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A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRIEF SWIMWEAR

Swimmers, trunks, speedos, budgie smugglers - call 'em what you will, brief swimwear has been making a splash (literally and figuratively) over the past couple of years, with more than one magazine or newspaper headline heralding their return to beaches and swimming pools across the world. But it's not the first time such a small piece of nylon fabric has caused such a furore...

The invention of the speedo style of swimwear is generally credited to an ex-pat Scotsman, Alexander McRae, who moved to Australia and set up a hosiery and beachwear company in the early twentieth century. Ever an innovator, he championed the use of cotton and silk instead of wool for his first (rather more modest) one-piece swimming costumes that had cut-away racer backs instead of sleeves.

"Board shorts: the swimsuit that ensures the male figure is cut off from navel to knee; the article of clothing that makes you wonder if you're actually swimming in a skirt; those 25 yards of fabric that never actually seem to dry..."

John Gerry, medium.com

As these proved so popular with sports swimmers due to their much-reduced drag in the water, McRae went one step further and provided the 1936 men's Olympic team with shorts - the first time professional swimmers had gone bare-chested.

Notes on
Urban Dipping

VOL. 1

Highs and Lows

As the century progressed, swimming briefs became...well... briefer, as both professional swimmers and casual dippers realised the comfort of wearing next to nothing. Initially shocking – a bunch of speedo-wearing guys were arrested on Bondi Beach in 1961 for ‘indecent exposure’ – the popularity of skimpy nylon swimwear rose as the sexual revolution swept across the Western world.

"I was Moses cutting through the Red Sea – fast, smooth, and free gliding from board-short captivity to bikini-bottom independence. There was no extra fabric dragging me down to my death; no drawstring coming undone to showcase my cold water shrinkage; no air bubbles getting caught in my pockets like tiny baby farts."
John Gerry, medium.com

Men wanted to look sexy, and a well-fitted pair of trunks allowed maximum skin, chest hair (and probably medallion) exposure. The 70s and early 80s saw the zenith of the speedo with Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz famously photographed in nothing but a stars and stripes pair and his seven gold medals in 1972. And Tom Selleck showed he was all man as he ran through the surf in Malibu in his rather fetching navy blue version.

The Long and Short of It

Sadly, by the 1990s, jock culture had become prevalent on the beach, and loose board shorts were the norm, forcing a generation of poor swimmers to face the discomfort, chafing and interminable dampness of baggy fabric shorts. Unflattering and impractical, these shorts were often in garish colours or ugly prints, but they suited the macho vibes of the late twentieth century.

However, as the years ticked on, the prevailing dominance of American culture seemed to lose a bit of its appeal. Maybe an orange buffoon as president finally put the nail in the coffin of US dominance, but recent years have seen a strong surge back to the liberating – and more European – swim brief.

"The global attitude about speedos for men is becoming increasingly tolerant, deemed acceptable by more than 70 percent of respondents, an eight percent increase over last year."
Expedia Flip-Flop Report 2017

Inspired perhaps by a certain Mr Gandy in an aftershave advertisement or Daniel Craig as Bond, striding out from the sea in skin-tight trunks, a whole new generation discovered that speedos beat baggies hands down, both in comfort and in style. Athletic guys now know that nothing highlights abs and ass better than a well-cut brief swimsuit, whilst bigger gentlemen realised that baggy shorts formed a very unflattering rectangle below the belly that actually made them look even larger.

"Speedos are an antidote to the churning cycle of trends and stand in defiance as a truly singular perennial"
GQ Magazine UK

Finally, people can see again that if you get the fit right, everyone looks good in a speedo. Briefer is better after all.

This piece was written by contributing writer and fashion editor Graham Addinall.









Urban Swimming In The World's Windiest City

Wellington is the Windy City. In this case the nickname is literal. Located at the southern tip of New Zealand's North Island, the nation's capital is frequently cited as the windiest city in the world. I, however, didn't require much convincing; I'd arrived in Wellington on a blustery summer day in January and after a brief walk around downtown, I realized I would need to change into jeans.

