Creating Swimmable Sea Islands

by Tiko, 9 February 2007

Introduction

Here's a pic of the kind of island we'll be building with this tutorial (though not the house!). I've called it a ***Swimmable Sea Island*** because the water around the island is a Sims2 swimming pool, not pond water.

Although in March 2005 a tutorial by *HabboArwen* on the Maxis site (now removed but versions by others are still there) showed how to use the game's swimming animation to get Sims swimming in painted ground (!), I've always much, much preferred the beauty and realism of Sims swimming in water, and many of my buildings have mingled pools and ponds. So this tutorial will help us to get them swimming in the sea – or maybe you'd prefer to design a river or lake. ***Note:*** Gameplay can be given a new dimension if you place 2 or more islands on a lot. ☺ Sims will need to swim to get to, say, a hot tub, or bowling lane ….. or even a secret date! (See Step #64.)

As deep as Sims can go

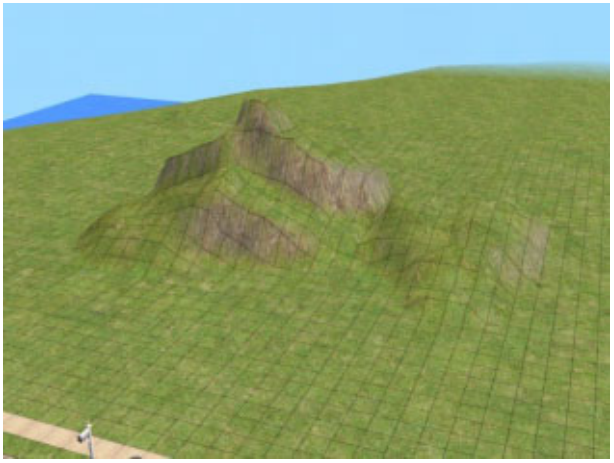
One of the striking features of the Sea Islands we'll be making is that we'll be taking both the ground and the pool down as deep as Sims can go. At Step #27 I'll say a bit more about this, but for now here's a pic of a Sims swimming – towards the moon! How? Because we can get the game camera *underwater* and see Sims in a new aspect!

In theory it is – just – possible to create something like it with the original game or *University.* In January 2005 a fine builder called *Sunni* at MTS2 developed a simpler method of working on this for the original game. But realistically, you need to have *Nightlife* or a more recent Expansion Pack. For *Nightlife* Maxis really overhauled the behaviour of pools. A gridsquare of pool became much like a gridsquare of building Foundation. With *Nightlife*, we can work with diagonals, cut bits out of a pool, stick extra bits of pool onto corners, and so on – just like Foundation. And also in *Nightlife* and more recent EPs, the blue water table (the surface of a pool) quickly repairs itself to follow the contours of the ground. (For more on this see my *Building Pool Waterslides* tutorial.) ☺

Step 1.

It's perfectly possible to design your island first, in the middle of a large lot. Though we're going to start with the pool, I'll start by giving a few illustrations of this route.

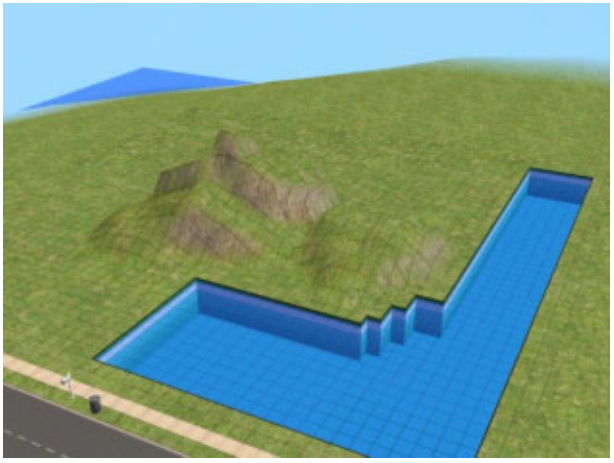
In this case I've created a mountainous little area in a 5 x 5 lot.



Step 2.

Then I've started laying sections of pool around it, cutting into the contours of the island to be guided by its shape.

You can use the Diagonal Pool Tool at the same time if you wish – in practice I've found it easier to use the Square Pool Tool first, then add in diagonals. I guess it depends how your mind works!!!!! (Mine seldom does.) ☺

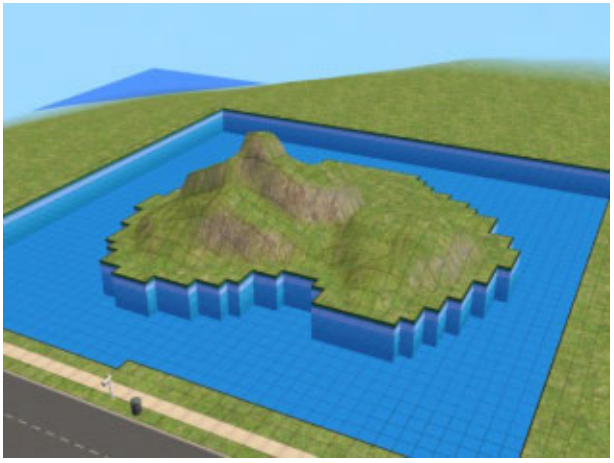


Step 3.

Here's the initial result. There are hardly any straight edges longer than 3 gridsquares – this is **a helpful tip to keep remembering** in getting natural, organic curves along your coastline.

Now I would move on to use the diagonal tool, but although you may find you prefer making the island first, there is a slight problem with making the island this way. Your dream house may not fit!

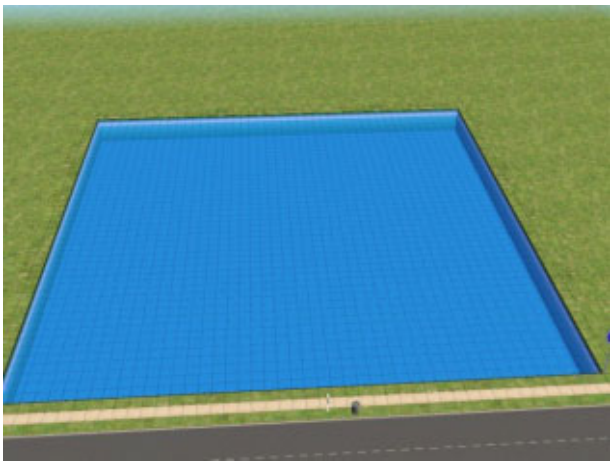
I've found that when adding a house, the house should come early on! ----- We can always change the island once we've got the basic house we want.



Step 4.

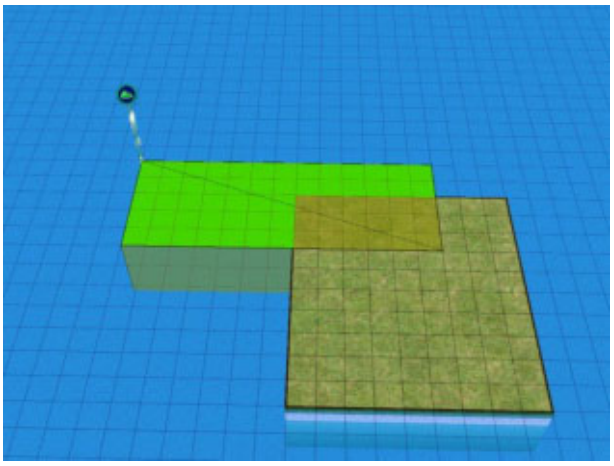
So we're going to start with a giant pool. Here it is, placed in a 5 x 5 lot. You'll have to leave a 2-gridsquare path round the outer edges; on the roadside, I've just left 1, but you can change this later.

Note: If you've never placed such a large pool before, don't surprised if nothing happens once you mark out the area and click. On some computers it can take 20-30 seconds for the pool to 'take'!!



Step 5.

Then use the Ctrl key and your mouse button to delete smallish rectangular areas at the middle of the pool. Try to create an unusual, ***not***-very-square shape overall.

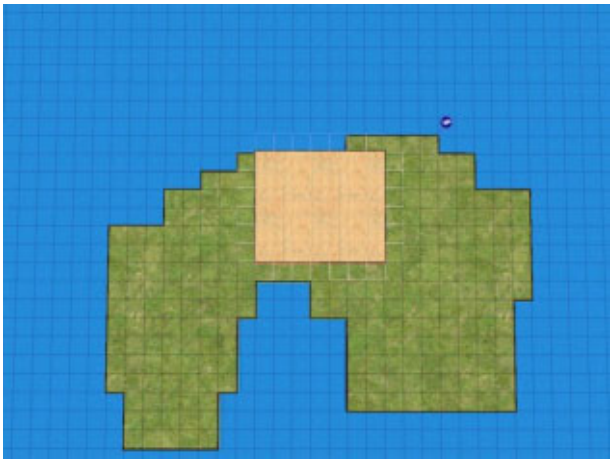


Step 6.

So here's a wonky version of Australia. ----- Sorry, all you cobbers! I've gone into TopDown View view (= press T on your keyboard), which we'll need to use a lot in this tutorial.

Now take a few minutes to plan out the kind of house you want to build. It doesn't need to be built on Foundation, but if you want a natural, contoured landscape then Foundation will certainly help.

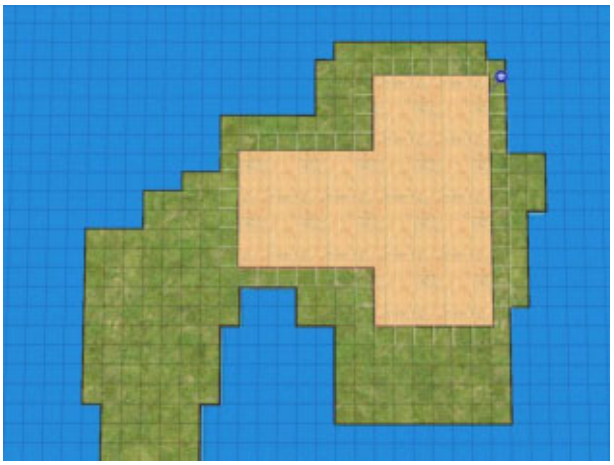
My lower-level floor plan involves a T-shape on its side, with the stem 7 x 6 gridsquares, and the crossbeam 6 x 13 gridsquares. I've laid the stem here, and you can see there's not enough island yet.



