

ConcreteTM Decor

The Journal of Decorative Concrete

VOL. 5 No. 2 • APR/MAY 2005 • \$6.95

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Employee Time Card

Name: DAVID B.				Dates: April		
Day:	Start:	Lunch:	End:	Jobsite:	Activity:	Hours:
Monday	7	:30	3:30	Morris	Gen	8
Tuesday	7	:30	3:30	'	'	8
Wednesday	7	:30	3:30	'	'	8
Thursday	7	:30	4:30	'	'	7
Friday	7	:30	4:30	'	'	7

Employee Signature: *David B.* Total Hours: 42

\$860.00

Okay, let The Jobclock System do it for you.

Employee Report

David Burns

Jobsite Name: **Morris Property** Date Range: **4/11/2005 through 4/15/2005**

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 4/11	7:19 AM	12:02 PM	Prep	4:43 hours
	12:40 PM	3:39 PM	Prep	2:59 hours 7:42 hours
Tue 4/12	7:21 AM	12:06 PM	Formwork	4:45 hours
	12:37 PM	3:42 PM	Formwork	3:05 hours 7:50 hours
Wed 4/13	7:16 AM	12:04 PM	Formwork	4:48 hours
	12:33 PM	3:44 PM	Formwork	3:11 hours 7:59 hours
Thu 4/14	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 4/15	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: *David B.* David Burns

Employee total 38:53 hours

\$777.67

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CIRCLE #37 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Spring Musings

Nothing could be more rewarding in life than the time we have with family and friends. So isn't it ironic when I say that my wife and I can't agree on anything as we currently attempt to design the landscaping for our backyard. *Oh my gosh!* Moments like these can lead any man or woman to wonder why they got married in the first place.

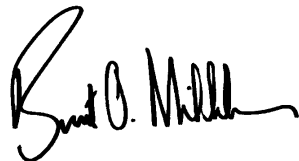
Thankfully, when we were at our wits' end, the landscape contractor who did the work on our front yard last fall paid us a visit. And suddenly the tension between husband and wife and our backyard planning vanished. Suddenly, Sheri and I were shoulder-to-shoulder, eagerly listening for words that could rescue us from the treacherous and somewhat lonely path we were on in trying to plan the backyard ourselves. To my amazement, even after our landscaper drove away, we were still shoulder-to-shoulder, more excited than ever about the future of our backyard.

Having spent time on all three sides of the fence — a contractor, a contractor's customer and a husband — I know better than ever the importance of being a good listener. In fact, the "Consider This" quote on Page 6 of this issue highlights the necessity of making sure customers are 100 percent satisfied. That quote, I'm quite sure, includes wives or "significant others" too. Boy, oh boy, it's not an easy road to travel — it means added work both mentally and physically. However, experience now tells me the results are most often happiness and contentment, and quite possibly, a double-wide hammock hanging in some shady corner of our new yard.

As I'm sure you know by now, I live life with a healthy fear of God and earnest desire to enjoy many good friendships. So when I sit down to write you letters such as this one, I enjoy talking about the trade — maybe that shows in the following pages. But I really enjoy talking about the more challenging roads in life, namely our relationships with the people in our lives. I know I've said it before, but I need to hear myself say it again: Without success in this area of our lives, we're nothing. I'm not always successful at some of them but I will be first in line to admit my shortcomings when it comes to sustaining and improving my relationships with others.

I know you're probably asking yourself: Is Bent doing any decorative concrete? Absolutely. Our little corner of the world wouldn't be complete without it. The imprinted concrete walkways are a constant reminder of the rewarding friendships I share with you. We hope you'll pay us a visit sometime soon. No gloves required!

Sincerely,



Bent Mikkelsen, *Publisher*



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Publisher: Bent O. Mikkelsen

Co-publisher: Ernst H. Mikkelsen

Editor: Rosemary Camozzi

News Editor: John Strieder

Circulation: Sheri Mikkelsen

Design and Production: Stephen Stanley

Web Design: Mark Dixon

National Sales Manager: Kathleen Goodman
(314) 367-1121

Western Regional Sales: Troy Ahmann
(702) 869-4342

Writers:

Susan Brimo-Cox

Mike Dawson

Amy Johnson

Stacey Enesey Klemenc

John Strieder

David Thompson

Contributing Writers:

Richard Smith

Editorial:

Professional Trade Publications, Inc.

3410 West 11th Avenue

Eugene, OR 97402

Tel: 541-341-3390

Fax: 541-341-6443

Email: rosemary@protradepub.com

Circulation and Administration:

Professional Trade Publications, Inc.

P.O. Box 25210

Eugene, OR 97402

Tel: 541-341-3390

Fax: 541-341-6443

Email: circulation@protradepub.com

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www.concretedecor.net

ON THE COVER: Becker Architectural Concrete's showroom shows the infinite possibilities of decorative concrete. Read about Chris Becker and his company on Page 12.

FEATURES

- 16 **Decorative Concrete Design**
Now that you've learned how to stamp and stain, it's time to give some serious thought to the design of your projects.
by Stacey Enesey Klemenc
- 22 **Layering Acid Stains**
There are as many techniques for layering stains as there are concrete artisans. Here are tips from some of the best in the trade.
by David Thompson
- 28 **Get a Grip on Graffiti**
Protective coatings may not deter graffiti artists, but they'll make cleanup a lot easier.
by John Strieder
- 40 **Decorative Curbing**
The market for residential curbing is growing by leaps and bounds. It can be a profitable niche for a concrete contractor.
by Susan Brimo-Cox

DEPARTMENTS

- 12 **CONTRACTOR PROFILE:** Becker Architectural Concrete
Along with his focus on quality work, Chris Becker makes education a priority — for homeowners, builders, architects and landscape designers.
by Amy B. Johnson
- 32 **TOOLING:** Brooms for Concrete
- 36 **RICHARD SMITH:** Taking it to the Next Level
Veteran contractor Rick Smith shares his expertise on how you can grow your business beyond your local area.
by Richard Smith
- 38 **PROJECT PROFILE:** No Pie in the Sky
Through snow, rain sleet and hail, this Cleveland contractor still delivered.
by David Thompson
- 46 **MANUFACTURER PROFILE:** Symons
A commitment to quality, innovation and exemplary customer service make Symons a leader in the industry.
by Mike Dawson
- 50 **A Trip to England**
Concrete Decor publisher Bent Mikkelsen reports on a training seminar in North Yorkshire.
- 58 **FOCUS ON EDUCATION:** Concrete Countertop Institute
- 64 **FINAL POUR:** Tsunami-inspired concrete art
- 54 **Classifieds**
- 55 **Concrete Marketplace**
- 4 **Decorative Concrete Tips**
- 6 **Industry News**
- 10 **Industry Spotlight — Association News**
- 61 **Product News**
- 45 **Product Profiles**
- 2 **Publisher's Letter**

DECORATIVE CONCRETE TIPS

Decorative Concrete Tips is a forum for readers to exchange information about methods, tools, and tricks they've devised.

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

Tips on Sealing Decorative Concrete

Decorative sealers are designed to provide a wide range of benefits. The top two are always protection and color enhancement. Safety, appearance, and performance (SAP) should be considered when determining what decorative sealer system to use. Safety is always first, followed by the level of gloss, and lastly, how long we want the sealer to last in its particular environment. Notice how price never enters the picture! Be aware that "curing compounds" and "cure and seals" are different than sealers, and often will not provide the same level of protection. With sealers, the adage holds true that "You get what you pay for."

As an applicator, the sealer system you choose can make or break a decorative project. There are four key factors that should be closely monitored every time sealers are applied.

1. **Moisture.** A dry surface is always important — 12 to 24 hour dry time!
2. **Surface Temperature.** Typically above 50°F and below 90°F is recommended.
3. **Surface Condition.** Clean and free of chemical and dirt contamination.
4. **Applicator.** Multiple thin applications are better than one heavy coat.

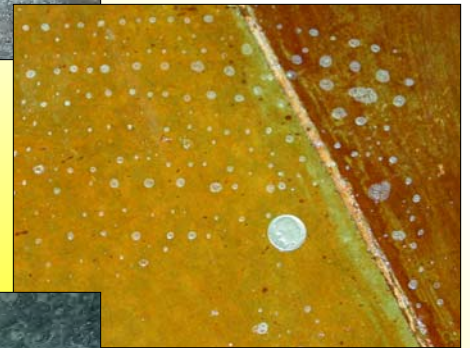
There are hundreds of sealers to choose from, many having slightly different resins and solvents. Understanding specific product limitations and following the above mentioned guidelines could help eliminate common sealer issues as we enter the busiest time of the year for decorative concrete installation.



Our thanks to Chris Sullivan, regional sales manager for QC Construction Products, for this tip.



Trapped moisture under the sealer.



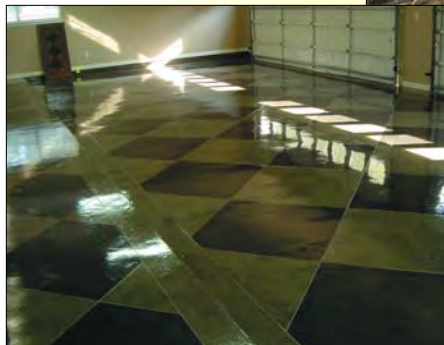
Blisters created by sealing a "hot" surface.



Stain residue creating sealer delaminating issues.



Cracking of sealer film created by over-application.



Sealed and maintained properly, decorative floors look good for years.

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Coloring System •

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Blush-Tone Acid Stain •

Decorative Sandblast Stencils •

Sealing & Maintenance •

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Consider This

"In this business, success depends 100 percent on matching clients' expectations."

Doug Carlton, Carlton Concrete. *See our story on layering acid stains, page 22.*

"Concrete should flow with the overall feel. You know, when you walk into a place or up to a place and it feels right ... that's what you're trying to go for."

Lee Levig, Concrete Works. *See our story on design and layout, page 16.*

Ill winds blow good to home improvement industry

Last year's hurricane season helped drive spending on home-improvement products in 2004 to an estimated \$271.4 billion, a record high, reports the Home Improvement Research Institute.

The estimated total for 2004 represents a 13 percent increase over 2003 spending. HIRI had predicted only a 10 percent increase in June 2004, before the hurricane season.

HIRI forecasts more modest but consistent growth for home improvement product sales through 2009, with an average annual growth rate of about 4 percent.

HIRI's membership is comprised of more than 70 companies in the home improvement industry and other fields. For more information, visit www.hiri.org or call (813) 627-6750.

Report bullish on Asia, forecasts lower demand for portland cement

World demand for cement and concrete additives is forecast to rise 6.8 percent per year through 2008 to \$6.7 billion, a big improvement over 1998-2003, according to a new study from market research firm The Freedonia Group Inc.

The report, "World Cement & Concrete Additives," predicts the healthiest gains will come from developing countries such as China, India, and Vietnam.

The study also finds that mineral additives such as fly ash and blast furnace slag are increasingly being used to partially replace portland cement, the most expensive component of concrete. The trend is lowering costs for producers while improving performance and durability. Thanks to technological improvements, an increasing share of portland cement will be replaced with pozzolanic mineral additives through 2008.

In addition, the report predicts that higher performance requirements for concrete will prompt

greater loading factors for additives. The fiber additive sector will register the strongest gains, but 90 percent of overall demand will concentrate in the chemical and mineral additive sectors.

For more information, call (440) 684-9600 or visit www.freedoniagroup.com.

Green homes a perfect fit at Yellowstone

Quad-Lock Building Systems Ltd. claimed its share of the credit when two single-family residences in Yellowstone National Park earned LEED certification. The houses were constructed with Quad-Lock insulating concrete forms.

The contractor, Zanterra Parks & Resorts, chose Quad-Lock because it was aiming for LEED certification, and Quad-Lock forms provide the highest R-value in the industry. The homes will serve as a model for green, energy-efficient construction developments in national parks.

To learn more about Quad-Lock, visit www.quadlock.com or call (888) 711-5625.

Graco gobbles Gusmer

Fluid handling equipment manufacturer Graco Inc. purchased Gusmer Corp. and, in a related transaction, Gusmer Europe S.L.

Gusmer is a leading designer and manufacturer of two-component dispense equipment systems. The systems are designed for use with polyureas, polyurethanes and epoxies, among others.

Graco acquired Gusmer Corp. from affiliates of PMC Global Inc., a diversified industrial company with holdings in chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electronics and machinery.

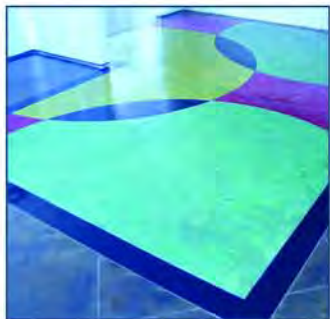
For more about Graco Inc., visit www.graco.com or call (612) 623-6000.

ISPC creates new company

International Surface Preparation Corp. has spun off a cut-wire abrasives company, Abrasive Materials LLC.

The Hillsdale, Mich., company has been a leader in cut-wire abrasives for 50 years, and was part of ISPC's Industrial Distribution Group for the past five. The new LLC is owned by former Abrasive Materials manager Ken Clark, former Abrasive products owner Mike Trotta, and ISPC itself. Trotta serves as managing member and Clark as general manager.

Abrasive Materials will continue to be the key supplier of stainless steel and zinc cut wire to ISPC. It also focuses on cast stainless steel shot. For more details, visit www.surfacepreparation.com or call (800) 544-4144.

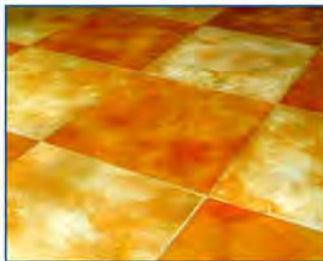


CHROME-ETCH™ ACID STAIN

Available in 12 unique colors, Chrome-Etch Acid Stains create natural, earth tone color shades that simulate the appearance of real stone or masonry. Ideal for interior floors, Chrome-Etch™ imparts a permanent color effect that won't fade, chip or peel from the concrete surface.

CONCRETE CANVAS™ SELF LEVEL OVERLAYMENT

Concrete Canvas is a self leveling polymer modified overlayment that is designed for fast track resurfacing of concrete surfaces. Available in White or Gray, Concrete Canvas readily accepts acid stains and acrylic shading materials to provide a wide range of color effects. It sets quickly, requires no troweling and can be acid stained or shaded in as little as 24 hours. Concrete Canvas reaches 5,030 psi in 28 days and when properly sealed and polished, provides a low maintenance, economical flooring alternative.

