

# Concrete™

The Journal of Decorative Concrete

VOL. 5 NO. 3 • JUNE/JULY 2005 • \$6.95

Decor

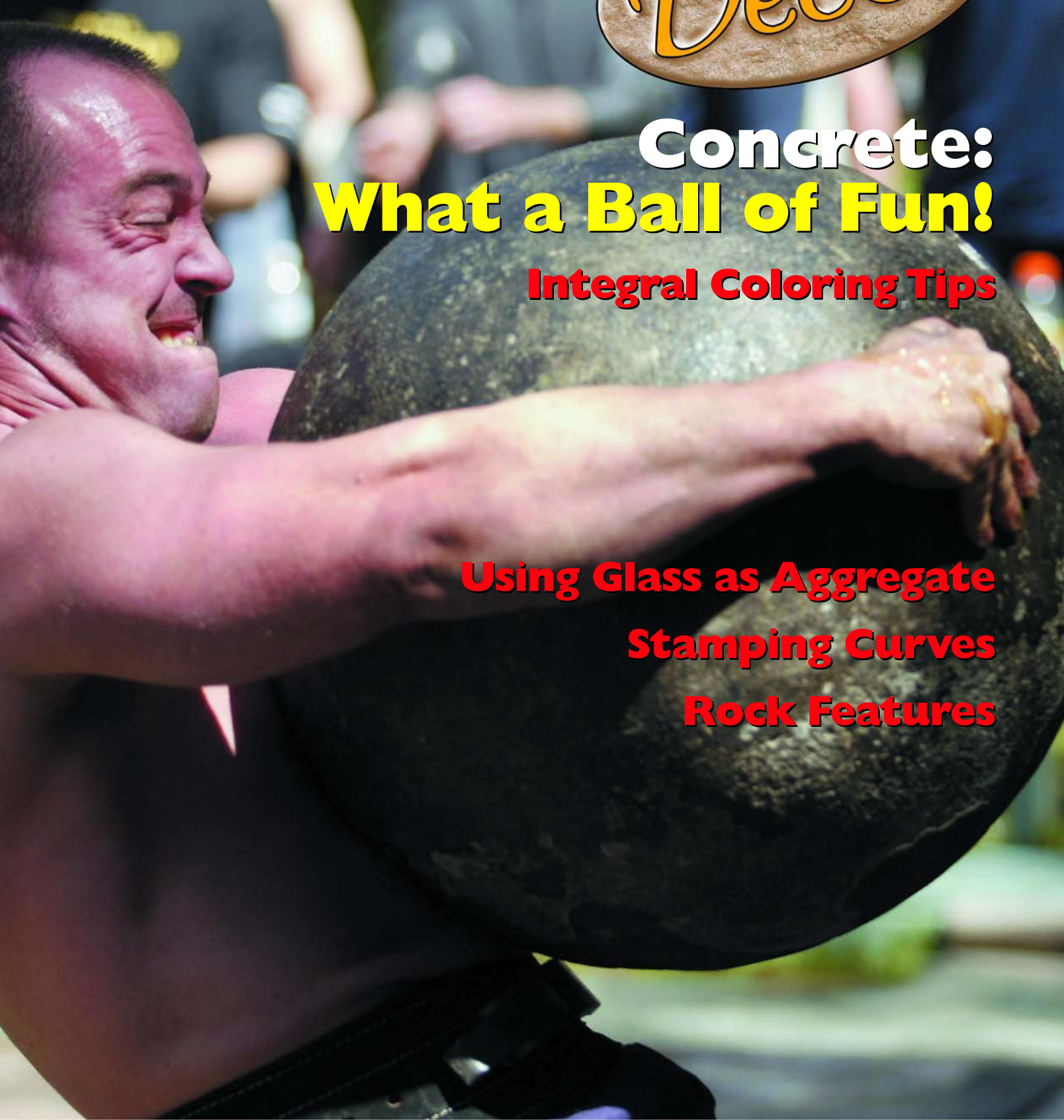
## Concrete: **What a Ball of Fun!**

**Integral Coloring Tips**

**Using Glass as Aggregate**

**Stamping Curves**

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CIRCLE #88 ON READER SERVICE CARD



How to treat  
concrete



# TIRED OF SECOND-GUESSING HANDWRITTEN TIMECARDS?

**EMPLOYEE TIME SHEET**

NAME: Frank Gomez DATES: June 13-17

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

Employee Signature: Frank Gomez Total Hours: 41.5



**REALITY?**

**Employee Report**

**Frank Gomez**

Jobsite Name: Walby Property Date Range: 6/13/2005 through 6/17/2005

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 6/13	7:19 AM	12:02 PM	Prep	4:43 hours
	12:40 PM	3:39 PM	Prep	2:59 hours 7:42 hours
Tue 6/14	7:21 AM	12:06 PM	Formwork	4:45 hours
	12:37 PM	3:42 PM	Formwork	3:05 hours 7:50 hours
Wed 6/15	7:16 AM	12:04 PM	Formwork	4:48 hours
	12:33 PM	3:44 PM	Formwork	3:11 hours 7:59 hours
Thu 6/16	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 6/17	7:17 AM	11:50 AM	Texture/Seal	4:33 hours
	12:36 PM	3:41 PM	Texture/Seal	3:05 hours 7:38 hours

Signature: Frank Gomez Frank Gomez

Employee total **38:53 hours**



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## Success Depends on High Standards

**A**s we headed off to a local burger joint for dinner the other evening, our new neighbors up the street were busily at work, supplementing the construction of their new home with a couple hammers in hand. When we stopped to say hello, I was surprised to discover that she and her husband were actually building forms for a new concrete patio in the back yard. What surprised me even more was their intent to rent "skins" and color and texture their concrete as well.

"Holy Cow," I exclaimed, "have you done this type of work in the past?" The reply came back, "No, but we really like the look."

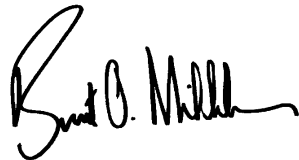
This experience left me rather frustrated at first. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how vulnerable our trade will become if its members, both contractors and suppliers, are not totally committed to learning the necessary skills for decorative concrete applications and also to learning how to market those skills and products appropriately.

In *Concrete Decor's* April/May issue, Chris Becker of Becker Architectural Concrete could not have said it better: "My goal from the beginning was to bring a more polished, educated and classy point of view to the industry." Becker brings that point of view to three areas that are key to his business success: installation, design and marketing.

The point that is so important for all of us to remember is that unless our businesses maintain a similar focus, we won't be able to properly educate customers or direct them to the resources where they can find examples of quality workmanship. Not taking responsibility for this aspect of your business, not making a 100 percent commitment to becoming your personal best, is essentially equipping consumers to think that creating beautiful decorative concrete is as easy as renting a few tools and reading a few slick online articles.

Like Chris Becker, we can all enjoy success by making a total commitment to these critical aspects of our businesses. What you'll discover is a vast number of people who are enthusiastic about helping you succeed. Best of all, this kind of approach to business gives customers confidence in your professionalism and skill. Such attributes will exist as long as your commitment to the highest possible standards remains intact.

Sincerely,



Bent Mikkelsen, *Publisher*



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**ON THE COVER:** Contractor Tom Ralston made an impressive collection of concrete balls for the NorCal Strong Man Competition, held in Santa Cruz, Calif., in April. The five balls, with the heaviest weighing 367 pounds, had to be lifted four feet off the ground and placed on a wall. Only one competitor succeeded in getting all five balls onto the wall.

Ralston says that the balls were graded by color, with the heaviest ones being blue. He put fiber mesh in the mix, and when he took them out of the molds, he ended up with, as he puts it, "big, heavy, hairy blue balls."

Photograph by Bill Lovejoy.



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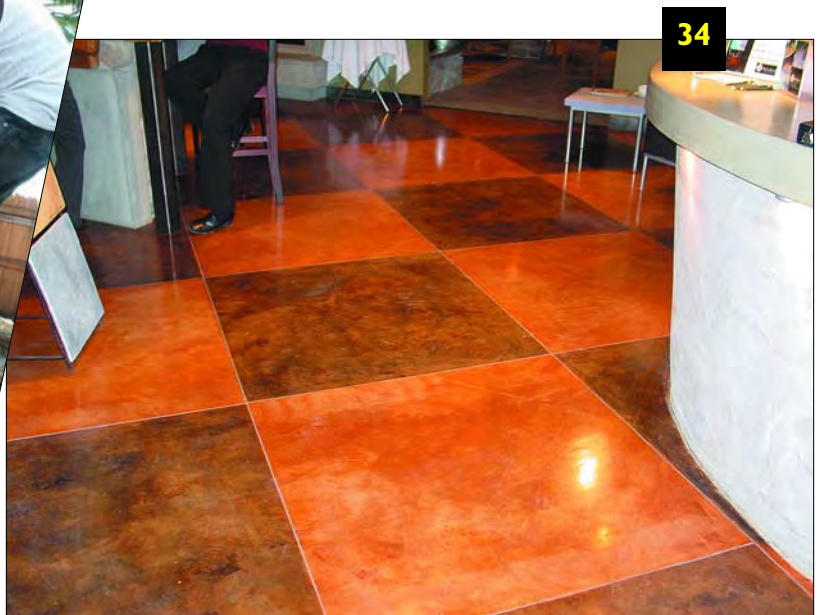


SINCE 1971



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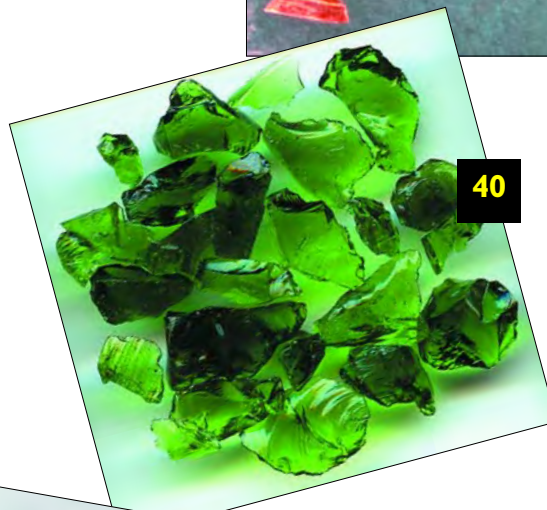
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## Consider This

"I'm in my early forties, and I'm already known as the grandfather of decorative concrete in China."

— Clyde Cobb, owner of Specialty Concrete Products, who began marketing decorative concrete in China in 1994. See our story on SCP on page 50.



# 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!

## Need a tool? Make it yourself!

It happens often: A concrete contractor is faced with a project that requires adaptations to an existing form or tool to shape the concrete during that critical hour before it turns hard.

Here's a case in point: A six-inch edger was transformed into a customized chamfer tool to provide a clean, straight and more consistent finish on the top edge of retaining walls and precast wall panels.

How, you ask? We'll let the photos speak for themselves.

As you know, most chamfer tools currently on the market are about an inch in length by six inches wide. For the most part, they make a quality finish cumbersome and very time-consuming.

To improve the finish and overall productivity on jobs that require a chamfered edge, Steve Jarred (a former contractor who is now a sales rep for Mason's Supply) took an old edger, cut off the radius, and spot-welded a piece of custom-shaped steel onto the bottom, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch back from one edge. That  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch distance allows the chamfer tool to ride along the edge of the form, guiding the chamfer through the concrete without any heaving of the material. Better yet, the tool leaves little or no edge on the face of the concrete when forms are pulled.



*Do you have a custom tool you are particularly proud of? Well, don't sit on it. Take it to market or share it with Concrete Decor. At least you can stake your claim to an idea that gets published here first. The industry stands to become a better trade either way.*



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## Television show will feature decorative concrete

Decorative concrete is a booming industry, but to many it's still a well-kept secret. That could soon be changing. San Antonio-based video production company J.E.L. Productions is working on a television program that will inform and educate consumers on the subject. The show was created by Wes Vollmer of Alternative Finishes as a way to benefit both the consumer and people in the industry.

"The Decorative Concrete Show" is both a national program and an interactive website: [www.thedecorativeconcreteshow.com](http://www.thedecorativeconcreteshow.com). The company is currently looking for sponsors for the first episode, an overview of the industry that highlights the various types of decorative concrete and how the work is done.

The program will be broadcast nationally, and Vollmer hopes to produce at least six episodes in the next year. "We work in a great industry, but most people have never heard of us," Vollmer says. "This program is going to help change that."

Vollmer hopes to have the first program on the air mid to late summer. He encourages contractors to visit the website and sign up to be listed.

## Durand names CEO

Durand Forms Inc., a manufacturer of aluminum wall forming systems and accessories for concrete contractors, has announced the appointment of Gary Brookshire as CEO.

Durand hopes the move will accelerate growth and further strengthen its position in the aluminum wall forming system industry. The shift also allows Mike White, Durand's current president, to further product development and expansion in domestic and international markets.

For more about Durand, visit [www.durandforms.com](http://www.durandforms.com) or call (800) 545-6342.

## The winners' circle

Twenty-seven concrete and masonry products were honored at the third annual "Most Innovative Product" awards program, held at the 2005 World of Concrete in Las Vegas.

Awards were issued in 17 categories, with an Attendees' Choice and Experts' Choice winner in each category.

Here is a partial list of winners:

- *Concrete Placing & Finishing Equipment* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: White Cap Construction Supply, the Tibroc CF-40. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Wacker Corp., the CT Series Walk-behind Power Trowels.
- *Concrete-Making Materials* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: Durafiber Inc., Buckeye UltraFiber 500. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Lafarge North America,

Tercem 3000 ternary cement blend.

- *Formwork & Forming Products* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: EZ-Footings, EZ-Footings. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Dayton Superior, E-Z Form Anchor System.
- *Decorative Tools & Materials* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: Acid Stain Enhancer & Neutralizer, Clemons Concrete Coatings. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Lifeguard Waterproofing Products, Lifeguard Wet Look Gloss.
- *Concrete Construction Tools* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: Jimmy T Tools, the Jimmy T Stake & Nail Puller. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Exaktime, the Jobclock.
- *Residential Concrete Products* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: Innovative Polymer Systems Inc., mold-making polyurethane. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Fritz-Pak Corp., Counter-Flo.
- *Production Equipment* — *Attendees' Choice Winner*: Concrete Washout Systems Inc., the Concrete Washout System, which contains concrete washout wastewater and material. *Experts' Choice Winner*: Concrete Washout Systems Inc., the Concrete Washout System.

