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A BLUMHOUSE Production



WYATT RUSSELL

KERRY CONDON

AMÉLIE HOEFERLE

GAVIN WARREN

Executive Producers

MICHAEL CLEAR

JUDSON SCOTT

RYAN TUREK

Produced by

JAMES WAN

JASON BLUM

Screen Story by

BRYCE McGUIRE & ROD BLACKHURST

Screenplay by

BRYCE McGUIRE

Directed by

BRYCE McGUIRE

NIGHT SWIM

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

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**THE SYNOPSIS**

No running. No diving. No lifeguard on duty. No swimming after dark.

Atomic Monster and Blumhouse, the producers of *M3GAN*, high dive into the deep end of horror with the new supernatural thriller, *Night Swim*.

Based on the acclaimed 2014 short film, the film stars WYATT RUSSELL (*The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *Overlord*) as Ray Waller, a former major league baseball player forced into early retirement by a degenerative illness, who moves into a new home with his concerned wife Eve (Oscar® nominee KERRY CONDON; *The Banshees of Inisherin*, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*), teenage daughter Izzy (AMÉLIE HOEFERLE, *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*) and young son Elliot (GAVIN WARREN, *Fear the Walking Dead*).

Secretly hoping, against the odds, to return to pro ball, Ray persuades Eve that the new home’s shimmering backyard swimming pool will be fun for the kids and provide physical therapy for him. But a dark secret in the home’s past will unleash a malevolent force that will drag the family under, into the depths of inescapable terror.

The stellar supporting cast includes JODI LONG (*Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*), NANCY LENEHAN (*Catch Me If You Can*), EDDIE MARTINEZ (*Justified: City Primeval*), newcomer ELIJAH ROBERTS and RAHNUMA PANTHAKY (*Modern Family*).

*Night Swim* is directed by BRYCE McGUIRE (writer of the upcoming film *Baghead* ), from a screenplay by BRYCE McGUIRE and a screen story by BRYCE McGUIRE & ROD BLACKHURST. The film is produced by JAMES WAN, the filmmaker behind the *Saw*, *Insidious* and *The Conjuring* franchises, and JASON BLUM, the producer of the *Halloween* films, *The Black Phone* and *The Invisible Man*. The film is executive produced by MICHAEL CLEAR (*M3GAN*)and JUDSON SCOTT (*M3GAN*) for Wan’s Atomic Monster and by RYAN TUREK (*The Exorcist: Believer*) for Blum’s Blumhouse.

The film’s director of photography is CHARLIE SARROFF (*Smile*, *Relic*). The production designer is HILLARY GURTLER (FX’s *Dave*, *Do Revenge*) and the editor is JEFF McEVOY (*M3GAN*, *Project Power*). The film’s costume designer is CHRISTIE WITTENBORN (*Hunters*, *Dirty Grandpa*) and the music is by MARK KORVEN (*The Black Phone*, *The Witch*).

**THE BACKSTORY**

A backyard swimming pool.

A symbol of youth, status and wish-fulfillment, quintessentially American yet universal in its shimmering appeal. A life-enhancing luxury to those who can afford the cost, an absolute necessity for those poor souls who live in the most hellishly hot of places. A heavenly playground for people of any age, a devilish hazard for those tempted by its cool, sky-blue waters yet who lack the ability to tread its deepest, darkest parts.

Especially at night.

Directed by Bryce McGuire from his screenplay, *Night Swim* takes the most banal pleasure of suburban life and transforms it into a wellspring of demonic evil in a movie that combines the style, impishness and wicked world-building that audiences have come to expect from horror film powerhouses Jason Blum and James Wan, with the eerie vibes and emotional resonance of classic eighties-era chillers like *Poltergeist* and *Pet Sematary*. The allusions and echoes of eighties pop culture not only nod to McGuire’s inspirations but have thematic purpose. “We set the cold open in the eighties in part because I wanted to evoke the feeling of nostalgia from older movies like *Poltergeist, Christine, Burnt Offerings*, or *Jaws* that inspired *Night Swim*,” McGuire says. “Most of the movie takes place in the unspecified present day, but in many ways the movie is about letting go of the past, so it felt right to indulge that feeling of nostalgia at the top.”

