

Concrete

The Journal of Decorative Concrete

VOL. 4 No. 5 • Oct/Nov 2004 • \$6.95

Decor

A photograph of a modern kitchen featuring a light-colored, polished concrete countertop. In the background, there is a stainless steel sink with a chrome faucet, a window with greenery outside, and a stainless steel gas stove with black knobs. The kitchen cabinets are a medium wood tone.

Part 2: Countertops

Plus: Sealers for the Finishing Touch

Working with Slump
Making Use of Leftovers

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EMPLOYEE TIME SHEET

NAME: Frank Gomez DATES: October

DAY	START	LUNCH	END	JOBSITE	WORK DONE	HOURS
Mon	7:00	1/2	3:30	Walby	Ext.	8
Tues	↓	↓	3:30	↓	↓	8
Wed	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5
Thurs	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5
Fri	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5

Employee Signature: Frank Gomez Total Hours: 41.5



REALITY?

Employee Report

Frank Gomez

Jobsite Name: Walby Residence Pool Date Range: 10/18/2004 through 10/18/2004

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 10/18	7:19 AM	12:02 PM	Prep	4:43 hours
	12:40 PM	3:39 PM	Prep	2:59 hours 7:42 hours
Tue 10/19	7:21 AM	12:06 PM	Formwork	4:45 hours
	12:37 PM	3:42 PM	Formwork	3:05 hours 7:50 hours
Wed 10/20	7:16 AM	12:04 PM	Formwork	4:48 hours
	12:33 PM	3:44 PM	Formwork	3:11 hours 7:59 hours
Thu 10/21	7:18 AM	12:25 PM	Texture/Seal	5:07 hours
	1:05 PM	3:42 PM	Texture/Seal	2:37 hours 7:44 hours
Fri 10/22	7:17 AM	11:50 AM	Texture/Seal	4:33 hours
	12:36 PM	3:41 PM	Texture/Seal	3:05 hours 7:38 hours

Signature: Frank Gomez Frank Gomez Employee total: 38:53 hours



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It's a Boy...

It's too bad we don't have the opportunity to meet regularly at a local coffee shop. It's also unfortunate that we don't get a chance to talk about more topics in these letters of mine. So please understand my excitement and pride in announcing the arrival of our third child.



His name is Kannen and he's got everyone in the office, our neighborhood and at home wrapped around him, literally. In spite of sleep-deprived nights and the relentless demand for our affection, he's such a wonderful addition to our family. In fact, at one month he's already participated in his first decorative concrete workshop at the IAC facility here in Eugene, Oregon. And, along with our other children, he now hangs out at the office on occasion, getting conditioned for a job in publishing. I'll talk to the kids later about any stress that may come along with the job title.

The pleasure in writing you each time a new issue of *Concrete Decor* is published is immeasurable. While it's a challenge to consider what will best influence the lives of more than 50,000 readers, a common question runs through everything I discuss: How can each of our lives become more fulfilling, personally and professionally? Such questions don't normally make things easier on us. However, they do help us discover our paths to success in many areas of our lives.

To this day, I enjoy a close relationship with a fellow tradesman I met nearly 20 years ago. Though we haven't seen each other in nearly two years, we still talk on the phone at least once a week. Back then, it was almost a daily ritual to find that certain coffee shop or a tailgate and discuss important work-related matters. Sometimes we would also get philosophical about the world, challenges in raising our children or ways we needed to improve our attitudes toward all of the above. And now, as we continue to laugh at many of our frustrations, we are glad to have the fellowship with each other. Our phone visits add meaning to our lives and help us push harder to accomplish the things that mean the most to us.

So, here we are. I'm sure some of you are welcoming new children into your lives or facing the challenge of improving your relationships. Rest assured, finding ways to influence those around us for the better starts with first finding ways to improve ourselves. And, I must add, good friends are an essential ingredient.

Now, that my family has grown, I am again realizing the importance of having people around me that can help me discover ways I can improve on myself. I hope it will help me to serve you better in the pages of this magazine as well.

Thanks for your friendship and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bent O. Mikkelsen".

Bent Mikkelsen, Publisher



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ON THE COVER: These gleaming countertops were created by Stone Soup Concrete, located in Florence, Massachusetts (www.stonesoupconcrete.com).

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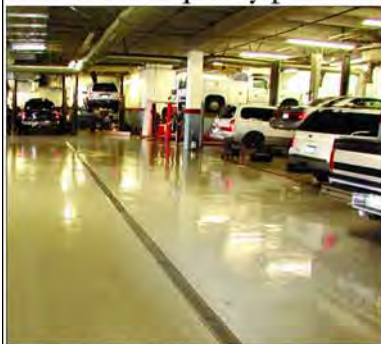


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Send details to CD Tips, Concrete Decor, P.O. Box 25210, Eugene, OR 97402.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Tek Gel gets rid of rust on concrete

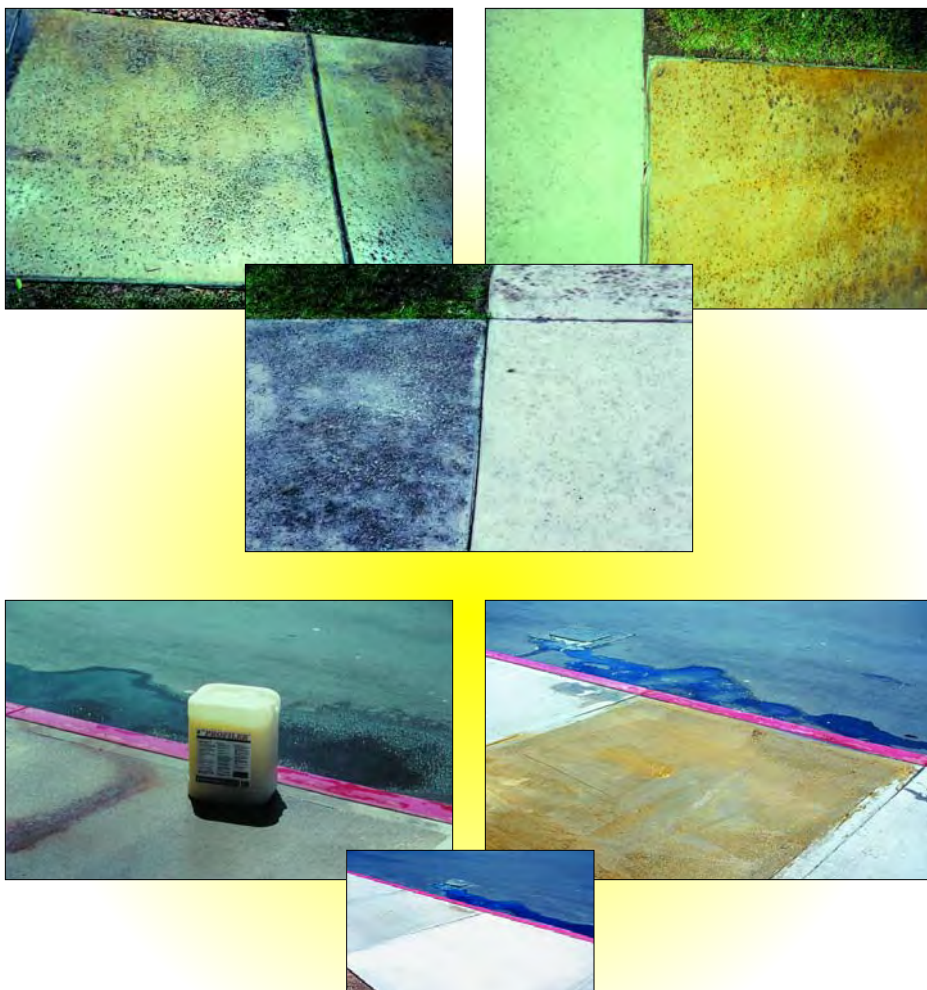
At a recent Flattoo workshop conducted by Surface Gel Tek, Tamryn Doolan discussed many decorative uses for the company's products. But I also learned another surprising benefit of Tek Gel for Profiling besides its etching and stenciling capabilities.

Tek Gel quickly removes rust from metal and concrete. In addition, it removes molds, mildew and algae and increases slip resistance all in one step. Its gel consistency keeps the hydrochloric acid suspended and capable of working fast and effectively on rusty surfaces so that it takes rust spots off in no time flat. Because Tek Gel is now sold in three strengths for stenciling and surface profiling applications, the product can address rust problems on everything from the harshest to the most delicate surfaces.

Lastly, another great attribute of this product is the fact that it washes to the sewer system completely neutralized, so it is an environmentally responsible product as well.



This tip was contributed by Bent Mikkelsen, publisher of Concrete Decor magazine.





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New company offers decorative designs, patterns

Melanie Royals, founder of Modello Designs, has been a leader in the decorative painting field for the last 15 years.

Through her initial business, Royal Design

Studio, she helped set the standard for decorative artistry in painted and textural finishes.

Now, with Modello Designs Decorative Masking Patterns, Royals has created a system that further expands the options for architectural surface treatments, including decorative concrete. Possibilities for sophisticated concrete applications include positive, resist and etched patterns; embossed and inlaid designs; and multi-tonal and layered treatments.

Artistic Concrete Effects (ACE) is an integrated system of education, design aids, and coordinated patterns that can be easily learned and applied for high-end, custom applications. Design planning and consultation services are also available. For more information, visit www.modellodesigns.com.

Lafarge wins multiple awards from PCA

Lafarge North America's Alpena Plant has won national awards for its environmental efforts, energy-saving innovations and safety record.

In April, the Portland Cement Association (PCA) awarded its third annual Cement Industry Environment and Energy Awards to six U.S. plants — including four Lafarge plants — with top honors going to the Alpena Plant for Overall Environmental Excellence.

Alpena is Lafarge's largest cement plant in North America and one of the longest continuously operating cement plants in the United States. In operation since 1908, the site has been in use since the late 1800s, yet new investments have made Alpena one of the most environmentally advanced cement plants in the world.

A major initiative cited in the PCA award was the company's rehabilitation of the abandoned Paxton Quarry on the property. Lafarge converted the old shale quarry into a lake, grading the embankments to create a natural appearance and provide access for wildlife. Working with local elementary schools and community partners, the company has also restored the area surrounding the lake to create wildlife habitats and nesting sites for migrating mallard ducks. Elementary school children helped plant more than 700 trees on the site, including cherry, oak, pine and spruce trees. In addition, the company stocked the lake with more than



30,000 fish, including fathead minnows, rainbow trout, catfish and bluegills.