## Lafarge turns heads

One of the "Most Innovative Product" winners at this year's World Of Concrete show in Las Vegas was Lafarge North America's Tercem 3000. The ternary cement blend won the Expert's Choice Award for the most innovative product in the concrete-making materials category.

Lafarge Tercem 3000 is a hydraulic cement containing a blend of silica fume, blast furnace slag and portland cement. It is blended for high strength, improved durability and superior placing and finishing qualities. Performance benefits include improved 28-day strengths, reduced permeability, improved rheology and pumpability of concrete (especially in hot weather), reduced concrete bleeding, and improved resistance to alkali-silica reactions.

The cement has environmental benefits too. Its production uses less energy and reduces carbon dioxide emissions compared to conventional cement manufacturing. Because it uses materials reclaimed from steelmaking and silicon metals operations, it is recognized as a "recovered" product by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and can help projects earn points toward LEED certification.

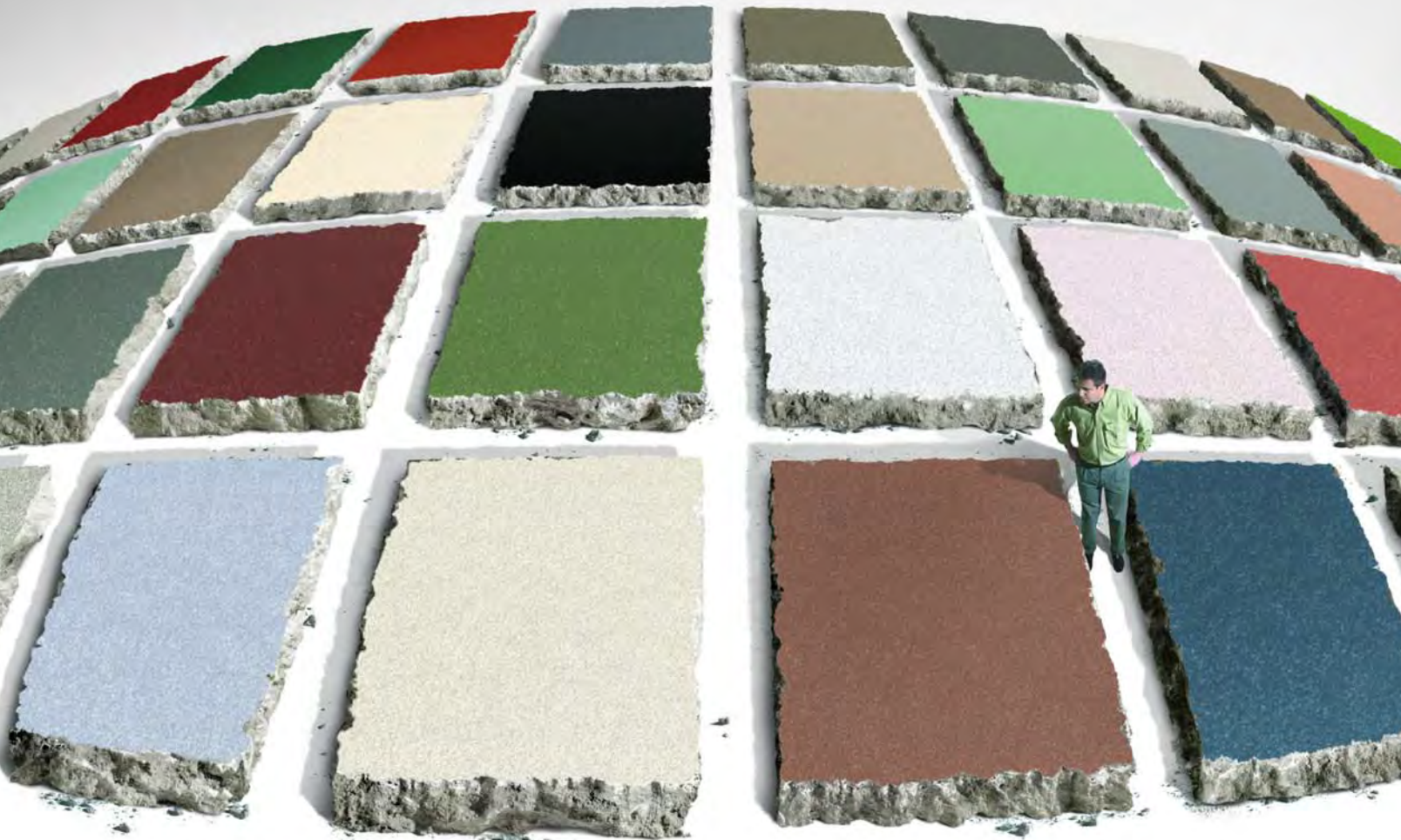
For more about Lafarge North America, visit [www.lafargenorthamerica.com](http://www.lafargenorthamerica.com).

## Parson a good steward

The National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (NRMCA) announced that Jack B. Parson Cos. is the winner of two Environmental Excellence Awards for two ready-mixed concrete plants, in West Haven, Utah, and Salt Lake City.

The awards were presented at NRMCA's annual convention, held in conjunction with the CONEXPO-





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CON/AGG exposition. The program salutes companies that have surpassed governmental compliance measures and demonstrated a commitment to environmental excellence through innovative management practices, plant operations, maintenance and staff investment.

Jack P. Parsons Cos. is a division of Staker & Parson Cos., the Intermountain region's largest supplier of sand and rock products, ready-mixed concrete, asphalt, paving and construction services. For more information, visit [www.stakerparson.com](http://www.stakerparson.com).

### A shining star

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has named California Portland Cement Co. as a 2005 Energy Star Partner of the Year for its outstanding contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The company was honored in the category of "Leadership in Energy Management."

CPC, an Energy Star partner since 1996, was praised for sustaining smart energy management practices and investments throughout its operations, including compressed air optimization, motor management, lighting improvements, process evaluations, plant operations and maintenance programs, and purchasing and inventory policies.

Partner of the Year Award winners are selected from thousands of organizations that participate in the Energy Star program. More than 7,000 organizations have become Energy Star partners.

For more about CPC, visit [www.calportland.com](http://www.calportland.com) or call (626) 852-6200. For more about Energy Star, visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) or call (888) 782-7937.

### Gracing Sweden with its presence

Grace AB, a Swedish subsidiary of W.R. Grace & Co. and a leading manufacturer of concrete admixtures, has acquired the concrete admixture business of Perstop Peramin AB.

Perstop's concrete admixtures are sold to ready-mix and precast concrete producers and civil contractors in

### And the Winner is ...

The first-ever Northern Ohio Decorative Concrete Competition awarded prizes in April for quality overlay and stamp work. The contest was held at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds in Berea, Ohio.

Ultimate Overlay, based in Huntsburg, Ohio, won in the overlay category with a wood-grain pattern achieved with a two-coating system and stenciling. The company took home \$300 cash.

Cornerstone Concrete Designs, of Orrville, Ohio, won the Grand Prize in the stamp competition for a design featuring a cross and bordered corners. It was awarded a \$1,000 travel certificate for getting to the 2006 World Of Concrete, plus free seminars and conference registration courtesy of publisher Hanley Wood.

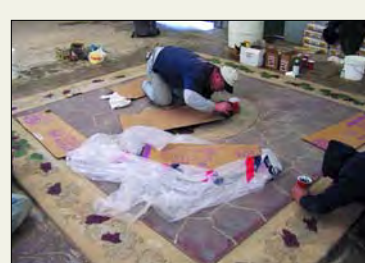
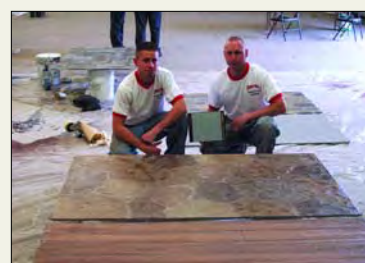
Cutting Edge Construction of Richfield, Ohio, won second place for stamping, while the Cement Masons Local 404 of Cleveland came in third.

The contest was organized by The Chas E. Phipps Co., a Cleveland-based distributor of decorative concrete contracting supplies. It was held in conjunction with the company's annual training seminar, the Decorative Concrete Forum.

The company solicited entries from decorative concrete contractors throughout Ohio. At the event, five competed in the overlay category and seven in the stamp category.

Phipps Co. plans to host the competition again next year. All contractors are welcome to compete, whether they are based in Ohio or not.

For further information and more photographs of the competition, visit [www.chasehipps.com](http://www.chasehipps.com).



Sweden and other Northern European countries. The deal expands Grace's presence in Scandinavian markets.

For more about concrete admixture services offered by W.R. Grace & Co., visit [www.graceconstruction.com](http://www.graceconstruction.com) or call (877) 423-6491.

### Multiquip improves Lone Star service

Multiquip has opened a new distribution center in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Fort Worth location will improve product delivery and

availability for customers in the Southwest. It stocks Multiquip compaction and power generation equipment, concrete and masonry products, light towers and dewatering pumps. Several lines of STOW Construction Equipment products are also housed at the facility.

Counting the new center, there are six Multiquip and STOW distribution centers in the United States. For more information, visit [www.multiquip.com](http://www.multiquip.com) or call (800) 421-1244.



## New distributors for Blastrac

Blastrac has named two new specialized distributors. Nelico Equipment Service & Supplies, located in Mills, Wyo., will serve Montana, Wyoming and southern Idaho. Dawson-Macdonald Co. Inc., based in Wilmington, Mass., will serve Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and northeastern New York state.

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 Nelico, visit [www.nelico.biz](http://www.nelico.biz) or call (800) 269-7855. To reach Dawson-Macdonald, visit [www.dawson-macdonald.com](http://www.dawson-macdonald.com) or call (800) 556-4456. Information about Blastrac and Sawtec can be found at [www.blastrac.com](http://www.blastrac.com).

## Degussa adds new management

Degussa Admixtures Inc. has promoted Dr. Steve Amey to director of the Business Performance Group. Amey will focus on achieving operational efficiency in all areas of the Degussa Admixtures business. This past year, Amey directed a complete review and overhaul of the company's supply chain management and worked as part of a team to develop and implement a computerized Management Operating System (MOS).

The company has also announced two other new managers: Dr. Eric Castner as group manager for product development and John Luciano as group manager of the Concrete Technology and Materials Testing Group. Castner, who comes to Degussa from Goodyear Chemical, will direct



research and development that supports initiatives in colored concrete, manufactured concrete products and underground construction.

Luciano has been with Degussa Admixtures for 21 years.

For information about Degussa Admixtures Inc., visit [www.master-builders.com](http://www.master-builders.com) or call (800) 628-9990.

## New faces at VIC

VIC International Corp. has made three new hires to serve its concrete surface preparation clients. Tony Simpson is a technical sales and support specialist in the concrete surface preparation division. Allen E. Slater has been hired as general manager of the concrete surface preparation industry division. Dan L. Caperton has been named Midwestern salesperson for the concrete surface preparation industry division.

To learn more about VIC International, visit [www.vicintl.com](http://www.vicintl.com) or call (800) 423-1634.

## Zinsser absorbs Okon

Zinsser Co. Inc. recently completed the acquisition of Okon Inc., a pioneer in the development of water-based, water-repellant sealer technology for concrete, masonry and wood.

Okon was founded in 1972 and markets sealers under the Okon and WeatherPro brands. Before the Denver-based company changed hands, it was a subsidiary of Rentech Inc., a Colorado-based intellectual property company that owns and licenses a process for converting synthesis gas into liquid fuels.

Headquartered in Somerset, N.J., Zinsser Co. Inc. offers a full line of paint primers, products for wallcovering installation and removal, shellac-based wood finishes, and mold and mildew prevention products.

For more about Zinsser, visit [www.zinsser.com](http://www.zinsser.com) or call (732) 469-8100.



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# Industry Spotlight

## Association News

### AMERICAN CONCRETE INSTITUTE ACI elects officers

The American Concrete Institute elected James R. Cagley as president and David Darwin as vice president at its spring meeting in April.



Cagley is president of Cagley & Associates Inc., Consulting Structural Engineers, Rockville, Md., as well as president of The Cagley Group. At the Institute, he is immediate past chair and an ACI Fellow. He will serve as president for one year.

Darwin was elected vice president through spring of

2007. He is Deane E. Ackers Distinguished Professor of Civil, Environmental, and Architectural Engineering and Director of the Structural Engineering and Materials Laboratory at the University of Kansas, where he has served on the faculty since 1974.



The ACI also elected Sergio M. Alcocer, Richard E. Klingner, Jon I. Mullarkey, and Julio A. Ramirez as directors.

For more, visit [www.concrete.org](http://www.concrete.org) or call (248) 848-3700.

### New releases from ACI

Four new publications are for sale from the American Concrete Institute.

The 2005 edition of ACI's "Manual of Concrete Practice" includes more than 20 new and updated publications, for a total count of 192. The Manual can be purchased as a six-book reference set, a CD-ROM or an online subscription.

Also new from the SCI is "SP225 — Serviceability of Concrete: A Symposium Honoring Dr. Edward G. Nawy." The symposium, held during the 2005 ACI Spring Convention, honored the distinguished career of Dr. Nawy.

## DEMONAR

(dém-un-nar), n: Seminar where demonstrations allow participation from attendees.



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**S**enior Technical Representative Marshall Hoskins is your Course Instructor and has taught thousands of contractors worldwide installation techniques for Decorative Concrete. He is an ACI Certified Flatwork Technician and frequently teaches at ASCC/DCC industry events. Mr. Hoskins has over 12 years of construction and Decorative Concrete experience.

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### ASCC hires ops manager

Julie Holtgrave has joined the American Society of Concrete Contractors as operations manager. She was previously the vice president of programs at the Springdale Chamber of Commerce, Springdale, Ark.



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## Lokahi Stone *Honolulu, Hawaii*



Jamie McGuire, left, and Andrew Simon.

