that the fountains, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1939, were not intended for bathing and that the measures put in place were for the protection of both the public and the fountains. While critics condemned the decision as another example of 'compensation culture' spoiling an age-old tradition, not far away in Hyde Park, injuries at a fountain that was designed to allow such behaviour, caused it to run dry.

The memorial fountain designed by Kathryn Gustafson to commemorate Diana, Princess of Wales, was intended to be accessible to the public and reflect Diana's inclusive personality. It was anticipated that the oval ring of Cornish

granite sunk into the grass of Hyde Park would play host to children and adults playing in its water during the summer months. But just two weeks after opening, the fountain was closed because of safety fears and reopened three weeks later with the proviso that visitors may sit on the banks and paddle their feet in, but not walk in, the fountain.

Contemporary designers have responded to people's compulsion to interact with water features. Emerging from the walkway of Dundas Square in Toronto, 22 fountains form a double row of water geysers for pedestrians to walk through or around. The fountains shoot jets of water, which designer Dan Euser asserts is better than pool quality, up to 8m high. The installation uses metal grids to drain away water and non-slip materials to avoid injuries, and, dubbed the 'urban beach', has won the approval of locals.

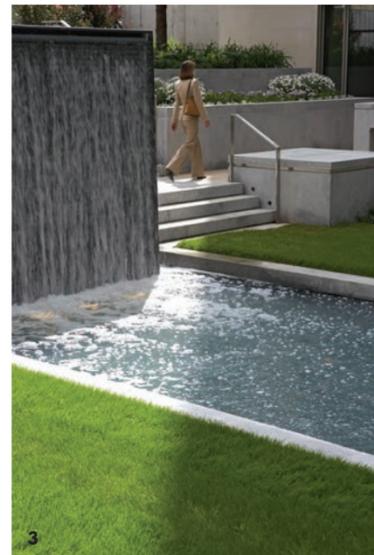




1 'Fish' is a 1.2m-high feature designed and made by Hammer and Tongs for a Hertfordshire property

2 Stainless steel and acrylic 'Globe' by GA Water features, sited at Newham University Hospital, London

3 Whitewater waterfall and canal pool by Fountains direct for Scape Design Associates' Knightsbridge garden





USEFUL LINKS

www.environment-agency.gov.uk
www.kingcombe.com
www.gawaterfeatures.co.uk
www.salixrw.com
www.fountains-direct.co.uk
www.thesculptureworkshop.co.uk
www.blacksmithonline.co.uk
www.bigfoot-play.com



POOLING RESOURCES

As well as providing a design element to their setting, ponds and lakes are an important source for the irrigation of plants but summer poses significant problems for their design and function. "As well as being an attractive landscaping feature, lakes provide a reservoir from which to water gardens", says John Colton, managing director of Kingcombe Aquacare Ltd. "The main problem is that the time of year when you want to maximise their aesthetic impact is precisely the same time of year when you will be drawing down on their reserve and making them less attractive as the waterline drops. This can be disguised, to some degree, with the use of planting that grows both in the water and at its edge."

Keeping lakes full and attractive becomes difficult as bans on 'non-essential' water usage come into force. "Water features have to be kept topped up and there is little one can do other than use mains water unless you have access to other sources of water."

"If you have a well or stream on your land, you are entitled to extract 20 cubic metres of water per day without a licence from the Environment Agency. Fitting a well is a simple procedure and, although it is expensive in the short term, will save money in the long run."

Fountains circulating lake water help to improve its quality, but they also increase the amount of evaporation and their spray increases the opportunity for legionella. "If the lake is being used as a reservoir for irrigating plants or if it is



1 This fountain was an integral feature of a new 3.5ha public amenity lake in the heart of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, designed by Kingcombe Aquacare

2 The Twister one of Boerby's water slides distributed in the UK by Bigfoot Play Systems Limited

3 Pre-planted coir by Salix River and Wetlands used to mitigate water vole habitat

4 The 4m-high 'Sail' by Alan Wilson for Sculpture Workshop, made in mirror polished stainless steel

home to fish or plant life, conventional chemical legionella treatments will not be an option", says Colton. "It is possible to treat the water with UV but this will substantially increase the cost."

COMPOUNDING DIFFICULTIES

As a result of two dry winters, the Environment Agency has warned that this summer there will be more environmental problems – such as fish deaths and algal blooms because of the low river levels – and possible restrictions on spray irrigation.

With greater restrictions on aquatic herbicides, gardeners have been resorting to others methods for treating algae and aquatic weeds. Transponders emitting a high frequency sound through water can be used to shatter algae blooms and Kingcombe Aquacare has developed an AquaTractor to remove weed on large areas of water. These general purpose workboats harvest

aquatic weed, floating debris, and act as a floating oil spill response vessel, and aquatic herbicide applicator. The proportions of the water features that adorn the grounds of stately homes across Britain can be seen as direct reference to the owner's wealth, and algae and weeds would not send out the right message.

In true Tiffany style, and in keeping with the raison d'être of the water feature, Gene Moore's gin fountain managed to exude wealth. But he wasn't the first to use alcohol as a flamboyant substitute for water. Commissioned by James V in 1537, to welcome his new French queen, King's Fountain in the quadrangle of Linlithgow Palace, Scotland, is the oldest fountain in Britain. In 1745, it flowed with wine when Bonnie Prince Charlie visited the Palace and last year the fountain was subject to a five-year restoration project to restore it to its former glory – so far it has flowed only with water.