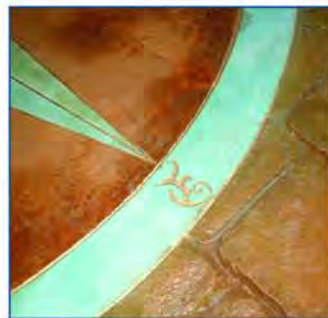


STENCIL-CRETE® PATENTED OVERLAY

The "original" stenciled resurfacing system, **STENCIL-CRETE®** can be applied over existing concrete to beautify and restore unsightly concrete without the costly expense of removal. The pre-colored **STENCIL-CRETE®** grouts eliminate jobsite color mixing leading to color inconsistencies associated with competitive systems. SCP's patented plastic stencils are completely reusable, reducing material costs significantly over paper stencils.

VENEER-CRETE™ STAMP OVERLAY SYSTEM

Veneer-Crete™ is a fast track resurfacing system that can be stamped, broomed, slick finished or acid stained. It can be applied from 1/8" to 1/2" thick and can be stamped with special overlay stamps or with traditional stamping tools. At over 6,000 psi compressive strength, Veneer-Crete™ is strong enough for heavy pedestrian and vehicular traffic.



DURA-TOP™ CONCRETE COUNTERTOP SYSTEM

Available in 28 standard colors, Dura-Top™ Countertop mixes can be sculpted into an endless array of textures, colors and shapes. Dura-Top™ surfaces can be stained, textured, scored or polished for a wide range of finished looks. Dura-Top™ Countertop mixes are polymer modified and fiber reinforced for maximum tensile strength and crack control.



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FACTORY TRAINING

SCP offers the most comprehensive Decorative Concrete training course at the SCP Decorative Concrete Demonar. This four-day course is designed to put students in jobsite settings and give them real "hands on" instruction on all of our Decorative Concrete systems. For Demonar Dates, visit our website at www.scpusa.com.

Colorado firm names president

Concrete contractor Colorado Hardscapes Inc. has named chief operating officer Andrew "A.J." Fox as its new president.

Fox, a former vice president of TruGreen Companies, has 20 years of green industry management experience. He is currently directing the implementation of a Western Slopes Branch of the company, which will serve the commercial and custom home construction markets in Aspen, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, Vail and surrounding areas.

For more about Colorado Hardscapes Inc., visit www.coloradohardscapes.com or call (800) 447-1888.

New faces at Degussa

Degussa Admixtures Inc. has added two new product line managers to its Technology Innovation and Sustainability Group.

Dana Pasquali will manage Degussa's Master Builders brand core products: water-reducing, accelerating and retarding admixtures, viscosity-modifying admixtures and the Rheomac UW450 product line. She will also lead the company's work in Liquid Sand technology designed to optimize concrete mixtures.

Joe Daczko will manage high-range water-reducing admixtures and lead efforts related to Rheodynamic Self-Consolidating Concrete. Previously,

Daczko was manager of Degussa's concrete laboratory.

For more about Degussa Admixtures Inc., visit www.masterbuilders.com or call (800) 628-9990.

Vic hires purchasing director

Vic International Corp., a global distributor of concrete polishing and stone and tile fabrication products, has named Johnny E. Blalock director of purchasing. Blalock was formerly a temporary buyer-planner with Sea Ray.

For more about Vic, visit www.vicintl.com or call (800) 423-1634.

New markets for Multiquip

Multiquip Inc. has begun marketing light and medium construction equipment to building professionals throughout the Middle East and in select Eastern European companies.

Multiquip products are now available from Turkey, Syria and Saudi Arabia in the east to Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west. European distribution includes such nations as Georgia, Armenia and Tajikistan.

The company and its Indian strategic partner, Multiquip Construction Equipment Pvt. Ltd., plan to establish a local distribution center to go along with an existing operation in Mumbai, India. The new center will help establish dealers throughout the new territory.

Meanwhile, a division of Multiquip, Stow Construction Equipment, has opened a centralized warehouse in

Londerzeel, Belgium, to better serve Europe. The warehouse will stock Stow's complete line of trowels, concrete and masonry saws, mixers, concrete vibrators and dewatering pumps.

For more information, visit www.multiquip.com or call (877) 289-7869.

Blastrac selects distributors

Blastrac has named new specialized distributors for the Pacific Northwest and Florida.

Kodiak Equipment, based in Kent, Wash., will serve Alaska, Washington, Oregon, northern Idaho and British Columbia, Canada. Standard Sand & Silica Co., with locations in Miami, Jacksonville and Haines City, Fla., will serve the state of Florida.

Blastrac specialized distributors are trained in the company's surface preparation products and offer rentals, sales and support. The two new distributors will also carry Sawtec hand tools for concrete repair and surface preparation.

To contact Kodiak, call (888) 872-9892. To reach Standard Sand & Silica, visit www.standardsand.com or call (877) 444-7263. Information about Blastrac and Sawtec can be found at www.blastrac.com.

Trade shows break records in 2005

More than 124,220 industry professionals from around the world attended the

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CONEXPO-CON/AGG 2005 and IFPE 2005 trade expositions in March. This is a big improvement over the 2002 shows, which attracted about 108,770 attendees.

The 2005 events, held in Las Vegas, occupied a record amount of exhibit space and attracted more than 21,220 international attendees, also a record high. International visitors to the shows hailed from more than 130 countries.

Attendance and exhibit numbers reflected an improved economy, including pent-up demand to replace aging fleets, according to an event press release.

The latest show information is online at www.conexpoconagg.com and www.ifpe.com.

Charity work earns MAPEI president kudos

Nick Di Tempora, president of MAPEI Americas, was named "2005 Man of the Year" by Boys' Towns of Italy Inc., the oldest

American charity in service abroad.

The charity supports the efforts of Boys' Towns of Italy to care for homeless, hungry children in that country. MAPEI supplies systems for tile and stone installation, floor-covering installation, decorative concrete and concrete restoration.

For more about Boys' Towns of Italy, visit www.boystown.it. For more about MAPEI, visit www.mapei.com or call (800) 426-2734.

Wildlife council names chair

The Wildlife Habitat Council board of directors has elected David W. Carroll as its new chairman.

Carroll is vice president, environmental, at Lafarge North America Inc. He has been on the WHC board of directors since 2000 and served previously as secretary-treasurer on the executive committee.

For more about the WHC, visit www.wildlifehc.org or call (301) 588-8994.



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CIRCLE #11 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Industry Spotlight

Association News

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CONCRETE CONTRACTORS Annual conference, CEO Forum coming up

The American Society of Concrete Contractors' CEO Forum is scheduled for June 23 through June 25 in Kohler, Wis. The Forum gathers CEOs, presidents and other top managers of concrete contracting firms to explore business topics of immediate and long-range interest to their companies.

The ASCC will hold its annual conference Sept. 15 through Sept. 18 in Westminster, Colo. The conference, titled "High Above The Rest," will include seminars, roundtable discussions and technique demonstrations. Early registration ends July 31.

For more about the ASCC or either event, visit www.asconline.org or call (866) 788-2722.

ASCC elects new officers



Also, the trade group has a new president: Michael J. Schneider, vice president of operations at Baker Concrete Construction Inc., Monroe, Ohio. He

was elected at the group's January board meeting. Paul A. Albanelli, Farmington Hills, Mich.; Clay Fischer, Jupiter, Fla.; Rocky Geans, Mishawaka, Ind.; and Donald Marks, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., were elected vice presidents. Glen Shamblen, Tampa, Fla., was re-elected secretary-treasurer. Gary Bureson, Glendale, Ariz.; Dan Sladek, Skokie, Ill.; and David Somero, New Ipswich, N.H., were elected to the board of directors.

The Decorative Concrete Council, part of the ASCC, elected Allan Thompson, Dow Reichhold Specialty

Latex LLC, Durham, N.C., as council director. Jay Fangman, Denver, Colo., was elected secretary-treasurer. Tim Blankenship, Alpharetta, Ga.; Greg Chapman, Merrillville, Ind.; and Scott Thome, Douglasville, Ga., were elected to the DCC advisory board.

2005 catalog adds to offerings

ASCC's 2004/2005 catalog includes three new offerings: "Bob Harris' Guide to Stained Concrete," a CD entitled "Exploring the Art of Concrete," and "Conference Notes: First North American Conference on the Design and Use of Self-Consolidating Concrete."

To obtain a copy of the catalog, write to ascc@asconline.org or call (866) 788-2722.

PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION PCA promotion awards

Portland Cement Association awarded eight industry professionals with Promotion Progress Awards at its annual spring committee meeting. Four of the winners received the industry's sustainable development award.

Honorees are: David Baker, Ash Grove Cement Co.; Larry Baloun, Lehigh Northwest Cement Ltd.

(Sustainable Development award winner, U.S.); Brad Belt, Salt River Materials Group/Phoenix Cement Co.; Dan Brown, Holcim (US) Inc., (Sustainable Development award winner, U.S.); Allan Kramer, Lehigh Cement Co., (Sustainable Development award winner, U.S.); Francois Marleau, Ciment Quebec; Lori Peterson, Lafarge Corp.; Mark Scripnick, St. Mary's Cement (Sustainable Development award winner, Canada).

The 2005 Promotion Progress Awards are sponsored by PCA and the Cement Association of Canada. For more about the PCA, visit www.cement.org.

Get the moist out of your floors

PCA has released "Concrete Floors and Moisture," a book that explores how to prevent unwanted moisture in concrete floors.

The 164-page book covers sources of moisture, drying of concrete, methods of measuring moisture, construction practices, specifications, and responsibilities for successful floor projects.

The cost is \$40. To order, visit www.cement.org/bookstore or call (800) 868-6733.



AMERICAN CONCRETE INSTITUTE ACI launches annual award

The American Concrete Institute presented its first Distinguished Achievement Award to Tod Williams, FAIA, of Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates in New York City. In a news release, the organization praised Williams' "rigorous and tactile celebration of materials in architecture and his extraordinary use of concrete in buildings." An inventory of his projects is online at www.twbta.com.

The ACI Distinguished Achievement Award will be presented regularly to individuals or entities that have made notable contributions to the advancement of the concrete industry. Candidates must be nonmembers of ACI and in the region of the Institute's conventions.

More about the ACI can be found at www.concrete.org or by calling (248) 848-3700.

New publications available

ACI has released several new publications.

The 2005 edition of "Building Code Requirements for Structural Concrete and Commentary" (318-05/318R-05) contains the latest code requirements for concrete building design and construction. The cost is \$153.50 for nonmembers, \$93 for members.

"Concrete Structures for Containment of

Hazardous Materials" (350.2R-04) presents design and construction recommendations for structures used for hazardous materials containment. The cost is \$29.50 for nonmembers, \$18 for members.

"Qualification of Post-Installed Mechanical Anchors in Concrete and Commentary" (355.2-04/355.2R-04) prescribes testing programs and evaluation requirements for post-installed mechanical anchors used in

concrete under the design provisions of ACI 318. The cost is \$61.50 for nonmembers, \$37 for members.

"Concrete Repair Guide" (546R-04) guides the selection and application of materials and methods for repairing, protecting and strengthening concrete structures. The cost is \$57.50 for nonmembers, \$35 for members.

"Building Code Requirements and Specifications for Masonry Structures and Related Commentaries" (ACI 530-05/ASCE 5-05/TMS 402-05) covers the design and construction of masonry structures. ACI 530-05 is available as either a book or CD-ROM. The cost is \$95 for nonmembers, \$71.25 for members.

"Test Method for Load Capacity of Polymer Concrete Underground Utility Structures" (548.7-04) details procedures for full-scale testing of three loading conditions that are experienced in field installations of polymer concrete underground utility structures. The cost is \$26.50 for nonmembers, \$17 for members.

Visit ACI's online bookstore at www.concrete.org or call (248) 848-3700.

CONCRETE SAWING AND DRILLING ASSOCIATION First woman to lead CSDA

The Concrete Sawing and Drilling Association elected Susan Hollingsworth the first woman president in the organization's history.

Hollingsworth owns Holes Inc. of Houston, Texas, and has served as vice president and as chairperson of the CSDA Safety Committee. She will continue to represent CSDA on the Silica Task Force, an alliance of industry groups.

Tom Stowell of Norton Construction Products, Flowery Branch, Ga., was elected vice president and Doug Walker of Atlantic Concrete Cutting, Mt. Holly, N.J., was elected secretary-treasurer. Six new board members were also elected.

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CIRCLE #33 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Becker Architectural Concrete *St. Paul, Minnesota*

by Amy B. Johnson

One question Chris Becker often hears is, "Why does your work look so different from everyone else's?"

Becker, founder and president of Becker Architectural Concrete Inc., in St. Paul, Minn., believes the answer lies in his commitment to bringing a high-quality, professional approach to the installation, design and marketing of architectural concrete.

The creativity and innovation of Becker Architectural Concrete is evident in homes, buildings and parks all around St. Paul, but it's not limited to concrete. Chris Becker's creative abilities also shine through in the way he manages and markets his business.

Becker came to architectural concrete in a roundabout way. Studying journalism at the University of Minnesota, he worked summers in concrete restoration. A slow job market when he graduated in 1989 led him to take a sales job with a ready-mix business, and he soon became director of marketing for the \$100 million



Chris Becker (far right, back row) with company members, wife Staci, and daughter Morgan.



company. This put him in the right place at the right time to spot the opportunities in architectural concrete as it began to take off in the early 1990s. He left the corporate world to work with an experienced contractor, learning hands-on how to install decorative concrete, how to run jobs in the field and how to manage a business.

Finally, in 2002 he was ready to go on his own. "So many people in architectural concrete come from a traditional concrete business. I came from a background in innovation and marketing. My goal from the beginning was to bring a more polished, educated and classy point of view to the industry," Becker explains. He brings that point of view to three areas that are key to his business: installation, design and marketing.

Technique you don't see

The first element that sets Becker Architectural Concrete apart is near-obsessive attention to detail. "A lot of it is having your own name on the company," Becker explains. "You have a distinctive energy to make sure every job turns out fantastic. We set the bar higher than most customers themselves would because this is still a new, very subjective industry."

Becker insists that his crews "leave no trace" — no hint of how the natural

look of a project was achieved. In other words, there should be no error to give a clue of how a color hardener was thrown or how a stamp was placed. A successful project by this definition depends on both skill and artistry.

This philosophy drove Becker to put together a team — 11 field technicians, an interior design intern, three administrative specialists and a sales professional — that shares his vision. Diverse skills are brought together to work on a single goal.

"There is a neat crossover of skills learned in a short time," Becker says. "We need both disciplines — technical expertise and artistic creativity — in one team." Potential employees must not only have excellent technical capabilities, but also share Becker's passion for detail and creative expression.