Inspired by Fu-Tung Cheng's landmark book, "Concrete Countertops," Andrew Simon and Jamie McGuire quit their corporate jobs and went into business for themselves in Honolulu in 2003.

Their seven-person company, Lokahi Stone, quickly filled a niche in Hawaii's thriving construction industry. The company specializes in custom-made concrete countertops and sinks, furniture and flooring. Lokahi Stone's work is sometimes embellished with imprints of native ferns or inlays based on ancient Hawaiian petroglyphs, touches that ground the finished product in the place it was created. *Concrete Decor* interviewed Andrew Simon to learn about the company and the state of decorative concrete in Hawaii.

### What's the story behind Lokahi Stone?

Jamie and I were both caught up in the corporate culture of a major international construction engineering firm. My background was in project controls, finance and accounting. Jamie's focus was engineering and project management. It was the end of another overseas contract that got our minds thinking about what's next — continue as cogs in the machine, or break the mold and begin anew?

Jamie's field-management experience and his experience as a tradesman working with concrete enabled Lokahi Stone to obtain a general contracting license. My experience in project controls enabled us to effectively manage the company from the financial and business perspective. Our mix of talents and our shared focus on creativity make for a very effective partnership. Having acquired a passion for the ocean and warm weather from our previous experience working contracts in the islands of the Pacific, we decided to form Lokahi Stone in trade-wind and sun-drenched Hawaii.

### How's business?

Business is booming right now. With the way real estate is all over the







islands, many families are remodeling their homes with proceeds from refinancing. And a lot of people are returning to the simplicity of concrete flooring after years of wall-to-wall carpeting. Concrete floors are easy to maintain and cool to the touch — perfect for our climate and lifestyle.

### How popular is decorative concrete in Hawaii?

It's catching on in the islands thanks to increased press and familiarity with the medium. Hawaii is influenced by the mainland through tourism and the many people who move here from places where decorative concrete reigns supreme. I can't count the number of times someone sees our showroom and exclaims, "I saw this floor in San Francisco and always wanted it in my home!" Or: "Do you guys do work in Arizona? I saw this countertop at a restaurant there. You must have made it!"

### What's your showroom like?

Our showroom, which is attached to our studio/workshop, is always a work in progress. It's about 800 square feet, and has many examples/vignettes displaying our floors and countertops. Three rooms show different scenarios of floor treatments, from acid staining on an aged warehouse floor through overlay products and stamped concrete. Each room also displays concrete counters of every shape,

size and color. Local artists display their work on the walls, from pop-art paintings to locally built surfboards.

### How do you market yourselves?

To reach homeowners we have been marketing our company through a local remodeling magazine. However, our main focus is designers, architects and builders. This requires more than advertising, and requires time spent in introductions and networking, as well as word of mouth, et cetera. Oftentimes we are called upon by architectural firms to make presentations about our product and its uses. Although concrete is by no means new to the islands, decorative concrete is.

### What are some of the more notable jobs you've done?

Commercially we have done work for Starbucks and Jamba Juice, as well as other established businesses. Residentially, some of our more notable jobs involved poured-in-place shower stalls, concrete sinks, and ground, integrally colored floors similar to terrazzo.

### Do you prefer cast-in-place applications or casting off site?

I don't really have a preference, but most of our work is cast off site in our studio. This method allows for greater quality control, versatility and expression.

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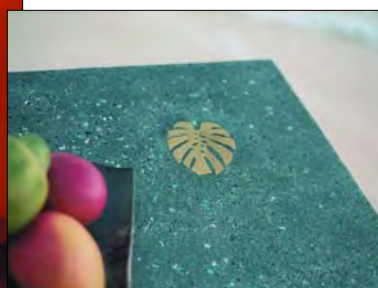
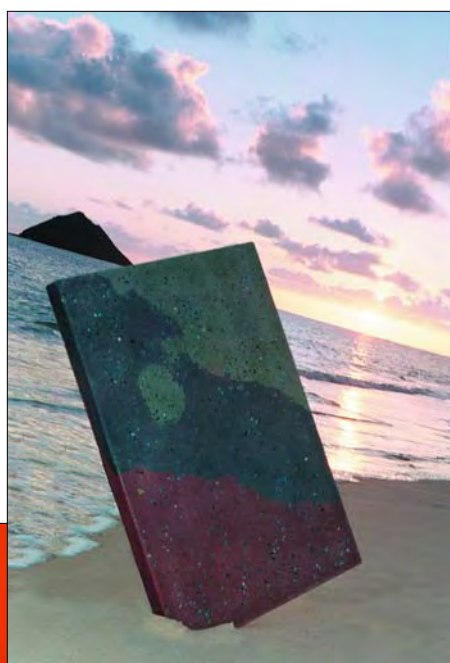
Forms can be made in the studio that are impossible to make on site, where most pieces are finished with a trowel. Three-dimensional works — inlays, drain-boards, bowls, et cetera — are more easily achieved and more beautifully executed in our studio.

That said, you can't beat the massiveness of a large, poured-in-place, monolithic piece. However, that look does not come without a cost. Poured-in-place work requires a client who is willing to have forms, workers and a mess in their home for a while. If at all possible, large monolithic pours should take place when construction is in its early stages.

Often, our poured-in-place walls and surrounds are topped with off-site cast counters — the best of both worlds.

### **Do you literally break the mold after every piece is done?**

We actually do break the molds each time. No two pieces are exactly alike, and no two molds are alike. Our clients like knowing that their pieces are one of a kind, and we like providing a product



that is as much art as it is functional — functional art, in other words.

### **We know you do a lot of acid staining and integral coloring. Do you ever use dyes or acrylic stains?**

We haven't done a lot of experimenting with dyes and acrylic stains. I think that's because, in our minds, the colors and effects do not mimic nature.

They're too flashy. I guess this is an area we need to explore some more.

### **How do you create those petroglyph inlays?**

The petroglyphs we use are bronze replicas of actual Hawaiian petroglyphs found around the islands. A local artist forms the images and has them cast on the mainland. We create imagery in brass, stainless steel and bronze, using high-pressure water-cutting and CAD. With this method, any image can be recreated and used as an inlay.

### **How has Fu-Tung Cheng influenced your work?**

Jamie and I have always admired Fu-Tung Cheng's work, and it was his book "Concrete Countertops" that started this whole venture. Years before starting Lokahi Stone, Jamie purchased a condo and began remodeling. It took the patience of a cabinet maker who let us use his shop (in return for a cabinet contract), and several weeks of "vacation" to produce our first concrete countertop. That countertop is still a beautiful — albeit crude, compared to





our more recent works — testimonial of what can be achieved with the right willpower and desire.

Since Lokahi Stone was formed, we've had the pleasure of working with Fu-Tung Cheng on jobs here in Hawaii, and sharing the spirit of Aloha with Cheng Design. Likewise, Jamie and I have both advanced our expertise by attending Cheng Design's seminars and being members of the Cheng Concrete Exchange from its inception.

**You guys won the Best Decorative Finishes category in the Cheng Concrete Exchange's design competition. What's the story behind your winning counter?**

That project was created in association with Building Industry Association of Hawaii's 2004 home show. The theme of this display was "build green," and it highlighted many "green" products and energy-efficient appliances. Our counter was made with recycled glass aggregates, discarded marble tailings, and found objects. In our business, you'd be surprised what treasures can be found in the local junkyards! It takes a creative eye to pick out objects that will ultimately make beautiful inlays. Wherever I travel, I keep a keen eye out for interesting objects, from automobile parts to fossils and polished minerals. The sky is the limit.

Here too is an area where the client can play a part in the design process. We've had many clients bring their own keepsakes, beach glass, found objects and heirlooms to our shop. Many even want to place them themselves. It really makes a client feel a part of the process, and lets them say, "I helped make it!"

**What are your long-range plans?**

Our plans include expansion to the islands of Hawaii and Maui, and possibly the West Coast.

**What drives you guys to do such beautiful work, and do you consider decorative concrete an art form?**

Decorative concrete is definitely an art form. Our clients seek our work because

each piece is a unique expression. Artisans, not machines, craft each piece. It is apparent in each work, not unlike the finger marks in handmade pottery or the brush strokes of Van Gogh. Around here, each day holds new surprises. Having spent so many years in the corporate conundrum, where creativity is as desolate as individuality, we needed a change. I've always had an unsatiated creative side that decorative concrete fulfills.





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CIRCLE #98 ON READER SERVICE CARD





# Achieving Customer Satisfaction With Integral Color

*Color specialists share their tips for success.*

by Amy Johnson

**The orange swirl was done with Butterfield Color's acid stain. The rest was done with Uni-Mix integral color.**

**T**he boom in architectural concrete that started in the 1990s has created a great opportunity for both creativity and increased profitability for concrete contractors. But experienced installers know that success in this growing market depends on craftsmanship and attention to detail, even with a process that seems as straightforward as placing integrally colored concrete.

Why? Because customers and designers have different (higher!) expectations for the results of integrally colored concrete than they do for traditional gray. Art Tyson, color product specialist for Grace Construction Products, explains, "There is greater interest and more emotion behind color from the customer standpoint. Blemishes are more easily tolerated in gray concrete. Most issues that arise are basic concrete issues, not color issues, but the interest in color heightens them more."

## Great expectations

A quality job that results in a satisfied customer starts and ends with managing expectations. While we sometimes

think of concrete as the ultimate man-made substance, it is more realistic to remind customers that it is in fact composed of natural materials and finished by hand. Minor variations are part of its charm and make each project unique. At the same time, a charming variation is quite a different thing from a contractor error, a difference that will be explored in depth later in this article.

The customer should not be the only one with great expectations. The most successful projects are those where everyone — ready-mix producer, contractor, designer and customer — all agree in advance on the standards and goals for the project and then remain consistent through the whole process.

Customers will have a better idea of what to expect if they see other completed jobs. The ideal situation is to make a mock-up using all the same materials and finishes that will be used on the job and then to ensure that no one deviates from that standard.





Laying objects on a colored slab while it is curing will cause discoloration as well as efflorescence due to trapped moisture.



Photographs courtesy of Butterfield Color

A job well done!



Good craftsmanship and consistency in finishing are keys to successful projects.

Photograph courtesy of Davis Color

## The mix

Consistency begins with the ready-mix producer. Steve Somerville, product line manager with Degussa Admixtures Inc., says, "We advise concrete producers to keep the mix consistent in order to keep the color consistent. It is important to maintain the same water-to-cement ratio and use the same aggregates and cementitious materials in every batch for the project. Once all parties agree on the mix design and the mock-up, consistency will guarantee customer satisfaction."

An important part of the mix is the coloring agent. Integral color can either be added by the ready mix producer or mixed on site. In either case, careful measurement, quality control and consistency are critical. Liquid colors and quality powdered pigments contain dispersing agents that help deliver even color through the batch and consistency from batch to batch. Colors are also available in water-reducing admixtures that compensate for the higher water requirements of the coloring agent. Rich Solomon, president

of Solomon Colors, points out, "It is up to the color manufacturer to supply a color shade that is uniform from lot to lot and batch to batch. From there it is up to the ready-mix producer to use the same products consistently."

Most suppliers of coloring agents recommend four-inch slump. This is adequate for workability, but keeps color deep and bright while minimizing the risk of efflorescence caused by excess water evaporation. If for some reason greater slump is required, a water-reducing admixture is recommended instead of adding water. Careful review of technical instructions from color suppliers and even direct consultation as needed will prevent problems.

## On the Job

Like traditional concrete, integrally colored concrete will perform best if placed on a properly prepared subgrade. A layer of 2 inches to 3 inches (some say as much as 4 inches) of sand, gravel or crushed stone should be compacted with vibrating equipment. "The subgrade should be well drained





A power trowel is used to finish integrally colored concrete on a new restaurant floor.



KML Finishers prepare steps for release agent and stamping.

Photographs courtesy of Southern Color

and have adequate and uniform load bearing characteristics,” says Cindy Rizzo, manager of training program development for L.M. Scofield Co. “It should be moist, completely consolidated and free of frost, mud or standing water.”

Porous form materials like untreated lumber or plywood can cause discoloration of the finished project because they absorb water, changing the water/cement ratio. Using form

liners, epoxy or urethane-coated plywood eliminates this problem. Forms should be placed to allow uniform thickness of the slab.

Proper weather conditions are critical for good results. Mild temperatures and high humidity with no rain forecast are the best conditions. If cool weather or project changes must be accommodated, make sure to use the same mix



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across the job so the finished project will look consistent. Joe Garceau, president of Butterfield Color, recommends using a surface evaporation retarder in dry climates to keep moisture in long enough to allow good hydration and finish time. He cautions against troweling a surface treated with a retarder too soon, though. "If you trowel the surface while the agent is still wet, you'll trowel water into the paste layer and alter the color," he says.

Colored concrete should be discharged as close as possible to its final location and moved with shovels rather than vibrators to prevent separation of the components that could make the color less uniform.

## Finishing

Even though integral color is consistent throughout the slab, how you finish the surface has a significant impact on the final appearance of the colored project. Wood floats are preferable to magnesium to avoid trapping moisture during bull floating.

Troweling integrally colored concrete requires extra care. "Troweling too soon potentially works bleed water back into the concrete and traps it there," explains Grace's Art Tyson. "Over-troweling changes the water/cement ratio at the surface and darkens the color." Garceau agrees, adding, "Power troweling or over-troweling can burn in a finish, darkening the color and leaving the high spots darker, resulting in uneven color." A broom or swirl finish will avoid this problem, but where troweling is desirable, workers should take care not to over-trowel.

Imprinting colored concrete is an excellent technique for minimizing visual variations and covering minor imperfections. Antiquing release agents can be used successfully with integral color, but they should be applied properly to get the best imprint. "Applying too much release

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when stamping is basically wasting material,” explains Steve Johnson, marketing and product development, Solomon Colors. “A light dusting is all that is needed to achieve a clean release of the stamp from the concrete. An excess amount of release agent will prevent the full texture of the stamp from being imprinted.”

Curing methods have an impact on the outcome of integrally colored concrete. Calcium chloride cure accelerators cause a chemical reaction with colored concrete that will spoil a project. Rizzo recommends using a curing compound that is color-matched to the integral color and manufactured specifically to be compatible with the coloring agent. Avoid wet burlap, plastic sheeting or waterproof paper, as these will cause mottled, uneven color. Once again, consistency is key. The entire project should cure at the same rate to keep the color uniform. It is important to keep construction materials and traffic off the slab until it is completely cured to avoid causing “shadows” in the color.