The film connects to McGuire’s own childhood and adolescence and, perhaps not surprisingly, the inspirations for *Night Swim* lie in a touch of aquaphobia. “I’ve always had water on the brain,” McGuire says. “Growing up in Florida, surrounded by ocean on three sides, in a climate that can only really be survived by partaking in water ritual, knowing friends who drowned, hurricanes that flooded homes, boating accidents, shark attacks, you come to have a kind of fear and reverence for the water.”

As McGuire became increasingly interested in movies as a kid, his wary regard for the water flowed naturally into an interest in seaside thrillers. “Probably the first horror film I ever saw was *Creature from the Black Lagoon,* and I haven’t stopped thinking about it since; I have a Creature tattoo on my right bicep,” says McGuire, who also cites *Night of the Hunter* and *The Abyss* as formative experiences. “And, of course, there was *Jaws*. I saw that movie when I was 10 years old. We had a swimming pool at the time, and I remember treading water by myself at night when my younger brother turned the lights out. And even though I knew the pool was only 9 feet deep and 18 feet wide, I was certain beyond any doubt that the water was an abyss and something horrible was rising toward me from the depths.”

Other classics of the horror genre influenced his emerging aesthetic, too, including *The Shining*, *The Sixth Sense* and *The Exorcist*. “They are scary, high-concept stories, but there’s a very human throughline at the core,” McGuire sys. The novels of Stephen King made a mark, too, specifically ones that turned humdrum features of everyday life—the family dog; a car; a toy—into talismans and vessels of supernatural evil. “The idea of an inanimate object or location being a source of mystery, terror, a crucible for someone’s innermost wishes, imprinted itself on my imagination. It’s always the things that are prettiest on the outside that can harm us the most.”

All of McGuire’s terrors and tastes find potent and poignant expression in *Night Swim*. “The pool represents status, diversion, fun,” McGuire says. “It’s sexy; it’s seductive, and that’s what makes it deadly. The colors are rich and vibrant; the cool glowing turquoise water invites us like a siren call. But in the water, when the lights go out, it feels big. I also loved the idea of tapping into the universal memories we all have with the pool from our childhoods—reaching into the drain flap, skimming out dead bugs from the surface, getting your leg caught in the pool cleaner tube, playing ‘Marco Polo’—and turning these memories into unique scares. I would always say on set, ‘I want to smell the chlorine.’ I hope people smell the chlorine when they watch this movie on a big screen.”

Some have already caught a hint of *Night Swim’s* pungent approach to horror: In 2014, McGuire made an acclaimed five-minute short, “Night Swim,” in collaboration with his good friend, filmmaker Rod Blackhurst (*Blood for Dust*; the Emmy-nominated Netflix documentary *Amanda Knox*). Shot in the backyard of Grammy-winning musician Michelle Branch and featuring actress Megalyn Echikunwoke (Fox’s *Almost Family*) as a young woman who goes missing in her own pool when an evening swim leads to a close encounter with something creepy, the short made a splash on YouTube and helped McGuire launch a successful screenwriting career. Among the short’s many fans was Judson Scott, executive vice president at Atomic Monster and a *Night Swim* executive producer, who recommended the short to Atomic Monster founder James Wan. “It was abundantly clear from watching the short that Bryce was a gifted filmmaker with a command of craft and tone,” James Wan says. “The story it told was so mysterious and evocative, and Bryce had a compelling vision for how it could be turned into something bigger, stranger and scarier while also being emotionally resonant.”

Expanding the short into a feature film involved creating an epic, supernatural mythology with a gothic fairytale undercurrent for the story’s sinister swimming pool. McGuire gave his wicked water hole layers of dimension, both figuratively and literally. More important, of course, was creating characters with compelling arcs and credible motivations—and temptations—that could keep them swimming in the proverbial pool from hell. At the heart of the movie is the Waller family: Ray and Eve, a devoted couple who’ve spent most of their married life moving from city to city because of his career as a professional baseball player; and their kids, Izzy, a high school Freshman and budding competitive swimmer, and her younger brother Elliot, a bright, sensitive, awkward middle-schooler. After Ray is diagnosed with a degenerative illness, forcing him to retire from baseball, the Wallers put down roots, buying a simple, two-story house with a big backyard that has the potential to be a revitalizing oasis, as long they can properly purify its gunky, spring-fed swimming pool that has gone mysteriously unused for many, many years.