Beauty you can see

This passion is evident in the second element that sets Becker apart: his approach to design, particularly color. One of his most unusual projects was a monumental navigational compass for the playground at St. Paul's Riverfront Park. This playground was intended to capture the spirit of the riverfront, but its creators had no idea how to build the compass. Becker Architectural Concrete came up with the solution. They scanned blueprints to create laser-

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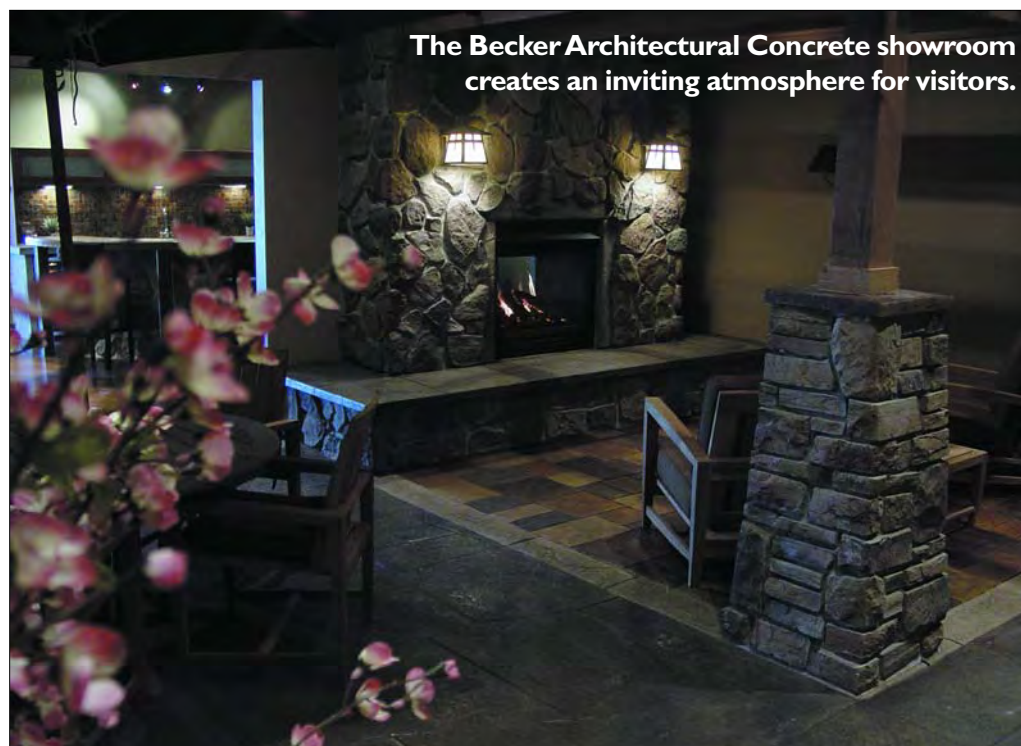
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The Becker Architectural Concrete showroom creates an inviting atmosphere for visitors.



CIRCLE #33 ON READER SERVICE CARD

www.ConcreteDecor.net • Apr/May 2005 • 13



cut templates big enough to cover 1,800 square feet. They colored the fresh concrete with a green color hardener and used the template to sandblast latitude and longitude lines and letters. These etched lines were then colored by hand. This project won first place for innovation from the Aggregate Ready-Mix Association of Minnesota, one of four such awards Becker has earned in less than three years.

It doesn't require a large-scale landscape project to showcase Becker's innovation. He has developed a way of integrally coloring concrete for countertops that allows him to match paint chips so homeowners and interior designers can have any color they want. All he needs is the name and number of the paint color. In one unusual case, he colored counters for a cabinet maker in steel gray and electric lime. At a recent home show, he displayed copper/green concrete counters next to the matching paint sample. "This kind of demonstration gets people really excited about the ability to customize," Becker says.



Twelve-foot long concrete surfboard table used with clients in "Board Room." Cast-in-place custom design. Chemical stain, two-part epoxy finish.

A place to see it all

Becker's penchant for innovation extends to the way he markets his business, the third element that sets him apart. He is one of a growing number of contractors who use a showroom to spotlight the range of possibilities of architectural concrete.

Rather than chase around giving on-site estimates, he invites prospects to bring a sketch of their project to the company's showroom for their first meeting. There, instead of walking into a room full of samples, they walk into a kitchen. The kitchen floor is designed with a stamped polymer overlay colored with a chemical stain. (Becker favors stains or integral color for the cementitious microtoppings and stampable overlays he uses for interiors.) The kitchen's integrally colored countertops coordinate with IKEA cabinets installed to show budget-minded homeowners they can still decorate with flair. Walking through the





kitchen, visitors step “outside” — where they see the façade of a house, complete with porch, courtyard and overhead arbor, all in concrete.

A tour of the showroom often finishes in the “board room,” so named for its 12-foot table in the shape of a surfboard. This table is a sample of reverse-cast technique, where a form is built and the concrete poured in the shop under controlled conditions. The finished piece is installed with the smooth surface created by the bottom of the form facing up, allowing for a much more refined and polished finished surface. Reverse casting in the shop is more efficient and less complicated than casting in place in a client’s home.

The showroom approach reduces the time Becker spends following unproductive leads, but more importantly, gets customers enthused about their own creative vision.

This same approach paid off for Becker at a recent home show with the theme “Weekend in the Wine Country.” His display, set behind a “storefront” modeled after a California street, featured kitchen counters in rich grays, terra cotta and aqua, colored to match the Benjamin Moore Paints spring color palette. The counters were imprinted with an Ashlar slate pattern and then individual stones were hand-

colored for a natural look. Stepping past the kitchen, visitors to the booth stepped into an outdoor room displaying all the techniques — integral color, chemical staining, shake-on hardeners, imprinting and stenciling — that Becker uses on exterior projects.

Besides marketing to homeowners and builders, Becker spends considerable resources educating designers and landscape architects. After starting with box lunch programs at their offices, Becker has progressed to sponsoring “field trips” to his showroom. These often result in a client visit within a month or two. He also offers training in advanced techniques to contractors from other markets.

So where does the company go from here? Becker sees great things in the future for architectural concrete. “Applications are unfolding on themselves as people find uses for a material that has proved itself for a long time,” he says. “Young designers have studied concrete more and embrace it as a versatile, sustainable, environmentally correct product to use. And so they are willing to take risks and look at different things, like furniture and wallcoverings.” And wherever architectural concrete goes, you can bet Chris Becker will be there, one step ahead.



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CIRCLE #33 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Decorative Concrete Design

You've mastered the application techniques, but are you comfortable with design? Here are some helpful tips from the pros.

by Stacey Enesey Klemenc



Contrary to what you may think, the best concrete designs do not shout “Look at me!” Rather, they subtly blend into the big picture without a lot of fanfare.

“There are different ways to draw attention to features without being demanding. You want people to walk on a job and notice the concrete as an enhanced feature of the overall project, but you don’t want them to gawk,” says Lee Levig, owner of Concrete Works in the San Francisco area. “If they immediately look down, you’ve failed.”

Doug Carlton, who heads up Carlton Concrete in Visalia, Calif., agrees. When he first started out and was trying to make a name for himself, he wanted each of his projects to stand out. “That’s a pitfall that many contractors fall into,” he says. “That’s not the point of it. You want it to blend in. The whole goal of a decorative sidewalk [for instance] is to enhance the natural look of the landscape with an organic piece of art.”

In the past, most people viewed a sidewalk as a whitish expanse of pavement that created a way to get from the street to the house, Carlton continues. Today, they still want it to serve the same purpose, but “Many want their walkways to be camouflaged to look like a natural surface, to look like it’s part of the landscape.”

Like feng shui, which stimulates the senses, “Concrete should flow with the overall feel,” Levig says. “You know, when you walk into a place or up to a place and it feels right ... that’s what you’re trying to go for.”

The drawing of the eye

One of the most prominent ways to draw an eye to a specific focal point, such as the front entrance, is to use a border along the walkway leading to the door. The front porch often has a border around it, too, tying the two elements together.

Another technique, Levig says, involves cutting control joints on the walkway on a 45-degree angle to the house. “This forms a series of diamonds, with every diamond centered to the front door. It’s like drawing an arrow to the front door.” This configuration, too, can be accented with a border.

Carlton, whose work has been featured on television’s “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition,” says you can also take a design on the house and extend it out to draw the eye in. By deeply scoring the concrete, for example, he created a driveway whose design was an extension of the grid pattern found on the garage door. “It almost looked like a sunburst design,” he says, as the score lines got farther and farther apart down the driveway.

Gary Jones, president of Colormaker Floors in Vancouver, B.C., says to attract the eye he likes to do designs that mimic a feature of a house, such as an art deco design that may be in the front door’s glass, by transferring that design to the entranceway. Most designs can be done with saw cuts, he says.

For commercial applications, footprints may be used to lead the eye and the consumer to the front door, says Darrel Adamson, president of Engrave-A-Crete in Bradenton, Fla., a company that manufactures and markets tools and templates to engrave concrete. He’s seen this technique used

Colorful advice

“Never hand a customer a color chart,” cautions Lee Levig, owner of Concrete Works in the San Francisco area. It not only may overwhelm them with choices but it may take away an advantage you may be unaware of.

Instead, show customers samples. They don’t have to be large; 1-foot by 1-foot will suffice. And instead of labeling them with the manufacturer’s name, come up with your own.

“I have a color that I call ‘Cappuccino’ that is actually three colors of a color hardener and a release,” he explains. “When I bid on a job, that’s the name I use.” So when a customer is dead set on Levig’s “Cappuccino,” the customer can’t find that color offered anywhere else.

There have been times, Levig says, that he was the high bidder but still got the job because the customers loved his colors and were willing to pay for them. He offers 10 basic colors which please most of his clientele. For an extra fee, he’ll whip up a custom color to fit any bill.

Coming up with unique formulas is fairly easy; it just takes some time to perfect the formulation. But the work will pay off, he insists. “I have architects and landscape architects who specify my colors in their jobs. I’m sold out through the end of this year.”

in various innovative ways, including a combination of animal prints leading to a kids’ section in a library.

Along this same line, Jones associate Mike Miller recently used fish imprints to lead customers in a Whole Foods store to the seafood section. He bought some salmon, sliced them in half and laid them in freshly poured concrete, even going so far as to arrange some of the fish so that they looked like they were swimming up the stairs.



Photograph courtesy of Colormaker Floors

Floored with designs

When it comes to trying to decide on decorative patterns for interior floors, “The house will tell you what it needs if you

let it," Levig says. "If it's contemporary, keep the design clean and simple. If it's Tuscan, use antique colors. Just look at the overall theme and stay inside those parameters." He also suggests using neutral colors for longevity's sake because people's tastes tend to change and evolve through the years.

Carlton thinks that designing interior floors is much tougher than outside surfaces because there are so many directions you can go. "We usually start by showing the homeowner pictures of completed projects to see if we have done something that they can visualize in their own home." Typically, he narrows it down to three or four projects, a number that works for him. "There's no reason to overcomplicate the job and give them too many to choose from," he says.

Rather than wanting to mimic a shape found elsewhere in the room, a technique commonly employed, Carlton says many of his customers opt to incorporate a favorite piece of furniture or some other furnishing into a floor design. For instance, in a dining room, he'll often do a contour around the table. In a kitchen, he'll do a band of color around an island and perhaps another band that runs parallel to the cabinetry. In a couple of cases, he's duplicated the texture of distressed leather furniture on the floor.

Jones says he likes to use saw cuts to pull you into a house or business and direct you to a preconceived destination. "And the cuts don't have to be straight lines," he emphasizes. "They can be wavy. Straight lines tend to be harsh and they make you feel tense."

Keep in mind that when you resurface a floor with concrete, it's like a blank canvas. "You don't have to mimic 12-by-12-inch tiles or put in 24-by-24 saw-cut lines to re-establish the look of the tile that had been there," says Jones, who is a big fan of Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian-born artist who many consider the father of abstract art.

"Concrete allows you to create different feelings in a house by using different shapes and designs. Use your imagination. Use circles. Be creative. A checkerboard pattern makes you feel enclosed, where amoeba-type shapes will make you feel more relaxed," Jones points out.

And don't be overly concerned with putting in expansion joints, he asserts. "I've done 20-by-15-foot rooms that didn't have one saw cut for expansion. There's no real need. Concrete is going to crack where it wants to crack. Cracks are our friends. They may bother some people, but they don't bother me."

Stay in control

Cracks do bother Carlton and he asserts that control joints are a necessity of concrete. "But they'll stand out like a sore thumb if you don't incorporate them into the design," he says.

"If you have to put a score line in that will mess up your design, it's best instead to put two control lines in that are 12 to 18 inches apart, and make an accent band in your decorative work. It's a win-win situation. It gives the decorative concrete more of an organic or natural look, and you can charge more money for the details. It gives the crew a

A picture's worth a thousand pours

Engrave-A-Crete, which manufactures tools and templates to engrave concrete, has come up with a state-of-the-art solution to help contractors help clients envision designs for their decorative concrete projects.

From a digital camera, contractors simply input a picture of the project into their computer. A CAD software program, a new product available from the company, will allow them to show their customers a variety of options. "This program allows them to see what a project would look like before it's done," says Darrel Adamson, president.

In addition to being able to change colors and patterns at the click of a key, you can also add sheens and remove shadows. "You can even remove an existing car and put a nicer one in the driveway," Adamson quips.

The software, which Adamson says contains step-by-step movies that make self-training easy, retails for \$495.





good stop-and-start point, too."

Levig says when you're getting ready to design a slab, the first thing you need to do is figure out where you have to cut a joint. "We call these 'mandatories' and we design around them. For instance, if you have two columns on the front porch that have an 18-inch base and are 6 feet away from the front door, you know when the concrete dries, it shrinks away from the columns and cracks. So you cut a control joint off the corners to isolate the columns and frame them. This frame becomes a functional part of the art.

"The Romans thought of this long before I was alive," Levig continues. "So did the English and the Moors. Borders were an essential part of design. What I'm trying to say is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Just pay attention to what's around you."

Now design this

To determine the decorative design, Carlton says the contractors and architects his company works with are more than happy for him to jump in to deal with the homeowners directly. "If it's a stamp job, we'll do a 30-minute to a two-hour tour of decorative concrete projects we've done," he says. "This way we make sure they get exactly what they want." During this "home tour," the homeowners get to see jobs that have been in place for some time, not freshly done jobs that haven't aged. "They usually like one of the first things they see," he says.

Levig, on the other hand, prefers to work out a design with the contractor, interior designer or architect, who then presents the options to the client. The biggest factor he's concerned about, he says, is coming up with a design that's within budget.

Somewhere in the middle, Jones likes to meet with all parties concerned. "We work alongside the contractor and owners and their designers to come up with ideas together," he says.