### “Water is a Killer in Color”

With a consistent mix, proper subgrade preparation, good weather and careful finishing, the only risk left is contractor error. Most experts agree that the addition of unwanted water is one of the most common reasons integral color



Photographs courtesy of L.M. Scofield

projects disappoint. This can occur in many ways, including practices that are common when placing gray concrete.

Water should not be added to the mix at the site. Adding water will lighten the color and introduce inconsistency from batch to batch. Worse, increasing the water-cement ratio weakens the concrete and can lead to crumbling

All bleed water should be allowed to evaporate before finishing. Otherwise that water is troweled or broomed back into the surface and it will change the color.

Water should not be introduced to the surface of freshly placed concrete. “There is an old finishing trick, bleaching gray concrete by hosing it off to make it look whiter by bringing efflorescence to the surface,” Garceau says. “But water is a killer in color. Using this technique with colored concrete will cause efflorescence and spoil the color.”

Another common mistake is to rinse off a broom with water and then run the wet broom over the surface. The water from that pass will lighten the color just in that spot. A better technique is to wipe off excess paste or rub it off on a piece of lumber.

Applying a curing or sealing agent too heavily can trap moisture, Steve Johnson points out. “Stripping the sealer or lightly sanding these areas will allow the moisture to pass out,” he says. “Most of these dark spots will go away naturally over time.”

Some errors can be remedied. A mild acid or scrub wash will often remove efflorescence caused by excess water. In extreme situations, texturing the surface with sandblasting removes the damaged surface and exposes the original color, but of course this results in a different finish than the one originally intended.

Color-matched sealers are used frequently for maintenance on integral color, Rizzo says. “The finished look depends on the application method. They should be applied with an airless sprayer for a more even look. The airless sprayer also lets you apply in thinner coats.”

### Achieve Success With Integral Color

Attention to detail is what ultimately pays off in a successful integral color project. A few general guidelines will help you

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deliver a finished product that delights the customer and looks good for years.

"Consistency is key," says Nick Paris, vice president of Davis Colors. "For best results, owners and contractors need to pay close attention to details and take extra precautions to make sure placement and finishing of decorative concrete is done consistently and with craftsmanship."

First, manage expectations. Don't promise an impossible outcome. Instead point out (or better yet, demonstrate) the attractive, durable, natural look integrally colored concrete can produce.

Second, be consistent. Work with the whole team to be sure the mix remains consistent, the conditions are as consistent as possible and the finishing is consistent.

Third, keep water in its place. Don't use extra water to make the slump more convenient, to cure the concrete or to facilitate the finish. It will change the color and weaken the concrete.

Fourth, be a craftsperson. Have your crew do their best, most careful work. Errors that are overlooked in gray concrete are not easily forgiven in a colored concrete job.

Finally, get help. Ready-mix producers and color suppliers have lots of experience and it is in their best interest to share it with you.



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# Straight Talk On Stamped Curves

*Doug Carlton tells it like it is!*

Photographs courtesy of Doug Carlton



**An example of how driveway curves match a residence's arches. Notice how naturally the driveway blends with the landscape and culture stone.**



**The walkway makes a gentle curve toward the courtyard gate.**

I'm going to come out and say it. I like curves. Curves are eye-catching and most appealing by nature. Ask any man and he will confess the more curve the better. Ask any women and she will agree curves are good as long as they flow — no bulging. Ask a decorative stamping crew and they will agree curves can cause loss of sleep at the design and installation phase.

## **Challenge #1: Layout**

Keep a digital camera in your truck and snap pictures of nice-looking hardscapes regardless if decorative or not. It is a fact that the best stamp job in a poor layout will pale in comparison to an average stamp job in a good design.

Most projects leave the hardscape layout to the decorative contractor. Landscape drawings with radius points and measurements are few and far between.

Those lucky enough to have a plan to work with must still incorporate the stamp pattern into the design. I call this the decorative design within the design. Stamp patterns, deep joints for crack control, cold joints from one day's pour to the next — all must be considered.

Keep in mind, interlocking tools will not follow curves and contours. The very first stamp tool imprinted into the wet concrete will decide the direction of pattern regardless of the layout of form work.

First, lay out all perimeter lines with a landscape chalking wheel. This visual aid will put you and your client on the same page. This is a great time to see if patio furniture fits, if two cars can fit in the driveway, etc. This layout phase is always a balance between decorative and functional. If the car has to run off the edge of the driveway to enter the garage, it doesn't matter how good the design looks. Trust me on this. This is also a great time to remeasure square footages and compare them with the estimated budget. It is much easier to shrink chalk lines or negotiate extra footage at this point.



## Challenge #2: Installation

The installation phase is completely dictated by pattern choice. Interlocking patterns will always require more planning than seamless texture patterns. Interlocking stamps with a square or rectangular pattern, like the popular Ashlar slate, may need accent bands to help with angle changes in the project.

The bands will allow your crew to split into separate areas if needed. Try to have enough stamp tools to allow your crew to split. This allows the two crews to stamp toward each other without the concern of patterns matching as they connect. When they do connect, the connection should be on either side of an accent. This accent will also provide an opportunity to realign your pattern.

Here's an important thing to keep in mind: The sidewalk pattern must stay square with the building where it connects to the entryway. This can cause you trouble if the entry area is in the shade and the curved connecting sidewalk is not.

It seems logical to start stamping near the house, so that everything comes out square, but the area near the house, which is usually in the shade, is drying slower and not ready to stamp. The condition of the concrete always decides where the stamping begins, and in this case, the beginning will be at the bottom of your curved walkway. Remember, your pattern must start at a 90-degree angle to your building to finish square with it. Eliminate this frustration by adding periodic accent strips.

Now let's talk a little about texture stamping, which is everything that interlocking is not. If I were just starting my decorative business today, it would consist entirely of texture patterns. There is more profit with half the frustration of interlocking patterns. Scoring or saw cuts can turn any texture job into a work of art. Stamp tool manufactures have created several variations of texture mats. I prefer

Proline Tools because of the handles built into their texture tools.

The more curves, the better these texture patterns show. Starting points and accenting are nonissues. Decorative crews across America should have a national holiday for the inventor of

texture stamps. I don't know, maybe a Texture Parade every year at the World of Concrete. I probably would be long out of the decorative business if not for the invention of texture stamp tools. Use them: They are money in the bank.



**Accent bands allow ashlar slate pattern to redirect. Some deep scoring is hidden in bands.**





**Planter beds are used to protect sealer from lawn sprinklers.**

### **Challenge #3: Cutting off pitfalls at the pass**

I hate to do it, but I must bring up the dirtiest word in the decorative language: SEALERS. Believe me, I would rather talk about integers, filibusters, even soap operas before sealers on decorative concrete. But this is an issue, especially with curves in your concrete. In a nutshell, sealers hate water. The mineral deposits, as well as the moisture breaking down the sealer, will make a good job look bad.

It is almost impossible to irrigate lawns that come up to curved hardscapes without overspraying concrete. I have wrestled, begged, and pleaded with landscapers on this issue. The only way to water the grass is to allow the sprinklers to spray onto the sealed concrete. This will be a problem for you if you allow it. Here is the solution: Ask for 12-inch to 18-inch planting areas along the decorative work. These areas can be irrigated with low-flow watering. This will eliminate

constant watering of your decorative art. The best time to discuss this is in the layout stage — if not sooner. Most homeowners will understand and agree; most landscapers could care less.

Either set your forms with curves or set them straight, but not in between. Nothing looks worse than flat spots in sweeping curves. This will not look natural. Remember, the whole idea of using decorative concrete is make the total landscape blend from left to right in an organic way.

Use deep joints for crack control. I realize it can be difficult to incorporate jointing with some pattern designs. But this is concrete and it will crack. Most homeowners will not see the hummer in your “no extra charge for the crack” comment after paying you 10 dollars a square foot. Let your client know you are doing everything possible to help minimize random cracking.

Keep your sub-base and thickness of concrete consistent. Concrete must dry even for even imprinting. You may have more control over this than you think. Example: Concrete over a 1-inch sand base will dry faster than over a 3-inch sand base. Why? Because three inches of sand will hold more moisture than one. Concrete placed four inches thick in some areas and five inches thick in another will dry differently.

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# Concrete that Rocks!

*Whether you create them on site or buy them precast, faux rocks can be a valuable part of your portfolio.*

by John Strieder

**W**hen it comes to putting boulders in a backyard pool or rock garden, concrete “faux rocks” are often better than the real thing.

Faux rock offers the same unique, attractive look and sturdy support for water accents as real rock. It can mimic the look of indigenous stone or be colored and textured to match just about any rock on the planet.

But faux rocks are lighter and easier to work with. Even though rock can cost less than a faux concrete facsimile, the time and labor of planting it in a backyard or pool setting can make up the difference in cost.

Mike Reinwald, general manager of Rock & Water Creations Inc., a manufacturer of precast rock features, says faux beats real rock in two categories — weight and placement.

Rock & Water’s faux rock pieces are formed in molds taken from actual boulders, so the texture is the same. But the glass-fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC) castings, with walls that are only about one inch thick, weigh nine pounds per square foot of coverage. That makes them easy to place and support. “You’ve got the ability to put them wherever you want,” Reinwald says.

A real boulder, he notes, takes up more space under the ground than on top of it. It’s the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. A faux rock piece exists completely above ground.

Going with real rock limits contractors to rocks that are indigenous to the area, says Tim Phelps, national sales manager for Boulder Image Inc., which sells the Techstone system for creating faux rock installations. “And

real rock, you can’t chip and shape any way you want.”

A rock that is four cubic feet might weigh as much as 6 tons, he says. “You almost have to bring it in with a crane,” he says, adding: “You don’t have to tear up the yard to install faux rock.”

Then there’s the matter of plumbing, part of any pool remodel or waterfall installation. Plumbing installers must work around real rock, sometimes even tearing out an existing deck to install piping. With faux rock, plumbing can be built into the hollow shell.

In fact, plumbing or not, a real rock installation will likely require that the existing deck be removed to construct a foundation that will support it.

What’s more, Phelps says, real rock must be embedded in mortar. Any temperature swing may cause cracks in the mortar bed, and the mortar erodes into the pool. “The things we do don’t erode at all,” he says.

Waterproofing natural rock waterfalls poses a special challenge, says Bruce Riley, managing director of Rico Rock LLC, a manufacturer of modular and structural waterfalls. Water will seep out hairline cracks where the grout joints meet the natural rock. Even with a waterproofed base, calcium deposits could seep out the back of the base. “It’s almost impossible to waterproof natural rock waterfalls from the top side,” he says. “You can’t just cement large rocks together and expect them to hold water.”

Faux rock also allows the contractor to shape a stream of water to an extent that is hard to do with natural rock, Riley says. When water cascades over a lip of natural rock, it typically curls over the edge. If the waterfall designer wants a sheet of



falling water, he or she has to install something that clashes with the natural look of the boulder, such as a lip of slate.

## How it’s done

There are as many ways of creating a faux-rock installation as there are faux rock manufacturers.

At Boulder Image, the process starts with Styrofoam blocks or cinder blocks. They are put together with rebar and spray foam. “You glue the styrofoam into the rough shape you want,” Phelps explains. “Basically, that’s your subsurface. You can incorporate plumbing into that.”

A Techstone filler mix that contains Styrofoam aggregate is packed over the top of the structure. After about an hour, a second application of filler goes over the first. The first application leaves a nice hard shell, but a structure that looks like a blob, Phelps says. The





Photographs courtesy of JPI Technologies



Photographs courtesy of Rico Rock

**Rico Rock uses cast pieces that are mortared together to form structural waterfalls. The core is steel-reinforced concrete. The outside texture is FRC castings.**



**This waterfall combines modular technology with older structural methods using rebar and concrete.**



second time defines the look of the boulder. "At that point, you're drawing the rock shapes out."

After that dries, the contractor cuts deeper grooves between the individual 'rocks' with a margin trowel.

Then, after cleaning, comes a topcoat that leaves a hard polymer-modified cement shell. The cement is

100 percent acrylic because many other polymers will emulsify in water. After that, a waterproofer is applied where wetting will occur.

Texture is applied next, with yet another layer of acrylic cement. For moss rock, pat the material on with rubber gloves. For granite with stipple, shoot the surface with a hopper gun.



For sandstone, use the hopper gun, then wet sand.

Finally, there's the tint, achieved by spraying chemical stains over the surface. "Most real rock gets color from some kind of oxidation process," Phelps notes. "That's what you've got to replicate with faux rock."

The stain is similar to acid stain, only without the acid, he says. "There's no need to open it up. The pores are big enough already."

The number and sequence of colors applied depends on the desired effect. Six or seven layers of color will create the illusion of depth, Phelps says. Boulder Image provides color sequences and combination designs to help contractors along.

Finally, the rock must be sealed. Boulder Image suggests a 22 percent solid acrylic sealer. Calcium deposits and the like will be easy to clean off, but the rock won't glimmer with a glossy sheen.

A contractor installing a precast Rock & Water Creations piece starts by putting in a cinderblock wall with rebar, then placing the panels. "We use a standard concrete mix with mesh in between panels," Reinwald says. "The embossers get the mesh to match."

As for coloring, Rock & Water begins with a spray acrylic coat of antique white or oyster shell. Then, they use acid stains — a brownish color for sandstone, for example — or the contractor may mix a dry color into the color coat. "We teach contractors in large jobs how to get a color for their area," Reinwald says.

Rico Rock strives to make faux rock installation as simple as possible, says Riley, adding that installing his company's modular component kit



Photographs courtesy of Rock & Water Creations

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requires only "good masonry skills." This sets them apart from faux rock firms that expect installers to

be skilled in coloring, concrete construction and blending castings, he says.

Rico Rock's pieces are filled fiber-reinforced concrete (FRC), as opposed to the hollow pieces sold by other rock firms that require backing. "The texture is done. They've been colored," Riley says. "They're all waterproofed and preplumbed. Some waterfalls you can actually install in one hour."

