

Aquarium technology can be fascinating

By Doug Margeson
Journal Reporter

There are big ones and little ones and tall ones and short ones and round ones and square ones. There even are oval and pentagonal ones and pie-shaped ones.

All contain fish. And that's what really counts.

"We tell people that an aquarium is a responsibility. It is a living thing in your midst. It requires commitment and knowledge on your part. But the fish are all worth it," said Steve Clayton.

Clayton is the owner of Clayton Aquariums Inc., the largest aquarium design and maintenance company in these parts. He and his staff of designers, cabinet-makers and biologists will build and maintain almost any kind of aquarium you can imagine. Their products and services aren't exactly cheap, but that's the way it should be.

"If you do it carelessly and on the cheap, you will end up with a big mess," said Russ Kelly, Clayton's service manager. "You need a good design and quality products. Patience helps, too."

Patience helps because, as a



Journal photo

Aquarium service technician Bill Zech works on removing a piece of coral for cleaning at one of the aquariums at Overlake Hospital.

living environment, an aquarium has a schedule of its own. Even aquariums maintained by professionals like the folks at Clayton need to be monitored by their owners.

Sound intimidating? It shouldn't, Clayton said. Not only are aquariums beautiful, they are a great deal of fun.

Aquarium technology has been undergoing steady improvement over the last 30 years or so, with the result being pumps, heaters, filtering systems, feeding systems and the like that are amazingly efficient and depend-

able. So, with proper care, most aquarium fish actually live longer, and better, than their counterparts in the wild, Clayton said.

Aquarists can reproduce most any marine environment you like: Fresh water, salt water, coral reef, tropical, even the waters of Puget Sound. Salt water is more complicated than fresh water because its chemistry is more complex. Cold water is more complicated than tropical because it's easier to heat water than cool it.

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Aquarium

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In the aquarium

The creatures in an aquarium vary considerably in size, shape, color and personality according to their environment. Generally speaking, salt water fish are more colorful than fresh water and cold water fish. As

a result, most of Clayton's clients want salt water tropical aquariums.

Clayton's biologists can stock those tropical tanks with most any fish you want. Usually, however, they recommend two dozen or so standard species that can thrive in aquariums.

"Ultimately, our goal is to keep the fish alive," Kelly said. "So, I suggest simplicity. Don't worry, the fish will still be beautiful."

The bigger the aquarium, the easier it is to maintain. Clayton recommends salt water aquariums be at least 100 gallons. Size is just the first consideration.

Where will the aquarium be in your house? To avoid excessive algae growth, it should be out of direct sunlight. Will it be in a room with a lot of traffic and activity? Then it will need fish with placid dispositions. Will it be free-standing, built into

a wall or protruding from a wall as a design element? Will you be out of the house for long periods of time? Then you will need someone to maintain it.

Any shape you want

Fortunately, all of it is doable. Plexiglas aquariums can be made almost any size of shape. So can the cabinets necessary to store their equipment. That equipment is silent and dependable.

These days, aquariums can even have automatic feeding systems that will dispense just the right amount of food at just the right time every day.

"We often talk to potential clients about their level of interest," Clayton said.

"Interesting thing is, once we get their aquarium up and running, their level of interest grows. They can't wait to get home and check on their fish. Aquariums do that."