The PCA also recognized the Alpena Plant for manufacturing innovations that reduce waste and conserve energy. Lafarge installed a system that reuses cement kiln dust created during manufacturing, reducing byproducts that would go to landfills. In addition, the plant captures excess heat created during the manufacturing process to generate power. Using energy that would otherwise be wasted, this system generates 95 percent of the electricity used at the plant, helping to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

PCA also recognized the Alpena Plant with two awards for its outstanding safety record: the Safety Commendation award for one year without a lost-time accident, and the Safety Excellence award for 1,000,000 hours with no lost-time accidents.

Worldwide, Lafarge has been recognized as a leader in environmental stewardship, with active land management and reclamation programs in 75 countries. Lafarge partners with WWF (World Wildlife Fund) and the Wildlife Habitat Council on a variety of environmental initiatives.

VanFleet watches over quality, customers



Grace Construction Products has named Greg Van Fleet as worldwide quality assurance manager for the company's Specialty Construction Chemicals Operations team. Van Fleet is a customer advocate, providing a quick response to customer needs, designing and implementing QA/QC programs and

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A graduate of the University of New Hampshire, where he earned a degree in environmental science, Van Fleet came to Grace in 1999.

Quikrete teams up with Valspar

Quikrete, a top name in concrete, and Valspar, a leading coatings manufacturer, have announced a strategic alliance to manufacture and market a complete line of premium concrete coatings. Debuting in early 2005, the new line will be manufactured and marketed jointly by Valspar and Quikrete under the brand name Quikrete Professional Concrete Coatings.

The line includes 14 advanced products, from sealers to floor coatings to waterproofer. The flagship product of the new line is the Epoxy Garage Floor Coating Kit, an all-in-one kit featuring Bond-Lok technology that delivers a coating that is twice as strong as concrete. The kit contains enough concentrated Quik-Prep cleaner, water-based, low-odor Garage Floor Epoxy and color flakes to do a one-car garage. Bond-Lok technology is catalyzed by the revolutionary Quik-Prep three-in-one degreaser, cleaner and etcher. Quik-Prep's advanced formula promotes the ultimate bond between the concrete and coating.

Since 1806, Minneapolis-based Valspar has been dedicated to bringing customers the latest innovations, finest quality and best customer service in

the industry. For more information, visit www.valspar.com.

Founded in 1940, Atlanta-based The Quikrete Companies has more than 75 manufacturing facilities in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and South America. For more information, visit www.Quikrete.com or call (800) 282-5828.

Holdfast to distribute Fab-Form

Fab-Form Industries Ltd., manufacturer of fabric forms for concrete footings, columns and pads, has appointed Holdfast Technologies LLC as distributor in Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky. Holdfast is a leading regional construction supply distributor, specializing in ICF construction and accessories. For more information on Holdfast, call (877) 423-2562. To learn more about Fab-form, call (888) 303-3278.

Sales manager rewarded with LEED accreditation

Donn Thompson, AIA, commercial sales manager for Reward Wall Systems, was recently accredited in the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. "Having a LEED-accredited professional on staff allows the company to provide more accurate information to vendors and customers about sustainable design and construction with our insulating concrete forms," says Reward president Ed Storm.

Thompson is also a licensed architect in the state of Illinois, a member of the American Institute of Architects, and has more than seven years of experience in the ICF industry.

"ICF's not only increase energy efficiency, but also minimize construction waste, make use of locally derived materials and capitalize on the green benefits of concrete," he says.

For more information on Reward Wall Systems, visit www.rewardwalls.com.

Hycrete used in bridge construction

Broadview Technologies' "Hycrete" concrete additive was used for the first time by the Kansas DOT in constructing a bridge. The pour used over 450 cubic yards of concrete with Hycrete being used at a dosage of 2 gallons per cubic yard. As a result of the superior anti-corrosion properties and lower moisture permeability imparted by Hycrete, a combination of mild steel and epoxy coated re-bar was used.

Hycrete was chosen as a result of extensive research by the Kansas DOT as well as multi-year studies conducted by the University of Connecticut and the University of Massachusetts. The research indicated that Hycrete's ability to retard corrosion of rebar and to lower the moisture permeability of concrete would increase both the structural and cosmetic life of the concrete. Life 365 algorithms predict a 4-10 times increase in the useful life of the bridge.

All present for this pour were extremely impressed with what they described as the "better workability" of the concrete with Hycrete. Hycrete was chosen over silica fume and calcium nitrite combinations. For more information, call (973) 465-0077.

Sara Jane joins Kover Krete

Sara Jane is the newest member of the Kover Krete Team. Jane was hired as the company's plaster and pebble specialist and is heading up Kover Krete's endeavor into the repairing and preparation of concrete swimming pools, both gunite and shotcrete re-dos.



We heard with great sadness of the passing of Geri Freis, vice-president and co-owner of Rafco Products. Geri passed away in her sleep on September 4, 2004, following a courageous battle with cancer. She is survived by her husband, Robert Freis, the president and owner of Rafco Products. We know she will be greatly missed by all.



Monica Stamper (left), president and CEO of Kover Krete, chats with Sarah Jane.

Jane started out working with one of the largest pool-supply distributors serving the industry. After learning the pool business thoroughly, she decided to concentrate solely on the interior of swimming pools.

Jane, who spent several years working with Pebble Tec, now spearheads Kover Krete's Pre-Kote (scratch coat) line. You can reach her at (407) 246-7797.




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 —Jody Mason, Artistic Gardens, Inc.

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—Erik Kinkade, **www.RockAndWater.com**, Author of "Artificial Rock Waterfalls: Rock Making Techniques For The Professional And Hobbyist"

"Fantastic! This has been one of the best-spent days in the last 10 years! An **excellent** class; I feel lucky to have been part of (it)."

—Dave Moore, Westlake Builders

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Industry Spotlight

Association News



PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION **Gibson named senior vice president**

Thomas J. Gibson is the new senior vice president, government affairs, at the Portland Cement Association. He will head PCA's Washington office and represent the Association and its member companies before Congress, the administration and the White House.

Gibson comes to PCA with a wealth of experience in politics and environmental affairs, including roles with government agencies, on Capitol Hill, the armed forces, and as an advisor to and within the private sector. Most recently he served as chief of staff for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Gibson graduated magna cum laude from Georgetown University, where he received his J.D. He holds a M.S. in marine affairs from the University of Rhode Island and a B.S. in naval architecture from the United States Naval Academy.

Cement industry leads in sustainable initiatives

PCA's Executive Committee has approved a goal addressing the implementation of environmental management systems (EMS) for cement plants in the United States. The committee set goals for at least 40 percent of U.S. cement plants to have implemented an auditable and verifiable EMS by the end of 2006, 75 percent by the end of 2010, and 90 percent by the end of 2020.

An EMS identifies the environmental aspects and impacts of a plant's activities and facilitates continuous improvement of environmental performance.

This effort is the latest component of the industry's multi-year, sustainable development initiative, *Concrete Thinking for a Sustainable World*. The initiative is helping outline guidelines for the industry, educate architects and designers about the benefits of concrete in sustainable development, and encourage sustainable cement manufacturing processes.

In June, PCA unveiled the Cement Manufacturing Sustainability (CMS) Program, which began with reduction targets for carbon dioxide emissions and cement kiln dust and included the call to implement EMS. Additional goals are also under consideration.

The cement industry was one of the first industries to tackle climate change by developing policies and improving manufacturing processes that benefit the global environment. Since 1975, the cement industry has reduced its energy usage in manufacturing by

33 percent. The *Concrete Thinking* initiative will enable PCA to serve as a centralized resource for sustainable development.

PCA also will continue its focus on providing information to encourage the industry to further minimize emissions and waste and to use energy efficiently in its manufacturing process as part of the federal government's Climate VISION program.

The association plans to conduct environmentally focused technical training seminars across the country and to highlight building projects that employ state-of-the-art sustainable development practices using concrete.

NATIONAL READY MIXED CONCRETE ASSOCIATION **Luther to head RMC foundation**

The RMC Research Foundation has named Julie Luther as its executive director. Luther comes to the foundation with extensive experience with the ready mixed concrete industry and not-for-profit organizations, most recently as senior vice president of the NRMCA. Her role as RMC executive director will include outreach to allied organizations, universities and other stakeholders to educate them about the Foundation's work and resources. She will also oversee the approval and administration of Foundation projects and continue fundraising efforts to grow the endowment in support of the industry's education and research goals. For more information on the RMC, call (888) 846-7622.

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**Info available on
cementitious products**

A new publication from the ACI, titled "Report on Thin Reinforced Cementitious Products," summarizes information on reinforcement, manufacturing methods, engineering properties, and applications of thin reinforced cementitious products. Special emphasis is placed on durability and fire resistance of thin reinforced cementitious products, in addition to other properties such as strength, moisture resistance, dimensional stability, aesthetics and ease of handling and installation. The publication costs \$35 for ACI members and \$59.50 for nonmembers. For more information, call (248) 848-3800 or visit www.concrete.org.

**CONCRETE SAWING &
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Take yourself to the Tech fair

The popular Tech Fair will return to the 2005 CSDA Convention, which will be held Feb. 16-19 in San Francisco. "The goal of the Tech Fair is to allow technical representatives from manufacturers to meet with a very selective group of cutting contractors to promote the latest developments in equipment and tool applications," said Patrick O'Brien, CSDA executive director. "This mini-show provides a highly-charged, one-on-one setting that is not possible at giant trade shows." For more information, visit www.csdas.org or call (727) 577-5004.



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CIRCLE #06 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Concrete Innovations by Hallack

Turlock, California

by David Thompson

Julio A. Hallack drives his wife crazy when he travels, because he always seems to have his head down. No, he's not embarrassed to be seen with her. He's just studying the floors.

As the owner of Concrete Innovations by Hallack, a small company that specializes in restoring concrete floors, he is a dedicated student of what's underfoot.

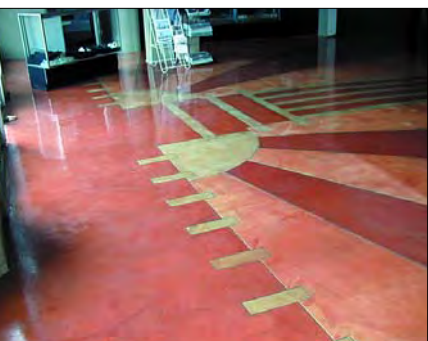
"My wife says I have a problem because I'm always staring at the floor," says Hallack. "But that helps me make decisions on what I think is going to look good because I've already seen it done by other professionals in the industry."

Based in the California farming community of Turlock, Hallack was one of the first contractors in the state's vast Central Valley to do decorative concrete work. It wasn't the easiest sell back in 1991, when he got started, but Hallack loved it and stuck with it.