“As soon as you start with the iconic backyard swimming pool as the central location and antagonist, you’re already surrounded by certain ideas and imagery,” McGuire says. “What does the pool represent? What did it mean in culture? What does it mean to me? How has it been used in other movies? The pool may be the most iconic symbol of the American dream. So, we started thinking about who this family was and what their dream was. Even though this is the story of a professional baseball player who gets sick and must rethink his entire identity, what the family wants when they move into this house is universal. Health, stability, community, the pursuit of happiness. And the pool promises this to each of the family members in different ways. Each character was chosen to represent some fundamental wish or desire at each stage in life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood and finally, someone who medically is representing old age. They are closer to death, and the desire for youth, strength, and health is the strongest. Like the American dream itself, the movie asks the same question: W*hat do you need to be happy and what are you willing to do to get it?”*

McGuire’s partners at Atomic Monster were thrilled with McGuire’s script. “It checked off all the boxes for the kind of movies we love to make,” says Scott. Among many scenes that captured his imagination for *Night Swim’s* potential was the way McGuire had written a sequence in which a game of “Marco Polo” takes a suspenseful, sinister turn. “It struck me as an instantly iconic horror movie scene that everyone would go nuts over,” says Scott, likening the set-piece to the way James Wan staged the famous ‘hide-and-clap’ scene in *The Conjuring*. “I loved how he took this childhood game that almost everyone can relate to and turned it into something audiences have never seen in a horror movie before.”

Helping to propel *Night Swim* toward production was another short film written and directed by McGuire, “Every House Is Haunted,” about a young couple that buys a home with a troubled history, with themes and style that served as further proofs of McGuire’s directing talent and the core concepts of *Night Swim*. Also helping the cause: the blockbuster smash *M3GAN*, a joint venture between horror juggernauts Atomic Monster, founded by James Wan, and Blumhouse, founded by Oscar®-nominated producer and CEO Jason Blum. Looking to replicate *M3GAN*’s success with another similar team-up, the companies set *Night Swim* in motion for a spring 2023 start.

“What I liked about Bryce’s script was how it fleshed out the premise of a ‘spooky swimming pool’ in a credible, relatable, emotional way that felt contemporary and relatable yet classical at the same time,” Jason Blum says. “It’s scary; it’s emotional; it keeps you engaged by constantly begging the question: ‘What would you do if this happened to you?’”

**THE CHARACTERS**

**EDITORIAL NOTE: All actor interviews were conducted**

**prior to the SAG-AFTRA labor strike**

**Ray Waller**

**Wyatt Russell**

A Georgia native and natural athlete who fulfilled his boyhood dream of being a pro baseball player, Ray Waller seemed destined for stardom after he led the Major Leagues in RBIs during his rookie season. Instead, he settled into a solid if unspectacular career as a journeyman outfielder with some decent power in his bat. He seemed to be on the verge of a resurgence when he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, bringing his playing days and the Waller’s itinerant lifestyle to an end. Even though he tells his wife, Eve, he’s content to focus on his health and supporting her career, he struggles with depression and issues of identity and purpose. After his doctor advises him that water therapy might help mitigate the effects of MS, Ray begins doing laps in his new swimming pool. And as he begins to feel mysteriously great again, a shining obsession slowly starts to take possession of him: m*aybe my glory days aren’t behind me, after all.*

Playing Ray is Wyatt Russell, known to fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe as flawed Captain America wannabe John Walker in *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* and star of *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters*, an offshoot of the popular *Godzilla* movie franchise. His life-long career in Hollywood (as a toddler, he appeared in the 1987 comedy *Overboard* starring his parents, Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn) also includes the films *22 Jump Street* and *Overlord* and the acclaimed TV shows *Lodge 49* and *The Good Lord Bird*. In addition to acting chops, Russell also brought athletic experience to the role: he played hockey, on the amateur and professional level, for six years, until injuries forced him to quit. “From our first conversation, I saw how deeply he understood the psychology of an athlete and an athlete’s struggle to move on from the sport they’ve dedicated so much of their life to,” director Bryce McGuire says. “Wyatt was a joy to work with for me because he was completely fearless. Without saying too much, he has to go to some extreme places in the movie and he was never self-conscious. He understands how to connect to an audience and he’ll try five different versions of something to give you options. That’s a dream for a director. He was game for anything, very selfless and always thinking of the movie.”

