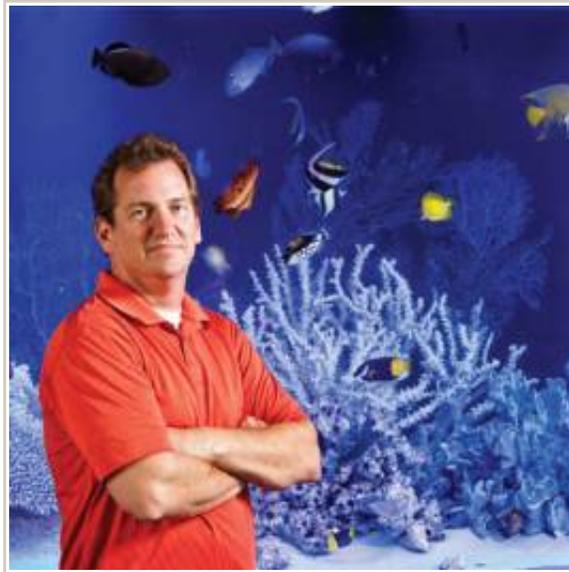


AQUARIUM DESIGNER MARK COLLIER

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Photos by Garrett Cook

Mark Collier poses in front of a custom-designed 900-gallon residential saltwater aquarium that measures 8 feet in length.

Aquaria.

Most of Collier's designs are for saltwater tanks, which he calls "more colorful and vibrant" than freshwater models because of the range of fish that can live in them. He says that his specialty is devising large, elaborate aquariums. "I do a lot of the jobs others won't take," he explains. A few projects he cites include a 30-foot-long design embedded in the floor of a home's media room that flowed to an outdoor pond, allowing fish to swim both indoors and out. Another was based on the lost city of Atlantis and featured hand-built underwater pillars. Other designs have utilized living coral, including some species propagated in captivity.

The fish that inhabit his tanks are a lot like people, Collier remarks. Each is different and has

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WATER WISE

You may know of Mark Collier by his other "name"—Arizona Fish Guy. Collier has been designing, installing and maintaining custom aquariums for residential and commercial clients for nearly 25 years. He estimates his creations number several hundred.

The Phoenix native says he was fascinated by fish and aquariums as a boy. His father was a hobbyist, and Collier spent much of his free time at the local fish store. He jokes that he was there so often the owner felt compelled to offer him a job, and he started working for the company after graduating from high school.

For the next 10 years, he learned all he could about designing and installing tanks while also doing extensive research on fish. In the late 1990s, he branched out and started his own firm, Custom Marine

its own characteristics. Puffer fish, for example, tend to be friendly and eager to see their owners. Selecting the right mix of fish for an aquarium can be one of the most challenging aspects of a project. "A tank is usually limited by who gets along with who," he comments, noting that he prefers hardy wild-caught species, such as angelfish, clown fish and tangs.

Collier says that one of the things he enjoys most about his job is coming up with designs that push the boundaries of typical tanks. "I'll tell clients, 'I've never done that before, but I can figure it out.'"



Photos - From left: Some of its inhabitants (of the aquarium pictured with Mark above) include a spiny lionfish—a species known to eat smaller tankmates—and an adult blue-green-striped Koran angelfish.