Both Levig and Carlton say they often work side by side with landscape architects in the design process. "They've done 90 percent of that front work," Carlton says. "We get a lot of direction from them. We used to shy away from those guys but they are our No. 1 allies. They can create work for you, and that's what you need in this business. It's not enough

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for homeowners to decide they want decorative work, you need people to suggest it, too."

Making the transfer

If the design isn't a simple geometric design, how do the pros transfer it to the floor?

Carlton says he uses chalk. "Before the crew shows up, we have a chalker. We completely lay out all the contours and designs and draw in all the score lines. Then we take digital pictures and give them to the crew leader.

"We've tried water hoses and PVC pipe but chalk is the best and most inexpensive way I've found [for design work]," Carlton says. If the client wants to make changes, the chalk is easy to rub out and alterations can be made before the crew shows up for work. "It's more costly to move forms," he says.

Adamson, whose company works closely with contractors, strongly believes in using templates to create complex designs. "The contractor sends us a likeness and we make a template from that," he says. Engrave-A-Crete's templates are made of a half-inch thick plastic material that can be used over and over.

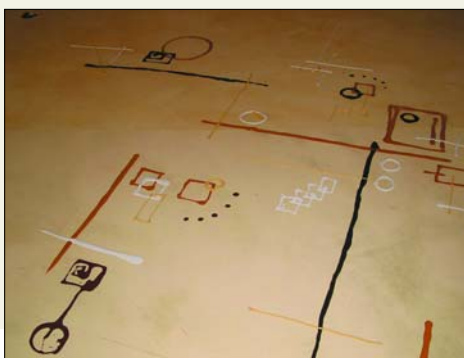
His company also has a variety of tools that are used to engrave concrete. They can be used to produce patterns from simple brick to more complex circular ones.

Artists can inspire

When trying to come up with designs, "Don't be afraid to look at artwork and transfer that design onto a floor," suggests Gary Jones of Colormaker Floors. "It can be part of a picture, as little as one square inch."

Jones often tries to imitate the work of Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), a Russian-born artist and accomplished musician who many refer to as the father of abstract art. Kandinsky asserted that color and musical harmony had an intrinsic relationship, even claiming that when he saw color he heard music. During his career, his

art forms evolved from fluid and organic to geometric and, finally, to pictographic.




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CIRCLE #39 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Getting away from square tiles

Jones often uses PVC pipe to help him draw curves and "create big swirls." He also is big on using "found objects," from the halved fish mentioned earlier to paddles, leaves, torn paper and even piles of sawdust.

Just like his inspiration, the artist Kandinsky, Jones' designs are often a conglomeration of layers of colors and shapes. To achieve his designs, he covers the area two, three or four times. "On day one, we'll put a square on two thirds of the room in one color. The next day we'll put a circle on part of that in another color. The next day it'll be a triangle in yet another color coming in from a different angle," he cites as an example. In between these layers, he sands and smooths the floor to achieve varying textures. "The transition between colors is vital to the overall design," he emphasizes.

With his technique, the various shapes take the colors differently because the thickness is different. In the end, "You can almost see through the concrete layers like Venetian plaster. But it's very subtle. You really have to look at it to see the different colors."

During this process, he also sometimes employs piles of sawdust. "We'll take clumps of sawdust and randomly place them on the floor before we spray a color. The next day, we'll vacuum up the dust. Beneath it, that area didn't get any of

that particular color." The process is repeated elsewhere during the subsequent layers. Sometimes, he says, they seal some areas and not others during the layering process to create visual images. "They're very simple techniques really," he admits, but the results can be stunning. "People used to think of floors as something you just walk on. There's no reason they can't be a piece of artwork."



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CIRCLE #27 ON READER SERVICE CARD



Layering Color with Acid Stain

by David Thompson

From subtle marbling to psychedelic tie-dyeing, some of the most artistic effects in decorative concrete are achieved by putting one color of acid stain on top of another.

There are many ways to go about layering acid stains, but a common approach is to cover the entire floor with a diluted color, then spot-stain sections with less diluted or undiluted colors, often using faux techniques such as ragging or sponging.

This approach reflects the rule of thumb that says lighter colors first, darker colors on top. If you do it the other way around, chances are the darker color will swallow up the lighter one.

There are exceptions, though. Some blue-green acid stains, for instance, stand out nicely on even the darkest underlying stain.



Photographs courtesy of Decorative Concrete Institute



This effect was achieved by using three layers of black stain: first, a solid black; then a 50 percent solution; and third, a 10 percent wash over the whole floor. The solid black was stippled on to create texture.



Bob Harris of the Decorative Concrete Institute in Georgia has gotten stunning results by applying green acid stain on top of black acid stain. “You get some very, very nice marbling and veining, and a lot of contrasting and layering of color,” he says.

Dana Boyer of Concretizen in Arizona has had similar success in violating the light-then-dark rule of thumb. “It’s best to start with your light layers and build from there, but there have been times when I’ve taken a dark brown, then come in with a full strength turquoise and thrown it on there,” she says. “The turquoise is not going to be as bright, but it gives me some good results.”

Wet or dry layering

Whether or not you wait for one layer of color to dry before applying the next

depends on the sort of transition between colors you want.

In the wet-on-wet approach — in which there’s no wait — colors tend to mingle and roll together. They may blend in strange and beautiful ways. Or they may look horrible. Results can be highly unpredictable, and there’s no substitute for doing a sample on an unobtrusive section of the substrate.

“I have 13 years of experience with acid staining, and I still don’t know what I’m going to get with wet-on-wet every time,” says Wes Vollmer of Alternative Finishes in Texas. “But that’s what’s fascinating to me. It’s like you’re like a big kid coloring.”

Vollmer once used every crayon in the box for an acid-staining job involving a floor at a bed-and-breakfast. He started by covering the entire floor with a light gold stain, then darkened

spots here and there with a thin mist of black. Once the black dried, six men in his crew mounted pump sprayers on their backs, each filled with a different color, and set off one behind the other across the floor, randomly applying their colors. They held their nozzles upside down and sprayed upward, layering colors in thin mists.

“It wasn’t the clean, crisp look that I like, but it did look good and the customer liked it,” he says. “The deal with wet-on-wet is you have to know what the customer wants, because you’re going to get results that are a little out there.”

In the wet-on-dry approach, an underlying layer of stain is given time to go through its reaction cycle before a subsequent layer is added. Typically the wait ranges from five hours to overnight. Wet-on-dry layering gives

you a sharper, cleaner transition between layers, as well as more predictable results.

Bob Harris offers this tip for softening the transition between wet-on-dry colors: Apply water to areas of the base coat that you want to retain, then spray the next layer into the dry spots, just overlapping the edges of the wet areas. "The water softens the hard

edge, defusing the transition very softly and very nicely," Harris says.

Dilution

The more an acid stain is diluted, the softer the color will be and the more layers you can build on top of it. Dilution rates start at 1:1 and generally peak somewhere at around 30:1. Darker colors are especially tolerant of high dilutions.

Many concrete artisans like starting with a color wash — a highly diluted stain — to establish a pastel-like base upon which to build. Washes are particularly useful for toning down the stark white that's popular in many of today's microtoppings.

Nice layering effects can be achieved with multiple applications of a single color of stain, diluted at different rates. For example, a base layer of amber covering an entire floor might be diluted 10:1. Eighty percent of the floor might then be stained with amber diluted at 5:1. Finally, details might be added using a 2:1 dilution.

Harris has a tip for diluting on the fly: Wet down some sections of the cementitious surface but not others, then spray an acid stain evenly across both wet and dry areas. The stain will essentially dilute itself in the wet areas but not the dry. "And you get some very nice layering effects," Harris says.

Many contractors use nothing but water to dilute stain, but manufacturers discourage the practice and offer stain extenders — essentially acid stain without the color — for dilution purposes.

"I would be very wary about diluting with water," say Chris Sullivan, technical director for concrete product manufacturer QC Construction. "Stains are composed of mineral salts, acid and water. You start adding too much water and you'll find that the mineral salts will fall out of solution and no longer be soluble. And you also won't get the reaction and the penetration into the concrete."

Residues and resists

Some brands of acid stain are known to leave heavy residues, especially those at the darker end of the spectrum. Residue will impede the reaction of subsequent layers of stain. If residue is heavy enough it might have to be washed off before the next layer of color is applied.

Or you might use it for creative effect.

"You can create textures if you lightly damp mop over the dried

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residue, rewetting it and moving some of it around," Boyer says. "Then when you come in and apply another color, you'll be able to see the textures and depth."

The entire gamut of faux techniques can be used in layering colors.

George Lacker of GLC3 Concrete in Florida has used everything from sawdust to corncobs to get interesting layered effects. One technique he likes is using a sea sponge to apply a mottled layer of sealer on top of a light color. Once the sealer dries, he applies a darker color of stain. That too gets mottled with sealer. Then he finishes things off with an even darker stain. The second and third layers of color don't react with the sealer, which allows what's beneath to show through.

"There's all kinds of possibilities," Lacker says. "There's unbelievable amounts of things you can do."

How much is too much?

There are limits to how many layers of color can be built up on top of one another. One limit is the availability of free lime, which acid stains need to react with. Each layer of acid stain uses up some of the free lime in the cementitious surface. Once all lime is gone, so is the ability of the cementitious surface to take further acid stain.

Another limit is aesthetic. Too many colors stacked on top of each other will cancel each other out. Sullivan refers to this as "The Banana Split Effect."

"In a banana split, you start with vanilla, strawberry and chocolate," he says. "If you let them all melt together, the brown in the chocolate overpowers everything else, and you get one brownish, gooey mess. So I would say be careful — if you get to the point where you try to blend too many colors, it all just becomes a mess."

Yet another limit is what a client is willing to pay for. Many clients are perfectly content with the variation, depth and price of a single layer of acid stain. If they're willing to pay for extra

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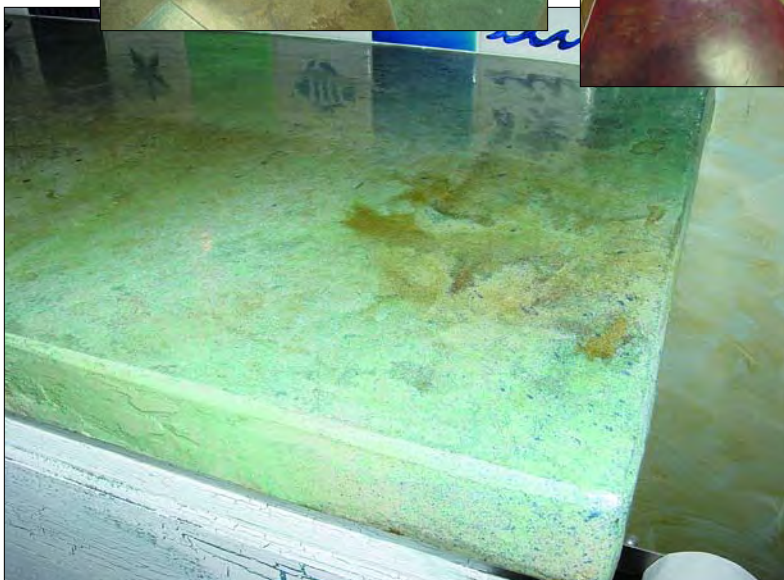
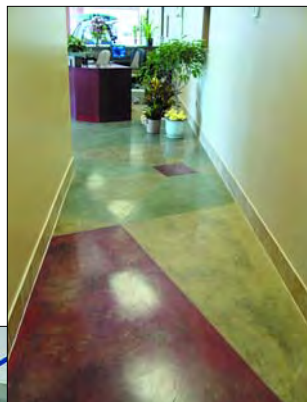
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This floor and countertop were created with different shades of QC's Patina Stains.

layers, it's critical for the contractor to work closely with them to ensure they understand what they're getting into.

"In this business, success depends 100 percent on matching clients' expectations," says Doug Carlton of Carlton Concrete in California. "You have to really screen your clients and make sure they have a really open mind as to what the multiple-layer-buildup floor will look like."

The more a contractor practices and experiments with layering color, the better the final results of a layered stain job are likely to be.

"It all really boils down to the artist, the person, their talent, and their ability to understand the materials and make things different and unique," says Boyer. "Once the contractor gets the basics of staining, then stain is stain. It becomes a matter of practicing, and having and wanting that pride, to move forward."





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Dealing with Graffiti

You can't guarantee that taggers won't mar your work, but there are protective coatings you can use to make cleanup easier.

by John Strieder



A concrete contractor uses stains, washes, paint and textures to give a unique, personal touch to a bare concrete wall. A tagger uses graffiti to do the same thing.

The most important difference is permission, or the lack of it. Decorative concrete contractors work where they're wanted. Taggers crave working where they're not wanted. Sometimes, in fact, they'll put their work right on top of a contractor's.

Decorative concrete will not deter taggers, says Barry Woods, president of Graffiti Control Systems, a Los Angeles contractor. "These guys don't think like that. They hit murals. They hit churches."

A wall that is hard to reach or unique in any way, such as one with a decorative design, can even be considered a challenge, he says. "They may vandalize it just for the sheer notoriety."

This presents a problem for legitimate artists. How does a concrete contractor protect work from being scarred or obliterated by graffiti?

The answer comes in two parts. Obviously, chemicals must be used to clean the tag off the wall. But even before that, many contractors seal their work with an anti-graffiti coating to make cleanup easier.

Should decorative concrete work be coated? If it is in a high-risk area, yes, Woods says. "If there is other tagging in the neighborhood, you want to protect it."

Waging war

The most effective way to keep a wall free of tags is to build that wall in a neighborhood that is well-off and graffiti-free. The second most effective method is to remove every tag immediately.

"The way to wage war against graffiti is to not let it stay up," says Nanette Schwartz, president of Genesis Coatings Inc. "The only thing that stops it is persistently wiping it off. You can't let graffiti sit for days. It's like a fungus. It grows."

Other anti-graffiti specialists agree. "Once somebody sees a tag, they put their tag right next to it," says Drew Lindner, managing partner at Graffiti Master Products. "It just blossoms."

Hy Dubin, president of Dumond Chemicals Inc., says the trick is to show you can take it off as easy as taggers can put it on. "Then they will go around the corner and bother somebody else and not bother you anymore."

If you let graffiti dry and cure, it's a lot harder to remove, notes Larry Ratliff, a California-based independent salesman who represents Genesis Coatings and Dumond Chemicals. "If an area is going to be tagged, it doesn't matter if it's

decorative, painted or whatever. It's a gang-related challenge for them to tag anything and everything in their territory."

Often, building managers and maintenance crews find that the cheapest response to graffiti is repainting. Ivy and other plants keep graffiti from view by obscuring the wall. But neither option will work for decorative concrete.

In any case, adjusting the look of a building to fight graffiti amounts to giving in, Schwartz says. "Any change takes away from the integrity of the architectural design. I should not have to sacrifice the integrity of the look of the building."