While writing *Night Swim,* McGuire consulted with DANIEL MYERS, a friend and classmate at the American Film Institute and the film’s First Assistant Editor, for insight on how to portray Ray’s struggle with multiple sclerosis. Myers was diagnosed with MS during their school days. “Daniel was extremely gracious and integral in giving notes on the script and opening up about his experience with the disease,” McGuire says.

Russell says he was drawn to *Night Swim* because of the thematically rich story that McGuire had built from its fiendishly simple swimming-pool premise. “I just love everything that the swimming pool represented—how it gives life and takes it away; how it holds both good and evil—and how it made for a refreshingly different approach to a genre story,” Russell says, adding he also appreciated the trajectory of Ray’s increasingly dark arc and how the true evil that threatens Ray and his family isn’t supernatural but his own flaws. “I liked how his selfishness and his misguided strategies for dealing with everything that comes with M.S. ends up being the forces that drive him. He’s a nice guy with a nice, normal family dealing with very real human dilemmas, but there’s this little kernel of narcissism that leaves him vulnerable to corruption that can take over his soul. It was just a fun part to play.”

Being able to draw on his own experience as an athlete helped his performance. “There are aspects of this character that obviously I've felt before, or seen in people I know, where you're sort of losing your ability and sense of identity to injury,” Russell says. “I know the feeling of wanting to do anything, even if it’s detrimental to yourself or your family, to keep playing; it’s a hard drug to let go of. There was that element of it that I know Bryce wanted, and I was able to do that because I had lived aspects of that life.”

Just as vital to his performance was developing a winning rapport and camaraderie with co-star Kerry Condon, who plays Ray’s wife, Eve. “Collaborating with an actress as great and kind as Kerry was just great fun,” Russell says. “Being able to rehearse with her prior to filming helped us build a relationship and learn how to support her, because Eve’s character is central to the movie: the story unfolds mostly through her perspective. Kerry’s fun. She’s very present. She’s super-smart about story; she’s open and doesn’t hold anything back. Everything you imagine Kerry Condon to be when you watch her in anything that you've watched her in, she is.”

**Eve Waller**

**Kerry Condon**

A Navy kid who used to fear the water before becoming a skilled swimmer, Eve has been married to Ray since he made it to the big leagues in their early twenties, and she’s played point on raising their two children throughout the entirety of his career. Now that they’ve settled down, she’s taken a job as a school administrator and pursues her calling of being a special ed teacher. Their marriage is tested when Ray’s health improves—and his personality changes—due to the strange properties of their seemingly supernatural swimming pool, and Eve emerges as the hero of the story as her search for answers turns into a fight to save her family and her husband.

To play Eve, McGuire cast acclaimed Irish actress Kerry Condon, whose diverse work on screen includes collaborations with directors Paolo Sorrentino (*This Must Be The Place*) and Martin McDonagh (*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*) and a role in *Better Call Saul.* Her performance in McDonagh’s celebrated 2022 drama *The Banshees of Inisherin* earned her numerous accolades, including an Academy Award® nomination for Best Supporting Actress. Like Russell, she’s a veteran of the Marvel Cinematic Universe; she voiced the role of Iron Man’s faithful A.I. assistant, F.R.I.D.A.Y.). And she, too, brought to the part the added value of uniquely relevant athletic experience: Condon is an accomplished swimmer and swam competitively as a child.

“On the day I met Kerry, she had been nominated for a Golden Globe for *Banshees of Inisherin* and swam a mile in the ocean that morning—not a bad day,” director Bryce McGuire says. “She had to do some really demanding underwater work, especially late in the movie, that most people simply would not have been able to do. She’s an extremely tough and physical actor. Something special happens with Kerry every time the camera rolls. She really pushed me and the material, and she’s fantastic in the movie.”

Indeed, Condon says the opportunity to play in the water was a major reason why she wanted to dive into *Night Swim*. “I was always interested in doing swimming on-camera and combining those two great interests for me,” Condon says, adding, with a laugh, that she is particularly fond of movies set on the sea—“any movie with waves”—including *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* and *The Abyss*. “But the other major reason why I thought this was a great opportunity for me was that I’d never done a horror movie before, and I've always wanted a career that would allow me to be a character actress in every kind of genre.”