I'd come to New Zealand to start the new year, hauling down the North Island due south for a wedding in Christchurch. I filled my itinerary with hikes, hot springs, and museums, and while I deeply wanted to dip into the Pacific, I didn't have quite enough time for a proper beach day. Thankfully, I've learned a thing or two about the urban dip from Pond, and consulting the Urban Dip Guide, I was in luck. In Wellington's central waterfront, a dive platform towers high, inviting the brave to ascend the metal rungs and take the plunge. On a walk my first day in the city, I watched a group battle the wind and launch from the two platforms into the harbor below. As soon as they surfaced, they were climbing the ladder for another round. Though there's a beach a short way down the road, the diving platform provides people with a place to enjoy the water and summer sun in the heart of the city. While the air was brisk, I knew I needed to follow suit.

For the Americans I know who love New Zealand, it's a place of adventure: hikes, white-water rafting, and elaborate outings into fjords. In Auckland, someone asked me if I wanted to be like Beyoncé and bungee off the Sky Tower. Bungee jumping was a hard no for me, and while I love getting outside, I'm keener on bite-size adventure suited to city exploring, and I was grateful to learn that Wellington had much to offer in the spirit of urban exploration. In the morning, I worked up a sweat by hiking up Mount Victoria, and shortly after I was ready to take the leap myself.

From the vantage of the walkway, the water was inviting: calm and turquoise. I was pleased to learn from Land, Air, Water Aotearoa, an organization established to help "communities find the balance between using natural resources and maintaining their quality and availability," that conditions in the harbor were both monitored and suitable for a swim. This is what I love about the urban dip—how it integrates swimming into life and the landscape of the city.

I slipped down to my swimsuit and climbed the wooden steps of the dive platform. As passing tourists realized what was about to happen, they paused to watch—just as I'd spectated the day before, I too would have a crowd. I walked to the edge of the lower platform and appraised the fall. Standing at eight meters, the platform made me feel as though I'd climbed atop the Sky Tower—I'm not particularly fond of heights. I didn't give myself too long to fret, though, and stepped off the edge, falling through the summer air and into the hold of the bay.

Bubbles shot up around me. The Windy City may not have provided me with a hot summer day for my dip, but the water was a tonic I hadn't known I needed: cool, refreshing saltwater to zap me awake for the rest of the day. I climbed the ladder back onto the walkway, feeling as though the spectating tourists held signs rating my performance.

Though in the northern hemisphere it'll be several months before we enjoy urban dips in summer conditions, leaping off the dive platform started the new year wonderfully, reminding me that sometimes all you need to find the right headspace is to get in the water.

This piece was written by contributing writer Michael Colbert.





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THE FUTURE OF URBAN SWIMMING

In 2027 Copenhagen is poised to celebrate a quarter-century since the inauguration of its first harbour bath. This upcoming landmark anniversary underscores a growing international movement toward embracing harbour baths, tidal pools, and outdoor public swimming facilities in urban landscapes.

At the forefront of this architectural revolution is Studio Octopi, a London-based firm whose commitment to integrating aquatic leisure spaces into city life is unmatched. In this feature, Chris Romer-Lee, co-founder, and visionary architect behind Studio Octopi, takes us through the evolution and latest advancements in this transformative journey, aiming to immerse more urban residents in the refreshing embrace of water.

Eleven years have passed since Studio Octopi's inaugural concept for Thames Baths was unveiled through a captivating CGI representation in the London Evening Standard, sparking an unexpected surge of interest from both Londoners and international observers. This innovative design featured a floating lower pool that adapted to the Thames' 6-meter tidal range, while the upper pool, positioned just beneath the high-water mark, was refreshed with brackish river water twice daily, offering bathers six hours of rejuvenating swims.