### Protecting against water

Stockton, Calif., concrete contractor Herb Keener says the biggest challenge he faces with faux rock is leakage.

Water seeps into the concrete and activates lime and chemicals in the mix anywhere it's not sealed, causing big, ugly white strips to appear, he says. "They leach out white, ugly stuff."

Keener, president of Keener Construction Inc. and distributor for Boulder Image, says that his choice of sealer depends on whether the job is indoors or out. Inside, he applies a plastic membrane anywhere water will be flowing, and outdoors, a Boulder Image sealer.

As scary as leaks sounds in theory, Phelps of Boulder Image says it can be easily avoided. "It's just too easy to do it right," he says. "If you follow the recommended process, you're just not going to have any leaks."

When it comes to waterproofers, the choice is between a cementitious coating and a rubber-plastic hybrid gel that leaves a plastic surface and bridges gaps, he says. "Personally, I like to use Eurostone deck coating over the top because it's white. I like cementitious

coats because they dry more quickly. Other guys like the gel because it's bright red. It's almost impossible to miss a spot."

Mike Reinwald of Rock & Water Creations says that sealing isn't always necessary when installing a Rock & Water product. "It's meant to be underwater in pools and ponds," he

says. "It's meant to have water flowing over the top of it."

A waterfall installation on a concrete pool deck is on a surface that is already sealed, he notes. "Customers may not want to spend the extra money to seal it."

If a Rock & Water rock is sealed, Reinwald recommends spraying with an

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acrylic color coat before applying acid stain to color it. "Acid stains won't adhere to sealed concrete, but they will adhere to acrylic color coat."

## Beyond the pool

Waterproofing is only an issue if a faux rock installation includes water. These days, faux rock is used for much more, according to Jim Jenkins, president of Dura Lite Rock Inc. and

## Where to find training

Rico Rock LLC [www.ricorock.com](http://www.ricorock.com), [info@ricorock.com](mailto:info@ricorock.com)

Rock & Water Creations Inc. [www.rock-n-water.com](http://www.rock-n-water.com)

Boulder Image Inc. [www.boulderimage.com](http://www.boulderimage.com)

Keener Construction inc., California-based distributor for Boulder Image  
[www.keenerent.com](http://www.keenerent.com)

School of Faux Rock Construction (a subsidiary of JPJ Technologies)  
[www.jpjtechnologies.com](http://www.jpjtechnologies.com)

JPJ Technologies Inc., which runs the School of Faux Rock Construction.

Three decades ago, faux rock mainly went into pools, spas and the like, he says. Today, it's being put to a growing number of creative uses, from covering a pipe in a backyard to casting outdoor patio furniture, and from jazzing up a security installation at a military base to giving an outdoor kitchen the look of limestone. "The demand for this type of training is just growing by leaps and bounds," he says. "The demand for synthetic rock of all kinds is high. If you just do waterfalls and rock, you're missing the mark on possible sales."

Faux rock can even replace the labor-intensive work of stone artisans, he says. "We've taken the artistry out of it. A good mason can only do so many square feet a day."

Sheets of rocklike veneer may be hung on the side of a house, and a shaped hunk of concrete will make a sign or fire pit that is just as attractive as one made with a mason's box of rocks, but for only a fraction of the cost.



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# Applying Protective Sealers to Decorative Concrete

by Susan Brimo-Cox

**D**ecorative concrete deserves to be protected. After you've put in all that hard work, creative effort and time, you — and your client — should expect that beauty to last a while. And it can, if you seal it properly.

Of course, with so many products on the market these days called "concrete sealers," it is not surprising that the topic can get a bit confusing. Chris Sullivan, national technical director of QC Construction Products, explains there are three general categories of products referred to as sealers: cures, cure-and-seals, and sealers. It's this third category — protective sealers — we're looking at in this discussion.

Decorative concrete sealers can be further grouped as either film-forming or penetrating sealers. Film-forming sealers, such as straight acrylics, urethanes and epoxies, provide a protective barrier on the surface of the concrete. Penetrating sealers, such as silanes, actually migrate into the surface of the concrete and generally do not affect the appearance of the surface. [For more information about types of protective sealers, see the June 2003 issue of *Concrete Decor*.]

However, as important as the correct selection and/or specification of a sealer may be, so is proper application.

## Start with a clean surface

Having a clean surface to seal is paramount, says Mark Glendrange, technical director at Versatile Building Products Inc. "I've always said 90 percent of dollars and time is spent in preparation."

Bert Adams, president of Glaze 'N Seal Products, agrees that you must have a clean, dry surface, free of any contaminants. But he cautions, "One thing people don't always remember is that most sealers don't like acid residue." Be sure to neutralize the surface after cleanup if there is any question, he advises.

For new floors, surface cleaning and preparation should be pretty straightforward. But if you have a previously finished surface to which you are applying sealer, the porosity of the surface is an important factor as well, Adams says. For example, if the old floor has been sealed with a penetrating sealer in the past, you may have a problem applying a film-forming sealer. Adams tests for the presence of penetrating sealer with a few drops of water. "If the water beads up, a film-type sealer may not bond properly." In these situations, he says, it's important to talk to the sealer manufacturer for advice regarding necessary surface preparation to accept the new sealer.



Before applying a sealer, the surface temperature — not the air temperature — also needs to be within the parameters specified by the sealer manufacturer.

However, the most critical factor in any sealer application is the applicator — the person and the equipment. As Sullivan observes, “The biggest contributing factor to sealer failure is not using the proper equipment, and not applying correctly or [applying it] outside the recommended parameters.”

## Spraying sealers

The application technique you should use for applying sealers depends on the sealer you’re using and the situation. Of course, be sure to read the manufacturer recommendations for the specific product you are using. Generally speaking, however, there are some preferences among the experts.

Pump-up, Hudson-type sprayers are the most-referenced and most-recommended spray apparatus used to apply solvent-based sealers. Some water-based and penetrating sealers can also be sprayed on. Key factors include the viscosity of the sealer and, for film-building sealers, how high a build you need; if you need a high build from a thick sealer, spraying won’t do.

When spraying, Sullivan says, the finer the tip, the better application you’ll get, with regard to consistency and minimal application. Also, “when you spray, back-rolling is a good idea,” he adds.

Silanes are very sprayable, reports Glendrange. And with penetrating sealers it’s “typically not as critical to get an even coating because it’ll penetrate.”

Spraying also helps you cover a lot of ground efficiently. Adams prefers pump-up sprayers when sealing large areas, particularly for exterior applications. Indoors, he says, in many cases you might use a sprayer, “but you have to worry about overspray, so you might use a lamb’s wool applicator or consider a paint pad.” For even, smooth surfaces, applicators are a very controlled method to apply sealers. But they don’t work so well for stamped or textured surfaces where you may need to work the sealer into stamped joints.

As an additional tip for applying sealers, Adams recommends having a natural-bristle paint brush in your

## To thin or not to thin

Is thinning a sealer recommended? The obvious answer is “no.” Anytime you alter a sealer’s formulation you risk affecting its performance — not to mention voiding any stated warranty.

Is it done? Of course it is. Some contractors thin a sealer to facilitate better penetration of the first coat, and then apply following coats at full strength or apply additional coats to achieve the build-up needed.

In some situations — for example, when troubleshooting special circumstances — you may want to alter the product. But in these special situations, the alteration should be done on a case-by-case basis with the advice and recommendation of the product manufacturer.

There is an added concern regarding solvent-based products governed by VOC regulations. By thinning solvent-based products you might push the VOC above the legal limits, which would be illegal.

Manufacturers typically offer a variety of solid levels to avoid the need to dilute products.

back pocket to brush out any puddling that may occur as you work your way across the surface.

## Rolling sealers

“Ninety-nine percent of sealers can be applied with a conventional paint roller,” observes Ira Goldberg, president of Beyond Concrete. “It’s also a proven method,” he adds, especially if you are adding a slip-resistant additive to your sealer for the final coat. “It won’t go through a sprayer — it has to be rolled on.”

Sullivan recommends rolling water-based sealers, though he also says thin-film sealers can be sponge or mop applied. Silanes, in addition to being sprayed on, can be rolled on effectively, too, he says.

Glendrange points out that rolling is necessary for urethanes. For larger jobs, one could squeegee and back-roll, but for smaller jobs you can dip and roll. “Some pour [the sealer] directly on the floor, but it’s more difficult to achieve an even film,” he says.

The kind of roller you use depends on the type of sealer you’re applying.

“With water-based sealers you can use any kind,” Goldberg reports. But for solvent-based sealers you want “one that the core won’t melt or be eaten by the solvent — use one that’s solvent-safe.”

According to Glendrange, lint-free rollers are best for water-based applications, as well as urethanes and epoxies. On the high end are mohair rollers, which, he adds, work the best and are the least likely to release lint. “The higher the viscosity, the more likely you are to have lint pulling out [from the roller],” Glendrange says.

Goldberg observes that “epoxy tends to pull back on the roller.” He strongly advises using special lint-free rollers when using epoxy sealers.





Some experts recommend using a squeegee to apply epoxies, then back-rolling.

The thickness of the nap of a roller depends on the texture of the substrate you're sealing. For smooth surfaces a shorter nap — say ¼-inch or shorter — should suffice. You'll need to use a higher-napped roller for textured surfaces.

A time-saving tip from Goldberg is to use an 18-inch roller instead of a 9-inch roller when doing a large job. "You'll cover twice as much in the same stroke."

## Other considerations

Something all the experts seem to agree on is that multiple, thin coats of sealer is best.

"A good rule of thumb is 'thin to win,'" says Sullivan.

"Film-forming sealers have to be applied more carefully; you need even, continuous film," explains Adams. And multiple thin coats gives you added control.

Glendrange agrees. "Two coats are always better than one, no matter what system you're using." Multiple coats help ensure you fill any voids that may have occurred in the first coat. But be aware of the recoat time recommended by the manufacturer. "For example, urethanes are more difficult to recoat than epoxies," he says.

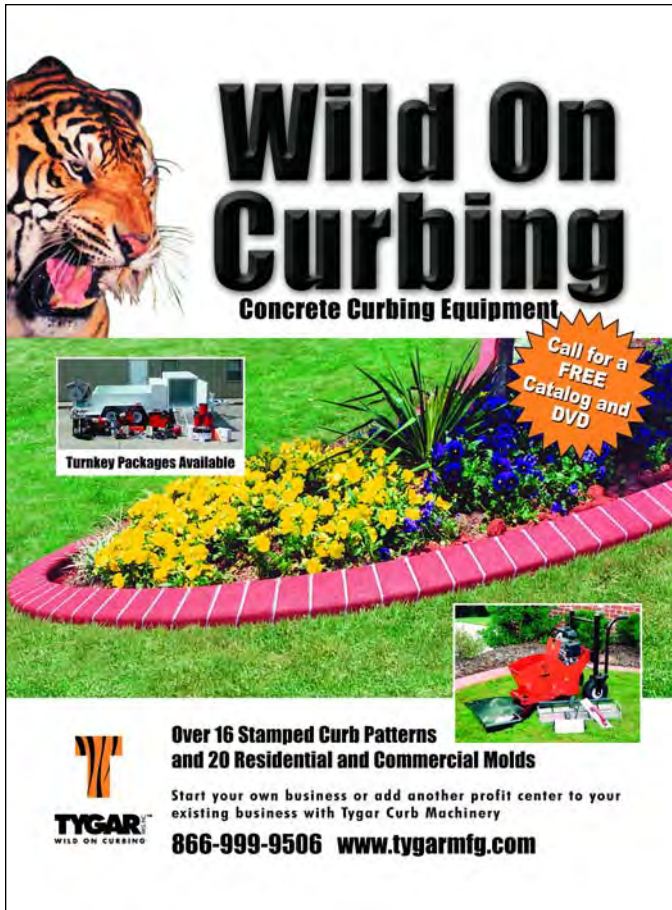
On the other hand, penetrating sealers are less demanding. You need to apply enough to soak into the surface, so these sealers are often applied liberally.

## Storing partially-used sealers

One-part products are easily stored for reuse in the future. Of course, you want to avoid foreign contaminants, so don't pour back into the container what you may have portioned off unless you strain the used material first. Fit the lid on securely. Be aware that this is not so much a problem of air being in the container; rather you don't want the carrier to evaporate. Then, store the remaining sealer in a temperature-controlled environment (don't let it freeze or become overheated). The effective shelf-life of a one-part product is generally two to four years, though some experts recommend using the sealer up within 18 months to two years. Remember, regardless of whether you're opening a new container or reopening used material, make it your practice to run your material through a strainer into a thoroughly clean container every time.

When it comes to two-part sealers, once activated, they have to be used during their allocated use time. This "pot life" is fixed and typically a short period. Do not store an activated two-part sealer.

Also, be aware of environmental conditions when applying sealers. Direct sunlight, high heat or cool temperatures, and windy conditions can all impact the application. For example: The set-up time of solvent-based sealers can be accelerated by wind and warm temperatures. "If the solvents



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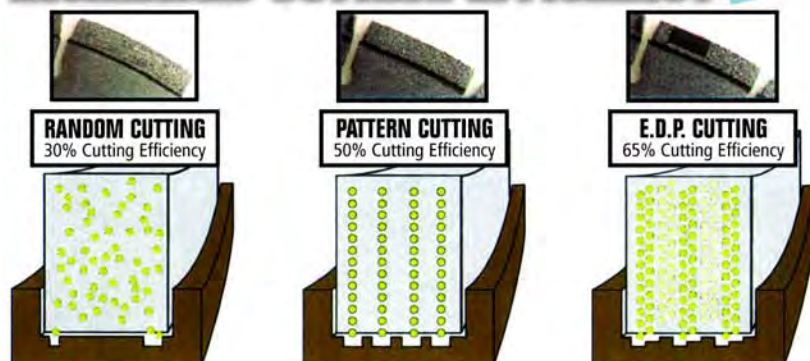
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flash off too fast there's not enough time for the acrylic to penetrate," Adams explains. "Instead it sits on the surface and you don't have a good bond, which may lead to sealer failure in the future."

How temperatures affect cure times is almost a science in itself, says Glendrange. Moisture in the air also may be a very important consideration. For example, "moisture-cure urethanes require moisture to cure, so dry climates can prevent the necessary chemical reactions they require."