Preventative coatings

If graffiti will be a common threat to a decorative wall, a special anti-graffiti sealer will protect the work, both from spray paint and from the removers that dissolve it.

Preventative anti-graffiti coatings are divided into two categories.

"Sacrificial" coatings come off the wall, taking spray paint with them, when blasted with hot water from a pressure washer. Sacrificial coatings can be silicone but are often wax-based. Using them is like "like putting floor wax on the wall," Lindner says. After the graffiti-stained coating is peeled from the wall, a fresh coat is applied.

Permanent or "nonsacrificial" coatings are usually epoxies, polyurethanes or urethanes, and they stand up to cleaning solvents. "A cleaner is strong enough to break up dyes of paint, but not strong enough to attack the permanent coating," Lindner says.

Permanent coatings are more expensive to install but less expensive to maintain, Woods explains.

With a permanent coating, cleanups can be done in-house by a janitor. Sacrificial coatings need to be scoured off with a hot-water pressure wash, something that is outside the scope of regular janitorial work.

What's more, sacrificial coatings leave a wet, steamy mess when removed, which limits their use indoors.

Mike Zink, chemist with Okon Inc., which makes Graffiti Solutions, says that based on what he knows about his company's products, he prefers sacrificial coatings. They are less filmy on a wall than nonsacrificials, he says, and they are cheaper. "Putting up another layer is just a matter of some time invested," he says.

Also, many permanent coatings aren't truly permanent. Depending on how often they're



Photograph courtesy of Dumond Chemicals



Photographs courtesy of Graffiti Master



tagged, many of them must be reapplied after five or 10 years.

"Nonsacrificials do wear, but it takes a long time, depending on how thick you put it on," says Ratliff. You get quite a few washes on those."

Another important question for decorative contractors is whether a coating will dull or change the meticulously crafted effects underneath.

A coating with a matte finish will look better than a glossy coating on a natural stone effect. "All anti-graffiti coatings are pretty much water white clear," says Ratliff. "But graffiti coatings tend to be high gloss."

Dumond's two-component polyurethane coating leaves a satin-type finish. Lindner of Graffiti Master, for his part, says to expect a slight satin sheen. "You will be able to tell something's there," he says.

Any visible coat of sealer may pose aesthetic problems. In many cases, anti-graffiti sealer is not applied to the entire wall. It is used only on parts that taggers might reach.

Lindner says the visible presence of anti-graffiti coating sometimes works as a deterrent. "The kids will see there's something there protecting it."

But Schwartz disagrees. A "loud statement" that a business is fighting back against graffiti may provoke taggers



to try harder to vandalize a building, she says. "The whole thing about graffiti is that you DON'T want to make it known that you're protecting it. These are not reasonable people. They will just aggravate you."

Removal

Often, cleanup comes before preventative coating, says Schwartz of Genesis. "One does not think one has a graffiti problem until one actually gets graffiti."

If the remover reacts with anything on the wall, the damage will be irreversible. And any solvent that dissolves spray paint will attack any paint on the wall.

"Removers don't have brains," Schwartz warns.

Removers come in aerosol or liquid form. They also come in different strengths. Graffiti Master Products, for example, makes three cleaners: an alcohol-based cleaner for bus stops and car finishes, a multipurpose NMP-based cleaner that will remove small tags from painted surfaces, and a potassium hydroxide cleaner for uncoated brick, concrete and masonry walls.

The user may need a brush to scrape residual traces of spray paint out of the crevices of a concrete wall, Lindner says. If the surface is smooth, a brush won't be needed.



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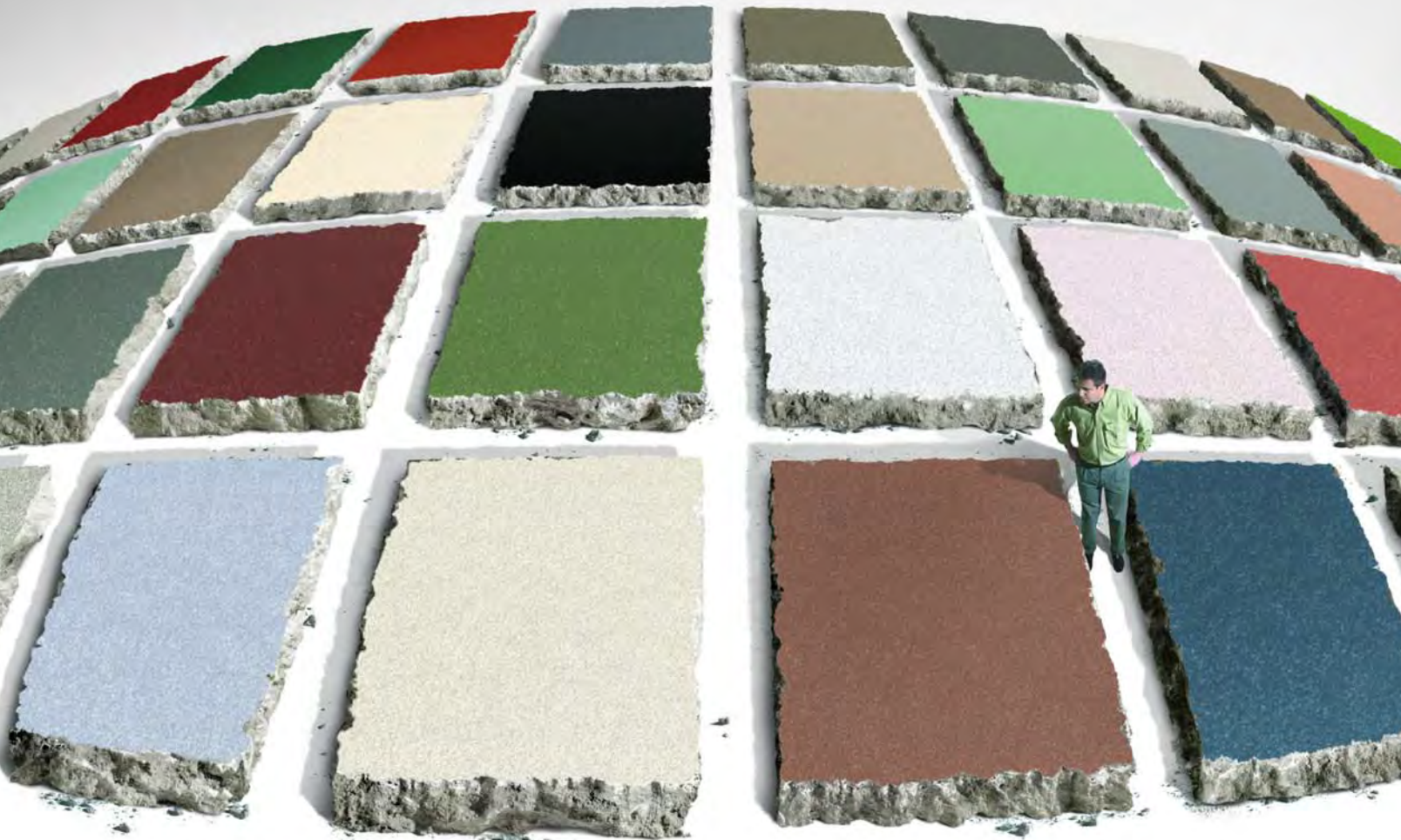
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CIRCLE #49 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Tooling Brooms for Concrete

by John Strieder

Concrete contracting doesn't usually lend itself to sweeping generalizations, but here's a good one: If a contractor wants to give a curing concrete slab more slip resistance, the easiest, simplest solution is to drag a broom across it.

The shallow, grooved texture left on the surface by a concrete broom or brush will help keep shoes and tires from slipping or skidding on a wet or icy slab.

There's not much of a secret in how a concrete broom is used, either. For a "broom finish," contractors pull a broom across the slab, preferably at a right angle to anticipated traffic. Less frequently, they swirl the broom for a "swirl finish," which looks nicer but requires more work.

The broom's bristles should be held at a 45-degree angle to the surface, says John Wight, vice president of sales at Bon Tool Co. The tool should be pulled with light pressure appropriate to the job. "It depends on how quickly the concrete is setting up," he says.

But while brooming is as simple as sweeping, finishing brushes and brooms are not ordinary cleaning brooms. They have unique properties that make them specifically suited for putting a textured finish on a slab.

The bristles of concrete finishing brooms have more consistent lengths and shapes than those of ordinary brooms, says John Strawn, product manager at Marshalltown Co. Consistent bristles

mean a more consistent finish, he says. "You're actually texturing, not working to clean up the concrete."

The connection between the broom and its handle can be different too. While a typical broom is attached to a handle that is fixed in place, a concrete broom may be bolted to its handle with a "clevis adapter" so it can be adjusted for pitch.

Finally, the typical bristles used in a concrete broom will be softer than those of a standard broom, although the coarsest concrete brooms can be rougher, Strawn says.

"With a finishing broom, you don't want it too stiff," says Robert Bower, marketing manager at Wagman Metal Products Inc. "You want



Photograph courtesy of Wagman Metal Products, Inc.

to finish, but you don't want to dig into the surface."

Ordinary brooms are no substitute. The standard push broom is too stiff and has too much body to make a good finishing broom, says Gary Bolden, president of Marion Brush Manufacturing Co. There are five or six rows of bristle tufts on a push broom, compared to only two rows on a finishing brush, he says. "A lot of times a push broom exposes aggregate. It's rougher than needed."

A push broom will also be too heavy compared to a finishing broom. "It digs into the slab, and doesn't make it as uniform or as level," Bolden says.

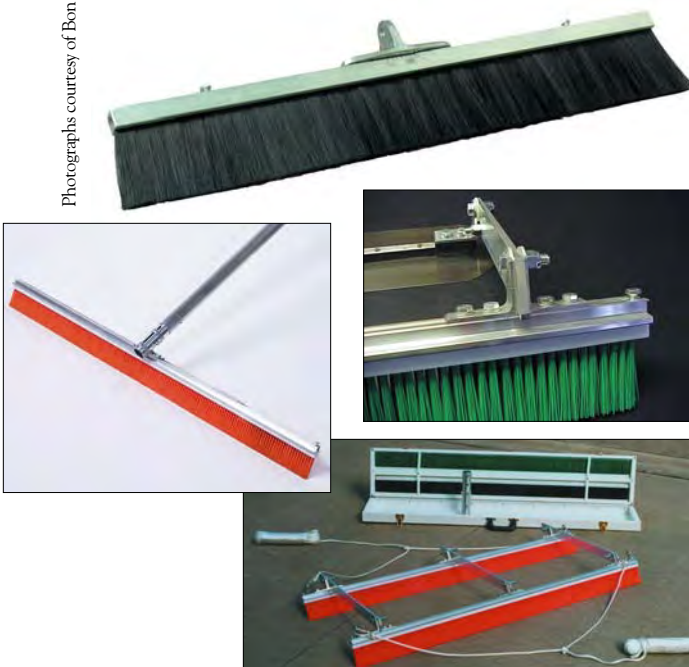
What's more, finishing brooms such as Marion Brush's are designed to texture with the sides of bristles rather than the ends, Bolden says. "If you use the ends of the bristles on a slab, it pulls away the cream and exposes the aggregate."

All about the bristle

There are differences within this niche market too. The most important characteristic of each concrete brush and broom is the bristle itself. "The bottom line is that the quality of bristle drives the quality of the broom," says Strawn. "A strong, consistent bristle makes a great broom."

Softer bristles are used when a contractor is getting on the floor sooner. Stiffer bristles are

Photographs courtesy of Bon Tool Co.





used for a rougher finish or when concrete has started to cure.

Contractors prize the aggressive texturing of a stiffer brush when slip resistance is more important than appearance, such as on a ramp. The stiffer the bristle, the rougher the surface, says Steve Cook, sales and marketing manager for Kraft Tool Co. "The contractor buys a broom based on the kind of finish he's looking for," he says.

Contractors in colder parts of the country often favor stiffer bristles, Cook says. In areas where winter ice coats sidewalks and driveways, contractors must be especially rough on surfaces to ward off accidents. In warmer areas, a soft bristle will create all the traction the end user is likely to need.

Softer brushes will give you a nicer, more aesthetically pleasing finish, Cook says, making them a solid choice where a lot of roughness isn't needed but looks are important. On the other hand, a stiffer brush may help make a decorative swirl finish stand out. "With soft bristles, you may barely see the brush strokes."

Wagman Metal Products sells hand-finishing brooms with either plastic fiber bristles or natural horsehair. The hair is embedded in a reinforced base that is molded around each strand. Horsehair bristles are more flexible, Bower says.

Marshalltown recently added three aluminum-backed brooms to its catalog. Aluminum-backed brooms don't warp, crack, or dry out in the sun like wood might, and they can be lighter than wood too. An aluminum back is "top of the line," Strawn says — stronger and more durable than wood, but generally more expensive.

Marshalltown has also introduced three new concrete "poly" brooms and an extra-coarse poly broom. Its new medium-coarse poly broom has clear fibers instead of black, making them less noticeable if they break off and fall onto the concrete surface.

Most of Kraft's brooms use "poly-fiber" bristles because the synthetic bristles are easily cleaned, Cook says. Kraft's horsehair brooms are significantly softer than poly-fiber and perform differently as well, he says. "Horsehair usually absorbs water, which polyfiber doesn't. It kind of flattens down on you."

Bristle count also varies from broom to broom. A cheap broom will not be as "filled" as a more expensive broom, which means that it will wear out faster.

On the other hand, a lightly filled broom can get on the concrete a little sooner, Cook says, which is why Kraft sells a specialty broom with just that feature. "The bristles don't drag the concrete as much."

Weigh-less Finishing Brushes from Bon Tool Co. are available with replaceable strips of medium or coarse bristles. The medium is recommended for normal jobs, the coarse for fast-setting concrete or a rougher finish.

Strawn says that, ultimately, a contractor may just choose the type of bristle he or she knows best. "It kind of comes down to what they're taught. That's usually what they go with."



Specialty tools

Some concrete brooms and brushes are even more specialized. Concrete brushes can sometimes be attached to bull floats, finishing tools or fresno trowels. "As you make your pass out, the bull float or fresno's leading edge is tilted up, lifting the brush off the slab," explains Bolden, referring to a Marion Brush system. "On the return trip the bull float or fresno is tilted down, letting the finishing brush come in contact with the slab to give a nice uniform textured finish. It is important to have your brush attached to the bull float or fresno on a free pivoting point."

Marion's Chameleon Trac II rope brush is able to finish a large slab of concrete, such as a parking lot, in a fraction of the typical time without stop-and-start marks. The "handleless brush" is pulled from side to side. As its name suggests, the Chameleon works with five color-coded brush inserts that have different degrees of softness.