"I was like the Lone Ranger pushing a product that many people had a hard time buying," he says. "And the ones who were buying it were bringing in contractors from out of the area with big portfolios."

Hallack's perseverance paid off as decorative concrete began to catch on through the 1990s. Now he travels throughout the Central Valley, working on jobs that have included rehabilitating the floors in a California supermarket chain (using acid stains), recreating the labyrinth of Chartres Cathedral (a gothic, paved stone floor that he reproduced in concrete on a private estate), and restoring a 1934 terrazzo floor in an old art deco movie theater (part of the larger renovation of the State Theater in Modesto, California).

About 80 percent of his business is floor restoration, though he also creates new floors and concrete countertops. Chemical staining is one of the main tools in his bag of tricks, along with overlays and stamping materials. He's a real fan of his two primary product manufacturers: L.M. Scofield Co. and Miracote.



Designing the job

Before starting a project, Hallack insists on involving his clients in developing a design, even when they'd prefer to leave it entirely up to him.

"I think the client should always be involved, because they become more appreciative at the end of the project," he says. "And it takes the weight off of me."

In developing a design, Hallack shows his clients lots of photographs, both from his portfolio and from magazines. He also encourages them visit his warehouse, which doubles as a showroom with 7,000 square feet of both indoor and outdoor decorative concrete on display.

Hallack believes that colors should be chosen with careful regard for their surroundings.

"A big mistake of architectural concrete is when the outside colors don't match the inside, or when the outside colors don't match the stucco of the house or the eaves or the roof," he says.

If a residence already has slate floors indoors, for instance, Hallack might draw from the slate's palette of blues, greens and terra cottas for the patio's color scheme. Lighter shades might be appropriate to reduce heat retention outdoors, but the indoor and the outdoor surfaces will still tie together, he says.

Likewise, if the house has a red roof, Hallack might broadcast some red dry-shake color onto the concrete to tie the new floor in with the roof. "Paying attention to detail like that is one of the ways that I try to be different from my competitors," he says.

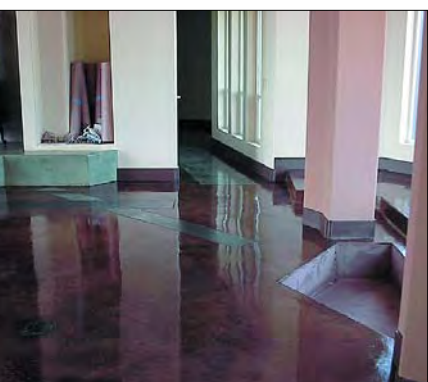
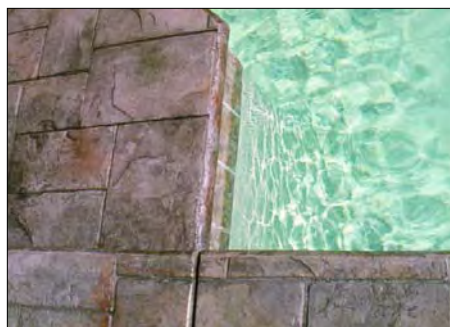
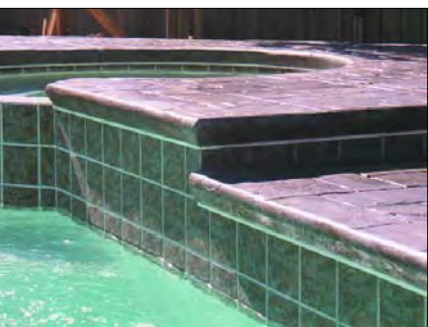
You can see Hallack's attention to detail in the hand-engraved designs he's known for. "I started doing sandblasting in the early 90s when everybody was hot for sandblasting, but I thought it looked kind of boring and I didn't like the mess," he says. "So I started doing my own engraving by hand."

He uses a Makita grinder for the bold lines, and specialty tools for fine details such as eyes, leaves and feathers. He typically acid stains individual sections of the engraving with various colors and then fills the borders with colored tile grout.

Hallack helped remodel the Central Valley's chain of homegrown grocery stores, Save Mart Supermarkets and S-Mart Food, redoing the floors and hand-engraving welcome messages at the entrances, with designs customized for each store.

When he restored the concrete floor in the lobby of a local beverage distributor, he capped off the job with a hand engraving of the Anheuser-Busch eagle logo — an eight-foot by eight-foot





screaming bird set atop the letter 'A.' "It's one of my masterpieces," he says.

The path into concrete

Hallack, 50, was born and raised in Mexico. He came to California in 1973 as an exchange student studying international marketing at the University of the Pacific. Upon graduating, he got a job as the South American representative for a U.S. farm equipment firm, then took a job as a customer service manager for a western boot manufacturer in El Paso. Along the way he got married, and in 1986 he and his wife moved to the Central Valley so she could be closer to her family.

The move left Hallack unemployed and uncertain of his next move. But that changed one day while he was at a gas station filling his tank. A landscaper pulled up next to him in a truck filled with lawnmowers. Hallack asked how landscaping paid, and the guy said he earned \$4,000 a week, which got Hallack's attention. The guy also offered Hallack work on a big job in a good neighborhood. Hallack took it.

"While I was doing this job," Hallack says, "somebody came by who was building a house and said, 'Hey, I'm looking for a landscaper,' and I said, 'I'm your man.'"

Suddenly Hallack had his own landscaping company, which he turned into a profitable business.

He found his way to concrete indirectly. Occasionally he hired sub-contractors to build retaining walls, walkways and whatnot, but he was never satisfied with their work.

"I was very unhappy with the quality and with how sloppy they were," he says. "They used to leave me a mess all the time, concrete debris and beer cans all over."

So Hallack began learning how to pour concrete, gradually growing more and more interested in the medium. He went to the World of Concrete trade shows in Las Vegas, attending seminars and learning about new products. Back at home, he began pouring and stamping practice slabs on his property, until he had confidence in his skills. Then he started experimenting with color.

Once his eyes were opened to the possibilities, there was no going back to plain old gray slabs. The allure of decorative concrete had him firmly in its grip, and still does.

"I don't think there's another product you can do as much with as concrete," Hallack says. "The



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opportunities for using your artistic talent are endless. There are no limitations, no borders whatsoever, except your imagination and your creativity and your enthusiasm.”

Gradually Hallack began to introduce concrete services to his landscaping customers, and the jobs he took on grew bigger as his skills and confidence grew. His first major milestone came when he contracted to do an outdoor multipurpose sports court (basketball, tennis, handball, etc.) at a private residence. It was a challenging project that couldn't have any birdbaths it whatsoever, and it had to drain perfectly. Hallack lost a lot of sleep worrying

about it, but it came out flawless in the end. And it opened the door for other opportunities.

“It was done in one of the most prestigious neighborhoods in Modesto, and anytime you work in these kinds of neighborhoods, people are more willing to trust you, and architects are willing to talk to you longer and so on,” Hallack says. “After that referrals began popping up left and right.”

Eventually, the concrete side of his business began eclipsing the landscaping end, and he discontinued the landscaping entirely in 1997.

The importance of image

Maintaining a clean-cut company image has carried over from his landscaping days into his concrete career.

“From Day One all of my vehicles are well painted and clean, and we have the company name, telephone number and website on them,” he says. “All of my employees look clean and well groomed, and all of my staff representing me in the field wear uniforms — very comfortable, good quality T-shirts with the company name and logo on them.”

Even after all his years of concrete work, Hallack still gets jittery and loses sleep before starting big jobs. But he hasn't lost any of his enthusiasm for decorative concrete.

“I still get really excited about every project,” he says. “You can take a boring piece of gray concrete, change the appearance of it with stains, saw-cut lines here and there, and suddenly you have a piece of artwork. It's a fact that the best product that Mother Nature has given us, and that God has given us, is concrete.”



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Concrete Countertops

*A two-part series covering forms,
mixes, tools and finishes*
Part 2: Precast Countertops
by Susan Brimo-Cox



Photographs courtesy of Stone Soup Concrete

Concrete countertop production falls into two general categories: cast-in-place and precast countertops. In the last issue of *Concrete Decor*, we looked at cast-in-place methods. This time we'll explore various techniques used in precasting concrete countertops.

Precasting advantages

If you prefer tight quality control, the precast method of making concrete countertops is the way to go. The environment in which you pour is controlled by you.

And if you also desire flexibility and more creative opportunity, again, go with precast.

There are other advantages to precasting, as well. "The surface created by precast vs. troweled concrete is a lot less permeable. [It's] easier to form overhangs and custom shapes on an inverted pour, and it's easier to cast integral sinks and inlays in surfaces," explains Steve Eyler, owner/operator of Eycon in Myersville, Md.

Daniel Gobillot, one of the founding partners of Stone Soup Concrete in Florence, Mass., says that with precasting "you can get any shape, any size, any thickness, any color. I think it's better in every situation, unless the piece is so massive you can't move it."

And this is probably the primary disadvantage of the precast process. You have to transport the countertop to the job site without breaking or cracking it.

Another disadvantage is the need to make templates. "It takes a lot more time and traveling [to do this step]," reports Tom Ralston, president and chief executive officer of Tom Ralston Concrete in Santa Cruz, Calif. "We use door skins to get the exact angles. [And] if different people do the measuring and the mold, some headaches can occur."

Nonetheless, precasting allows you to work on several projects simultaneously. Buddy Rhodes, president of Buddy Rhodes Studio Inc. in San Francisco, observes, "Precast counters [are] more suited for making more than





one project at once. Also, if [the countertop] goes 'south' you can make it again and have a happy client."

Building molds

An important consideration — before you even begin building a mold — is that you have solid support for the mold and the concrete you will pour into it. Another is that the molding table be level. If there is not enough support and the floor or table flexes, the concrete in the mold will reflect that. If the table is not level, the thickness of the countertop will not be consistent from one end to the other.

Experienced contractors will also tell you that now is when you have to consider the size of the mold. As Rhodes says, "One thing about precast is you have to think about moving these things and placing seams at seven feet or so. The weight is a consideration when you have to move it up stairs or over hill and dale."

Gobillot explains that making sections to fit on standard 4-foot by 8-foot plywood sheets is common in the industry, and that's Stone Soup Concrete's preference. "Anything beyond that becomes a special order," he says, but he adds they have never turned anything away as too large. "It takes more money, but we haven't had a project too large to make." The largest project his company has tackled to-date was a countertop 12 feet long, 5 feet wide, with two different levels and an integral sink, and which weighed more than 1,400 pounds.

