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By Malcolm Parry, Vancouver Sun June 30, 2011

POOL PARTIES: Internally heated concrete gave Bellano Tile Co. principal Rita Bellano a \$200,000-plus job and the thorniest technical and bureaucratic challenge she'd ever faced. The locale was Whistler's Lost Lake Lodge, where the failure of electrical elements in a circular swimming pool's surrounding concrete slab impaired the slab's snow-melting ability. That was a no-no for Vancouver Coastal Health, which oversees such matters in Whistler. It also meant a hefty repair bill for the lodge's strata council, whose members didn't like the look of plain concrete, anyway.

Council president Carlo Alberi wanted a tile surround for the pool like one he'd seen at an Italian ski resort. So he bore down on fellow owner Giovanni (Benny) Maameur, who happened to be Bellano's future husband. Thus, the problem devolved to her and brother Paul, who operate the Burnaby company their parents Pietro and Tina Bellano founded in 1972. Disregarding a recent trend for Chinese products to take over perhaps half of the ceramics market, Bellano Tile still deals only in Italian-made goods. "To stay in business, Italians had to do what they do best," Bellano said, meaning art and "technical" goods with superior strength and durability.

Those were required by Vancouver Coastal Health, along with specific slip-resistance coupled with the contrasting demand for comfort underfoot. Also, a fail-safe heating system had to be found. And Lost Lake's council wanted no jointing strips imparting what Bellano calls a "cartwheel" look to the circular surround. With necessary expertise in those areas, she still had to visit Italy to find a porphyry-based tile sourced in the Dolomites, and Toronto for a heating system with the required technical and ecological properties.

More conventional mosaic tiles are used in pool steps and throughout the adjacent spa, with depth indicators and such all hand-formed. The installation was honourably mentioned by the Terrazo, Tile and Marble Association of Canada for technical product application. Still, Bellano is most proud "that I have brought rock from the Dolomites to Whistler," a mountain composed mostly of Early Cretaceous metamorphic rock and shale from a long-ago ocean floor. .