With penetrating sealers you have a little more flexibility, but temperatures and the environment are important considerations with all sealers.

In choosing a sealer, your decision will likely be based on the desired aesthetics and the protection you need. But in applying a sealer, the specific criteria of the job — indoors or

outdoors, smooth or textured surface, film-forming or penetrating sealer, and water-based or solvent-based — will dictate the proper equipment and application method.

"If you are working with sealers for the first time or don't use them frequently, read the product directions carefully and do a test patch to verify you get the kind of look and protection you anticipate," cautions Adams. It will also help you determine the most efficient technique for application before you tackle the whole project.

At the end of the day, Sullivan says, sealers aren't anything to be afraid of, but they do need to be maintained. "It is key to their longevity and in keeping them looking good," he says.

If in doubt, ask questions. As Glendrange points out, "When a manufacturer has a chemist on staff, it's advantageous for the contractor to take advantage of that expertise."



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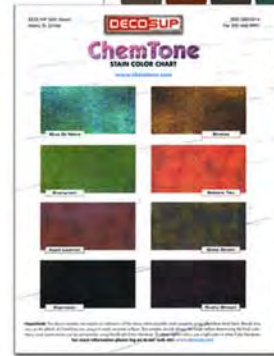
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# All that Glitters is not Gold

*Try using glass in your concrete!*

by David Thompson



If you want concrete that truly sparkles and shines, put some glass in the mix.

Glass aggregate can replace part or all of the sand and gravel in concrete, for effects that range from colorful terrazzo, to granite- or marble-like finishes, to concrete that reflects light like a mirror. Glass aggregate can even be used to produce concrete that literally glows.

"One of the prettiest countertops I ever saw had clear glass aggregate in white concrete," says Wes Vollmer, of Alternative Finishes in Texas. "There were lights underneath it that shone through and made the whole thing glow faintly. It was just unbelievable."

Glass aggregate can also win a project the "green" stamp of approval, since it almost always comes from recycled glass, saving landfill space and requiring no mining.





Glass aggregate is typically graded by color and size. Sizes can range from six-inch rocks to gravel-sized pieces to a fine talc-like powder. Polishing, grinding or other exposed aggregate techniques are employed to reveal the glass. Or glass can be seeded on the surface and then exposed.

Colored glass can be coordinated with the matrix of integrally colored concrete. In general, lighter colors of glass are used in darker matrixes, and vice versa. But not always.

A dark brown glass in a dark brown matrix can have an appeal all its own. Mixing light and dark colors of glass will give you a terrazzo effect. If you use clear glass aggregate, it will take on the color of the matrix, and it will add the most depth. Since glass is acid resistant, acid staining will color the surrounding matrix without affecting the color of the aggregate.

Finely ground glass can add background colors to the matrix. Using finely ground clear glass in place of sand can make for purer colors of concrete. Finely ground glass also lends itself to highly polished finishes. A marble or granite look can be attained by putting a high polish on concrete made with finely ground, earth-toned glass aggregates.

As for strength, glass aggregate can match, exceed or fall short of traditional aggregates, depending on size. Studies have found that very finely ground glass aggregate used in place of sand actually increases the strength of the concrete, whereas gravel-sized glass aggregate decreases strength. Mixing fine and coarse glass aggregates can have a net effect of zero, rendering concrete no stronger or weaker than that mixed with traditional sand and gravel.

## Buy it or bash it

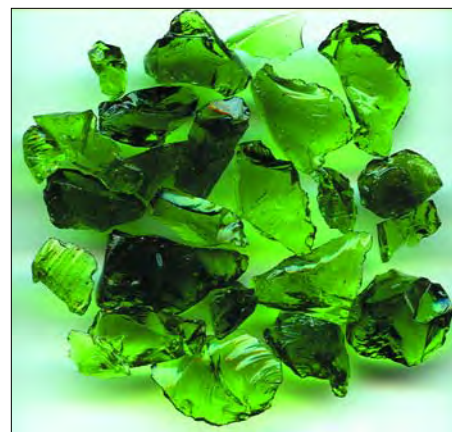
Glass aggregate can be obtained from a variety of sources. Locally, recycling centers may have cullet — crushed bottles and other glass — cleaned and sorted by size and color. Nationally, specialty glass manufacturers melt down bottles and window glass to produce glass aggregate for terrazzo floor

contractors, landscapers and decorative concrete artisans.

And then there's always your personal stash of empty beer bottles. With a small investment in a high-impact glass-crushing machine, you can make your own cullet, though some contractors opt to do it the hard way — with the help of a scrub brush to remove labels, safety goggles to protect eyes, and a hammer to do the dirty work. The use of a good crushing machine is preferred, though, because it doesn't produce the sharp, dangerous edges of the hammer-the-bottle method.

Tom Ralston, of Tom Ralston Concrete in California, has glass aggregate connections that include a hard-core beachcomber who collects heaps of beach glass, and a glass-blowing shop, which always has an interesting mix of aggregate just waiting to be raked off the floor. He has also mined his own stash of empties, the down-and-dirty way. "I had my crew sitting around like Cro-Magnon creatures, breaking beer bottles with hammers into a cardboard box," says Ralston. "It was like an ancient ritual."

Specialty glass aggregates made from recycled glass that is melted down and



Photographs courtesy of American Specialty Glass, Inc.



re-formed give you a different look than plain old crushed glass. Crushed bottles and window glass tend to be flat, with parallel sides, whereas specialty glass aggregates can have fuller, more irregular shapes, like crushed gravel.

"Crushed bottles don't have as much depth and sparkle," says Ken Thornley, general manager of Utah-based Heritage Glass, one of the country's largest specialty glass manufacturers. "But with the more irregular shapes, light bounces off it like it does off the facets of a diamond."

Sparkle notwithstanding, some decorative concrete artisans prefer cullet for the simple reason that it takes less polishing or grinding to bring out flat pieces of aggregate than it does to reveal more multidimensional aggregate.

When maximum sparkle is desired, Heritage Glass has a silver-coated glass aggregate that reflects light like a jewel,



Thornley says. But if it's not so much sparkle as shine that you want, both Heritage and American Specialty Glass, another Utah-based specialty glass maker, have crushed mirror aggregate. Mirror chips can add a hard reflective shine, and finely ground mirror aggregate can add a subtle iridescent sheen.

"If you use 30-mesh mirror or smaller, and put it in the background matrix, it gives you a sheen like granite," says Jim Silver, general partner with American Specialty Glass.

Pricewise, specialty glass can go for as little as 30 cents per pound for large quantities of some types, and up to \$6.35 per pound for Heritage's silver-

coated aggregates. Cullet goes for whatever the local market rate is.

## Alkali-silica reaction must be considered

When using glass aggregate outdoors, or anywhere else that the concrete will be exposed to moisture, beware of the dreaded alkali-silica reaction, an unhappy phenomenon in which the silica in glass and the alkali in cement create a gel that swells in the presence of moisture. The reaction may happen right away or it may take 20 years, but in either case it can cause cracking. Any source of moisture can set it off, including mopping, using excess water in the concrete mix, and so forth.

But the alkali-silica reaction can be prevented. Engineers at Columbia University, committed to developing more environmentally friendly building materials, discovered that the reaction can be avoided if the glass is ground finely enough to pass through 50-mesh or smaller screen. They also found that the mineral admixture metakaolin will suppress the reaction — an effective but expensive solution.

"We replace 20 percent of the cement with metakaolin, which may double the cost of the concrete, because metakaolin can cost as much as four or five times what cement costs," says Christian Meyer, a professor of civil engineering at Columbia.

Other studies have shown that fly ash suppresses alkali-silica reaction, Meyer says. "It's not as effective as metakaolin, but it's cheaper," he says.

The Columbia researchers also found that green glass does not cause the alkali-silica reaction, due to the chromium oxide used to get the green color.

Of course, keeping out moisture with a good sealer (presuming you haven't used too much water in the mix) will also suppress the reaction.

In the decorative concrete arena, most glass aggregate currently goes into countertops. But there's really no reason it can't go into floors, walls, furniture or anywhere else decorative concrete is found — indoors or out.



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# Tooling Stamps

## Rollers make texturing easy

Thanks to a new roller system from Kraft Tool Co., contractors no longer have to rock around the clock to get texturing projects done in half the time.

The Rock 'N' Roller Concrete Stamping System features a set of rollers that are pushed and pulled over the surface of concrete. The polyurethane rollers leave three-dimensional impressions of natural stone or brick. They do the same job as mats, but roll over an entire surface in one motion without a laborer having to pick up or set anything, requiring less work to get a job done faster.

The lightweight rollers can also get onto the surface of a slab much sooner than mats could be applied. They come with weight systems and spray release systems that help them adjust to different concrete environments.



Rock 'N' Roller systems are available in five patterns: Running Bond Brick, Cobble Stone, Ashlar Slate, Royal Slate and Pathway Slate. Each system includes large rollers, matching border rollers, stamps and touch-up tools. The border rollers require no special setup.

Kraft also sells a big stamping roller that turns out a truncated-dome texture for ramps and other ADA-oriented surfaces.

For more information, visit [www.krafttool.com](http://www.krafttool.com) or [www.rock-n-roller.biz](http://www.rock-n-roller.biz), or call (800) 422-2448.

## Brickform skins flex to suit

When it comes to texture skins, flexibility is often appreciated, and Raeco-Brickform LLC aims to please.

The company makes three grades, or "flex ratings," of texture skin to suit the disparate needs of its customers. The skins complement the company's regular texture mats and leave detailed surface textures on new concrete.

Each grade of flexibility is made from different materials and sold in corresponding colors. Soft "Ultra Flexible" skins with 60A shore hardness are pink. "Standard Flexible" skins with 80A shore hardness are blue, red or yellow, and "High-Density" skins with 90A shore hardness are green. Ultra-Flexible skins do not come with handles, but the other two grades have them.

Each level of flexibility has distinct advantages. An Ultra-Flexible skin, for example, is recommended for



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corner and angle details, bull-nose steps, or faux rock applications. Both the Ultra-Flexible and Standard Flexible skins work around columns. The High-Density skin, on the other hand, offers the most even weight distribution on concrete, is the most durable, reduces the potential for “birdbaths” and “footprints” and expands less in extreme temperatures. More flexible skins are commonly used with smaller tools, while the harder skins are used with larger tools.

Brickform makes customization as easy as ordering a sandwich from a deli. Its “Texture Skins Order Form” takes customers through the five-step process of choosing a texture, size, flexibility rating, shape and handle option for a skin that suits each client’s needs.

For more information, visit [www.brickform.com](http://www.brickform.com) or call (800) 483-9628.

### Stamps mimic Keystone slate

A new stamp pattern from L.M. Scofield Co. offers serious stampers a taste of old America.

The Pennsylvania Slate series is modeled after a natural slate found in the Keystone State. The rock is popular there as an accent for traditional architectural styles.

Pennsylvania Slate imprinting tools can be laid in a virtually unlimited number of combinations to imitate natural stone. There are 30 different sizes or shapes available in the line.

“It was originally created as a custom tool set for a specialty contractor who does high-end custom homes and wanted each pattern to look random like natural stone,” says Scofield integrated marketing director Sherry Boyd. “We have only recently made this available for regular purchase.”

The stamps are part of the Prestige line of tools, themselves part of the Lithotex Pavecrafters line. The Prestige line features single-stone tools with complex patterns that require sophisticated skills to use.

The Pavecrafters family includes more than 300 tools in over 100 different patterns.

For more information call (800) 800-9900.

### New designs coming from Custom

Custom Concrete Creations Inc., which sells interlocking, swiveling stamps to fit curved borders, plans to corner a whole new market.

The company has introduced a circular corner-accent stamp that Custom Concrete designer and president Shawn Daniels says will be the first in a series.

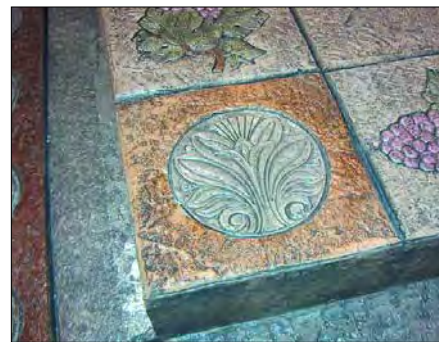
The accent that is for sale right now features a plantlike design roughly similar to Custom’s fleur-de-lis stamp pattern. Upcoming designs include a rose pattern, a star pattern and a Greek theme.

Daniels also wants to release a design or two that is simpler than the one found on the first accent. “You’ve got to present patterns everyone wants to use at their home,” he says.

In the border stamp department, the company is preparing several new models of 18-inch interlocking border stamps to complement the 12-inch tools it already sells.

The designs — a fancy scrollwork, a rose design and a redesigned dolphin pattern — are expected to be on the market in a couple of months. “Once we test them and people like them, we’ll start selling them,” Daniels says.

For more information about Custom Concrete Creations’ products, visit [www.cccbysawndaniels.com](http://www.cccbysawndaniels.com) or call (800) 573-8044.





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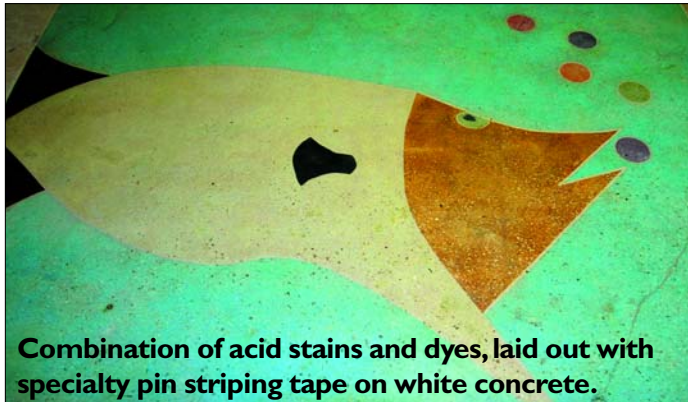


# Polished Perspectives

by Peter Wagner

In my first column I had the opportunity to discuss how to produce a proper “scratch pattern.” In this issue I will focus on producing graphics which can either highlight your polished concrete or become the focus of your floor.