The role of Eve appealed to Condon because of Eve’s grounded, relatable heroism. “Usually in movies, the hero’s this strong, athletic superhuman,” Condon says. “But sometimes heroes are regular people, and Eve is just that, a regular woman, bringing up two children when her husband is off working, which is a hard and, too often, thankless job. She’s always been the one who is holding things together, but not getting all the glory in the family. Her marriage isn’t perfect, either, and that really appealed to me as well. There’s real love between Eve and Ray, but there’s friction between them, too. Their whole lives had been all about his career, and moving around, for him, and even now that he’s retired, there’s this narcissism to him that won’t allow him to let go of this dream, because he feels like he’s nobody without his career. I imagine being married to somebody like that must be quite lonely and have its challenges and playing that really interested me. There’s a lot of thinking that goes on without saying it, a lot of stillness. Combined with the parent-child dynamics that exist between Eve and the kids, and you get a character and a family that’s very grounded, which is important for the movie. The horror needs to be grounded in some kind of reality for the audience to believe in it.”

Condon says playing opposite Wyatt Russell, and sharing close quarters with him, greatly helped her performance. “With horror, you must be willing to go big, to establish the most extreme tone of a performance, then rein it back to find what’s right,” Condon says. “That can be difficult for some. But Wyatt is great at giving it 100 percent, totally going for it, and being very good at it, which in turn makes it easier for others to react to it in a very authentic way. We also laughed a lot with each other, because we shared a trailer during production, which, practically, is like sharing a toilet. In other words, sharing the trailer, we got on like a married couple, both having a laugh and driving each other nuts, which was just perfect for our characters in the movie.”

**Izzy Waller**

**Amélie Hoeferle**

According to Waller family lore, Izzy, 15, was born at the exact moment Ray clobbered a home run during his glory days as a pro baseball player. Like her father, she’s athletic (her heroes: Serena Williams and Jordan Larson), and now that her family is finally putting down roots, she’s looking forward to a normal, stable teenage life—full of friends, maybe a boyfriend, possibly competing on the swim team— and she doesn’t want anything spoiling that, especially her anxious little brother, Elliot. So, when Elliot starts claiming that there are scary strangers malingering in the backyard at night, lurking around the pool, Izzy thinks he’s acting out and trying to ruin the family’s good new thing. But as it becomes clear Elliot isn’t seeing things, Izzy’s better Big Sister self begins to emerge.

Playing Izzy is young actress Amélie Hoeferle (*The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*), who, like her director, captured Hollywood’s attention with an award-winning horror short, “The Boogeywoman.” “I saw the film while we were casting and thought Amélie was brilliant in it,” director Bryce McGuire says. “And then, subsequently and coincidentally, I learned she had taped for the role of Izzy, so it was an easy choice.”

20-year-old Hoeferle says that horror vibes come easy to her. “It's funny that I keep getting drawn into these scary stories, I find it amusing,” Hoeferle says. “I used to be an anxious child. I still am in some ways. I used to fear a lot of things. So doing horror movies is a way of taking back that fear and taking control of it.”

Doing this horror movie, though, first meant reading the *Night Swim* script, which proved to be a chilling experience unto itself. “When I first got the script, I was so scared reading it,” Hoeferle says. “It was night, the lights in my house were dim, and I remember reading it at my desk and feeling like someone was behind me. Just in general, the script captures that scary feeling that there’s something lurking in the shadows, hunting you, and more specific to the movie, it captures that dread you feel when you’re in the water, whether it’s the ocean or in a pool, and you let yourself wonder: *Is there something underneath me?* It’s such a potent, primal fear and I thought it would make for a very entertaining, scary movie if we could put that on screen.”

Hoeferle says she could easily connect with the character of Izzy. “She reminds me a lot of myself when I was 15,” Hoeferle says. “I’m the oldest kid in my family, too, so I know this sense of responsibility to your younger siblings, being a role model for them. Izzy is sporty and I did sports growing up. I played soccer, did martial arts, and I loved swimming. When I was a kid, I wished I could be in the water all the time. I saw myself in her in many ways.”