Step 7.

So here's an enlarged island, with the house layout fitting nicely in. ☺

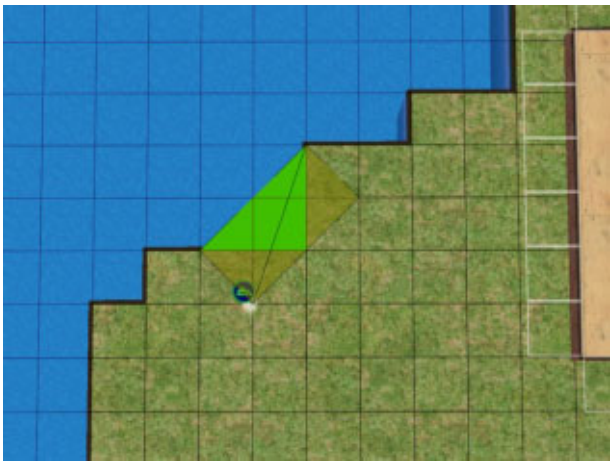
What I'll need to do (while you're not looking) is add a little more land (= deleted pool) around the top right and bottom right corners of the house. We're going to lower the pool edges, and if there's only 1 gridsquare between house and pool edge, the Foundation will look like it's hundreds of meters deep!



Step 8.

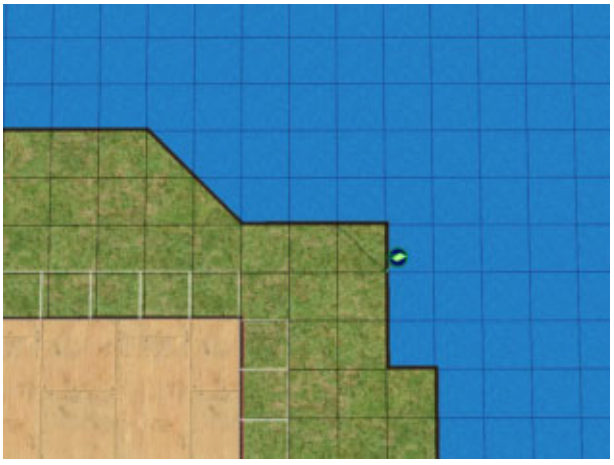
Now we can switch to the Diagonal Pool tool, and start softening the corners of the island.

Mostly this will involve deleting little triangles of pool using Ctrl + Click, as shown here.



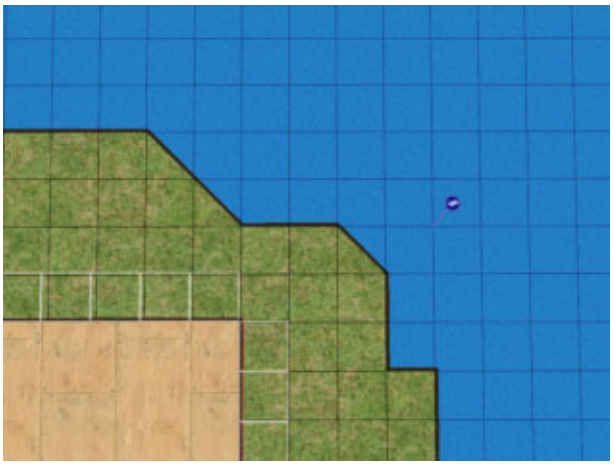
Step 9.

But sometimes we can usefully add little triangles of pool too. Here's the top right corner of the house (see – told you I'd been busy!) We want to smooth that sharp corner .....



Step 10.

..... like this.

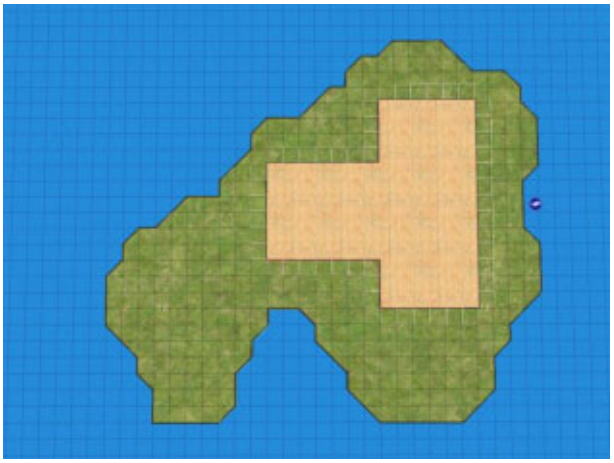


Step 11.

Here's the final result.

There are only 2 straight line edges longer than 3 gridsquares. One is for a bridge end; the other will become a small cliff face.

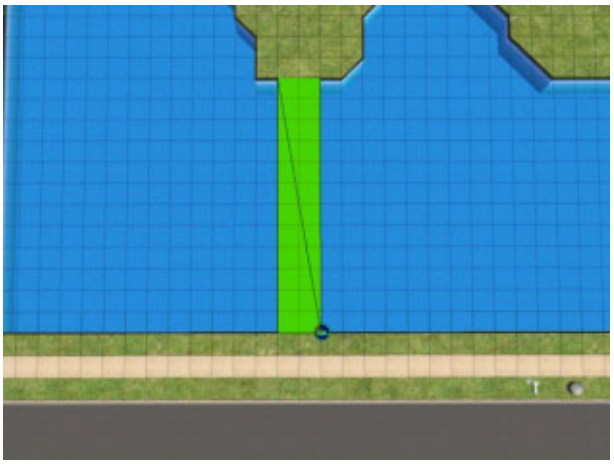
Another tip is not to make any promontories (little stick-out bumps) less than 3 gridsquares wide, because when the pool edges are lowered you'll be left with a strange narrow ridge of ground which Sims – or you – can't use.



Step 12.

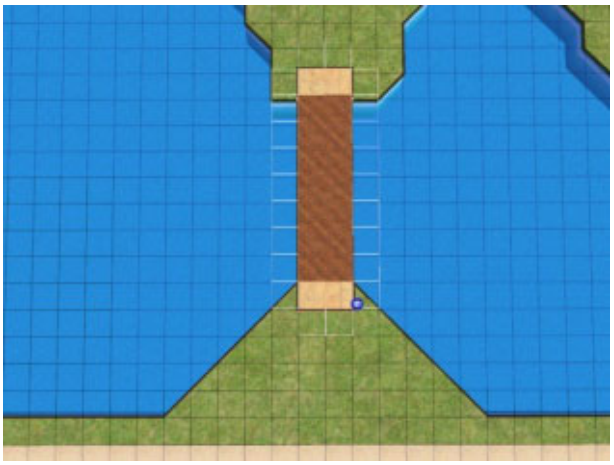
Now let's add a bridge. (Of course you may prefer to have your Sims swim over to the island – and maids and other Service NPCs are *delighted* to take their clothes off and take a dip!!!!! But for now we'll add a bridge.)

For the basic method, check with my *Building Pool Bridges* tutorial, available here at TSR. Delete a strip of pool 2 gridsquares wide (Sims can sometimes obstruct one another on a 1-tile wide bridge).



Step 13.

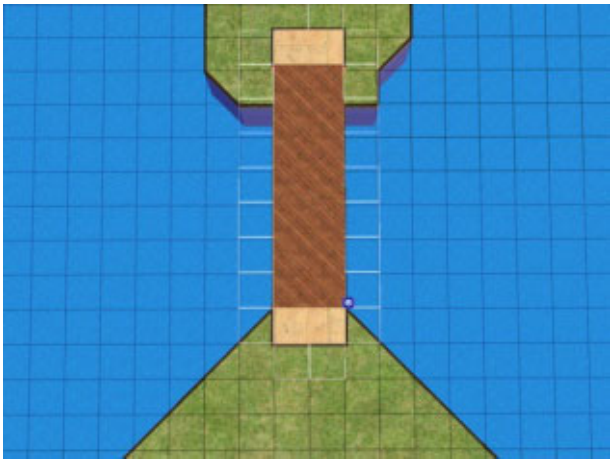
I'm going to add a bridge that's 9 gridsquares long. Now usually I'd position the bridge as shown here – with the ends (made of brick Foundation) butting onto the pool edges.



But since we're going to be lowering the pool edges around the island, that end of the bridge has to be given an extra strip of ground. Why? Same point as at Step #7 – otherwise we'll have Foundation stretching down into the very bowels of the earth/sea.

Step 14.

So this is the right sort of layout, with an extra row of gridsquares under the bridge.



As you've seen, I also started deleting bits of pool alongside the sidewalk to give a wider approach to the bridge.

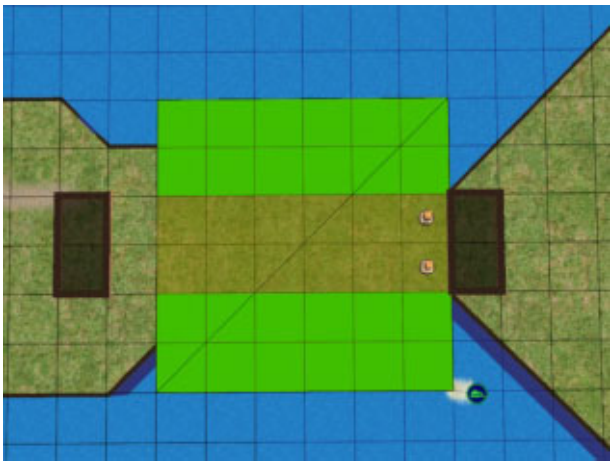
Step 15.