What you use to build your forms depends on the casting and finishing technique you plan to use. Jeffrey Girard, president of The Concrete Countertop Institute, explains, "If the concrete is to be minimally processed (very little grinding), then the forms need to be much more meticulously prepared than if the concrete is to be ground and grouted. Either way, the forms must be dimensionally accurate in order to cast slabs that will be the right size and shape. Therefore, sturdy materials like steel and melamine are good."





According to Eyer, "Building forms is like normal carpentry, but a bit more precise. On an inverted cast everything is formed as a negative." Materials he prefers include melamine, plastic and rubber.

Not only do materials commonly used for making molds need to be able to handle the weight of the concrete

and create a smooth face, they also need to withstand moisture.

"You need water-resistant or waterproof materials," reports Gobillot. His company uses plastics and laminated wood. For a finish that looks like hand-troweled, they've used MDO (medium density overlay plywood) to build molds. "There's 10 ways to do

what we do and many materials to get to the same end." But he cautions, "Not every lumberyard carries good materials for working with concrete."

Most contractors who make precast concrete countertops use caulk or some other material to slightly round the edges and prevent the concrete from leaking out of the mold. Silicone caulk is one of the preferred methods. Once you have your basic mold constructed, then the real fun — and creativity — begins, says Fu-Tung Cheng, principal and chief executive officer of Cheng Design in Berkeley, Calif. "The form can be the ultimate simplicity. What you do from there is what it's all about. It's your imagination — it's unlimited."

Rigid foam, rubber molds and other materials are used to create the negative forms for sinks, faucet knockouts, trivets and stand offs, integral drain boards, and the like. Embedded objects are affixed to the bottom of the mold — upside down, of course, so they are right side up when

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the countertop is de-molded and inverted. And then there is the concrete mix and what you do with it.

Reinforcement and mix design

Most precast contractors use reinforcement. Wire mesh, fiber reinforcement and rebar are all used with this process, depending on the thickness of the countertop and the project specifics.

But concrete countertops are not the same as sidewalks poured on-grade. Countertops have different reinforcement requirements, Girard points out. "The topic of reinforcing is one of the most misunderstood in the industry today. It's basically an engineering problem — you need

primary and secondary reinforcement with the right materials and in the right places to ensure proper compressive, tensile and flexural strength."

With precast concrete countertops, aesthetics goes hand-in-hand with structural performance, so any old concrete mix won't do.

"Choice of ingredients is highly dependent on the desired workability, final appearance and structural performance. I designed my mix to have a high early strength in order to speed fabrication and deliver in a timely fashion," says Girard, who designed his mix to be cast on a Friday and stripped on a Monday. "I use Type 1 portland cement, sand as aggregate, integral powder pigments and superplasticizer in a very dry zero-slump mix."

Rhodes also uses a thicker, drier, zero-slump mix when he is trying to achieve his "pressed finish." With this technique, handfuls of the thick concrete are hand-pressed into the mold. The haphazard voids thus created are intentional, and are filled later with a slurry mix.

Gobillot likes a mix that is workable, but not runny.



Cheng prefers a 6-inch slump, and uses his fingers to push his dense oatmeal-like NeoMix into the mold's nooks and crannies.

To help ensure consistency, Gobillot says, "We pour the whole kitchen at once, in multiple mixes, but each batch we weigh out to the 100th of a pound, especially with dyes."

Frequently, special aggregates (such as colored glass) are incorporated in a mix, and are later exposed by grinding.

Countertop Training Opportunities

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The Concrete Countertop Institute www.ConcreteCountertopInstitute.com
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Casting and finishing techniques

Each precast contractor has his own preference as to tools, but many use standard concrete, woodworking or granite tools. Gobillot says his preference is for gardening tools, which "seem to work better than construction tools."

From Ralston's perspective, "It's almost a necessity for precasters to have a whole repertoire of tools that let you get into little nooks and crannies."

Latex or rubber gloves are standard gear, as are respirators to protect from the ill effects of portland cement and sand.

Whether a concrete countertop needs to be vibrated — or how much so — depends on whether you plan to

grout the surface with a slurry mix for creative effect, Girard says.

Vibrating the poured concrete will help eliminate bug holes and voids.

Finally, you want to screed off the excess concrete so it is level with the top of the mold.

How soon you unmold depends on the concrete mix you use.

"We de-form between two to four days after pouring," Gobillot says. "We begin sealing after three weeks. Our surfaces come out like a mirror finish so we go straight to sealing them."

Cheng recommends placing a moist blanket over the piece after it sets up, and leaving it there for one to three days while it hydrates and cures. He typically demolds four days after

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pouring; then he waits another two to three days before grinding.

For some concrete countertop artists, much of the creative magic is in their finishing techniques.

If you've embedded decorative objects or aggregates into your countertop, you'll need to grind the surface to expose them. This can get rather messy, but can produce very satisfactory results in short order.

If you have bugholes, these are typically filled with a slurry mix that matches or contrasts with the color of the concrete, depending on the result you are seeking.

Rhodes uses voids to great effect by pressing a slurry into them in several applications, allowing it to set up, and grinding between applications. This results in a veined appearance.

Ralston also uses a slurry coat to fill voids and bugholes. Then he grinds with finer and finer grit to a polished finish. "People seem to prefer a light polish," he observes.

On the other hand, as Eyler points out, "The higher the polish the less permeable the surface."

Still, regardless of individual preferences, Ralston echoes the sentiments of many contractors when he says, "We're always looking for something new and different [in our finishes]. It becomes an evolution of design — texture, colors, embedded objects. It's much more unique."

Curing, transporting and filling seams

How long you should allow the countertop to cure before you deliver and install it depends on your process and the specific recommendations of the manufacturer if you use a prepared mix.

Cheng gives his precast countertops 10 to 29 days to cure.

Girard says, "We can completely finish a countertop from template to install in 14 days. [However] we set expectations at 4-6 weeks, since we have multiple projects going on at the same time, and we're not going to be

able to push a single project through at maximum speed."

Rhodes places his precast slabs on 2x4 sticks to allow for even curing all around. "If the slab is left on the table it will warp, because the top surface will dry faster than the bottom," he says.

Transporting precast countertops to the installation site is a little like handling artwork — which these countertops are, after all. Ship them vertically, stacked on edge. Protect them with shipping blankets or foam, protect the corners and strap them in.

At Stone Soup Concrete, they've invented a lot of equipment to make the job of moving the countertops easier. "We move everything on rolling carts that flip up and down," Gobillot says.

The challenges don't stop once you get to the job site, however.

"Sometimes when we install a counter we bring it from a nice [moist] place into a home that has the heat on and is in the direct path of the southern sun, [and] the counters will warp after a couple of days," Rhodes reports. "If the project is covered and kept moist, the warping will not occur. If they do curl they can be wet with a damp towels, and sometimes they will straighten out."

What to fill the seams with is a matter of preference. Colored, two-part epoxy, color-matched acrylic caulk, and silicon are some of the materials commonly used.

Cheng uses an innovative technique for seams in his precast countertops. "We key all our seams. We make a male-female tongue and groove, so when you push the pieces together they self-level."

Final thoughts

If you are considering trying your hand at either the precast or cast-in-place method of creating concrete countertops, know that there will be a considerable learning curve.

"Don't let anyone fool you that either technique is easy," Ralston cautions. "Both require practice, skill and talent."

Girard agrees wholeheartedly. "Training and practice are essential in making concrete countertops. The pioneers of the industry taught themselves how to make concrete countertops, but there is no need to do that anymore."

Fortunately, more classes are becoming available (see list on page 23).

As Girard strongly emphasizes, "I always tell people to get the training they feel they need, then make samples and practice on their own homes before trying to make a concrete countertop for a client — don't use clients as guinea pigs!"





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Sealers for Concrete Countertops

by Susan Brimo-Cox



Concrete countertops need protection from everyday abuses. The acids in vinegar and lemon juice can etch the surface, and the strong colors in tea, red wine and mustard can cause stains. While sealers are not a total guarantee, they can go a long way in ensuring a concrete countertop retains its “like new” appearance for a good long while.

A wide range of materials can be used to seal concrete countertops. Each has its own performance characteristics and maintenance requirements. Methods of application may be an important consideration. In the kitchen, a prime issue is whether a sealer is food-safe.

If you are new at creating concrete countertops, it is wise to consult with an experienced countertop contractor to learn which sealers work best for specific countertop applications. Often, you can also acquire appropriate knowledge when you take in-depth concrete countertop training. For the sake of our brief discussion, the experts at the Concrete Countertop Institute divide concrete countertop sealers into two main categories: penetrating sealers and film-building sealers. The following is an overview:

Penetrating sealers

Penetrating sealers soak into the concrete surface and dry to a nearly invisible appearance. Liquid hardeners work by decreasing the porosity of the concrete. Repellants, such as silanes, siloxanes and fluorocarbons, work by increasing the surface tension to cause beading. There are also formulations that are a combination of both.

Concrete countertops sealed with penetrating sealers offer some degree of protection, but it is still important to quickly wipe up water, acidic liquids, and substances that could stain the surface.

Film-building sealers

Wax is the most basic film-building sealer. There are a variety of waxes that can be used, including plain beeswax;

however, automotive waxes should be avoided because of additives in those formulas. Wax produces a low- to moderate-sheen finish. It is easy to apply and, usually needs to be reapplied regularly to remain effective. By itself, it offers minimal protection. And, because it is wax, warm temperatures can cause it to melt and acids can strip it away.

Acrylics are a commonly used sealer. They come in solvent-based or water-based formulations (solvent-based products are often preferred). These sealers dry water-clear and are UV-resistant. Acrylic sealers can be brushed, sprayed or rolled on to the concrete. Water-based products are less durable than solvent-based, but, overall, they offer moderate protection and some heat resistance. Acrylic sealers can scratch, so periodic reapplications are required for upkeep.

Epoxies come in hundreds of different formulations, but two-component systems are typically used

for concrete. They offer a durable, hard surface that is very resistant to staining, but they can be affected by UV light if a UV inhibitor is not part of the formula. Epoxies create a very shiny surface and are subject to scratching. They are also sensitive to heat.

As a rule, urethanes are very stain-resistant and heat-resistant, provide good UV resistance, and are scratch-resistant. They can produce a matte or glossy finish, but also can look “plasticky” due to thick film buildup. Be aware that the application of urethanes can be tricky and that they require strict substrate preparation. Urethanes also are very expensive.