Despite the ensuing eight years of navigating through scepticism from authorities and wavering commitment from developers, the physical realization of Thames Baths remains on the horizon. However, this journey ignited a deeper passion within me to envision and create community pools worldwide, democratizing access to the health benefits of seawater at a time when the need is more pressing than ever amidst a global swimming pool crisis and escalating city temperatures.



A Global Swimming Pool Crisis

Europe is currently facing a severe swimming pool crisis, exacerbated by rising construction costs and an acute energy shortage. This dire situation has led to significant operational changes across the continent: community pools in Germany are lowering their water temperatures to cut costs, France is witnessing pool closures, and in the UK, Swim England has reported the closure of 1,000 pools since 2010, with an additional 1,500 facilities nearing the end of their useful life after four decades of service. Alarmingly, this decline disproportionately affects the most underprivileged communities, where public pools are closing at three times the rate of those in wealthier areas.

Looking towards Australia, a staggering 40% of public swimming pools are projected to reach the end of their operational life by 2030, with replacement costs estimated at around AU\$ 8 billion. However, there is a silver lining as Australia looks ahead. A 2020 study by the University of New South Wales' School of Civil and Environmental Engineering proposed a cost-effective solution: constructing ocean pools for AU\$ 3-8 million each, with annual operating expenses of approximately AU\$ 100,000. These ocean pools are expected to attract up to 150,000 visitors annually, generating health and economic benefits valued between AU\$ 6-10 million per year – or about AU\$ 40 per visit. Such compelling data highlights the potential for innovative solutions to mitigate the global swimming pool crisis.

The Dawn of Tidal Pools

Tidal pools, a seawater-fed pool that naturally overtops twice a day on the high tide, trace their origins back to the late 18th century in the UK. Among the pioneers, Lady Basset's Baths, established in 1782 in Cornwall, stand out as quintessential examples. These pools, hewn directly from granite by the family's own stonemason, featured at varying elevations within the intertidal zone, ensuring a continual supply of fresh seawater. Sized comparably to large bathtubs, with some even boasting rock-carved steps for entry and exit, these pools have, over two centuries of exposure to the elements, acquired a smooth, almost organic texture, a stark contrast to the harsh lines of man-made construction.

The era also saw Dr. Richard Russell, a visionary physician, championing the health benefits of seawater, advocating for both its immersion and ingestion as remedies for a plethora of conditions. This belief catalysed a shift from the inland mineral spas, like those in Bath, to the untamed beauty of the coast, setting the stage for the flourishing of British seaside resorts such as Scarborough, Brighton, and Margate. These destinations became the sanctuaries of the elite, seeking the therapeutic embrace of the sea. The expansion of the railway network in the 19th century democratized access to these coastal retreats, making the joys and health benefits of seawater available to the wider public.

The tradition of embracing seawater's curative properties wasn't limited to the British Isles. With the spread of colonialism, this practice took root in distant lands. In Australia, McIver's Ladies Baths in Sydney represents a poignant chapter in this narrative. Originally a site for

Aboriginal women, it became a secluded swimming haven for female settlers in the 1830s, eventually gaining formal recognition as a women-only space. Despite facing legal challenges, McIver's has endured, testament to the lasting appeal and societal importance of such communal water spaces.

The thread that links all tidal pools is the problem they solve. Unlike indoor and outdoor treated water pools, that are plonked anywhere, tidal pools are problem solvers. They were built to provide safe access to natural water and work hand-in-hand with nature. A nature-based solution. Some pools are shallow, like those along the Thames Estuary, others are considerably deeper and often include 3-5-metre-high diving boards; but regardless they all ensure that there is access to that vitamin rich seawater at all states of the tide and regardless of the coastline topography.

Studio Octopi's Architectural Advocacy

At the heart of Studio Octopi's mission and work lies the profound health benefits of swimming. The journey of Thames Baths, though still awaiting realization, has paved the way for a host of new ventures, all of which have moved more fluidly through the regulatory entanglement that is UK local government.