Although I've referred you to my *Pool Bridges* tutorial to design and shape your bridge (and you may enjoy my other Bridge tutorials too for different designs), I need to briefly show one extra thing we need to do.

PageDown to ground level. We've got the columns of the Column Decking at both ends. We need to remove them at the island end *without* adding pool back against the brick Foundation. So use your Ctrl + Click method with the Pool tool again ….. only DON'T click at all. Just hold down Ctrl and mark out a rectangle as here, then calmly let go of key and mouse button. The columns disappear.

Step 16.

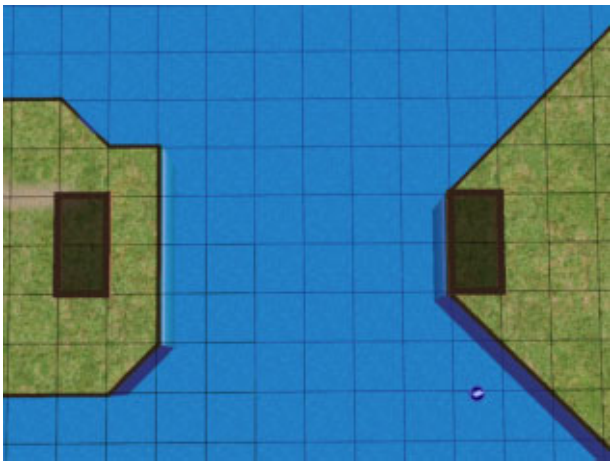
Whereas for the rest of the ground under the bridge, use Ctrl + Click to cover the whole remainder of the ground under the bridge, starting and finishing outside the bridge area as shown here. This time, click your mouse button and about ½ a second later click firmly again.



Step 17.

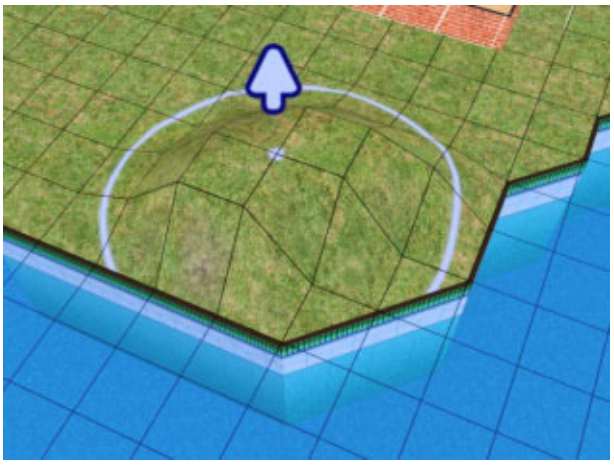
This should be the result.

If the ground remains, just Undo and try Step #16 again. Be patient – it will work!!!!!

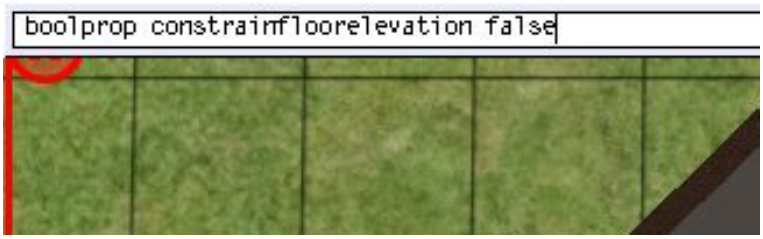


Step 18.

Now we're going to start landscaping our island, just to get an idea of what the final result will look like before we finishing its details. Use the RaiseTerrain tool, mixing the Medium and Small settings to get natural hills.



Step 19.



I also want to raise the overall height of the house's Foundation, and to do this we'll need to turn on the building command which allows us to modify the heights of floors and walls. Hold down Ctrl+Shift and tap C. In the white Commands window that opens at the top of your screen, type:

boolProp constrainFloorElevation false

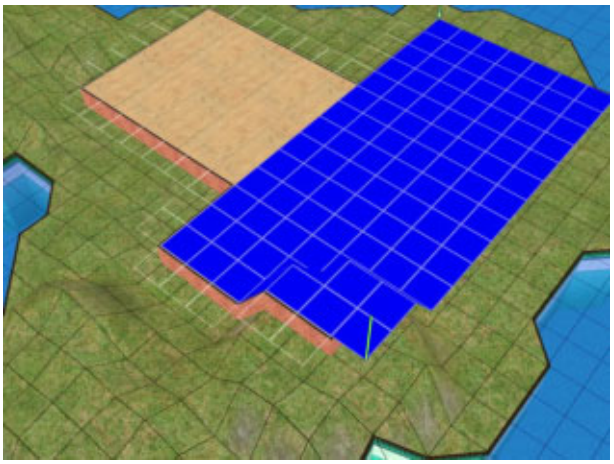
and press Enter. If you've got the words right (the command is almost always called 'CFE' because of the middle phrase), the window will close. (The capital letters don't matter - it's just easier to read.) ☺.

This allows us to use the RaiseTerrain tool to lift up part of a house Foundation to any height we desire. Here we're just going to raise it by 4 clicks.

Of course, on a flat piece of land we'd normally just raise the ground first, then start laying Foundation from the new height, without needing to turn on the CFE command. But here we needed to get the layout of the house in place before landscaping.

Tip: When using the CFE command a lot, copy and paste it – minus the words true or false – into your Commands window.

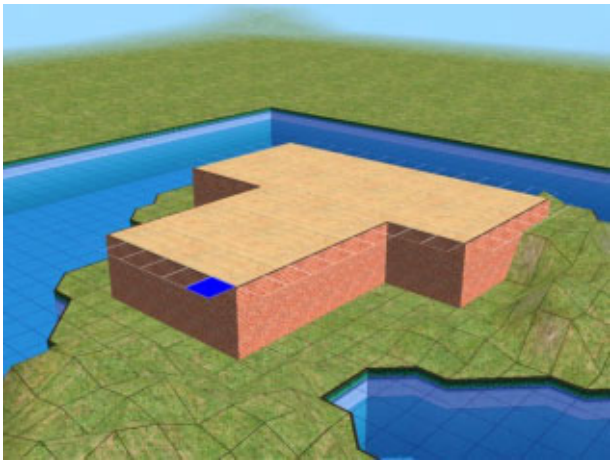
Step 20.



Using the levelTerrain too, we can then sweep across the top surface of the Foundation in a few movements, to lift it all to the new height .....

Step 21.

..... giving us this result.

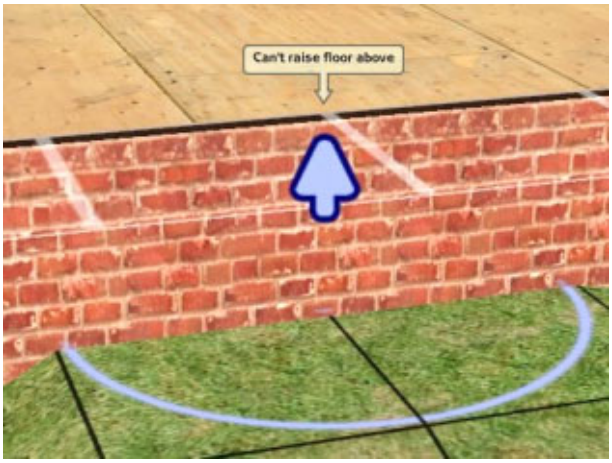


Now we just need to switch off the CFE command. Open the white Commands window again and type in

boolProp constrainFloorElevation true

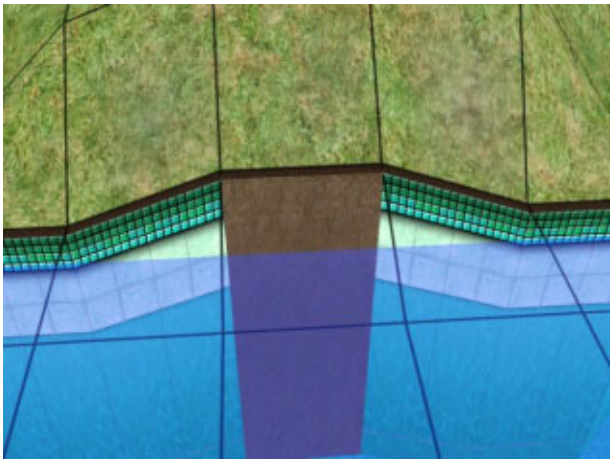
and press Enter. The built levels are locked or 'constrained'.

Step 22.



Foundation can be stretched downwards for a long way – in fact the whole depth of the game's ground – without affecting its flat top. So now we can use the RaiseTerrain and LowerTerrain tools to slope the land around the house. The only limit is the game's default minimum gap of 4 clicks or steps between levels – so when using the RaiseTerrain tool we'll reach this minimum gap and the game will tell us "Can't raise floor above".

Step 23.

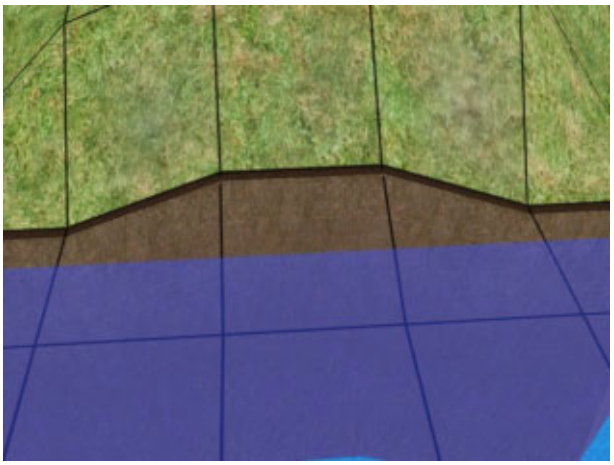


We're now almost ready to start forming our Sea Island. One last step is to replace the tiled Pool Walls with a more natural stone or rock face. The replacement walls will only be visible where we place diving boards and ladders or wherever you want a more gradual slop to the shoreline, but since this can be done as quickly all round the island as in one or two places, let's have a go.