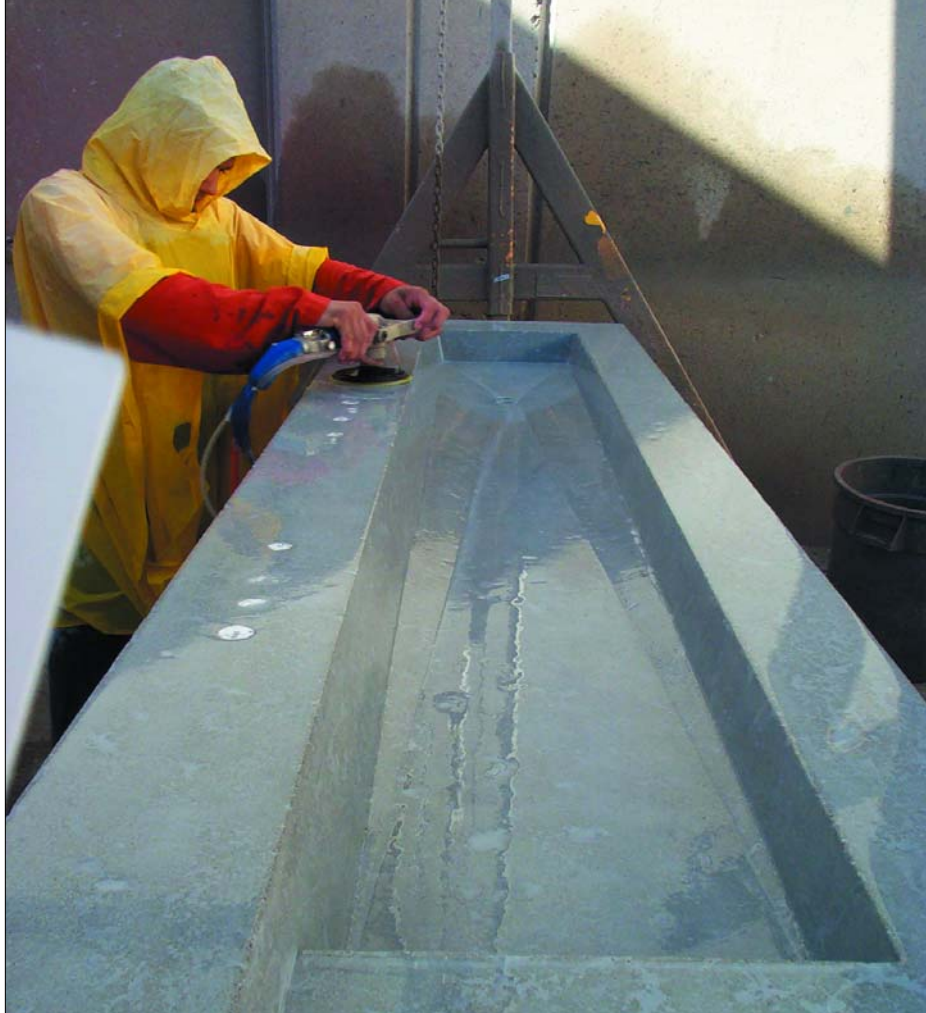
Tips from the experts

Steve Eylor, Eycon

“Topical sealers are pretty much bulletproof when it comes to acid and stain resistance, but you lose aesthetics. You get that glossy, plastic look and feel. It scratches and is harder to repair. I use penetrating sealers mainly



Photographs courtesy of Buddy Rhodes Studio



because they let the concrete breathe. This helps in the aging process to let the concrete naturally patina. Penetrating sealers are stain-resistant, not stain-proof. The sealer I use has a 15-year warranty on it. [How much use the counter gets] determines reapplication need."

Fu-Tung Cheng, Cheng Design

"[The] Holy Grail of concrete sealers — by definition one that protects the concrete from staining without encasing it in a layer of vulnerable plastic — has yet to be invented or discovered.

"Most penetrating sealers do a reasonable job resisting water penetration, but it's a different story with acids such as vinegar, wines, lemon juice and salad dressings. At best, they resist those substances for a few minutes, just enough time to wipe them up.

"Most homeowners do not like the high-gloss, topical finishes like urethane or epoxy. The look is too

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plastic and the tactical appeal of the concrete is lost. Many fabricators who use topical sealers (because they are virtually stain-proof) dull the gloss with steel wool to a satin finish and then wax and buff to get a more natural look. We are now using a hybrid topical sealer that penetrates and leaves a thin film of protection that gets waxed over. It's the best we have found, but hardly perfect."

Buddy Rhodes, Buddy Rhodes Studio

"Most people do not like a highly polished surface, but more of a natural look. We use a combination of products. We first brush on one to two coats of penetrating sealer that absorbs into the surface. Then we apply a topical sealer, either lacquer or water-base, to bring out the colors in the slabs and to put a layer of sealer between the stain and the cement. Last, we put on a wax and buff it out.

"[In the kitchen], we use food-grade beeswax for the last coat. The wax is used on a regular maintenance schedule, say once a month or so, to protect the surface from stains. But with all that, the cement will acquire a patina over time.

"We try not to tint the sealer because it may wear down [unevenly] over time and leave you with an untinted area."

Daniel Gobillot, Stone Soup Concrete

"What we're using now is an FDA-approved product that contains ethylene glycol, butyl carbitol and dibutyl phthalate. It works as a permeating and topical sealer, applied over about five days in five to 10 coats. We stay away from epoxies and lacquers because they don't work with the concrete. I use butcher's wax [for the kitchen] in my own home."



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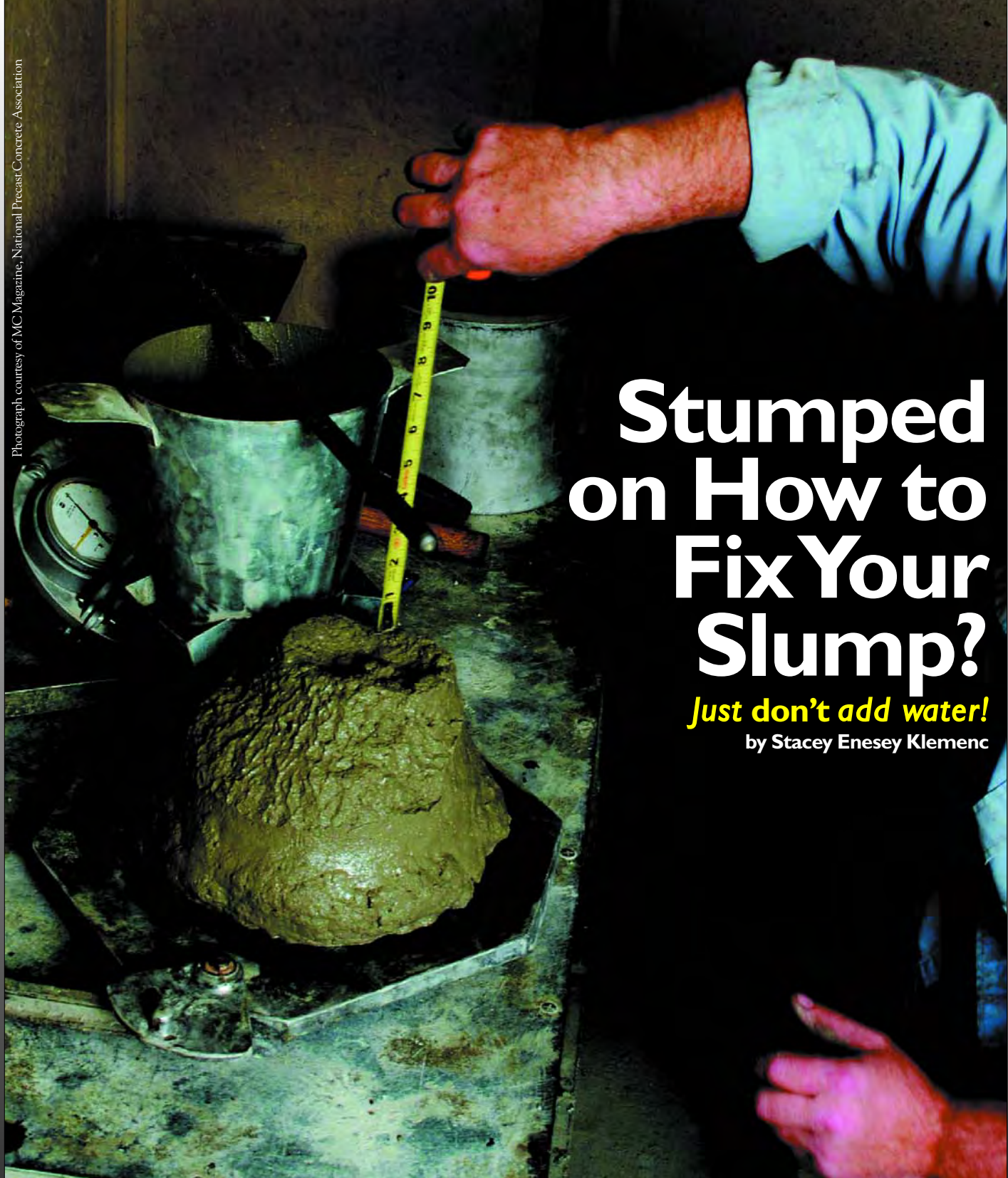
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CIRCLE #94 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Stumped on How to Fix Your Slump?

Just don't add water!

by Stacey Enesey Klemenc



How would you define slump?

According to the Tennessee Ready Mix Concrete Association, slump is a measurement of concrete's workability, or fluidity.

It's an indirect measurement of concrete's quality, states Gabriel Ojeda, president of Fritz-Pak Corp. in Dallas.

And Joe Daczko, group manager of concrete technology for Degussa Admixtures Inc. (formerly Master Builders) in Cleveland, maintains it's a measurement for consistency, both from a quality-control perspective and to determine how fluid or stiff a material is.

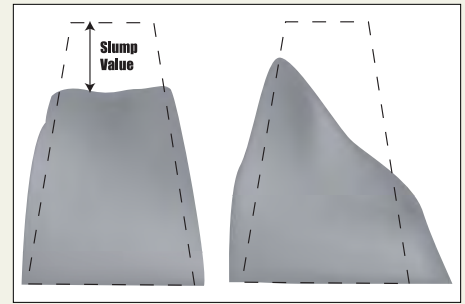
However you define it, though, the bottom line remains the same: Slump is a test for the rigidity of uncured concrete. Lower slump concrete is very stiff, and higher slump concrete is more fluid.

Most people in the business agree that a typical slump for ordinary decorative concrete applications would be in the 4- to 5-inch range, but there's no hard-and-fast rule. "The slump should match the application," says Daczko. "It could be anywhere from 1 to 10 inches depending on what you're doing. If you're paving a road, you need a much stiffer material that can stand on its own. If you're doing a wall, the

Testing 1-2-3

For official results, slump is measured with a metal cone made explicitly for that purpose. There are certain procedures that must be followed to conduct a standard test, which are outlined in ASTM C143, the Standard Test Method for Slump of Hydraulic Cement Concrete. The four-page document can be purchased online from ASTM International at www.astm.org.