Graphic design can be produced before or after the full curing of the slab, utilizing saw cuts, specialty tape, stamping or stenciling. In this article we will focus on the methods used following a full cure, in conjunction with acid stains and



acetone-based dyes. These stains and dyes can be applied to gray, white and integrally colored concrete.

You will note the conspicuous absence of overlays. To date no overlay works with a densifier to allow the creation of a long-wearing, densified polished floor. The polymers that provide for the flexion and flowability of a self-leveling overlay interfere with the cement and densifier. If you require a self-leveling overlay you will be forced to utilize a topical sealer to protect your work.

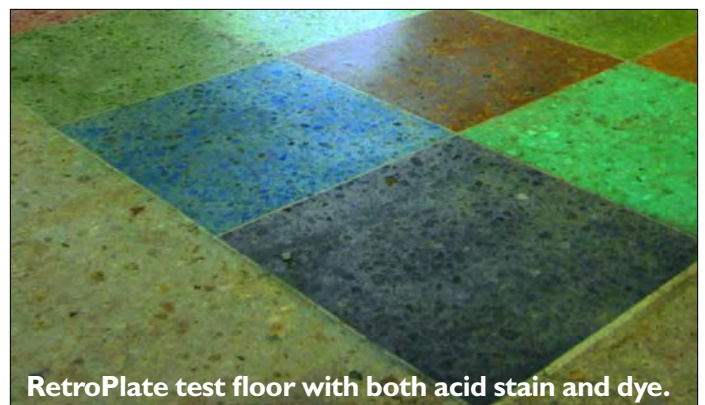
Why do acid stains, and more recently some dyes, work with a densifier without requiring a sacrificial sealer? When you read an acid stain manufacturer's disclaimer, it will state that their product will last as long as the wear surface to which it is applied.

So if you simply clean the surface, and then apply the acid stain, you are counting on the weakest part of the slab to



protect your acid stain or dye application. This promotes the opportunity for guaranteed failure, unless you are willing to continually reapply a sacrificial sealer coating on the surface.

When you combine the integration of acid staining with proper grinding, polishing and densifying, you eliminate the need for a topical sealer. When you think about it, the acid stain and dye manufacturer is concerned with “the wear surface,” and a densifier like RetroPlate has been shown to increase the floor's abrasion resistance by up to 400 percent. It doesn't take a giant leap of faith to know which method will provide your customer with the best-wearing floor — and



the floor with lower maintenance costs. In fact, a polished and densified concrete floor has one of the lowest life-cycle costs of any flooring option available today.

## Acid stains and dyes

When we talk about acid stains and acetone-based dyes, what are we talking about?

Acid stains are actually water-based liquids that have two main components in addition to the water, acids and metallic salts. The acid component opens up the pores of the concrete through etching to allow the penetration of metallic salts. The metallic salts then chemically interact with the calcium hydroxide (free lime) within the cement to produce a





permanent color change in the affected concrete. The colors will be earth tones, with a mottled, variegated appearance replicating marble. (Note: Blues and greens should not be used in areas of constant or standing water, as they will oxidize toward a black color.)

In the past, topical stains and dyes had generally failed in conjunction with polished concrete because unlike acid stains, they do not create a color change through chemical reactivity. Today we are starting to see manufacturers, such as Colormaker Floors, successfully formulate their products to achieve penetration of the dyes into the surface. In the case of this type of dye, as the acetone carrier flashes, the size of the dye's molecular structure allows it to be driven into the surface of the prepared slab. Think back to what the densifier does for the concrete, and again we can see why the "walk-off" has been eliminated. The dyes are bringing new excitement to our industry because they are capable of either

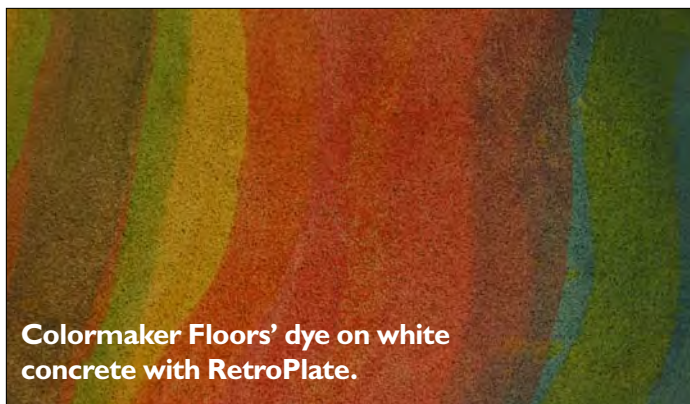
being mixed to create a full palette of color, being utilized in conjunction with acid stains to produce highlighting, or being used to save projects where an acid stain did not take. Several manufacturers are also starting to produce stains that have dyes incorporated in them during the manufacturing process.

### Graphic Presentation

When designing or laying out a graphic pattern with polished concrete, or when simply applying an acid stain or acetone-based dye to the whole floor, you must take into account the fact that you will be grinding the slab at some point, and that if you apply the acid stain or dye too early in the process, that you will end up grinding off your color. At what point you apply the color will depend on several variables: what look you are trying to achieve, what the manufacturer recommends, and more importantly, your own testing, knowledge and experience. Following are suggestions to help you ask the correct questions, allowing you to deliver the expected results:

#### Depth:

- Acid stain reacts more vibrantly with cream and becomes mottled.
- The more aggregate that you expose, and the less cream that remains, the lighter and more monolithic the results.
- Acid stain in conjunction with densifying produces a more translucent, natural stone appearance than an unground, topically sealed application.



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**Acid stain with large aggregate.**



#### **Saw-cutting:**

- Cutting is generally performed prior to the application of color.
- Decorative cuts are generally the width and depth of the blade thickness.
- Patience is a virtue, as is using a sharp blade. You cannot “erase” a mistake.
- Protection from concrete dust is a necessity for both health and the preservation of the customer’s space.

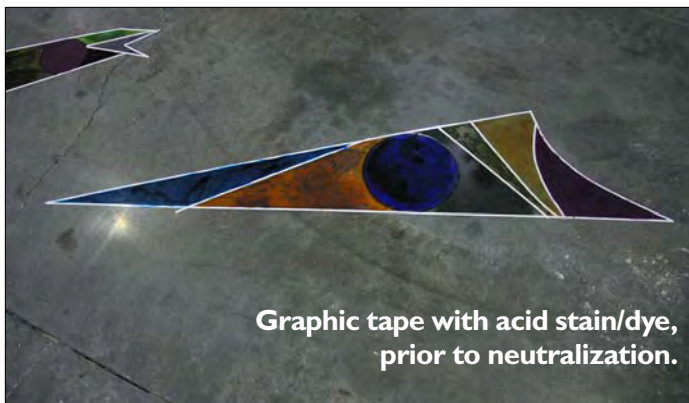
#### **Stencils:**

- Stencils may be intricate in design or as simple as a piece of rough-torn paper.
- When using stencils with acid stain, have the sign maker provide samples of different vinyls to ensure that the material doesn’t allow wicking of stain under the stencil.
- When using acetone-based dyes, be aware that excessive application can dissolve adhesives.



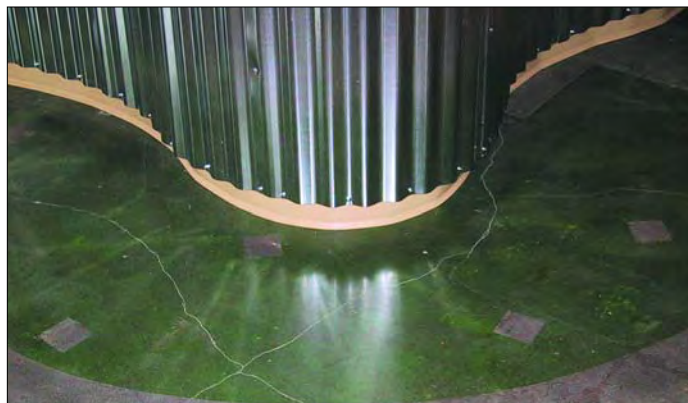
#### **Specialty tape:**

- Specialty tape (automotive pin-stripe tape works well) comes in many widths and is only limited in design by the radius you can turn.
- Do not overstretch or pull up the tape to readjust your line, as either will promote wicking. Unlike a saw cut, you



have the luxury of starting with a new piece of tape if you are not happy with its application.

- Always neutralize your acid stain prior to removing the tape to eliminate color contamination of your “faux” joint.
- Your “faux” joint will be the color of your slab. Make sure that you and your customer agree on the final appearance.
- Do not leave the tape down for more than two days. It’s applied to cars for a reason.



#### **Tips:**

- Spilled acid stain, if addressed quickly, can usually be cleaned up with muriatic acid. Flush with water.
- Spilled acetone-based dyes, if addressed quickly, can usually be cleaned up with acetone and a cloth.
- Acid stains cannot be mixed like a dye, with the mixer expecting a  $a + b = c$  results. They do not react like primary colors. Experiment before committing to anything. It is better to achieve variation through overlaying or highlighting with either a second stain or a dye.
- Adding “water only” generally results in weaker, more mottled colors due to a reduction in the water-to-acid ratio. This affects the opening up of the surface and the subsequent penetration of the metallic salts.



*Peter Wagner is the marketing director for RetroPlate and is responsible for working with RetroPlate’s Certified Applicator network throughout North America. Mr. Wagner has more than 20 years experience in the flooring industry.*



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# Manufacturer Profile:

# Specialty Concrete Products *West Columbia, South Carolina*

by Loretta Hall



**Y**ou might say Clyde Cobb got into decorative concrete on the ground floor.

"When I was growing up, my father was in industrial flooring, and I'd give him a hand now and then," he says. "I sort of grew up in epoxy overlays, and knowing concrete a little bit."

After graduating from the University of South Carolina (USC) in 1985, Cobb joined his father's company as a full-time employee. The enthusiasm in his voice makes it clear that this was a choice of passion, not of family convenience.

He recalls participating in a USC career day event that featured graduates of the business school. "I saw all my buddies going in wearing coats and ties, and I'm out front on my hands and knees troweling epoxy stone," he says,

chuckling. "They were kidding me: 'Clyde, did you graduate?'" But his skill in combining industry experience with an education in business and marketing is giving him the last laugh.

Shortly after he and his father began installing decorative concrete in 1987, Cobb's ability to envision and develop new products became evident. He developed an efficient color grout system that allowed suppliers to stock only two base colors of grout (white and gray), along with small packets of pigment that customers could add themselves. "But we found out real quick that people don't like to mix on the job site," he says.

That experience did not dampen his enthusiasm, though. His father's installation company was making products for its own use, and Cobb saw an







opportunity to expand. "I threw some products in the back of my truck and decided to see if I could sell it myself," Cobb says. "The concrete contractors I talked to were very interested, so I started a company called Monolithic Polymers in 1988. I was formulating epoxies and sealers, and blending all my own grouts."

The following year, he went a step further, spurred by a desire to speed up the installation process. "It would take the better part of a day to tape out bricks on a pool deck," he says. A friend of his installed linoleum floors, and Cobb took home a scrap piece one day. "I cut little brick patterns out of that linoleum floor, and I laid it down over a pool deck I had to do the next day, and I sprayed a red grout over it. When I lifted that linoleum up, I thought, 'Wow, I'm on to something here.'" That *something* ultimately led to a U.S. patent on Stencil-Crete, a system for decoratively resurfacing existing concrete.

Cobb's products proved to be so popular that in 1992 he decided to stop doing installation and concentrate on manufacturing. That's when he changed his company's name to Specialty Concrete Products (SCP). Distributors around the country now sell the company's own branded products. In addition, SCP produces private label products for numerous other companies.

Always on the lookout for marketing opportunities, Cobb went to China in 1994 for a concrete summit organized

by the Aberdeen Group. "I introduced stamped concrete over there," he says. "They had never seen it before, and I knew I had a hit." Manufacturing the products in South Carolina and shipping them to China was not economically feasible, though. So in 1996 Cobb entered into a joint venture to build a local plant. That Shanghai facility now produces most of the decorative concrete products used in mainland China. "I'm in my early forties, and I'm already known as the grandfather of decorative concrete in China," he says.

Today, SCP's international expansion is not limited to China. "I'm all over Europe now," Cobb says. "I'm all over South America, we're spreading around





Asia, and we're still growing at home." All of that growth took a lot of time and effort. "I didn't do all of this myself," Cobb says, giving credit to the support of his wife, Nichole, and the dedication and skill of his employees. He believes that SCP's success is due to a focus on quality, in terms of both customer service and products. Employees try to treat customers the way they would like to be treated, including giving effective

technical support. And they make the best products they can, not skimping on quality just to lower the price.

In 1997, Cobb went on what he describes as a quality rampage. "I wanted our product to be the best it could be. We hired a polymer chemical engineer,



and we became ISO 9002 certified."

During the certification process, a representative of the International Organization for Standardization

(ISO) visited SCP headquarters in West Columbia, S.C. She asked whether problems in the field are usually the contractor's fault or the material's fault. Cobb and his staff, somewhat jokingly, responded that 98 percent of the time it is the contractor's fault. "She looked at me dead in the eye, and she said, 'Whose fault is that?'" Cobb says. That led him to reevaluate SCP's training program, which consisted of sending out demonstration videos. "If I watch a video on how to fly a plane, are you going to come fly with me?" Cobb asks. "I don't think so."

Now SCP offers monthly four-day "demonars" that give contractors hands-on experience with using the company's products. Among those products are etching, staining, and resurfacing materials; stamping and stencilling systems; a countertop mix; and engraving equipment. The training program also includes a Specifying Stamped Concrete course that qualifies for a one-hour continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Cobb foresees broad opportunities for the decorative concrete industry. "A lot of times, people will take one of our products and do something new with it. Or people will come to us and ask if we can make a product — we'll all sit down with our chemical engineer and see how we can make it work," he says. "The more products people have, the more the artist comes out in them."

"Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa, but he didn't make the canvas and he didn't make the paint. We're the canvas and paint manufacturer; the artists are the people out there in the field. But I want to have the best canvas and I want to have the best paint that Leonardo can use."



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The **X-50 Handheld** saw is designed for finish cuts, scoring and decorative applications. The low dust blade block system allows for a dry cut and it controls the debris for easy cleanup.