She also saw something of her own family in Gavin Warren, who plays her on-screen brother, Elliot. “Gavin’s the younger brother I never had,” Hoeferle says. “We had this immediate sibling bond, so much so that I thought: *Oh, my gosh, this kid might be my actual brother. I should go take a DNA test!* He was so fun. The first time we met, he was telling me about a TikTok video. I didn’t know what he was talking about, and he started making fun of me, asking me if I even knew what a meme was. Our sibling rapport just took off from there, and from that point on, we were just always goofing off with each other. It was great.”

**Elliot Waller**

**Gavin Warren**

Elliot, age 12, is a quintessential tween, caught in the transition zone between being a little kid dependent on his parents and a teenager wanting independence. He looks after the family cat, Cider, and likes playing with action figures, but even more so wants to connect with his action hero dad. Elliot aspires to be on a baseball team, but he’s still waiting on a growth spurt, some self-confidence and the family birthright of natural athletic ability to kick in. Elliot always struggles when the family moves to a new city, so no one believes him when he claims that he’s experiencing a most peculiar form of bullying, in their own backyard, in the form of sinister phantoms who’ve taken a menacing interest in him.

To play Elliot, director Bryce McGuire chose Gavin Warren (*12 Mighty Orphans; Fear The Walking Dead*), who made his film debut in 2019, at the age of 11, in Damien Chazelle’s *First Man*. **“**Elliot was probably the toughest to cast,” McGuire says. “We saw a lot of kids and none of them were quite right. Elliot had to be sensitive, a little fragile, the opposite of a jock like his dad. We needed that disconnect between them. The first audition, I really liked Gavin, but he was a little older than the character I conceived. So, I did some re-writing so we could cast him, because I knew he was just right for the part. He perfectly captured the sensitive purity of this character. It didn’t hurt that Gavin was an absolute fish either, an amazing swimmer who loved the water. Even when we weren’t filming his scenes, we couldn’t keep him out of the pool.”

Warren wanted to stay in the pool for good reason. “I hated getting out of the pool, especially at night, because in between shots, I’d be all freezing cold from being wet!” Warren, now 15, says. “But I love swimming, and I always loved being in the water during the movie, whether it was doing scenes or hanging out with the stunt team. They taught me so much.”

But the water work wasn’t always easy for him, especially if the scenes involved interacting with the pool’s ghoulish entities. “Whenever Elliot goes into the pool, things get creepy,” Warren says. “He seems to be able to see the weird, monstrous things that haunt the pool that no one else can. But for me, seeing these monsters was rather scary, because the make-up on them was so good. I did not want to get in the water with them.” But Warren’s experience in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead* served him well. “I had an awesome time making this movie,” Warren says. “I love scary movies and TV shows, and I love doing them, whether it’s doing scenes with monsters or getting dragged around by them. I love doing my own stunts, when they let me.”

Warren adds that the support from his fellow castmates and McGuire’s clear vision and leadership made it even more fun. “Bryce is such a great director,” Warren says. “He’s so nice and so energetic. It’s great to have someone who’s good with talking to kids and knows how to explain things and break it down easier.”

**THE SWIMMING POOL**

*Night Swim’s* toughest casting challenge was finding its monster—the Waller family swimming pool. Director Bryce McGuire wanted to build his lethal lido on a Hollywood backlot, but the unusually wet winter season of 2022-2023, with its record-setting precipitation, washed that plan away. So commenced an epic scout of Southern California backyards. “We searched for houses with pools in almost every neighborhood in Los Angeles,” McGuire says. “We needed a big pool with lots of space around it, because I wanted it to feel like you were on an island surrounded by darkness when a character was in the water alone. I also wanted big trees on the property, but not palm trees; I wanted the movie to feel like it could be taking place in Anywhere, America. But we’re shooting in L.A., so that’s not easy to come by. There were so many options we almost tried to ‘make work’ by piecing together the front of one house and the back of another and the pool of another, but it became such a scheduling headache.”