Bob Harris, president of the Decorative Concrete Institute in Georgia, adds that for reliable readings it's key to conduct tests on a level base made out of a nonabsorbent material such as sheet metal or Plexiglas, not wood.



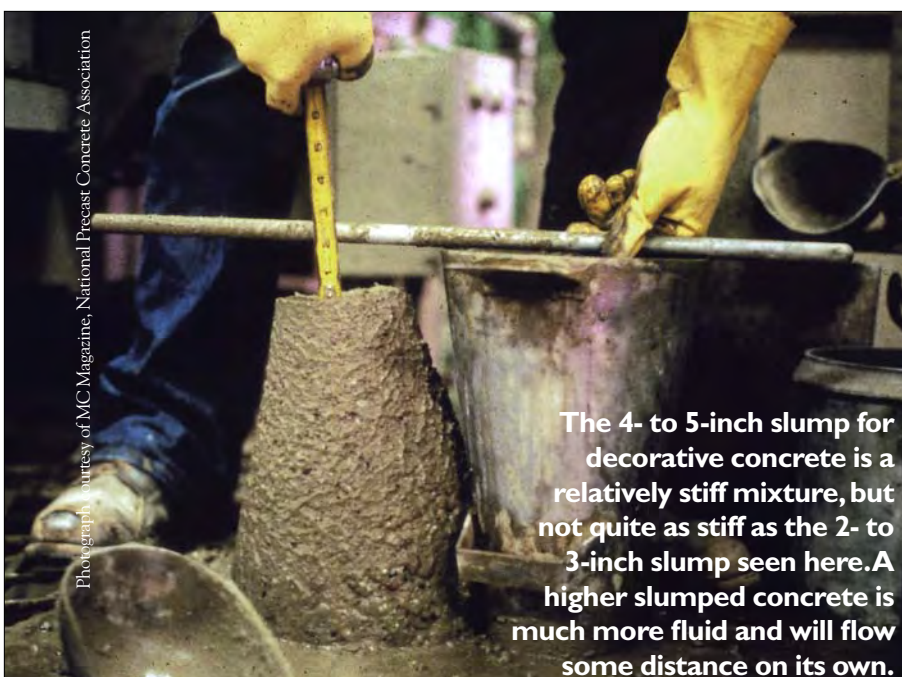
A slump test will provide information regarding the stability of your mix. Two consecutive shear slumps may indicate that your mix is prone to segregation and lacks cohesion.



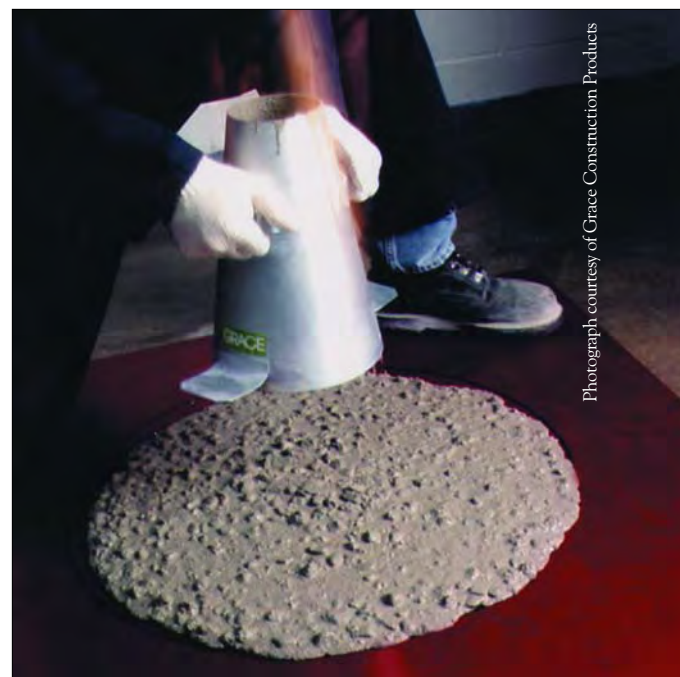
Photograph courtesy of Degussa Admixtures

Most decorative concrete contractors don't conduct standardized tests when pouring driveways, pool decks or the like. For practical purposes, most seasoned contractors can tell if the slump is right when they see the concrete coming down the chute. Harris can go one better: "I can tell if it's dry or wet just by listening to the truck turning," he says with a laugh.

An example of a true slump.



The 4- to 5-inch slump for decorative concrete is a relatively stiff mixture, but not quite as stiff as the 2- to 3-inch slump seen here. A higher slumped concrete is much more fluid and will flow some distance on its own.



Photograph courtesy of Grace Construction Products



Advantages of superplasticizers

- Increases flow, making placing easier — even in heavily reinforced or difficult to access areas — which allows you to focus your efforts on creating decorative concrete.
- Makes your mix more workable without adding more water or changing the water-cement ratio.
- Temporarily makes concrete more fluid, allowing integral color to disperse much better.
- Reduces bleed water, resulting in fewer shrinkage cracks and more evenly colored surfaces.
- Improves cohesiveness and reduces concrete segregation.
- Allows for the option of adding less water, creating a stronger concrete overall.



flow needs to be much more fluid." And if you're pouring a patio, it needs to be somewhere in between.

Sizing it up

Bob Harris, an industry leader and president of the Decorative Concrete Institute in Temple, Ga., says that although most decorative concrete contractors don't conduct formal slump tests on the job, that doesn't make using the proper slump any less important. "They need to understand the correlation [of slump] and how it affects the overall finish and structure of concrete," he says.

Harris, who teaches concrete techniques across the country and beyond, likes to explain it this way to his students who are just getting started in the business: If you make grape Kool-Aid and it's too strong, you add water.

The new mixture isn't as sweet and it's not as deep a shade of purple. The same holds true for integrally colored concrete: If you change the slump by the addition of excess water, you change the makeup of the entire mixture as well as the intensity of the color.

"If you use excessive amounts of water, sometimes referred to as 'water of convenience,' it makes the concrete a

lot more permeable," Harris says. "It won't stand up to the test of time in aggressive environments and to things like de-icing salts and certain chemicals that could attack the concrete."

Basically, if you add too much water to your mix, it dilutes the cement paste and weakens the concrete mixture. The materials segregate, with the heavier aggregates sinking to the bottom, the



Photograph courtesy of Degussa Admixtures

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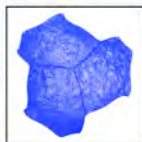
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sand staying in the middle and the cement floating to the top. "You end up with a cement-poor bottom and a cement-rich surface," says Ojeda, adding that a weaker surface is prone to cracking due to cement's inherent shrinking qualities.

There's a huge difference in adjusting the slump with chemicals rather than with water, Harris continues. By using water-reducing admixtures, you can change the slump without affecting the integrity of the concrete mix.

High-range water reducers, sometimes referred to as superplasticizers, increase the mix's flow, improve workability, disperse the cement more evenly and allow you to reduce the amount of water in your mix by a certain percentage, making for a more durable product in the long run. It must be kept in mind that they work for a limited amount of time.



Photographs courtesy of Fritz-Pak Corp.

The use of admixtures

There is a wide range of admixtures that can be used to "fix the mix," says Ojeda, whose company is well known for its handy Fritz-Paks that can be tossed into the ready-mix

truck at the job site, bag and all. Fritz-Pak Corp.'s admixtures are designed to restore loads of concrete that might otherwise be rejected and to improve the performance of problem concrete by modifying its

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characteristics and enhancing workability.

There are any number of reasons why you would use an admixture, all of which have to do with improving characteristics of the concrete. "To ensure the best finished project, contractors should work with their ready-mix supplier to develop a mix design before the concrete is delivered to the job site," Daczko advises. "Besides adjusting slump, there are admixtures that can be used to slow down the set of concrete or accelerate it, improve the strength, control cracking, protect against freeze-thaw cycles and add coloring, just to name a few." Some admixtures make the concrete temporarily more fluid, so colors added to the mix disperse much better.

Admixtures can often save the day, Ojeda points out, by increasing the slump without excessive water. They can fix concrete that is not quite what you ordered and they also can fill in when your crew is shorthanded or limited on the number of stamps.

Using a technique called step retardation, he says, you can discharge half the concrete and retard the other half. You can start stamping at one end and work from soft to medium to hard before getting to the next section that's just starting to set. Again, you go from soft to medium to hard to get a consistent pattern.

Mike Costello, a regional manager with Dayton Superior, points out that admixtures have been around ever since they first started building concrete dams, but he marvels over the variety available today. "With the latest admixtures, you can have just about any slump you want. You just decide what you want your concrete to do and you can create a mix design to cause that to happen."

Harris points out that not every job or application requires an admixture. But more contractors should be aware that help is there when they need it.



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CIRCLE #106 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Manufacturer Profile: QC Construction Products Madera, California

by John Chandler



QC CONSTRUCTION PRODUCTS found gold at the end of the rainbow.

In other words, color meant opportunity.

Started in 1992 in Madera, Calif., QC Construction began life as a regional supplier of decorative concrete raw materials — colors, hardeners, release powders — to contractors in central and southern California. The company blossomed in the mid-'90s when contractors and homeowners alike discovered that there was more to concrete than mere shades of gray.

"The growth of decorative concrete during the mid-'90s was huge," says QC's national technical director, Chris Sullivan. "QC went from being a small, regional player servicing a few-hundred-mile radius from the plant in Madera to where we are now, a national player with five regional sales managers and 30 sales reps all across the country."

Sullivan attributes the phenomenal growth in sales to a few key factors. First of all, the design community vigorously embraced the product line being offered by QC. Suddenly, it seemed, everyone wanted concrete in different colors. A variety of integral colors and stains were clearly the way to go, particularly in style-conscious California. It was only a matter of time before the rest of the country followed suit.

"Number two, contractors and applicators were seeing the increase in the amount of money they could make," Sullivan says.

And finally, he says, homeowners climbed aboard this colorful

bandwagon. "I would say a large portion of (the sales) came from residential use — patios, driveways, walkways. And we're seeing more decorative concrete use in interiors as well. HGTV is huge at getting people introduced at the homeowner level. We get so many calls from people saying they want this or that kind of stain that they saw on HGTV for their patio."

When it became apparent that the demand for color was going to be a market force to be reckoned with, the brain trust at QC faced a critical decision: quality versus quantity.