Wagman Metal Products' broom trolley addresses the same need. Workers stand on either side of a slab and use rope to pull the trolley back and forth. The trolley can be outfitted with either plastic fiber or horsehair bristle brooms, and their angles are adjustable.

Broom Protectors

A concrete finishing broom is an artist's tool, and like any important tool, it needs to be treated with care.

The Broom Cover/Protector, a new product from Kraft Tool Co., offers a snappy solution to the problem.

The Protector snaps around the bristle end of a broom, protecting its shape in storage. The tool fits Kraft aluminum finish brooms up to 48 inches wide. The open ends of the protector allow the broom to dry and keep its original shape. Snap-button closures secure the broom in place.

"Most contractors don't have a really good way to protect a broom," says Kraft sales and marketing manager Steve Cook.

Magnolia Brush and Marshalltown Co. don't make broom protectors. Wagman Metal Products doesn't either, says Wagman marketing manager Robert Bower.

Wagman's brooms come in cardboard boxes, which would be perfect for storage, but only after the broom is dry, he says. "You're going to want to wash the broom, so optimally, you're going to want some sort of air flow to dry it. I don't know if putting a wet broom in a box is a good thing."

A curb and gutter broom, such as one sold by Wagman, is actually two brooms joined at a pivot point. The angle between the brooms can be set to conform to any curb rise. "You can adjust it 360 degrees so you can get any angle you want," Bower says.

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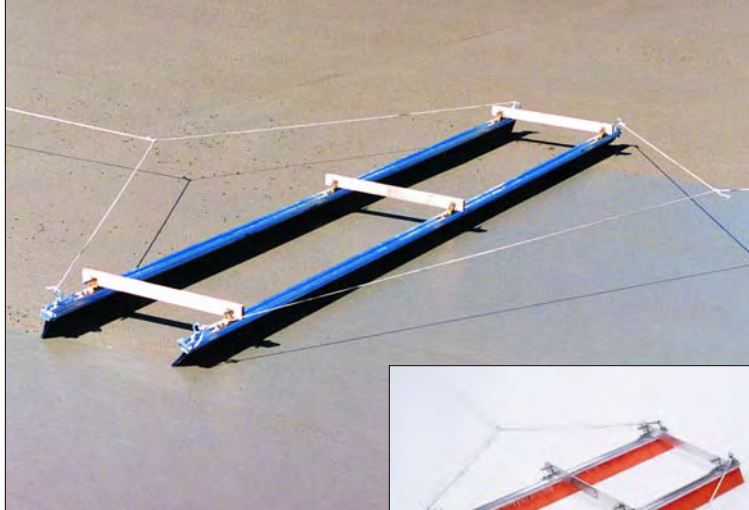
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This tool allows a worker to broom-finish gutter and curb in one sweep with evenness virtually assured. "You don't need to bend down and use a hand finishing broom," Bower says. "You also don't need to worry about holding the broom at a consistent angle."

Wagman also markets a "Concrete Texture Comb," which delivers a nonskid surface with a uniform rough groove finish. It does the job with tempered spring steel flat-wire tines affixed to an aluminum block.



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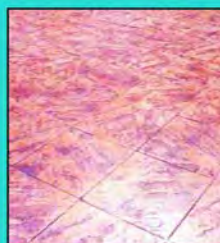
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CIRCLE #69 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Taking Your Business to the Next Level

by Richard Smith

You are walking in the mall one day and notice a beautiful concrete floor in a national retail store. You think, "I could do that." But how do you get those accounts? How do you expand your service area?

Why you should, and when

You already have the expertise in decorative concrete. You have many projects in your local area that people always comment on. You have even received inquiries from a large retail chain that is opening a location in your area. You have many projects on your schedule for the next few months, but they are on the small side.

Decorative concrete is a growing trend all across the country. From retail to restaurants to homes, it is more in demand. How can you tap into this exciting trend?

Research your target audience. Are they general contractors, architects or designers? Who makes the ultimate decision regarding who does the work? It has been my experience that unless a particular decorative concrete contractor has been requested by either the owner or the architect, the general contractor makes the decision.

Try to find the top 100 general contractors in the country. These are usually the ones with larger national clients. Send them information on your company. Call and speak with the head estimator. Getting your name out there is the biggest step.

Ready, willing and able

All your hard work has paid off. A national retail chain is opening 14 stores in the next 12 months and they want all their floors to look the same. They want you to do them. The new stores are spread out across the country. You think, "This is what I have been waiting for!" But are you ready?

You have landed that big account. Now, logistically, how do you do this job? You could use all your own employees. They are experienced, and they can get the job done. But one has a new baby and can't leave home, and another is afraid to fly. This certainly puts a damper on your excitement.

You could call a supply house in the area near the new project and get some recommendations on help. Most supply house reps know their customers and what they do. An employment services company is another good alternative. They can match you with skilled or unskilled labor to help out.

Do you have to be licensed for the state in which you are working? Will your liability insurance and workers' compensation carriers allow out-of-state work? These are important details.

Will the client pay upfront for airfare, hotel and rental truck? Or do you have to put that money up and wait for 45 days to be reimbursed? This is a problem for many of us.

Once these questions have been answered, you can begin arrangements. Arrange for a rental van your crew can pick up at the airport. Be careful, however, to be certain that you can pay for the van over the phone. Many rental companies require the person driving to also pay for the van. You could open a prepaid credit card for your foreman for this purpose.

This prepaid credit card may also be used to purchase supplies you will need. Unless you have an account with a national supply house, you will have to pay cash for most of your tools and materials. And don't forget about food and gas.

The hotel, supply house and job location should be as close together as possible. Don't go for a hotel 40 miles away just because they can give you a great price. The client must understand that they may have to pay a little more for the convenience of a local hotel. Make it clear that it is necessary to be close because you will probably be working at night (because of mall rules) and the safety of your men is your paramount concern.

Set up your labor beforehand. Get the potential help's contact information and call them directly. You should get a sense that they are dependable, capable, and willing to work in a high-pressure situation.

Be sure to speak directly with the job superintendent about job-site conditions. Are electrical,

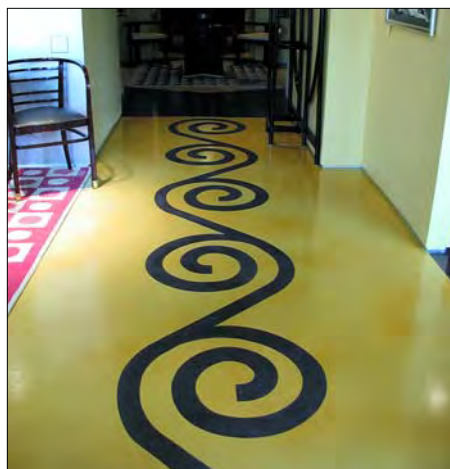


Whole Foods





**Samaritan Medical
Building, Los Angeles**



Hope International University

water and lighting available and set? If the floor must be shot-blasted, can the superintendent send you a page from the local phone book so you can set it up? Where do deliveries go? From where do you stage your work?

Another suggestion is, if the project is in a mall, speak directly with mall management. Introduce yourself and discuss the project with them. Tell them you are coming from another state and want to be sure about mall hours of work, where deliveries can go, the staging areas, and any particular rules you must follow concerning your work.

Now, you must think about your tools. Do you fly with them? Do you buy new ones?

Some tools you probably want to bring along with you, such as trowels that are broken in just the way you want them. Check with the airline to get any restrictions they may have. You could box the tools and check the boxes in with your baggage. Airlines usually allow two checked bags per person, so each man could bring a box of tools, but be aware of weight restrictions. You can't bring brooms, fans or a Skilsaw, so be prepared to buy those things at the job location. And be prepared to leave them. I have spent more than \$1,000 on tools at job locations and been forced to leave them to the general contractor, or perhaps another deserving tradesperson.

Because of the increased security restrictions at airports, be sure that each man in your crew has a valid, up-to-date driver's license or another piece of required identification. The last thing you need is to be all set for a job and have a major setback because one of the best guys on your crew is turned away because of an expired driver's license.

Getting into the groove

The first couple of jobs can be frustrating. Problems can and will come up. But once you get into the flow of the projects, they become much easier. You know the exact materials you need and you have your timing down to a science. Your crew finds the groove, and they mesh into a well-rounded team. Your clients see that you are doing a great job and they loosen the purse strings to get you an advance on the next project to cover travel expenses upfront, easing your cash flow.



Rick Smith, owner of Richard Smith Custom Concrete in Canoga Park, Calif., has been in the business for 25 years.

The Rhodes Tower Plaza Renovation

Rain, snow, sleet and howling winds were not strong enough to stop this stamping job.

by David Thompson



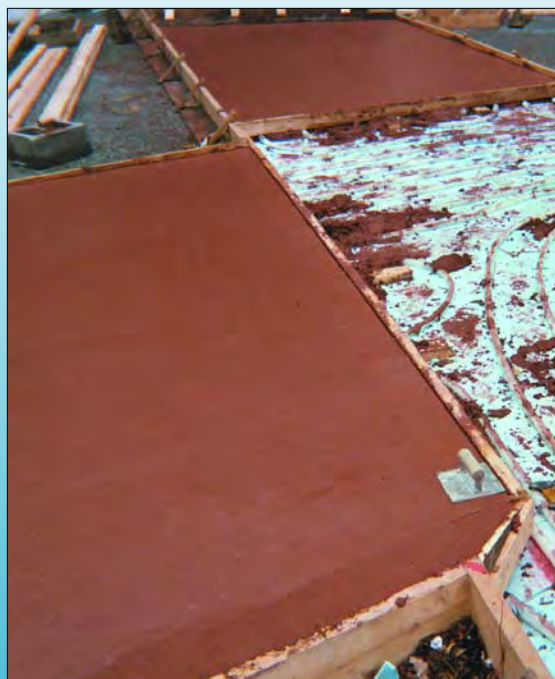
Snowstorms aren't the best weather for stamping concrete.

But heavy snowfall was only part of what crews working on the renovation of Cleveland State University's Rhodes Tower Plaza had to deal with last winter. There were also freezing rains, howling winds and sub-zero temperatures.

"We got clobbered with bad weather," says the project's superintendent, Mike Bechkowiak, of Cold Harbor Building Co., the general contractor. "Some days it was warm enough to rain, and overnight the rain changed to snow. Once it went from rain to literally a foot and a half of snow."

The project's original summer start date was delayed when the university put the project up for rebidding, Bechkowiak says. That moved the job toward the end of the year and into Cleveland's notorious winter weather.

"I've been around the country and seen a lot of stamping jobs, but I've



never seen a job done in weather as poor as this," says Dale Mizer, a representative for the project's decorative concrete supplier, Chas. E. Phipps Co., who worked closely with the concrete subcontractor, Union Industrial Contractors. "I think they were crazy for doing it, but the school wanted it done."

The 37,000-square-foot Rhodes Tower Plaza sits atop a parking garage in the heart of the university's downtown campus, connecting several buildings. Originally, it was a gray concrete plain with a few trees and shrubs stuck into planters here and there. The redesigned plaza is a much more inviting place, featuring colorful walkways that crisscross each other like search beams and slice through undulating lines and big loops. The pattern reveals itself fully when viewed from the tall campus buildings that look down on it.

The project features integrally colored concrete sidewalks stamped with Brickform's Heavy Stone Texture

skins and accented with dry shake release colors. Because the plaza serves as the central crossroads of the urban campus, the crew had just a small window of time while students were away on winter break to get the main walkways done.

An indispensable component for stamping in the wicked winter weather was the movable shelter built of two-by-fours and Visqueen. The shelter provided enough room to stamp about 300 square feet at a time. The crew would stamp an area one day, sweep away the extra release agent on the following day, then move the shelter to the next section to be stamped and start again.

To speed up the process, a non-chloride accelerator was used so the concrete would set more quickly. "The guys were still waiting around four or five hours before they could stamp the concrete, but otherwise they'd have been waiting all day or until the next day," Mizer says.

Radiant heat tubing was placed beneath the sidewalks as a natural ice-melting system. The tubes sit upon half-inch sheets of extruded polystyrene foam, a lightweight material that the winter winds blowing off Lake Erie redistributed through the city. "There were days when they were trying to lay down the extruded polystyrene foam, and they'd find the product scattered three blocks down the street," Mizer says.

Despite the challenges, the plaza turned out beautifully. "It's definitely an area where Clevelanders can go and see decorative concrete at its finest," Mizer says.

And his advice for anyone else crazy enough to undertake a huge stamping job in winter?

"Plan it for summer," he says. "And if it's a school project, do it over summer break, not winter break."





Getting Started in the Business of Decorative Curbing

by Susan Brimo-Cox



Decorative curbing is giving entrepreneurs across the country a creative edge in the competitive concrete market. For many it is a stand-alone business; for others a lucrative add-on.

"Concrete curbing is one of the fastest growing segments of the landscape industry," observes Jeremy Garrett, president of Tygar Manufacturing Inc. He's not alone in this assessment.

Larry Rose, president of Curbmate Corp., and Lane McKinnon, director of manufacturing at Tool Engineering and Manufacturing (maker of Curb-King), also report the majority of decorative curbing is used in landscape applications.

Residential market growing by leaps and bounds

The most popular curb style among homeowners is the mower edge.

"It has the lower edge set at the same height as the firm sod for lawn-mowing

applications," Rose explains. "It then curves over and up so that the back side is higher, allowing for raised flower beds. In the early days we emphasized the beauty of this style by saying that it was like putting a picture frame around your landscaping."

But another style is gaining in popularity, too. "The slant style has become very popular because it likewise has a lower side against the grass and a higher side for raised flower beds," Rose says. But instead of curving up to the back side, this curbing has a straight slant, allowing for imprints and impressions that look like stone or slate or brick.

Style and profile preferences naturally vary from region to region of the country. McKinnon reports that in Southern California, a 5-inch profile with rounded edges is popular, while the most popular preference in the Northwest is exposed aggregate. In Las Vegas, customers favor a very narrow 4-inch by 4-inch profile.



Preferences for a smooth or stamped finish seem to mirror architectural styles. "We find that nationwide, the stamped curb is more popular," Garrett says. "In the western United States and Florida there are many smooth-finished or stucco homes. In these areas contractors will use more smooth-finished colored curbs." Because stamp designs and color choices are virtually endless, a contractor can pretty much make the curbing match the exterior décor of a customer's home — brick, stone, wood, whatever.

What you need to get started

Robert Parrish, CEO of Decorative Curbmaking Machines Inc., lays out a list of what you need to get a curbing business going: an extrusion machine, mixer, sod cutter, plate compactor and trailer. "It normally takes two people to get a job done," he says, "but three to four people will cut the installation time down."

