Ralph had an old walled garden next to his house; originally it would have been the kitchen garden. It was a nicely secluded area. He wanted a large outdoor pool for his extended family, which included numerous children and grandchildren.

He was a busy man who had never had a swimming pool and knew little about them. He had already asked an architect to come up with some designs, but he was not happy with what the practice had produced. By the time he came to us, all he knew was what he didn’t want.

As a client he didn’t have much time to attend to the building of his pool. He was only able to have short planning discussions with us from time to time. Our job was to package up bundles of decisions for him that he could make very swiftly whenever we were able to meet. On aesthetic issues (such as the mosaic tiling in the pool), we also had the views of the rest of his family to consider.

One of the interesting details of this project was the question of the precise length of the pool. Ralph was talking about 15 or 20 metres. But he was absolutely enchanted when we suggested 16.6 metres – precisely one hundredth of a mile which would enable him to swim a mile a day by doing a hundred lengths. So that is what we did.
A curious detail I recall”, says Mark Saxton, “was that the local pool company who dug and installed this particular pool was a group of people whose grandparents had started out in life as grave-diggers, before moving into swimming pools. It’s unusual to find several generations of expertise involved in this way!

A big challenge associated with this project was the pool house. Ralph wanted a pool-side enclosure that would not only house the plant and the changing rooms, but would also double up as a place where he could entertain people in warmth and comfort. We designed an octagonal structure, one half of which was his entertaining room. The four sides of this part of the structure were sealed by sliding glass doors that could be folded away entirely in warm weather. The doors were not easy to find – we sourced them from Germany. The flooring of this pool house, incidentally, is another delightful feature, with rectangular tiles spiralling round into a central boss.

Ralph says: “Mark Saxton is serious. He’s very professional – he takes written minutes, he follows up everything, he speaks his mind, he takes no prisoners. He’s absolutely first class. He charges quite a bit but I would absolutely recommend him. He’s been all round the circuit and knows exactly what he is doing. I would never have got this result without him.”