"We are not a commodity-driven line," Sullivan says. "I think one of the challenges we faced on the way up was whether or not we were going to try and be all things to all people. There are companies out there that treat these products like commodities, available on every street corner. We want to deal with the upper-end, leading distributors in the market, and we want to have cutting-edge product quality. We aren't trying to sell everybody, just the people who are striving to do the highest quality work."

Sullivan and his QC compatriots found that they got great feedback by getting the stains and colors into the hands of applicators doing the most creative work. "They're doing things with our products that we never thought of," he says.

As for the products themselves, many have contributed to QC's rise in popularity. In addition to QC Patina Stain and ColorTech E, which have been used on high-profile jobs at the





Luxor in Las Vegas and Disney World in Orlando, Sullivan is especially keen on another development.

"We have a product, that to my knowledge, nobody out there has anything quite like it," he says. "It's a penetrating reactive stain, but it's water-based. It's called QC CemTint and it's a water/lithium-based reactive stain. It works on different chemistries and different properties than acid stains.

"Acid stains are available in basically eight colors. CemTint is derived from a proprietary blend of reactive, UV-stable chemicals. You can now get any tint under the sun — purples, blues, shades of green. The palette is now endless. There are other companies that have what they call water-based stains, but nothing that is actually a true reactive or penetrating stain like this product."

Sullivan also proudly points to a new one-part modified epoxy called QC Perma Seal. "It's had great results in durability, both inside and outside,

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and it's a simple application. It's good for people imprinting concrete outside who want more of a matte or satin look. It's also excellent for people working inside with stain or overlay who are looking for durability but who don't have the time to wait for a two-part urethane to cure out. You can walk on this product in about an hour."

QC also has new sealers and overlay products in various stages of production. Sealers in particular, Sullivan says, continue to create a lot of questions for applicators. QC's solution was to create an entire operating system for its distributors.

"We target training and education with our products and getting the word out to the applicators through our distribution network," Sullivan says. "We have a training program called the QC Color Tour that travels around the country to our big distributors and offers either free or low-cost training with our products. It's a whole system from nuts to bolts: service, training and backup within a product family.

"Take acid staining for example: We have all the products from beginning to end. We have the prep products, the cleaners, the stains. We have the neutralizing and washing products. We have the base-coat sealers, the finish and maintenance sealers. We have accessory products and additives. And we'll show you how to use them."

Apparently, QC made all the right moves at crunch time. The company is enjoying considerable growth and currently has about 60 employees. QC also recently opened a second plant in Knoxville, Tenn., to service the expanding Northeast market.

"These trends tend to go from west to east," Sullivan says. "Decorative concrete, while it continues to grow nicely everywhere, is getting hot on the East Coast. It's a huge market with huge potential. I expect substantial growth in the next five to 10 years."

Sullivan says that he sees more and more concrete contractors everywhere looking for training in decorative applications.

"I've been in this industry for about 12 years," he says. "When I first started,

there were a lot of applicators and ready-mix suppliers who wanted nothing to do with color. It was a pain, it was a bother, it was messy. Now, because of financial gain, sales and demand, we're seeing very few places where that attitude prevails.

"We're finding more and more applicators are becoming savvy to the products and actually becoming artisans."





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CIRCLE #82 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Waste Not, Want Not

Conserving concrete in times of shortage

By Evan Lloyd

Last week, I passed by my local supply house and witnessed an unfamiliar sight. Encasing the building was an infinite line of people eager to get in the store. At first I thought, “Did *N SYNC get back together and start selling concert tickets at hardware stores?” I approached one of the men in line and asked what the fuss was all about.

“We’re waiting in line for cement,” said David Cunningham of David Jack Corp. “They ran out last week and a new shipment arrived today.” When asked how long he had been waiting in line, he gave me a frustrated look and said, “Since 4:30 A.M.”

Unfortunately, Mr. Cunningham is not alone. The concrete industry, as a whole, may soon be affected by a cement shortage. In order to understand the cement shortage, we must first take a look at the factors that are responsible for the lack of this precious material. They include growth in construction activity, limited supply, and increased shipping rates.

Supply vs. demand

This past year was a hallmark for the construction industry. The Commerce Department reported that nearly \$100 billion dollars was spent on construction costs this year alone, and that this spending trend is likely to continue. Even cold winter days didn’t slow the building industry. Normally, when construction is slowed in the holiday season, cement plants will stock up on cement to prepare for the spring explosion. With no letup in demand for cement products, many plants did not have the resources to facilitate the booming spring and summer seasons, when construction is at its highest. However, this is only a part of the problem.

The United States produces the majority of the concrete products we use. However, 22.6 percent of our cement is imported. The importation of cement from countries like China helps fill the voids in domestic production and demand. This year, freight costs and limited availability of shipping have put a stranglehold on the importation of cement. China’s economy is at an all-time high and their ability to export many of the goods they produce is limited. The result is

diminished cement supply and expensive shipping rates. Prices have not only increased for cement products, but they have become unavailable in many parts of the country. With conditions being what they are, we as artisans need to do all we can to conserve this natural resource.

What can we do?

There is an old saying that states, “A little goes a long way.” First, only mix what you need. It seems simple, but how many times have you completed a project only to find an obscene amount of leftover concrete sitting in a bucket? As you near completion of a stamp or overlay project, mixing only half or a quarter of a bag will not only conserve materials, it will also save you money. Next, find creative ways to use your leftover materials. At Solid Solutions, we have reusable molds that we use to make concrete countertop samples. At the end of every pour, we fill these molds with the leftover material and then give them to clients as samples.

On flooring jobs, always carry some scrap plywood or cement board to every job site. After you complete a job, trowel the leftover flooring material onto the wood and then use them as samples. We like to take these uncolored samples to our clients’ homes, where they can spray stain on them and pick the color for their project. The clients love being able to mix their own colors and we’re using material that we would have had to throw away.

Finally, make some stepping-stones. You can find reusable molds for stepping-stones at any craft store. Fill the molds with your scrap material, and allow them to cure. Once released from the mold, stain and seal the stepping-stones and give them to your clients as a “Thank-you-for-your-business gift.” This small gesture has gotten us many client referrals. They are easy to make and the homeowners love them.

For more information on the cement shortage, visit the Portland Cement Association at www.cement.org.




Evan Lloyd is the president of Solid Solutions, a decorative concrete company located in Fresno, California.



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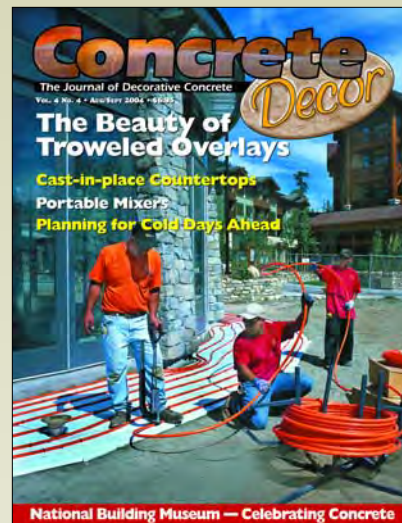
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Countertop Intensive Offers Valuable Training

by Rosemary Camozzi



Countertops were the name of the game at a recent workshop sponsored by the Institute for American Craftsmanship in Eugene, Oregon.

Taught by Beto Esquivel, a master craftsman from Buddy Rhodes Studio, the two-day workshop offered its participants valuable experience in making precast and cast-in-place countertops, decorative concrete tiles and even concrete stools.

"This class has been really informative," said Joe Geise, a contractor from Roseburg, Oregon. "It opens windows for us, because we get to see all the tricks Buddy's learned over 25 years that make him good."

Attendees got hands-on experience in every step of the process, from creating forms to blending the thick, integrally colored mix, pushing it into place by hand, reinforcing, troweling for a smooth finish, and sealing with a penetrating sealer and beeswax.

One of the most important benefits was the chance to learn how to duplicate Buddy Rhodes' signature veined finish. "It's a whole different technique from what I already knew about countertops," said Kenny Sides, a contractor from Olga, Washington. "That gives it a whole different look."

Buddy Rhodes Studio manufactures a complete line of products with everything needed to create countertops, whether precast or cast-in-place. "You take the product and just add water and color," says Jim Mason, sales and marketing director for the mix product division. "This product is designed to simplify the process."

The company has recently launched its reformulated countertop mix nationwide, with improvements that make the mix accept color better and that create a more vibrant, rich finish.

Buddy Rhodes has also recruited some of the top names in decorative concrete as distributors and trainers: Bob Harris and Bart Sacco on the East Coast; Wes Vollmer, Dana Boyer and Tom Ralston on the West Coast. "We're trying to align ourselves with the best people in the industry," Mason says. "Education is so key to the success of our product."

Indeed, as the class drew to a close, Geise said he planned to ditch the countertops that he had experimented with at home and start from scratch using the techniques he had just learned. "Using the mix would make a very consistent product," he said. "With the techniques these guys showed us, you can get the same finish every time."

He wasn't the only student who was impressed with the product. "This class was presented real well," Sides said. "I've already been asking, 'Where do I get the product and how soon can I get it?'"



PRODUCT PROFILES



Top Cast Surface Retarder

Top Cast is a water-based, film-forming surface retarder that saves time by eliminating the need for covering the surface even when it rains. The product, available in thirteen depths of etch, is designed for poured-in-place flatwork and the top surface of precast panels.

Top Cast has been used with both integrally colored and color-hardened concrete surfaces to achieve the popular "sand" finish without loss of coloration.

"Its outstanding quality is that it is not only a chemical retarder, but it has polymer in it," says Dustin Ferch, a contractor from Roseburg, Oregon. "When you apply it, you don't have to cover it with plastic because it creates its own film."

Ferch also likes the product because it will come off concrete even if left on the surface for a couple of days in hot weather. "It's very user-friendly, very forgiving," he says.

The fact that it is available in many subtle gradations of depth — from super-fine sand, to sand, to exposed aggregate — also makes it extremely useful. "If you need to match a pre-existing job, it gives you a lot of range so you can get an exact match," he says.

His only caution is that you need to be careful about overspray. "Ammonia does clean it up but it takes a lot of elbow grease," he says. He recommends covering adjacent areas to avoid this problem.

The product is VOC-compliant and easy to apply. It has an excellent coverage rate. For more information, visit www.graceconstruction.com.

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Haven't heard of the Magic Trowel yet? You will.