Turn the CFE command ***On*** again (see Step #19) and with the RaiseTerrain tool raise one panel of pool wall by 2 or 3 clicks (the exact number doesn't matter). Place your chosen wallpaper by holding your cursor against the top edge of the tiled wall .....

Step 24.

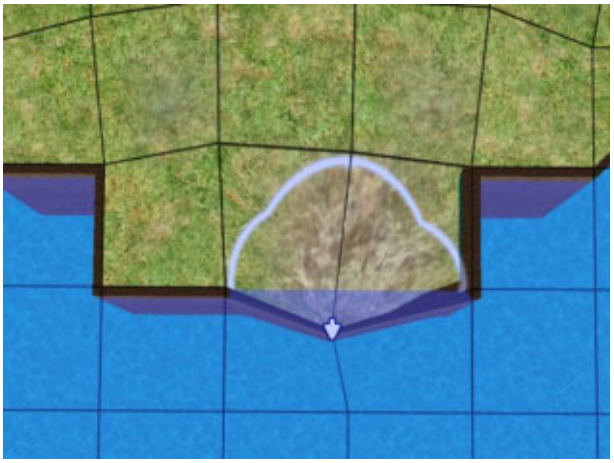
..... then hold your your Shift key and click your mouse button. All the pool walls around the island (though not the outer walls of the pool) are replaced with one click.



Please note: At the time of writing, replacing pool walls does NOT work with *Pets*. So I'd recommend building in *Nightlife* or *OFB*, then re-installing *Pets*. For more on this method, please have a look at my *Replacing Pool Walls* tutorial!

Step 25.

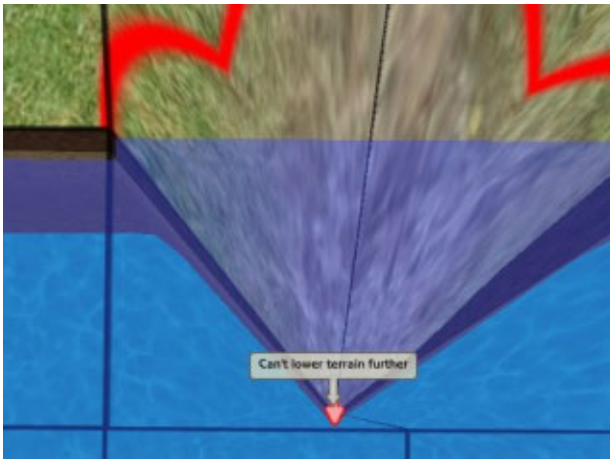
Now we're ready to starting turning our island from a lump in the pool into a natural looking geographic formation!!! Leave the CFE command turned ***On***.



Go to the game's vertical or TopDown View. With your LowerTerrain tool set to Small, start lowering one single corner on a pool wall, as shown here. Don't click individual steps, just hold down the mouse button, take a deep breath and watch. Don't shake the mouse!!! Don't blink!!!! ☺

Step 26.

After maybe 15 seconds the dent you've created in the fabric of space-time will flash red and the message "Can't lower terrain further" will appear.



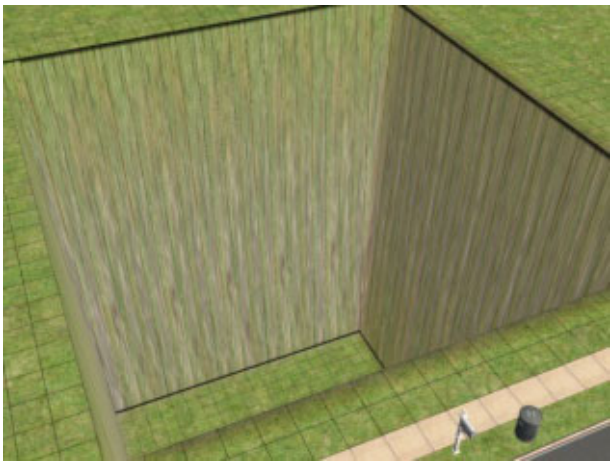
This is – for the Sims2 game – **Absolute Zero**. The pool wall is a mere 4 clicks high down there. Our main aim is to keep the pool wall completely out of sight – so in theory we don't need to go down quite this far – but as you'll see it's much much quicker and easier to do this and the following steps (# 28-39) than to lower each corner by – say – 80 clicks, and it also provides beautiful effects.

Step 27.

How deep have we gone?

Well – purely in the interests of Sims2 Science, of course – I went over to another lot to measure this. Clicking isn't the best way to measure this scale, so using Connecting Stairs, 4 at a time, I found that Absolute Zero is 150 steps or clicks down.

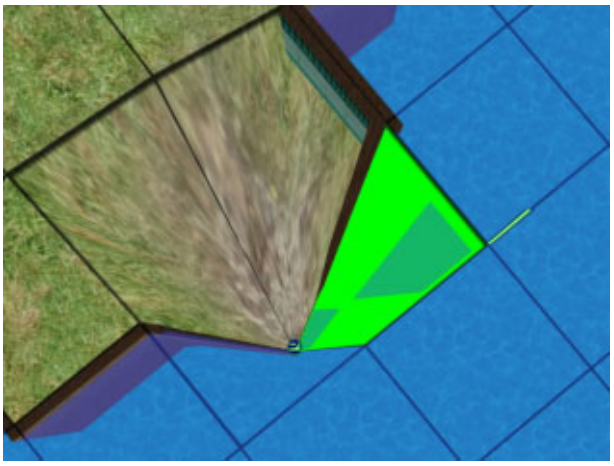
Here's the resulting pit!!!!! If you like planning deep basements, that means it's 9 levels + 6 steps down.



Step 28.

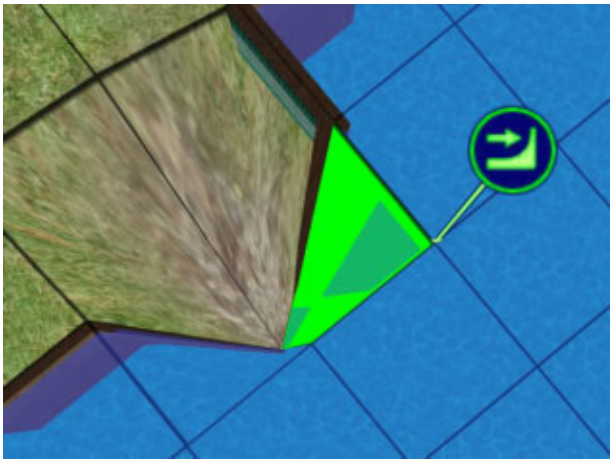
Now I know what you're thinking! You're thinking, "Whoa – Am I gonna have to do this all round the island? No way, Jose!"

Happily, you don't need to. ☺ Just use your LevelTerrain tool to level off all the pool wall at Absolute Zero. Place the LevelTerrain tool on the corner we've just lowered (you MUST be in TopDown View) and .....



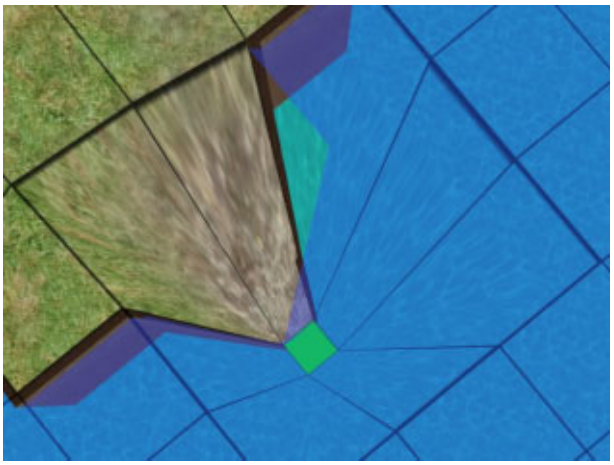
Step 29.

..... carefully ..... slide the tool to the opposite corner of one gridsquare, as shown here.



Step 30.

Here's the result – one flattened gridsquare of pool, 150 steps down.

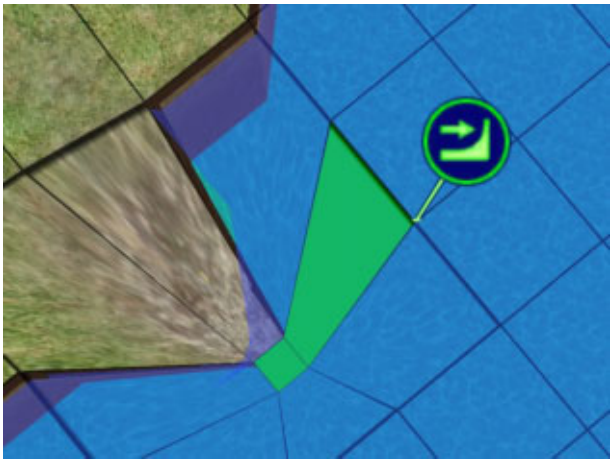


Step 31.

Now you ***could*** just zoom round, smashing the pool wall down as you go, but of course you'll be taking down a lot of the island – and the pool – with you as you go. So you'll still need to get the hang of tidying up the mess anyway!!!