One notable endeavour is the revival of Grange-over-Sands Lido, a coastal gem in northwest England. Built in 1932 with a distinctive mushroom-shaped basin, it stands as the lone survivor of the 1930s northern England coastal pools. Its initial success waned with the advent of affordable international travel, leading to its closure in 1993. Collaborating with Save Grange Lido, our studio has spent the last four years working to rejuvenate this historic site, planning a 50m heated pool complemented by modern amenities while preserving its heritage essence.

In Scotland, we're so thrilled to be working on the restoration of two historic tidal pools: Saltcoats Bathing Pond and Tarlair Outdoor Pool. Both Art Deco structures, dating back to the early 1930s, offered Scots a cherished retreat. Current efforts focus on reviving these spaces with respect to their original charm and community significance, starting with Tarlair's pavilion and extending to its aquatic facilities, though the diving boards will sadly not make a return.

Expanding our reach beyond the UK, we have embarked on international projects, including George's Dock Lido in Dublin envisioning a new outdoor pool within a repurposed city centre dock. Our work also extends to Sydney, where we've conducted a comprehensive study for Sydney Water, to illustrate how to establish new swimming sites across the city. This initiative tackles the challenge of equitable water access, proposing innovative solutions to bring safe, enjoyable swimming options to underserved areas of the harbour and Parramatta River.

A Tribute to Saltwater Sanctuaries

Our work at Studio Octopi ultimately inspired me to do a book, "Sea Pools," as an exploration into the world's tidal pools.

"Sea Pools" celebrates the community-driven genesis and

stewardship of these pools, despite their complex histories. The decision to build these pools was never arbitrary but stemmed from specific needs: significant tidal ranges, challenging access due to rocky shores, or the presence of hazardous marine life. A case in point is Cape Town, where environmental activism led by Lisa Beasley transformed some pools into vibrant marine habitats, ceasing the use of harmful chemicals and paints, thus turning them into educational platforms where children, equipped with snorkels and wetsuits, learn about marine biology up close.

This philosophy of viewing tidal pools as more than just places for recreation but as vital educational and ecological assets is informing our project with Swim the Wight CIC aimed at enhancing the seascape around the Isle of Wight. Collaborating with eco-engineers Artecology, we're designing pools that double as biodiversity hotspots, addressing the urgent need for climate resilience, habitat preservation, and environmental education.

Swimmable Cities Alliance On The Rise

In an era where the accessibility of public pools is being challenged, we at Studio Octopi, alongside our allies such as the Australian consultancy Regeneration Projects and the champions of urban plunging, Pond Copenhagen, are laying the groundwork for a 'Swimmable Cities' alliance. This non-profit organization will be dedicated to championing the development of new tidal pools and harbour baths globally.

Our mission is to preserve the tradition of community swimming, enhance mental and physical health, offer invaluable educational opportunities, and safeguard marine ecosystems. Through this collective effort, we aim to ensure that swimming and water-based activities continue to enrich lives and foster a deeper connection with the natural aquatic environment.

This piece is written by Chris Romer-Lee, co-founder of architects Studio Octopi, Thames Baths & Future Lidos Group. Author of Sea Pools (Batsford, 2023). Chris is currently researching his next book, titled Diving Boards: The Climb & Fall.

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Pond was born in Copenhagen, self-proclaimed harbour bath capital of the world, in 2021 by four guys sick and tired of uncomfortable and unflattering swimwear for urban dipping.

We are driven by the emerging urban dipping culture forming in progressive cities around the globe. We believe that swimming in open water should not be limited to palm-fringed beaches or confined to the summer months.

All our items are designed in Copenhagen and crafted in Portugal from premium, recycled materials. We are passionate about responsible production practices and carefully manage our production in small batches to prevent overproduction and to lower our overall impact. Good for us. And good for mother nature.

We are always excited to hear from our growing, global community of urban dippers. Reach us @pondcph or sos@pondcph.dk.

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