As with most things, speed of installation directly affects the profit margin, and installation time is dependent on the scope and difficulty of the project, site preparation, and the efficiency of the crew. "An owner is generally part of the crew," Garrett says. "This will help your cash flow and cost of labor tremendously."

Leon Burch, owner and president of Concrete Crafters, one of the leading

commercial curbing firms in the country, emphasizes the importance of having both a good business plan and a good marketing plan. "I worked for years in the residential market — it's tough. Customers sometimes have unrealistic expectations." Unfortunately, he adds, some homeowners go with the cheapest price, though it is likely not the best work.

Garrett estimates, "Depending on the region, cost of materials can be from 30 cents to 50 cents a foot for colored curb, and 90 cents to \$1.10 a foot for stamped curb. Again, depending on region, contractors are charging anywhere from \$3 a foot to \$5 a foot for colored curb and \$6 a foot to \$10 a foot for stamped curb."

Equipment is a major upfront cost. Many in the industry emphatically stress the importance of making good equipment choices.

"A word to the wise about purchasing curbing equipment: Cheap is not always the best way to go," says Parrish. "If you are serious about getting into the business, weigh your options carefully — it can be the difference between your success or total failure. Make sure you compare apples with apples."

Burch observes, "It's really a hostile environment. Look for quality equipment. It has to deal with moisture, dust, dirt, grit and grime. Check the quality of the power plant on the machinery you get. Does it have a reputable engine? Look at the



Photographs courtesy of Decorative Curbmaking Machines

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bearings. Really shop it. Look at the quality of the trailer, the mixer and the whole package."

Extrusion machine technologies, including ram or plunger compaction, single- or double-auger, vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different technologies and research the durability track record of different product models. It is not uncommon to see

conflicting information, so do your homework. Test-drive the machines. Get contractor references from equipment manufacturers and talk to experienced contractors.

Tools and techniques for applying textures and finishes to curbing are similar to those used for flatwork. However, with many curbing profiles it is faster to apply an imprint using an imprint roller. Many kinds are available. Again, shop around for the tools you'll use.

Custom designs and lighted curbing

The demand for custom curb designs is growing, but remains a small segment of the market. This includes custom shapes as well as custom stamp patterns. As Garrett observes, "They do take a little time to catch on, but they end up being a standard part of each contractor's curbing operation."

Homeowners across the board are using more and more accent lighting in their landscapes, but that does not necessarily translate to jumps in demand for lighted landscape curbing. "We see lighted curbing growing, but slowly — it's pricey," McKinnon says. He says lighted curbing can add \$7 per foot to the retail price of plain curbing.

There are some challenges to installing lighted curbing, too.

Typically a rope or piece of foam is embedded in the mortar or concrete mix as the curbing is extruded. When the curb sets up, the rope or foam is removed and rope lighting inserted. That may seem pretty straightforward, but McKinnon says it can get tricky sometimes with inside curves, where the rope may want to pull itself out.

You also need an electrical hookup. "The lighting is equipped with an outdoor-rated plug that can be plugged into an outdoor GFI outlet. You can also hook a timer into the lights to regulate when the lights will come on and go off," Garrett says.

In all cases, Parrish says, "Make sure you have UL approval on all your light products, have EFI breakers, and meet all electrical codes, or your customers may end up owning your company as well as maxing out your liability policy!" And, he cautions, "Weed eaters,' playful animals, shovels and rakes can destroy plastic rope lighting. Also, UV rays will make the plastic brittle in time. Plus lights do burn out."

Training is important

If decorative curbing is a business that appeals to you, be sure to get some quality hands-on training. Look for specialized training that gets you over

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the learning curve, beyond simple equipment operation.

In addition to curbing installation training, some equipment manufacturers offer expanded training that helps a new business owner get a handle on their business operations and marketing and sales activities.

Marketing yourself

To drum up business in the residential marketplace, advertising is a must, but the type you use may vary depending on your market.

"If consumers don't know about decorative curbing, you'll need to educate them," McKinnon explains. In this situation, he says, a home-show booth is effective. "Have a machine running in the booth, extruding sand, so they can see how it works."

Another effective method is to install decorative curbing in high-profile locations. "A corner home in a neighborhood is the best advertisement you can get," Garrett says. "The curb will sell itself after potential customers

can see it on the ground. The first few jobs may have to be at a reduced or discounted rate, but they will pay for themselves time and time again."

Arrange with the homeowner to post signs during installation and a short time afterward. And distribute fliers and door hangers to neighbors.

Selling decorative curbing as an upgrade or landscape improvement is also effective.

Advertising in newspapers and the Yellow Pages is recommended in a mature market where decorative curbing is not new, though this kind of advertising can get costly.

Of course the best advertising, Parrish says, is word-of-mouth. But, he adds, "You better do a good job."

The commercial market

Commercial curbing applications range from industrial applications, such as retaining curbs inside manufacturing plants, to retail applications, such as parking lot curbing, to commercial landscape projects. It is a much tougher

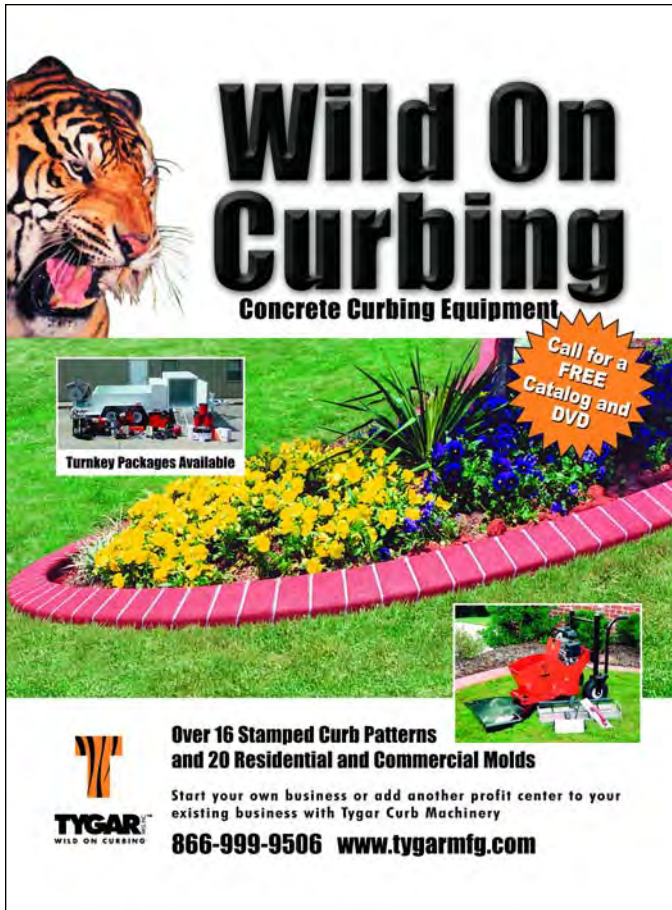
market to get into than residential, but not impossible.

"Commercial curb is marketed by talking to contractors, developers, architects, landscapers and anyone in the commercial building field," Garrett says. "Some curbing contractors have installed curbing on a spec or model home for free. This gets great exposure to the commercial market."

McKinnon reports some decorative curbing contractors are successful in developing ongoing working relationships with landscaping firms. In this kind of business-to-business relationship, when a landscape contractor secures a project that includes curbing, he relies on his curbing contractor to handle that part of the installation.



Editor's note: To learn more about decorative curbing options and details about its installation, read "Get an edge on your competitors" in the August-September 2004 issue of Concrete Decor magazine.



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PRODUCT PROFILES

Edge forms offer natural look

If you're looking to give your concrete countertop a natural edge, look no further than two new texture edge forms from Bon Tool Co.

The forms, one stone and one seashell, were introduced in January. Both give a unique, natural-looking texture to the side of a bathroom or kitchen countertop.

The stone form is a pattern taken from an actual rock's edge. It offers subtle variations in a texture that suggests the side of a cliff.

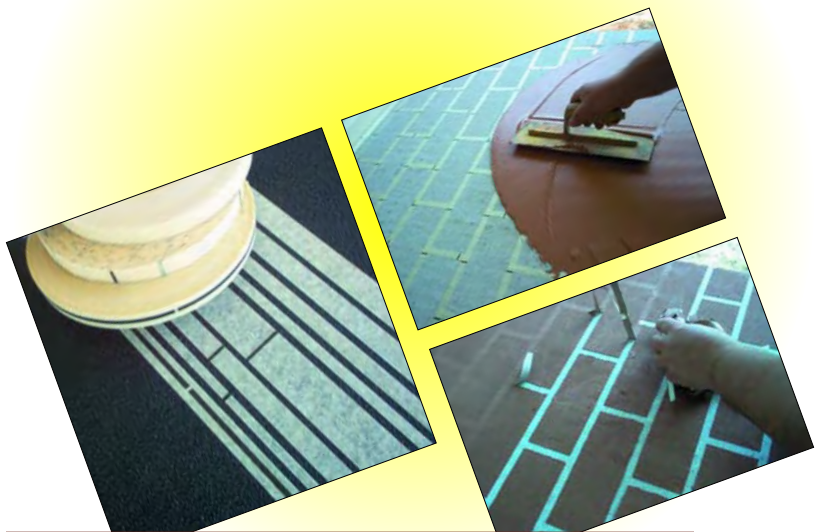
The seashell form, for its part, was made with real seashells glued to cut coral. It leaves raised impressions of common seashells and looks vaguely like a fossil bed.

The flexible, reusable urethane forms are applied to wet concrete during fabrication. Each tool measures 8 feet by 2 inches. Because of the special blend of rubber used in their manufacture, they do not require a release agent during application.

The forms present a range of stylistic opportunities to contractors, who may stain them to look like their natural inspirations or get creative. A Bon Tool press release about the forms offers some basic recommendations: "The entire slab of concrete should be colored in a method typically used to achieve desired effect. Afterward, a spot application of acid stain or water-based acrylic paint should be considered to enhance the shaded areas of the rock's edge or the individual shells in the pattern."

The edge forms are new additions to Bon Tool's Bonway line of tools and materials for decorative concrete. The line includes texturing, coloring and sealing products.

To learn more, visit www.bontool.com or contact the Bon Tool sales department at (724) 443-7080.



Tapes help with layout, cutting, blasting

Trimtape Inc., a Georgia company, is unspooling several sticky options for concrete contractors.

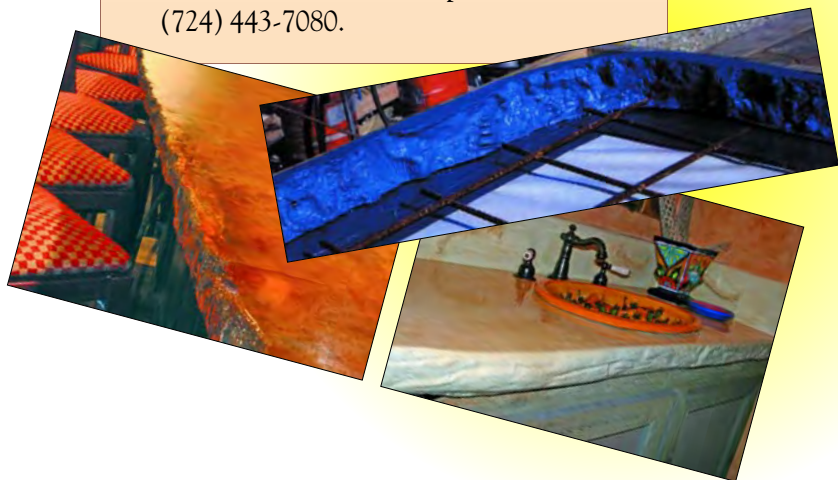
Trimtape's grout line tapes, which range in width from 1/4 inch to 1 inch, are laced with strands of fiberglass for strength. Layout marker lines appear every four inches of tape. "It's a huge help in laying out patterns, such as tile patterns," says Trimtape co-owner Mark White.

The company's scoring tape is 1/2-inch wide, fiberglass-reinforced tape with a black line printed down its center and breaks every 4 inches. It works as a guide for diamond-blade saw cuts. When using the tape, cutters will be able to follow a line that won't be easily obscured or disturbed by dust. What's more, the tape keeps dust from cuts off the surrounding surface. "Even if you're on a warehouse floor cutting an expansion joint, it helps you make a fast, quick line that won't go away," White says. "It's easy to see."

Finally, there's Trimtape's abrasive blasting tape, a heavy, rubbery EDPM tape with a clean-removing adhesive.

While Trimtape Inc. is new to the decorative concrete niche, it was founded back in 1996 with a line of trimming tapes for the protective coatings market. The company began working on concrete-specific tape designs last year after noting a surge of interest from decorative concrete professionals at the 2004 World of Concrete show.

For more information, visit www.trimtape.com or call (888) 746-8273.



Manufacturer Profile: Symons

Des Plaines, Illinois

by Mike Dawson



Clients like Disney are the Mount Everest of the decorative concrete industry. So the company that builds the 220-foot-tall Expedition Everest, a mountain of concrete at Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom, can't climb much higher. The concrete forming and engineering company Symons can claim that peak, and several others, including features at Universal Studios and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China.

But while high-profile customers are important, the Symons Decorative Division gives equal attention to the distribution pipeline that leads to the everyday architect and contractor. That is this manufacturer's route to success, says Ron Cottingham, national program manager for decorative concrete for Symons, a division of Dayton-Superior.

Cottingham says providing information is as important as providing a product. And that information must be accessible up and down the entire sales/distribution chain so that a contractor standing in a homeowner's back yard can get answers on the spot. This attention to customer service is what separates Symons from its competition, Cottingham says.

Symons has been a concrete forming company based in Des Plaines, Ill., since 1901. The Symons decorative division is just one member of a large team, but it is a player with an ever-growing role as the horizons of the decorative industry expand.

The company's history lies in industrial forms, so it was natural to branch off into decorative form liners when the field emerged. Symons claims to have the widest selection of form liners in the industry. Patterns include wood-grain, stone, brick and a wide variety of ribbed and other textures, as well as custom designs. Symons also offers the choice of four different materials to create an architectural finish:

- SPS Plastic, a polystyrene form liner for inexpensive single-use applications.

- ABS Plastic, a more durable liner, suitable for projects requiring five to 10 pours.
- Dura-Tex, a medium-range, 40-use, elastomeric material that can be stripped from complex form liner designs without damage.
- Elasto-Tex, a pure urethane form liner for projects that require 100 uses or more.

The decorative line also features the Design-Crete concrete stamping system, which produces detailed stone, brick or tile patterns with authentic-looking textures. The Design-Crete system can be applied to almost any newly placed horizontal concrete interior and exterior surface.

Another product for new pours is the Texture-Rite system, a concrete patterning process that requires color hardener, paper stencils and sealer to create a textured surface, often on borders. Slate, tile, brick and stone are some of the more common patterns.