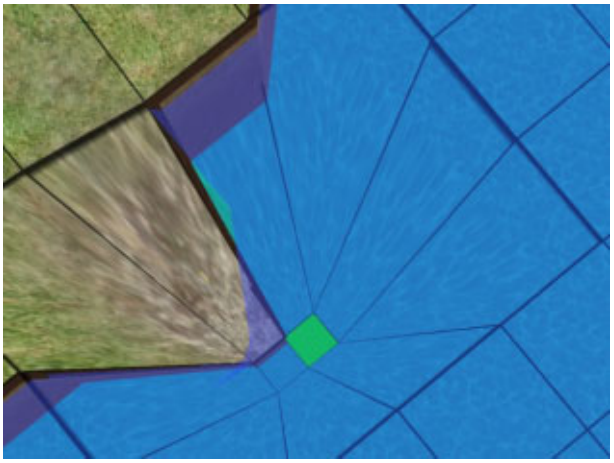
For now, try this more gentle approach, guys!! ☺

Use the LevelTerrain tool to work round the pool edge. When there's a corner, go right or left one gridsquare,



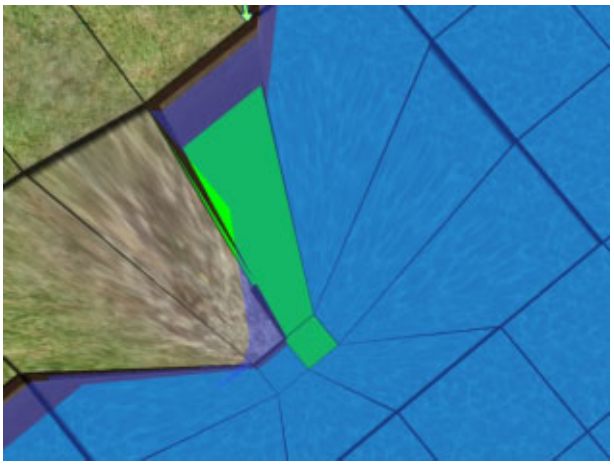
Step 32.

..... to produce this result, ...



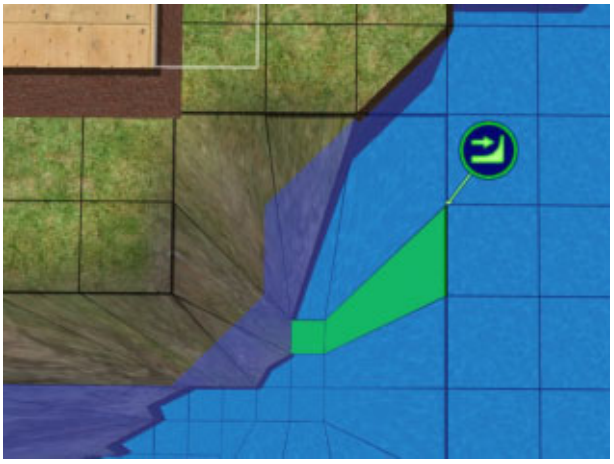
Step 33.

..... then forward 1 gridsquare.



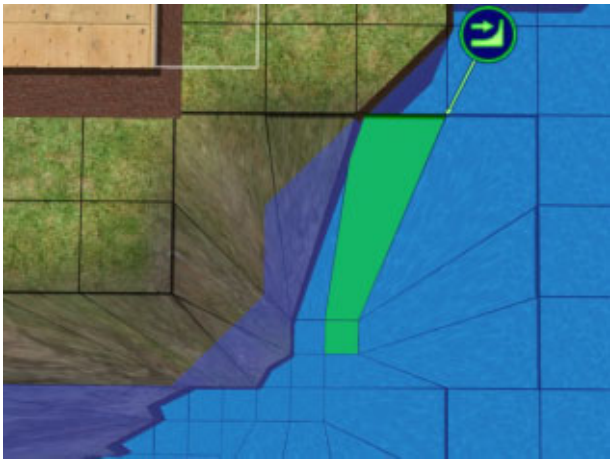
Step 34.

When you come to a diagonal pool wall, don't lower the whole gridsquare it crosses. Use another chess-like or crab-like movement and go sideways 1 gridsquare .....



Step 35.

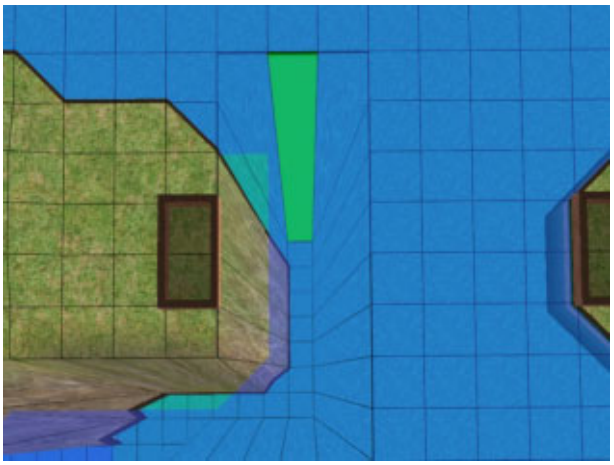
..... and then forwards 1 gridsquare. If you look very hard, you'll see that the diagonal pool wall does peak a little in its middle (like all diagonal walls do in the game when raised or lowered), but when playing the game it's impossible to see.



Step 36.

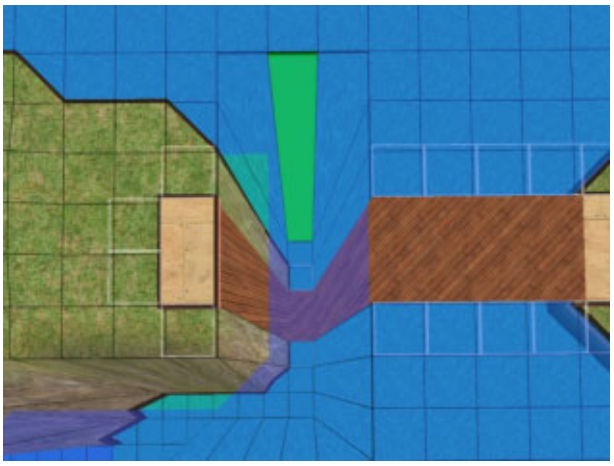
Finally, as we work our way round the island – always in vertical mode – we'll come to the bridge.

Slide the LevelTerrain tool across the pool wall edge that runs under the bridge, as shown here



Step 37.

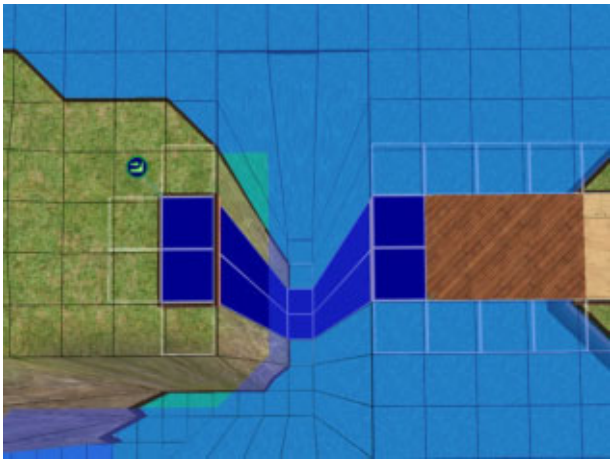
Press PageUp to go up one level and you'll see that – of course – this drags the bridge down as well. Oh darn – panic – what can I do?!!!



Step 38.

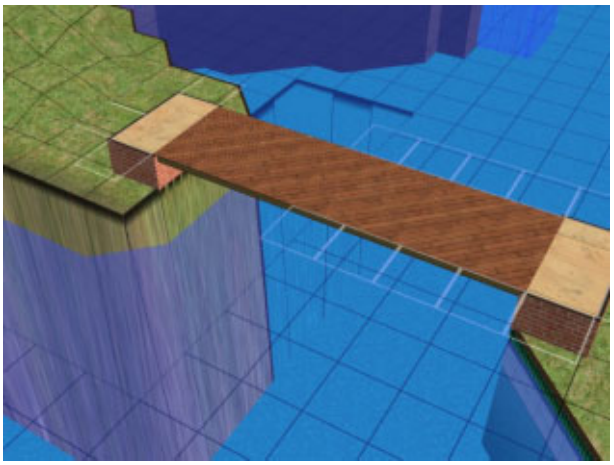
Happily, in the world of CFE what we do at a higher level doesn't normally affect lower levels (in fact only where we create a gap between levels of less than 4 steps).

So just take your sturdy LevelTerrain tool in your hand again, and sweep from one side of the bridge's big dent across to a level empty white gridsquare on the opposite side (the dark blue squares in this pic).



Step 39.

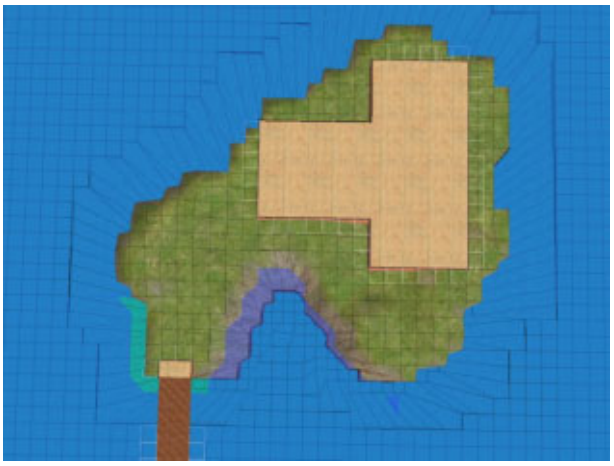
Here's the result.



Step 40.