McGuire finally found his watery nightmare fuel in Altadena, California, an ethnically diverse, middle-class suburban community about 13 miles northeast of Los Angeles near Pasadena. “The house had everything we wanted,” McGuire says. “The yard was wrapped in massive, live oak trees above the deep end that almost feels like a gaping mouth about to swallow you whole. The pool was over 9 feet deep and 44 feet long with a diving board and an interesting silhouette. When I saw the pool looking down from the second story window, it took my breath away. It was everything I imagined.” (Some scenes did require deeper water, so McGuire shot for four days in a 13-foot-deep Olympic sized pool in Chatsworth, California.)

While McGuire did utilize blue screen for some shots, *Night Swim* was mostly filmed “wet for wet,” as opposed to “dry for wet,” meaning it didn’t rely on computer animation to generate a simulation of water. McGuire and his director of photography, Charlie Sarroff (*Smile*), used older, wider lenses to make the pool seem as terrifyingly vast as the ocean when it goes into supernatural mode. For underwater sequences, they collaborated with two specialists: cinematographer IAN TAKAHASHI (James Gunn’s *The Suicide Squad*; Beyonce’s *Lemonade*) and stunt coordinator MARK RAYNER (*Underwater*, *Inception*, *Baywatch*), whose wet-work team included performers who had just come off *Avatar: The Way of Water*. “Shooting in water is twice as slow, twice as expensive and twice as dangerous as shooting on land,” McGuire says. “It was a huge logistical challenge. Everything from keeping the water clear enough to have visibility and having the right flashlights to the amount of time talent could safely hold their breath required specific problem-solving and strategies that you’d never even think about until you’re making a movie called *Night Swim*.”

For swim stunts that involved anything more complicated than a dog paddle, the cast would first study action drawings created by storyboard artist JOHN McKEY (*M3GAN*, *The Black Phone*) then watch Rayner’s divers demonstrate the choreography—which sometimes required the actors to don goggles and linger underwater to observe them before doing it themselves. Each member of the cast did have to pass a basic swim test prior to production, and unlike their bedeviled characters, the cast always had lifeguards watching out for them during every take.

For early scenes of the Wallers discovering the derelict pool littered with fall leaves and coated with scummy algae (and for the moment in which Ray accidentally slips into it), production designer Hillary Gurtler (*The Craft: Legacy*) and the art department team created large vinyl prints that were fitted to the bottom of the pool to create the illusion of dirty water, so as to prevent damaging the pool and to spare actor Wyatt Russell the unpleasantness of flailing in muck. As the pool had to belch up bubbles from undetectable subterranean regions, it fell to special effects foreperson ZAK KNIGHT *(The Forever Purge,* *Insidious: The Last Key*) to modify the actual pool in order for it to spew evil dark water. In order to achieve this effect, the team moved the over 27 thousand gallons of water into storage tanks on the street and kept it warm in order to send it back into the pool the next day. Special effects technician CADE FALL (*Black Panther*, *Based on a True Story*) then rigged up special hoses and nozzles that could percolate various patterns and sizes of supernatural bubbles from which our evil entities would emerge and return to.

**THE LOCATIONS, FX MAKEUP AND MUSIC**

* *Night Swim* was filmed on location in Altadena, California and the Los Angeles region over the course of 34 days in 2023.
* To create the prosthetics for the film’s waterlogged ghouls, special makeup effects designer JUSTIN RALEIGH of Fractured FX utilized techniques and materials developed while working on *Aquaman and* the TV show *Swamp Thing* and had to craft pieces that could absorb water and, if necessary, slyly hide and disguise the scuba gear worn by the performers.
* The music was composed by Mark Korven. “Mark has scored some of my favorite horror movies in the last decade,” director Bryce McGuire says, citing Korven’s music for *The Witch, The Lighthouse* and *The Black Phone*. “I wrote Mark a letter telling him that his music is on all my writing playlists and pitched him my vision for the music feeling like it could only come from the water, like some drowned choir rising from the depths, and he was in. He is such a sweet and gifted dude. Only Mark could create sounds this strange and chilling.”
* In much the way that *Night Swim* references ‘80s film genre classics, so does the film’s soundtrack. Wyatt Russell’s character Ray Waller has an affinity for 1980s metal. “The soundtrack of eighties pop songs—Def Leppard, Poison, Quiet Riot, Sabbath, White Snake—were always about Ray being drawn to the past,” McGuire says. “It was probably music he listened to with his dad in the car on the way to baseball practice growing up.”

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