To upgrade plain, damaged or stained concrete, Symons offers its Spray-Rite system, a polymer-modified cement system that provides a thinset surface in a variety of colors and pattern templates.

Symons also offers a Stampable Overlay System, used to improve existing surfaces. This stampable, color-infused cementitious topping, resistant to ultraviolet light and water intrusion, provides a color-stable surface that minimizes spalling and cracking.

Symons' wide selection of products — which also includes integral colors and penetrating stains and coatings for both vertical and horizontal surfaces — requires a strong technical support team. Cottingham believes Symons' training and technical service are the best in the business.

Marketing begins at the local level. Once each month a date is set for a regional training seminar for architects and contractors. Before anyone is invited, Symons' team of three specifiers is deployed to gather information about the local market: what is in style, who does the work. They study specific architects to learn their fields and specialties before ever approaching them. This targeted approach is much more effective than mass mailing or cold calling, Cottingham says. "These architects get information overload; in order to be successful you have to listen and understand their needs. They don't want a product pitch, they want a creative problem solver."



Once the Symons specifier team understands the architectural firm's needs, the professional is invited to the four-hour training. "There we encourage a dialogue that allows the professional to pick our brains on the areas that are most important to them and their clients. Every project has a uniqueness to it, and once we understand what they are trying to

achieve, we can ensure the solution meets all of their design criteria."

As a manufacturer, Symons' doesn't have a lot of direct contact with contractors, but it keeps them in mind when designing products and technical service programs. "We have to stop and think about what that guy is up against every day," Cottingham says. Those daily challenges include cash flow, time,

investment in equipment and, he says, "If I have a question, where do I call?"

It's the job of the manufacturer to make sure that the distributor and the contractor can make the product perform in the field, Cottingham says. "We are like an insurance policy. Calls come in at all hours to the 24-hour technical assistance line. When they call is when they need an answer to a unique situation. The most important thing is that we get them an answer."


Cottingham believes that the industry as a whole needs to do a better job at educating contractors and architects. He sees the industry headed toward more standardization and national certification programs. Decorative concrete has grown so fast, he says, that this area has not quite caught up with itself.

Another area where the industry has not quite caught up is safety. Cottingham feels that the industry needs to move more quickly to create less volatile products. Symons continues to develop new innovative products that address the technical needs of the marketplace, such as sealers that are VOC-compliant, yet won't cause decorative concrete to blush. "Once the technical need is met, we ensure that the whole sales team from manufacturer to contractor is properly trained," Cottingham added. "In doing so we ensure our customer's customer has the right system installed correctly."

Attention to safety is one reason Symons has the Mount Everest job at Walt Disney World. The four-year project, which is the setting for a high-speed train, is carved concrete with liquid integral colors and both reactive and water-based stains, for an amusement park ride that is classified as non-hazmat, user-friendly and environmentally friendly. The complete Symons decorative system has met and surpassed strict Disney codes while extending the life expectancy of the architectural finish and maintenance schedules by more than 40 percent over previous types of architectural finishes, Cottingham says.



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If decorative concrete is your passion, you're probably well aware that training in decorative concrete happens in some unusual places — and that these somewhat unusual places are home to some of the best hands-on training imaginable.

With that said, I've got to tell you about a few bone-chilling days I recently spent in the northern township of Boroughbridge, rubbing shoulders with some of England's better-known contractors. It was the kickoff to Lafarge UK's Spring 2005 training for decorative concrete professionals.

Leading off Lafarge's training program were some talented concrete artisans: Jon Anderson and Roger Shroff — product managers for Lafarge UK's decorative concrete division — as well as Mike Archambault, a long-time friend to many U.S. concrete professionals (and former owner of

Mastering the skills of decorative concrete on English soil

by **Bent Mikkelsen**





Arkansas-based Patterned Concrete Industries) who now resides a short distance from Paris. The focus was a demonstration of finishing techniques for concrete surfaces available from Lafarge Decorative Materials, particularly its Bomanite range.

More than 30 contractors and engineers gathered at the Crown Hotel in Boroughbridge, two blocks from a Lafarge ready mix plant. According to Joe Rice-Jones of Done Right Concrete Company, the quality of this training was "smashing."

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"I couldn't have asked for a better experience," he said. "I have learned as much in these three days as I could from a mountain of books on the subject."

Mike and Jon used traditional concrete tools to demonstrate several techniques that helped refine some of the more experienced contractors' skills while giving younger tradesmen a perspective on concrete finishing. It's apparent that these European contractors understand the important role that decorative concrete holds in increasing the overall demand for concrete products in Europe.

One facet of this coloring and texturing seminar was a focus on exposed aggregate finishes. Surprising, I suppose, because it was in the '70s and '80s that aggregate finishes were the rage in many parts of the U.S. However, just like the renewed interest in bellbottom pants and pastel colors, it seems that UK contractors may be on the verge of reigniting our soil with a growth in demand for aggregate finishes.

Comparing this seminar to stateside training events, I would have to give Lafarge an "A." These contractors enjoyed exceptional training and the seminar helped build the essential network of relationships with their supplier and with each other. It's important to add, if you've never gathered with a dozen concrete rogues in an English pub with Tetley's or Black Sheep on tap, you might give it a try. It's both comforting and a delightful place to build new relationships and talk shop, along with a few surprisingly similar political views.


According to Lafarge's Jon Anderson, "A challenge facing English innovators in concrete are the traditional standards Europe is so well loved for. Architectural specifiers and consumers alike still share a tendency toward traditional building materials such as stone and brick. Imprinted concrete is fake! Undoubtedly, however, these attitudes are changing as concrete's durability, performance, speed of application, safety and undeniable beauty proves itself time and again."

I count it a privilege to meet many talented individuals as part of my job, and I am constantly surprised to discover how far people will travel to learn more about decorative concrete. Some of the contractors came from as far away as Holland and even the island of Cypress. It's good that English is a common language, or the training seminar might have been quietly delivered by people wielding hand tools. Of course, that's what most of us were focused on anyway.


Words such as experience, leadership, and quality probably best define this event. Coupled with Lafarge's focus on innovation, customer service and unquenchable desire to excel in every aspect of concrete, this seminar has undoubtedly set new standards for European contractors and architects. After all, the American concrete industry is a shining example of similar standards.




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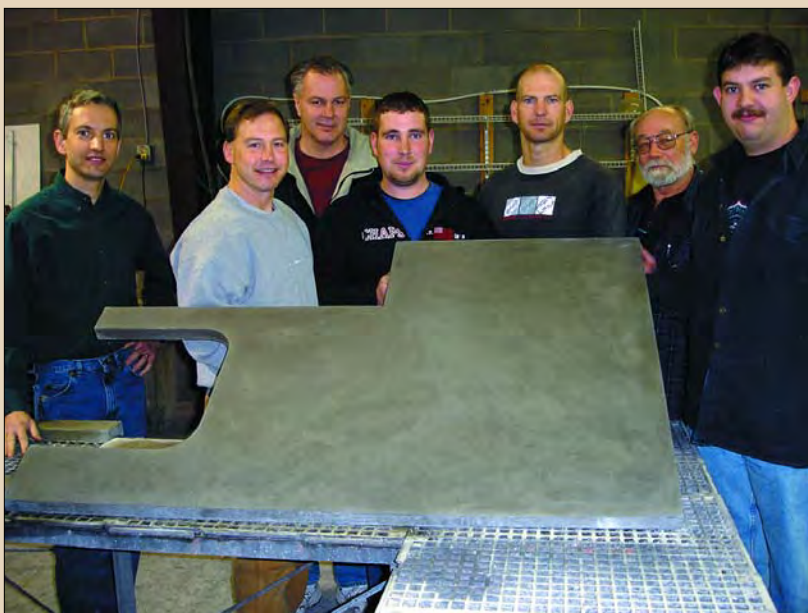
The Concrete Countertop

Focus on Education



The Concrete Countertop Institute (CCI) offers comprehensive education and resources for all aspects of concrete countertops. The Institute has recently added classes on creating cast-in-place countertops, marketing and selling countertops, and advanced sink fabrication. It is also a source for materials that have been unavailable to most fabricators, including specialized ingredients, pigments and admixtures, as well as a comprehensive array of tools and tooling used in the fabrication process.

The Institute was founded in response to the growing popularity of concrete countertops and the need for substantial education regarding their fabrication. Jeff Girard, its founder, is a licensed, professional civil engineer who believes that the key to success lies in comprehensive education, expert technical support and training that goes beyond designing highly stylized countertops. CCI's hands-on training is based on fundamentals and engineering principles, with the focus



Institute



on efficiency, simplicity and quality. For instance, students learn how reinforced concrete works structurally, how the ingredients in concrete work together, and the importance of proper reinforcing.

You don't have to be a designer

Girard's philosophy is, "Concrete countertops are *countertops*. You will be relieved to hear that most people just want a flat, standard-thickness countertop, just like every other type of countertop, that happens to be a beautiful color and sheen because it is made out of concrete. You don't have to be an artist or a designer unless you want to be."

Girard's wife, Lane Mangum, teaches CCI's sales and marketing class. She teaches that relationships with kitchen designers are the key to success in a concrete countertop business. The class includes scripts and role-playing to teach students how to work effectively with kitchen designers.

Students also learn how to help clients with basic design decisions when there's not a professional designer involved. Mangum notes, "Homeowners do sometimes look to their concrete countertop fabricator to collaborate with them on design ideas, but usually those ideas are limited to color, edge details, whether to have a drain board, and the placement of a few embedments such as some copper accents."

You don't have to be an engineer

You don't have to be an engineer to make concrete countertops, but you do need to understand some basic engineering principles. Girard emphasizes that concrete countertops, unlike sidewalk slabs, are structural beams, and that this has deep-reaching implications that have largely been ignored or misunderstood. Sidewalk slabs are designed to be fully supported by a compacted sub-base, which itself is an engineered foundation. Countertops, on the other hand, are supported by cabinets.

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There are two essential components to the performance of a concrete countertop: compressive strength and tensile strength. There are high-quality concrete countertop mixes available that can achieve compressive strengths approaching 11,000 psi. This refers only to compressive strength. Concrete generally cracks due to lack of tensile strength. The only way to ensure proper tensile strength is with proper reinforcing. Girard provides the following example:

- Take a non-reinforced 10' x 2' x 1.5" concrete countertop slab that has a compressive strength of 11,000 psi and a tensile strength of only 630 psi. That slab is guaranteed to break when lifted by the ends.
- When properly reinforced, that same slab can withstand a 250-lb person standing in the middle of it with no cracking.

CCI's classes teach mix designs and reinforcement designs that provide both compressive and tensile strength. Girard does not expect students to understand the engineering formulas. He gives them the step-by-step procedures that will result in high-performance countertops.

You do have to be a craftsman

The level of finishing detail required is different for countertops than for floors. Because concrete countertops are 3 feet off the ground, they are under much more scrutiny than concrete floors. And people prepare food on them. This means that the countertops must be very smooth and completely free of pinholes. "The good news is, most of my students are already craftsman because they do excellent work in concrete floors," Girard notes. "I just teach them the criteria for countertops, and they embrace the challenge of quality craftsmanship."



Sika announces new tape, certified sealants

Sika Corp. has introduced SikaSil Tape, a preformed elastomeric silicone profile for sealing expansion joints. The tape's silicone technology gives it strong resistance to weather and UV rays. It is sold in 100-foot rolls, in widths from 1 inch to 12 inches, and in six standard colors. The manufacturer also does color matching.

Also, three of Sika's polyurethane construction sealants, Sikaflex 1a, Sikaflex 15lm and Sikaflex Textured Sealant, have been certified by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association under AAMA 808.9-92, "Voluntary Specifications and Test Methods for Sealants: Exterior Perimeter Sealing Compound." The sealants are elastomeric, offer good adhesion and are available in a range of colors.

For more information visit www.sikacorp.com or call (201) 933-8800.

Quikrete, Valspar team up to enter concrete coatings market

Concrete manufacturer Quikrete Cos. and coatings manufacturer Valspar Corp. announced a strategic alliance to produce a complete line of premium concrete coatings.

The new line will be manufactured and marketed jointly by Valspar and Quikrete under the brand name Quikrete Professional Concrete Coatings. The line will feature 14 technologically advanced products, including sealers, floor coatings, waterproofer, and the Quikrete Epoxy Garage Floor Coating Kit, which includes cleaner, epoxy and color flakes. The products will often be merchandized at a single-source "Concrete Solution Center."

The venture is Quikrete's first into the coatings industry. Information about Quikrete can be found at www.quikrete.com or (800) 282-5828. For more about Valspar, visit www.valspar.com or call (612) 332-7371.

Not just hot air

Ground Heaters Inc. has introduced the S3000 Ground Heater, an economy version of its hydronic ground thawing and concrete curing equipment.

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Underlayment offers strength, sound resistance

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Allied Marketing was founded in 2003 to create and market a superior, versatile gypsum concrete floor product. The company is AccuCrete's sole distributor. For more information, visit www.alliedmarketingsystems.net or call (800) 392-1320.

Classic Series combines new and familiar form products

Durand Forms Inc. has unveiled the 94 Smooth panel, the newest aluminum form in its freshly christened Classic Panel Series.

The 94 Smooth offers all the characteristics of the company's standard aluminum form in a lighter product, giving contractors more flexibility in aboveground applications.

Durand's standard aluminum panel is now also a part of the Classic Panel Series. It has been given a new name, the 125 Smooth, and sports a few new features of its own, including optional rail extrusions and attached-pin and bushing options. In addition, the company's Textured and VIP brick forming panels have been brought into the Classic line.

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The Vegas Groover cuts long, straight 1 3/4-inch control joints in fresh concrete.



The Stainless Steel Groovy Fresco cuts clean, sharp safety

grooves that measure 1/4 inch wide by 1/4 inch deep.

Bon Tools has also beefed up its BonWay Decorative Concrete product line. It has introduced two new 100 percent acrylic sealers, BossGloss Clear VOC/OTC Compliant Enhancer and BossMatte Clear VOC/OTC Compliant Enhancer, and a new Water Base Cure & Seal. And it has added four paper stencils — Flagstone, Silverdale, Cobble Circle and Cobble Header — to its existing line of six.



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A fast first impression

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Hammer drill powers through concrete

Hitachi Power Drills has introduced a 1/2-inch hammer drill, the DV20VB2. The drill features an aggressive



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The DV20VB2 is powered by an 8.3-amp motor that delivers 940 watts. The motor produces a no-load speed of 0-1,000/3,000 RPM and an impact rate of 0-13,000/39,000 BPM.

The durable hammer drill is comprised of a one-piece cylindrical housing and aluminum die-cast inner cover and gear cover. It weighs 4.9 pounds and its no-load noise level is 79 dB.

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