OK! Well done – that's the bit that needed most concentration. ☺

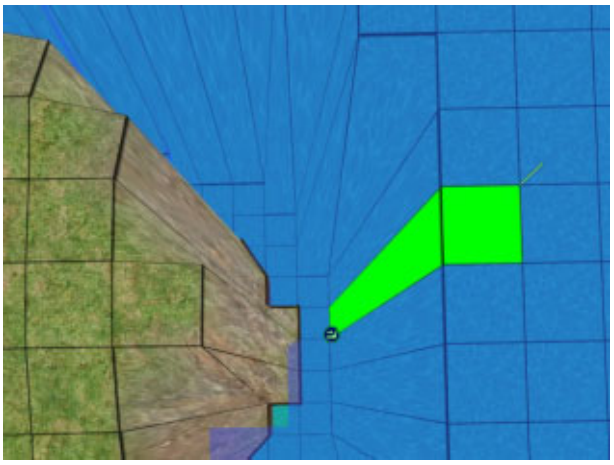
Go to TopDown View again if you need to, and have a look at your whole island. What we can see is that at the moment there are a lot of sharp corners – simply because we've levelled whole gridsquares all round the pool.



Step 41.

Get your view closer to the island's 'coastline' and use your trusty LevelTerrain tool to raise the outside edges of all the flat lowered gridsquares of pool floor.

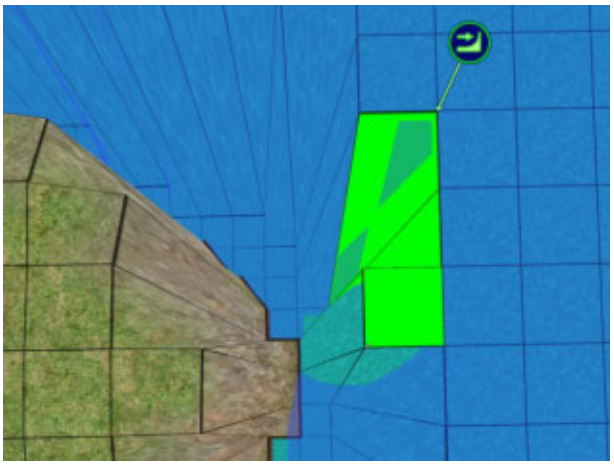
Start one at a time until you get the hang of it.



Step 42.

Then starting raising small rows of the outer edges of your flat lowered gridsquares of pool floor.

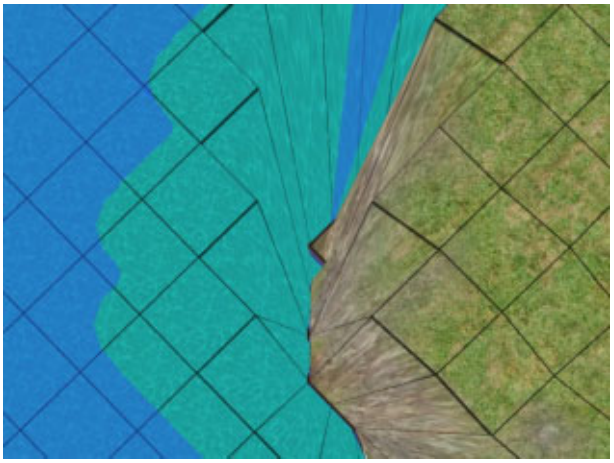
Be careful NOT to slide onto any bit of the actual pool edge ..... though if you do, don't worry, just calmly UNDO and try again. ☺



Step 43.

Here's a pic of a slice of the coastline.

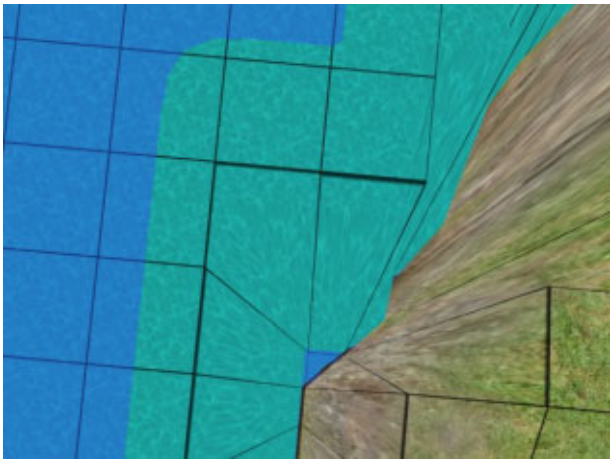
You'll probably get the graphic glitch that I do – the blue surface of the pool is broken or torn and we see straight down to the pool floor. Don't worry about this – *Nightlife's* improvements mean that this will quickly be restored, either when we use a different building tool or by saving the lot, going up to the neighborhood, then going back into the lot again.



Step 44.

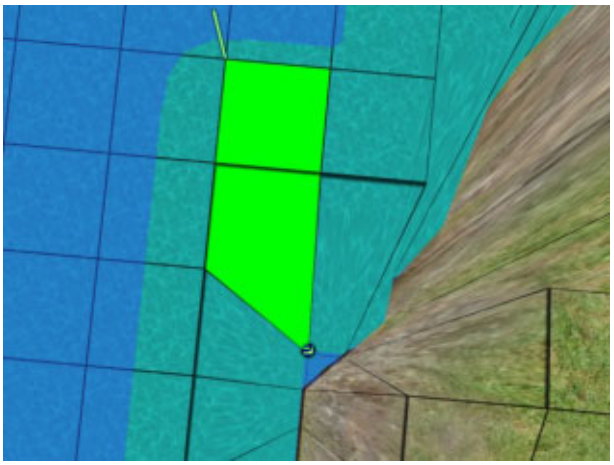
When you have corners to ease round, make sure every possible corner of the pool's gridsquares is raised – except of course the ones at the pool wall edge.

So when you come to a diagonal piece of coastline, as here .....



Step 45.

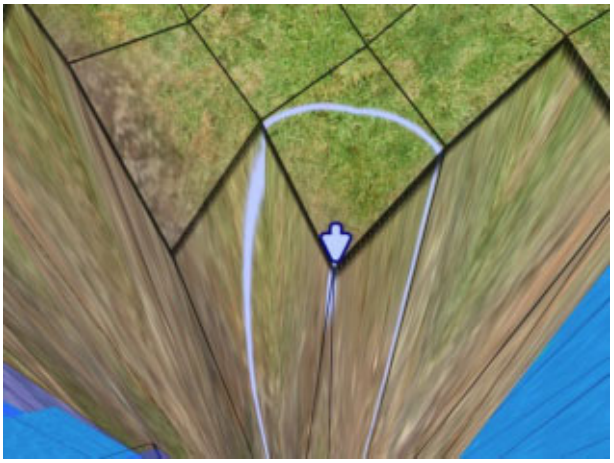
..... just level off the one corner opposite the diagonal. If you try to raise the gridsquare edges you'll also raise a corner of the island as well.



Step 46.

We now need to soften all the sharp corners, both on the island's coast and the pool floor.

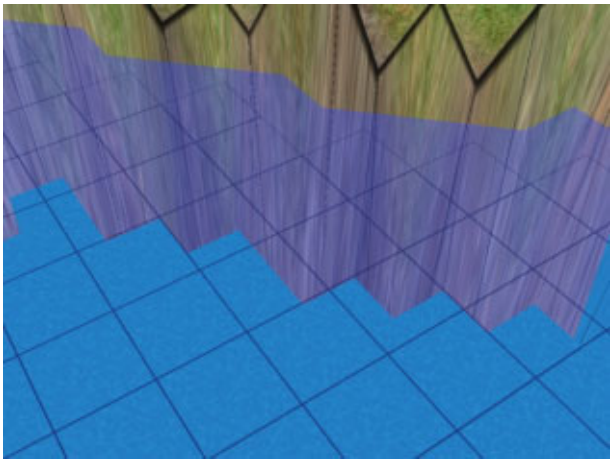
Come out of TopDown View, and use the LowerTerrain tool – set to small – to lower each sharp corner of coast – somewhere between 6 and 12 clicks. Vary the depth to create an undulating effect.



Step 47.

Then when you're happy with the shape of your island's edges, get close in and look at the lines of the pool floor.

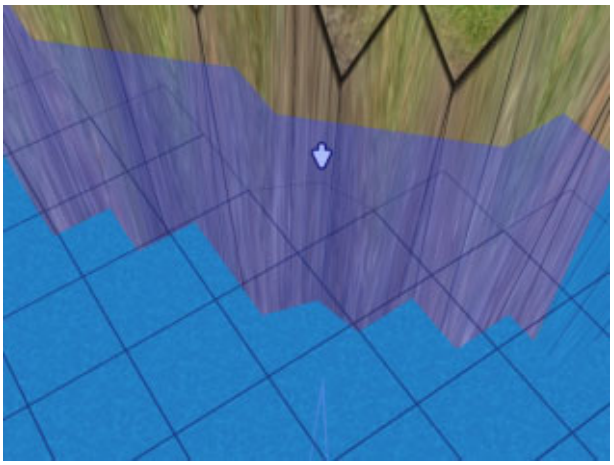
See all those shark's teeth edges?



Step 48.

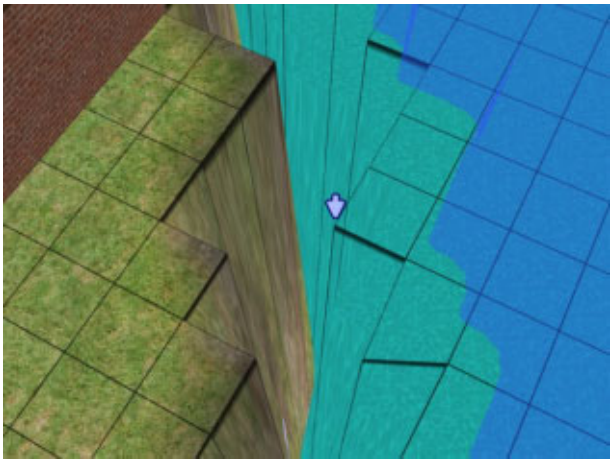
Use the LowerTerrain tool on top of the empty black gridsquares above the floor corners.