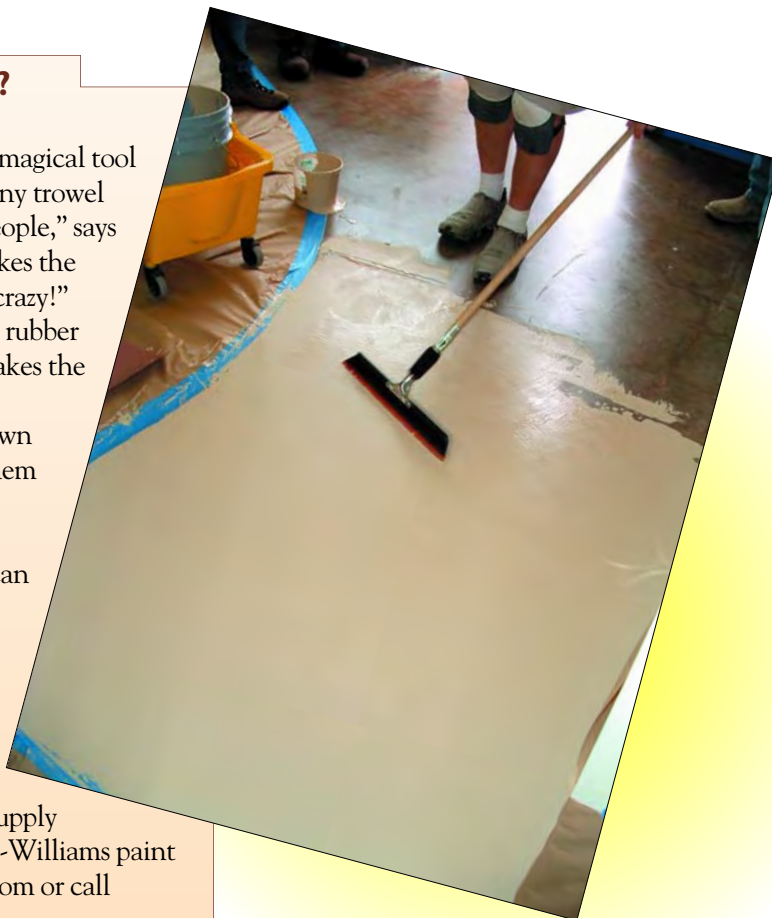
Originally developed for finishing drywall, this magical tool smooths concrete surfaces without leaving any trowel lines. "We're getting so many calls from concrete people," says Joe Torres, president of TexMaster Tools, which makes the Magic Trowel. "The guys in this industry are going crazy!"

The Magic Trowel's patented blade has a flexible rubber edge. The edge is cut on a 30-degree angle, which takes the pressure off so the trowel doesn't leave trowel lines.

Another plus is the fact that the blade pushes down imperfections in the concrete instead of dragging them through. "It's not like a squeegee, which has a hard edge," Torres says.

At a recent workshop at the Institute for American Craftsmanship, Colormaker Floors president Gary Jones demonstrated the finish he could quickly achieve with this trowel. Many "oohs" and "aahs" came from the crowd as he created perfectly smooth surfaces by drawing it across cementitious toppings applied both horizontally and vertically.

The Magic Trowel is just coming into concrete supply houses, but it is currently available at most Sherwin-Williams paint stores. For more information, visit www.texmaster.com or call (800) 852-8355.



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New solution for moisture-prone areas

Key Resin Company has introduced a new version of Key Urecon that combines a urethane binder with portland cement and graded aggregates to deliver superior qualities for a flooring application in manufacturing and plant settings.

Key Urecon is a heavy-duty, trowel-applied, urethane-modified cementitious topping. High impact-resistance and excellent thermal shock make Key Urecon ideal for manufacturing areas. In addition, as a "breathing" system, the product is a solution for many moisture problems. The textured surface reduces slipping under most wet conditions.

Key Urecon may be used both indoors and outdoors. The system is ideal for rehabbing old floors because it provides a strong and long-lasting surface. It is an ideal choice for wet areas, like dairies, food processing plants and industrial kitchens. The product can be installed with an integral cove base for areas requiring seamless wall to floor coatings. It will not support the growth of fungus or bacteria.

Key Urecon is available in grey, tan, red and green, in addition to a variety of custom colors subject to laboratory approvals. Colors will not fade or wear thin. For more information, call (888) 943-4532 or visit www.keyresin.com.

Get ready for cold weather

Ground Heaters Inc. has introduced an air heater that is ideal for temporarily heating large enclosed spaces and multistory buildings while under construction. The unit uses a trailer-mounted hydronic heater to heat the unit's 140 gallons of heat transfer fluid up to 180 degrees Fahrenheit. A pump then circulates the warm fluid through hoses to the liquid-to-air heat exchangers placed throughout the enclosed spaces. Each heat

exchanger's fan draws cooler air from the room and blows it cross the heated coils to produce hot, dry, clean air. The fluid then returns to the main unit for reheating.

Hydronic air heaters are growing in popularity because they safely deliver clean, dry heat into the workspace while using less fuel than traditional methods. They also remove excess moisture from the workplace, which prevents mold and mildew formation and speeds

finishing work. They are also safer than traditional heating methods because there is no open flame or combustion byproducts. They can be powered by diesel, propane or natural gas and come with three sizes of

liquid-to-air heat exchangers. For more information, call (231) 799-9600 or visit www.groundheaters.com.

Make the cut with the Crac-Vac

The Saw-Tec Crac-Vac Decorative Kit is ideal for saw-cutting artificial grout lines or decorative cuts into stained or overlay-finished decorative concrete floors. The kit includes everything needed for the contractor: a Crac-Vac saw mounted on a dolly; 6-foot hose; reusable dust collection bag; and bag shoulder strap.

The saw cuts to a depth of 1½ inch. It controls dust during cutting for faster cleanup and to allow other trades to work in the area simultaneously. A patented vacuum housing with internal impeller fan routes the dust to the reusable dust collection bag, so no separate vacuum is required. The Crac-Vac is also used for routing out random cracks in preparation for the application of repair compounds and for cleaning out expansion or control joints on concrete floors. For more information, call (800) 624-7832 or visit www.surfacepreparation.com.

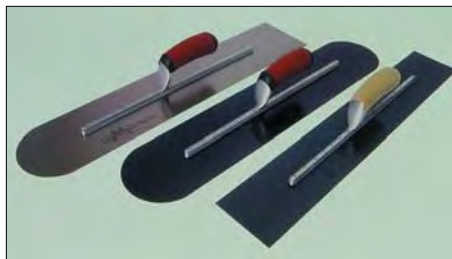


Add a scarifier to your ride-on scraper

A new scarifier attachment is available for the Blastrac BMS 270 scraper, which is used for high-volume, light demolition and concrete surface prep. The attachment increases the flexibility of this ride-on scraping machine to allow scarifying of concrete surfaces for planing or removal of built-up contaminants, mastics, glues and coatings. Scarifying can also be used to correct common slab problems such as curled joints, high spots or uneven areas.



The scarifier features a 13" working path and is powered via the hydraulic system of the BMS 270. A range of cutter teeth is available to meet application needs. For more information, visit www.surfacepreparation.com.



New line of extended length trowels

Marshalltown has released eight new Extended Length Finishing Trowels. The longer trowels vary in length from 22 to 24 inches and in width from 4 to 5 inches. Five of the trowels feature a smooth, natural finish hardwood handle and three have the patented Durasoft handle. Six are made of hardened carbon steel blades, while two offer tempered blue steel blades. All are properly shaped to deliver a smooth consistent finish. For more information, visit www.marshalltown.com.



Backpack vibrator perfect for remote jobs

Wyco Tool Company has introduced a new portable, self-contained backpack vibrator: the gas-powered Model 402. Because no electrical cords or pneumatic hoses are required, it is the best choice for remote and hard-to-reach jobs. It is also ideal for use as an

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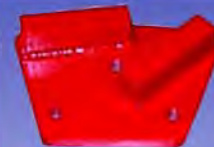


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emergency or backup vibrator in case of power failure at the job site.

The new backpack vibrator maintains constant vibration in the mix, due to easy operator control of the vibration speed via the engine throttle. The powerful Robin engine supplies consistent, full-vibrating capacity to the Wyco Square Head vibrator. A single digital tachometer/hour meter on the unit indicates precise engine speed while the unit is operating and displays accumulated hours when the engine is not running, providing important input for preventative maintenance. A speed increaser reduces engine speed for longer life and less noise.

The portable Model 402 is available with a choice of shaft lengths and head sizes. For more information, call (800) 233-9926 or visit www.wycotool.com.

Concrete stain offers affordable protection

Sherwin-Williams Vertical Concrete Stain is an ideal, cost-effective way to add distinctive color and improved appearance to large concrete structures such as parking garages, stadium supports and tilt-up, block and stucco walls. The penetrating coating adds extra protection from water and weather damage.

Vertical Concrete Stain can be applied to new or aged concrete. It offers excellent adhesion and resists color fading, blistering and efflorescence. Contractors can also count on a fast turnaround since the stain dries quickly and is ready for a second coat in as little as 15 minutes. It goes on easily with conventional spray equipment and offers superior sag resistance and less overspray than similar products.

While some applications require the heavy-duty properties of elastomeric or high-build textured coatings to protect against harsh weather conditions and wind-driven rain, many jobs simply don't warrant such a high level of protection. This stain offers better weather protection than conventional acrylic coatings without adding excessive costs to the project. It is available in a wide range of colors. For more information, visit www.sherwin-williams.com.

Bull float bracket lets you rock n' roll

Bon Tool Co.'s new Rock N' Roll Bracket for bull floats and fresnos provides full-up and full-down pitch with just half a turn on the handle. This eliminates side-to-side movement on the bull float.

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Bon's "build your own bull float" product line includes 12 bull float options, more than 20 handles, seven handle adapters, a universal four-hole to two-hole adapter, and additional brackets, including the popular Rite-Height Adjustable Bracket. For more information, call (724) 443-7080 or visit www.bontool.com.

Be kind to your knees

Also new from Bon Tool is the Contoured Kneeler Board, which provides comfortable, soft support for concrete finishing. The foam polyurethane is molded to fit the shape of the knees in the kneeling position. The cushion is anatomically formed to

provide even weight distribution and consequently greater relief for knees and joints. The exceptional absorbing characteristics of the foam reduce the risk of damage and pain to the knees, even when kneeling for long periods of time.

The cushion is permanently set in a heavy-gauge, polyethylene tray that provides waterproofing and protects against sharp objects. The overall dimension of the Contoured Kneeler Board is 24 inches by 14 inches. It is chemical resistant and washable. For more information, visit www.bontool.com or call (724) 443-7080.



Modern colors update Scofield line

Scofield has added new colors to its premier line of Chromix Admixtures for Color-Conditioned Concrete. The "modern" palette offers expanded choices for integrally coloring concrete. More than 400 custom colors also are available by special order. For a copy of Color Chart A-312.11 for CHROMIX Admixtures for Color-Conditioned Concrete, email info@scofield.com or call (800) 800-9900.




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