Tip: If you leave Shadows set on (to medium or high on your Options/F5 Graphics settings for the game) then the floor area you shape will take on a pattern of variously shaded squares. It's OK, but the floor will look much more attractive and curved if at this point you simply turn Shadows **OFF**. You can always turn them on again whenever you want them!



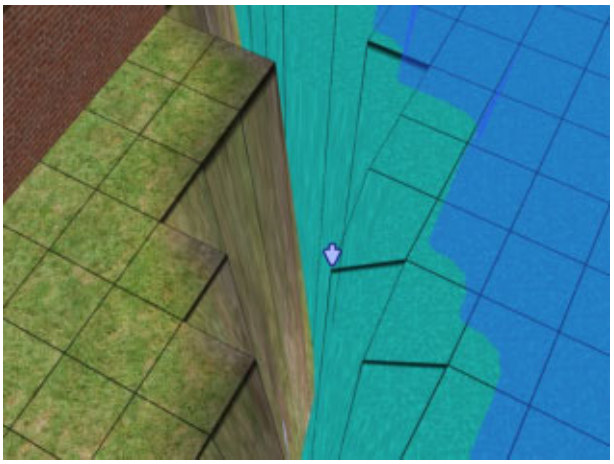
Step 49.

You'll find that, working from this viewpoint, after a few clicks the LowerTerrain tool will try to jump onto the ground that's graphically behind it, so once you get the idea, rotate the view sideways so that your cursor isn't also touching the ground.



Step 50.

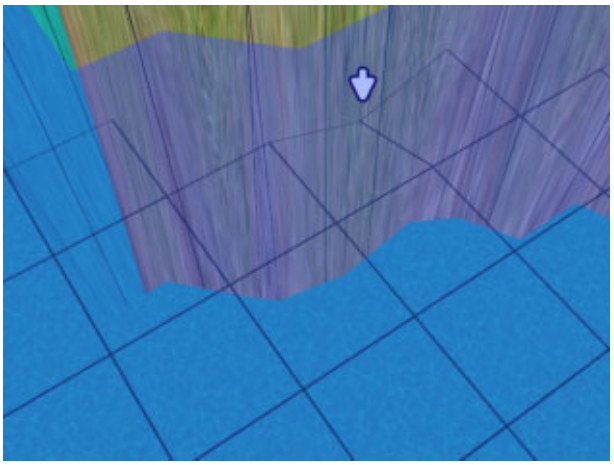
Then you can click down easily – usually 6-8 clicks, but vary it and experiment! ☺.



Step 51.

Where you also have straight-edged lines of pool floor, try curving and undulating these as well. Fewer clicks – between 2 and 4, aiming for natural slopes and curves!

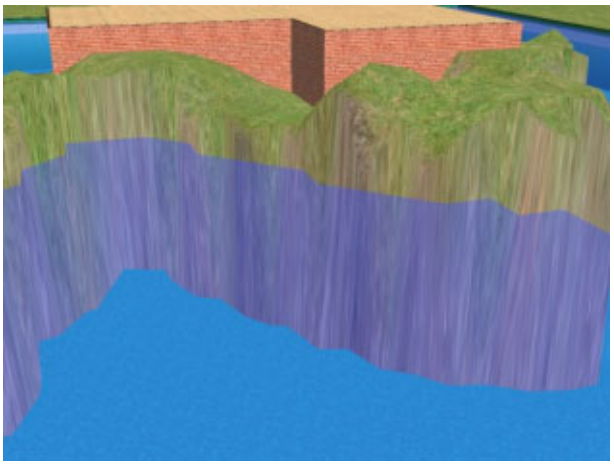
(I know – you've just ignored all I've been saying and made some whopping stalagmites and rocks spearing up out of the water ..... ok, good for you !!!! ☺)



Step 52.

I sure hope you enjoy shaping ground and water – it can be a relaxing way to spend half an hour. Well, I think so. ;)

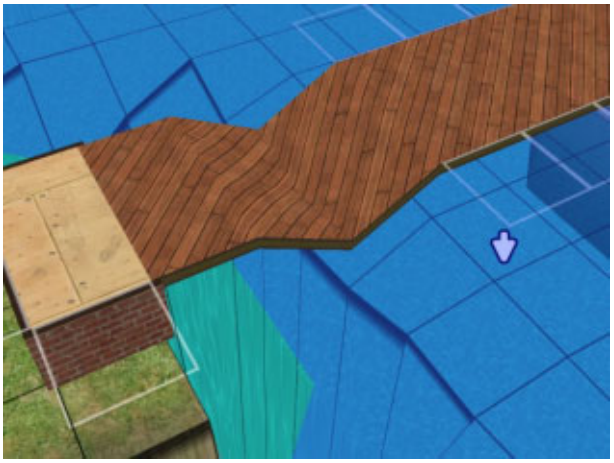
Anyway, this is how the coastline is shaping up, with the ground under the house also sloping in different ways.



Step 53.

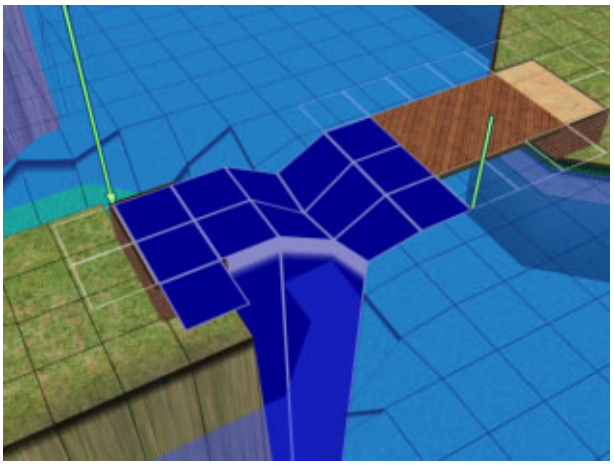
When we come to our bridge, follow Step #51 here too, curving the straight edge of pool floor underneath the bridge.

PageUp and of course this has lowered the bridge itself .....



Step 54.

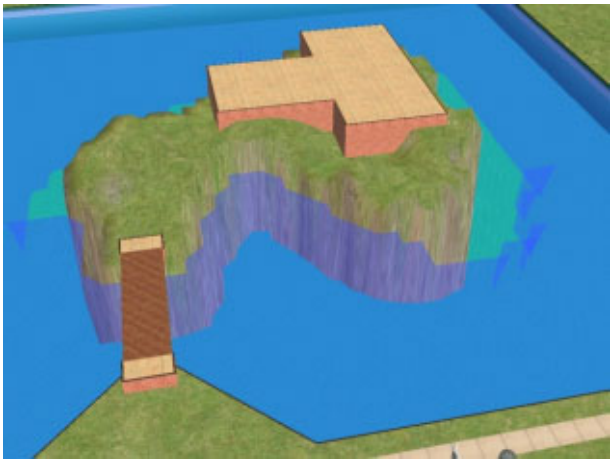
..... but all we need to do is repeat Step #38 and level the bridge.



Step 55.

Here, finally, is the whole island. The tears in the water table or pool surface are still visible here. As I said, if you use another build tool (maybe start deleting some more of the pool by the sidewalk) or if you go into Buy Mode and add a few objects, the surface should miraculously repair itself.

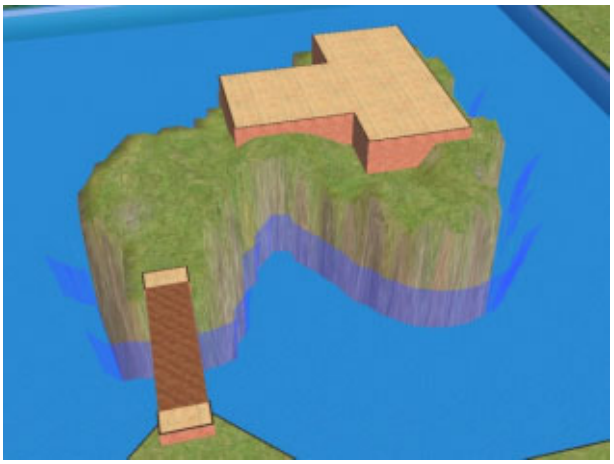
If not, just Save, go up to the Neighborhood then re-enter your lot .....



Step 56.

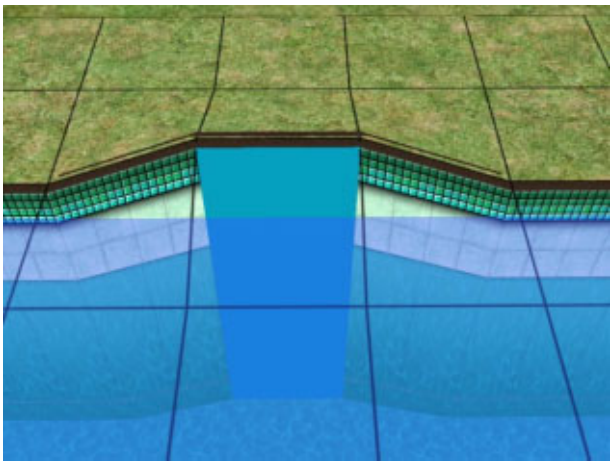
..... and you'll find you have created a beautiful and peaceful island paradise. ☺

(Yeah, I know, ***you've*** got sharp rocks and stalagmites everywhere!)



Step 57.

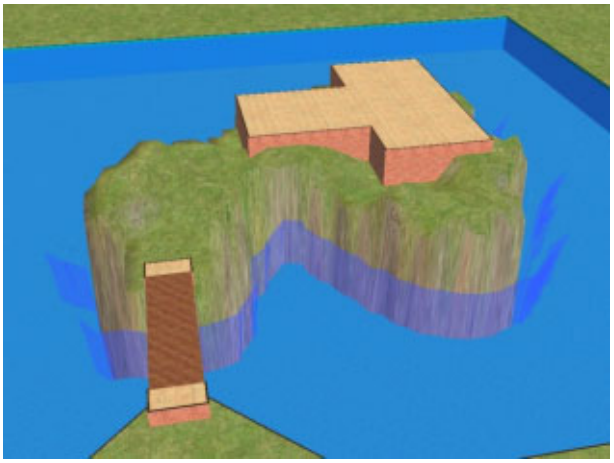
All that remains is to tidy up the rest of the sea / river / lake and add a diving board and ladder.



I've found that the colour of the game's *"Paradise Blue" Paint* wallpaper is very close to the colour my graphics card gives me for the water surface of the pool, but do experiment since different cards will use different colour palettes. Then – repeating Steps #23-24 but this time on the outside edges of the pool / sea – raise a panel of pool wall by 2-3 clicks, then hold down Shift and click with the wallpaper of your choice.

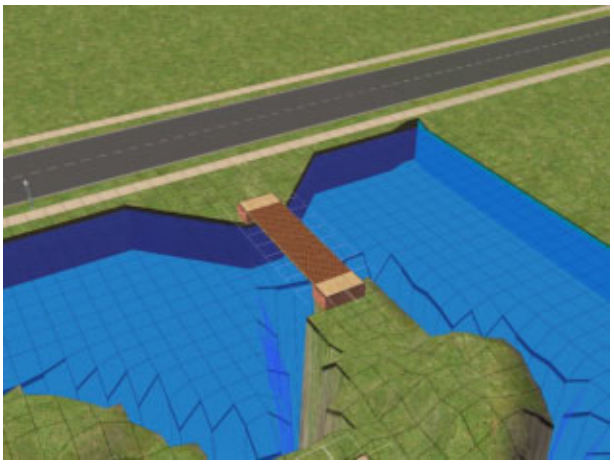
Step 58.

Here's the result for my graphics card.



Step 59.

I've preferred to keep the coastline next to the sidewalk with a rocky appearance, so I've pasted this edge with the same paper as the island itself. (But it's up to you.)

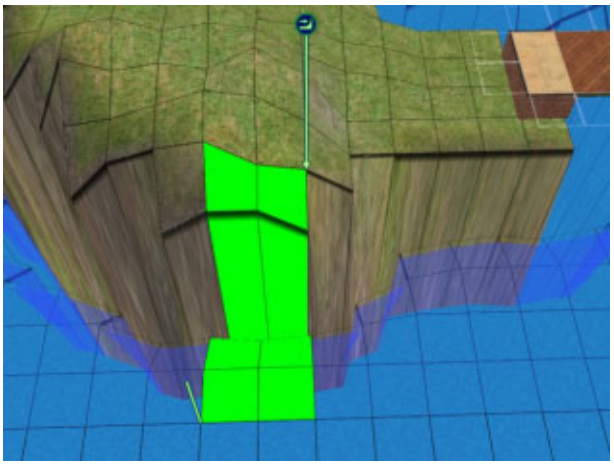


Do do this quickly and easily, without also replacing all the blue you've just added, raise the 2 end panels of pool wall alongside the sidewalk edge, PLUS one more next to one of them. Replace the 2 end panels individually, just by clicking once per panel, then go to the 2nd panel you raised, and use the Shift + Click step to fill in all the wall panels between the 2 ends – in one go. ☺

Step 60.

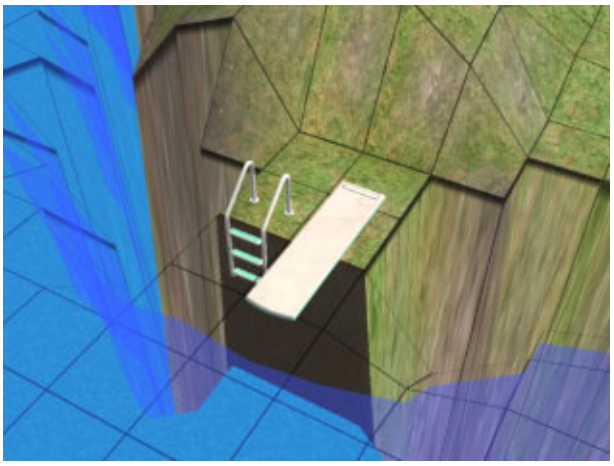
Onto the diving board and ladders.

You can have these at separate points on the island's coastline, but I've chosen to keep them together. Sims will only be really happy swimming **if the pool depth at the the board and ladder is exactly normal**, so use the LevelTerrain tool to slide across from a level gridsquare on the pool / sea, onto the island as shown here.



Step 61.

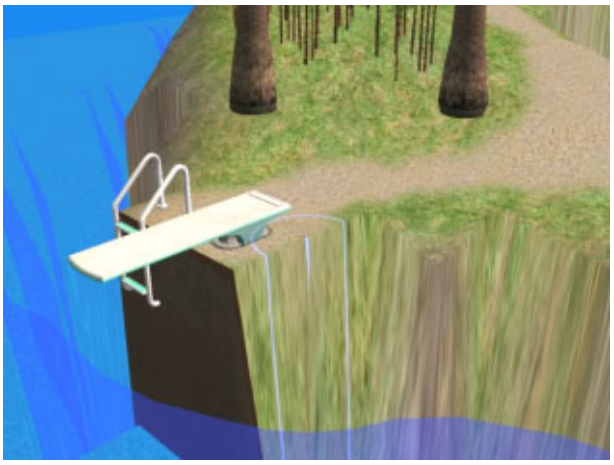
On the board and ladder go and they fit very snugly, and the darkness of the pool wall looks more like a rocky cliff (I hope!!!).



Step 62.

To finish (well, sorry, you've still got your house to build !!!!) use a mixture of planting and Ground Cover (= Terrain Paints) to give the coastline a rocky and / or sandy look.

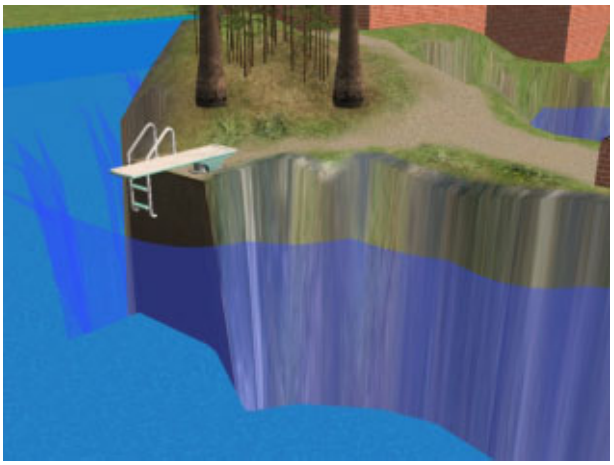
Because the coast walls are nearly vertical, when using Ground Cover, place the cursor on the edge of the drop as here. **Note:** To get the new image to form you'll need to keep painting for much longer than on flat ground. (Save your work every few minutes at this point.)



Step 63.

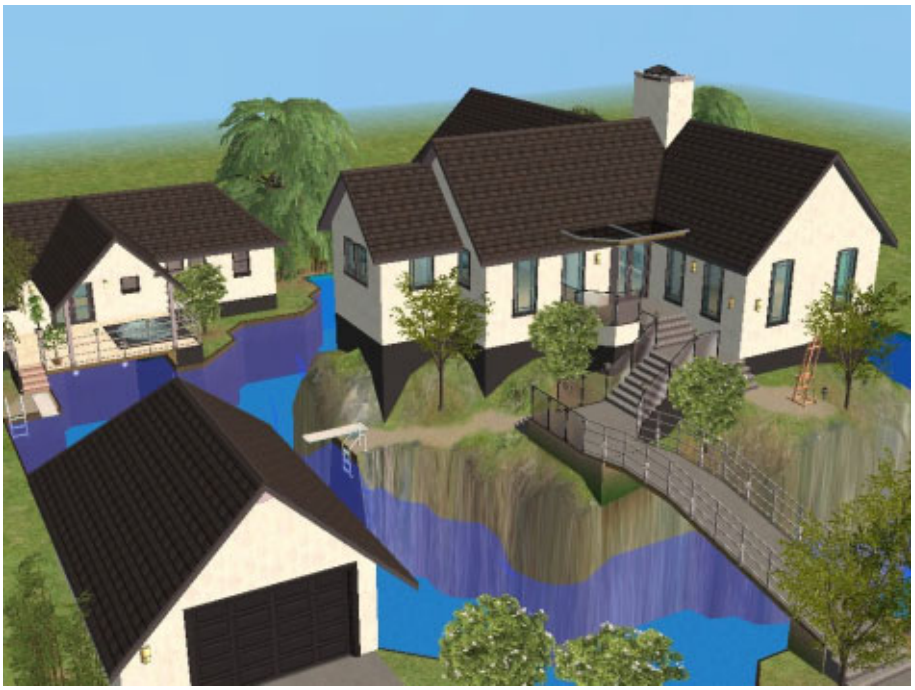
Here you can see the rocky look taking shape.

Finally, make sure you turn the CFE command ***Off*** as at Step #21.



Step 64.

As for the house you're about to build, well of course it can be any style or design.



This is a modern island home, called *River Island,* where I've added a boathouse on the far bank of the river, containing hot tub and bowling lane, which Sims can only reach by swimming. That's one example of how you can enrich your gameplay with these islands. Among my other island homes at TSR are *Island Paradise*, *Sunset Islands*, and a set of 3 called *Various Paradise Islands*.

For pool bridge designs, if you have time please do check my *Building Pool Bridges tutorial*, and you may get design ideas from my *Creating Japanese Arched Bridges* and *Building A Venice Bridge* tutorials – all here at TSR. And you may also find useful tips in my *Replacing Pool Walls* and *Building Pool Waterslides* tutorials.

Bye!

Wishing you lots of enjoyment and pleasure as you explore the magical world of Sims2 architecture! ☺