Much like other Soff-Cut saws, the **X-50 Handheld** works in conjunction with Soff-Cut blades and patented skid plates.



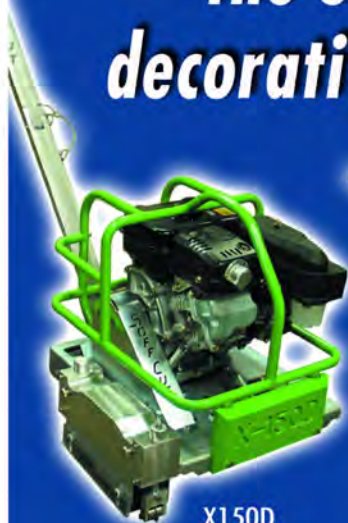
Contractors will find the **Pro-Edge Blades** ideal for residential and commercial applications, including driveways, sidewalks, hardscapes, patios, pool decks, parking garages and commercial site work. With the Soff-Cut system, the **Pro-Edge Blades** can be used along with the model 310, X50 Handheld Saw or X-150D Deco Prowler saw to chase standard joints for a beveled look the day after early-entry dry-cut control joints are cut. Using **ProEdge Blades** versus hand tooling can allow a larger area of concrete to be placed at one time, thus eliminating

costly multiple concrete pours. It also allows for versatility in the saw joint contour.



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X50  
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The **X-150 Prowler** gas saw is designed for ease of use and convenience. The lightest push saw in the Soff-Cut lineup, was designed for ease of use and convenience. Features include a patented low noise and low dust blade block system, allowing the unit to be used in residential areas with minimal disruption to homeowners. The **X-150 Prowler** comes with a 4.5 hp engine, making it ideal for residential and light commercial applications.



The **X-150D Decorative Prowler** saw was designed especially for the contractor who wants a no-hassle way to make decorative cuts. It was also designed to be economical and durable. This saw is the perfect compliment to the **X-150 Prowler**. It has a low noise, low vibration 4.5 horsepower Robin engine and is ideal for large and small jobs alike. The **X-150 Prowler** saw is set up to handle the full line of ProEdge beveled blades, which create a beautiful decorative look for control joints and saw cuts.

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# Concrete Marketplace

is a paid listing of quality-related products. If you would like more information about any of these products, circle the appropriate number on the reader service card found between pages 48 and 49 of this issue.



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# PRODUCT PROFILES

## Shotcrete machine sized for decorative work

The QuikShot Vertical Mix Shotcrete Machine, distributed by FossilCrete Inc., is a typical shotcrete pump, only smaller. And that makes it perfect for decorative concrete contractors.

The scaled-down machine goes through less concrete per batch. A contractor can mix two buckets of concrete, shoot it, then lay the gun down and go to work shaping the wet mud. "Basically, this is a miniature shotcrete machine," says FossilCrete president Stanton Pace. "You can do small batches at a time."

The QuikShot is manufactured by Quickspray Inc. to FossilCrete's specifications, and it is sold bearing the FossilCrete name. "We've used Quickspray's products before," Pace says. "I used to use one of these as a contractor. This is everything we like in a machine."

The QuikShot pumps 25 bags of vertical mix in 15 minutes, or 1.5 yards per hour. It requires only 110 volts of electric power and uses only 10 cfm of air.

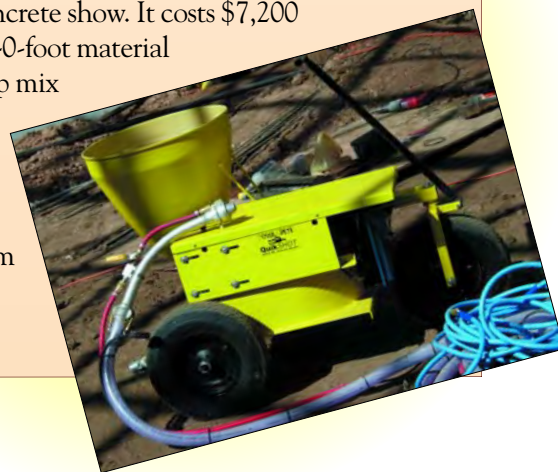
The portable machine propels material with peristaltic squeezes through a soft rubber tube. The system can handle up to ¼-inch aggregate and can easily pump fiber mix. No internal moving parts come in contact with the material as it is pumped, which minimizes maintenance. The rubber tube is inexpensive and easily replaced. What's more, the machine's parabolic hoppers don't have corners that might clog.

If any outfit knows vertical concrete stamping, it's FossilCrete. The company manufactures a number of unusual stamps, including several fossil designs, as well as its own vertical stamp mix.

A large, conventional shotcrete machine is a hassle for decorative concrete contractors. Leasing one of these behemoths can run \$1,000 a day, not including concrete, Pace says. "With QuikShot, you don't have to rent a huge air compressor."

FossilCrete introduced their shotcrete machine at the 2005 World of Concrete show. It costs \$7,200 and comes with a 40-foot material hose, vertical stamp mix gun and spare pump hose.

For more information, visit [www.fossilcrete.com](http://www.fossilcrete.com) or call (405) 525-3722.







### Go dustless with the Pulse-Bac

**H**ere's a novel idea — a vacuum specifically designed to suck it up for the concrete industry.

Concrete dust is the most difficult kind of dust to vacuum, says Travis McCutchen, vice president of sales and marketing at CDCLarue Industries Inc. The gritty powder spewed during saw cuts can clog a typical vacuum's filter in 15 minutes, faster than wood or drywall dust does. "It's very abrasive, it's very fine and it's hard to contain," he says.

CDCLarue's Pulse-Bac Industrial Vacuum & Dust Collector will remove and contain that dust without constant clogs or lagging lift.

The machine features a patented valving system that regularly pulls bursts of air back through its collection filters. The bursts knock loose accumulated dust and debris, keeping it from clogging the machine.

The machine's three-filter system is electronically controlled. Two of the filters stay in vacuum mode as the third is cleaned, and the machine automatically cleans each filter in turn. Additionally, the vacuum's "air dam" creates a cyclone effect that stops debris from recycling through the filters and directs it to the bottom of the tank.

Pulse-Bac's vacuum system sets it apart from standard vacuums, which use blowers, shakers, compressors or magnets to flush filters clean.

There are two Pulse-Bac models, the HD for heavy-duty applications and the LD for lighter work. The HD generates 266 cubic feet per minute with 77 inches of lift, while the LD turns out 133 cfm with 77 inches of lift. Both machines include moisture-resistant filters that trap particles as small as 0.5 micron at an efficiency rating of 99 percent.

The vacuum can be attached to a wide range of concrete surfacing and cutting equipment. Concrete dust is Pulse-Bac's bread and butter, notes McCutchen. "We sell primarily to the concrete surface preparation industry."

The machine will also capture dust generated by stone, wood, fiberglass, drywall and other dry debris.

Pulse-Bac vacuums come with a 20-gallon powder-coated carbonate steel tank and a nylon grip handle for dumping. An optional extender for the HD model allows it to be placed on any standard 40-gallon or 55-gallon drum. As for noise, Pulse-Bac puts out less than 85 dB, which is at least as quiet as other vacuums, McCutchen says.

For more information, visit [www.cdclarue.com](http://www.cdclarue.com) or call (866) 954-9700.

## ATTENTION CONCRETE CONTRACTORS!

Win a Hand Float by circling number 120 on your Product Information card (found between pages 48-49).

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**For Information on Wagman's complete line of concrete finishing tools and accessories, call 717-854-2120 or visit, [www.wagmanmetal.com](http://www.wagmanmetal.com).**



An interior designer recently approached a decorative concrete contractor in Naples, Fla., for a solution to an unfortunate stroke of ill luck.

One of Pam Novakovich's clients had ordered a \$9,000 shipment of Italian tiles to lend old-world Tuscan ambience to an 85-square-foot entryway. The tiles had been irreparably damaged in transit, so the owner of the \$5 million home naturally turned to Novakovich for help in salvaging the situation. She, in turn, went to artisan-installer Corby Albright.

Albright had recently attended one of Colormaker Floors' Wild Workshops, at which he had experimented with Modello designs using Pentimento and Sgraffino products. He knew that some of the techniques he had worked with just might do the job. He presented his samples to the designer to show her the wide-ranging effects and intricacy of detail that could be achieved. Sure enough, he was appointed to the task.

The mission was accomplished. The result was an awe-inspiring 85-square-foot Tuscany floor created for \$11,000—a cost-effective solution for the client and a tidy profit to Albright for his value-added efforts.

Here's a quick description of the procedure, including the names of appropriate Colormaker products:

**Step 1:** Install Pentimento (Grey) at ⅜-inch thickness.

**Step 2:** Acid-stained Patinaetch (Sumatra) diluted with water at 1:1.

**Step 3:** Dye-wash the surface by spraying Someru Dye Black (diluted with water at 5:1), Someru Dye Red (diluted with water at 4:1) and Someru Dye Blue (diluted with water at 6:1). These dyes are sprayed separately but simultaneously using spritzer bottles and mopped till the dye is completely dry.

**Step 4:** Lay the Modello design on the floor and use Decographic Dye Black, diluted with acetone at 5:1, to transfer the design on the floor.

**Step 5:** Seal the surface with two coats of Texture Seal solvent-based acrylic sealer.

**Step 6:** Apply two coats of Uro Finish urethane-based floor finish.



## Designer's Disaster Turns to Gold for Contractor







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# White Cap Offers Amazing New Tool

*The distributor's new Web site offers customized features that will allow you to streamline and document your bidding, planning and purchases.*

by Bob Mealey

**W**hite Cap Construction Supply has introduced "the ultimate power tool," a new Web site at [www.whitecap.net](http://www.whitecap.net). The site is designed to give the professional contractor important business and purchasing information not otherwise available in the field.

Contractors can research and purchase a wide selection of products, check out specials or request a catalog or line card. But this barely scratches the surface of the Web site.

Whitecap.net also gives registered customers the ability to create customized material packages for bidding and planning purposes. It lets them access their account history, reprint invoices, obtain statements and record purchases by the job.

The site offers fully customized data for each registered customer. Shoppers can create and maintain complete purchase histories for each job. They may search for and reprint invoices using invoice number, purchase order number or White Cap part number.

Registered users can access prior-period monthly statements or produce a current account statement that reflects the activity of the previous business day. Ship-to job sites may be added under the customer's master account. Specific job site histories let the customer identify projects on an invoice-by-invoice basis and receive statements sorted by job.

Besides these backroom office functions, White Cap's site provides customers the ability to review and print Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and Technical Data Sheets for many of the products used in large,



**White Cap Construction Supply's director of Web-based services, Bob Mealey, offers some pointers to Marisela Marroquin from White Cap's marketing department.**

complex construction work. Calculators help with concrete and waterproofing calculations, and the regularly updated construction glossary is one of the most complete and comprehensive listing of construction terminology on the Web.

White Cap has taken measures to ensure a high level of security for customer data. Electronic data used in conjunction with Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover and JCB is tested and certified daily by ScanAlert Inc.'s Hacker Safe software. Once a customer's account is established and linked on the Web site, an account administrator chosen by the customer

may add and remove users. All access to customer specific data is password protected.

The secure, on-demand availability of Whitecap.net lets White Cap customers monitor account and purchasing activity and build in jobs or custom packages in just a few steps. It is accessible via desktop, laptop or handheld computer, allowing customers to select and utilize the options best suited to their individual needs.



*Bob Mealey is director of Web-based services for White Cap Construction Supply Inc.*



## A breath of fresh air

Versatile Building Products Inc. has announced two new nose-friendly coatings: Versa-Thane 5400 and Poly Urea 5000.

Versa-Thane 5400, a waterborne chemical-resistant urethane, offers the film build, gloss and chemical resistance of solvent-based systems without the intense odor or high VOC emission levels. The high-solid product delivers thick film build while avoiding the outgassing problems of its predecessors.

Poly Urea 5000, a 100 percent solids coating, lets more film thickness build than standard systems do. The cross-linking of the film in the cure makes it exceptionally tough and durable, and it maintains its gloss far longer than comparable products. Poly Urea 5000 is nonflammable and has a very mild odor.

For more information, contact Versatile at [www.garagecoatings.com](http://www.garagecoatings.com) or (800) 535-3352.



## Upgrade your ram

Multiquip Inc.'s three new gasoline-powered rammers, the MT-65HA, MT-74FA and MT-84FA, do a bang-up job compacting cohesive and mixed soils.

Each rammer showcases practical new features.

Contoured handles reduce vibration by up to 61 percent. Functional "duck bill" fuel caps and diaphragm carburetors let operators lay down the units without fuel spills, and built-in guide handle retainers prevent overextension of the handle and subsequent damage to the shock mounts.

The MT-65HA delivers 2,900 pounds (1,300 kilograms) of impact force on 645 to 695 blows per minute, fueled by a 3-horsepower Honda GX100 engine. The MT-74FA generates 3,100 pounds (1,400 kg.) of centrifugal force with the energy of a 3.5-horsepower Robin EH12 engine.

The most powerful model, the MT-84F, delivers 3,500 pounds (1,600 kg.) of impact force on 660 to 700 blows per minute. It is driven by a 3.5-horsepower Robin EH12 gasoline engine and travels up to 36 feet (11 meters) per minute.



For more information, visit [www.multiquip.com](http://www.multiquip.com) or call (800) 421-1244.

## A faster cure

After almost two years of field and independent testing, ChemMasters Inc. has introduced Silencure, a product for curing and sealing exterior concrete.

Silencure cures fresh concrete to ASTM C309 standards. It contains special silanes that penetrate concrete and seal it to the standards of NCHRP 244. Proper curing and long-term protection are accomplished in a one-time application of 150 square feet per gallon.

Silencure replaces both curing compound and silane or siloxane, and it eliminates the need for cleaners and stripping materials. Contractors who use this product will not have to wait 28 days before giving new concrete a silane treatment.

For more, visit [www.chemmasters.net](http://www.chemmasters.net) or call (800) 486-7866.



## How to kleen konkrete

Gardner-Gibson has introduced Gardner Driveway Kleen, a highly concentrated cleaner and degreaser that is formulated to clean blacktop, concrete, brick, stone and other masonry surfaces before sealing or staining.

Driveway Kleen can be used to prepare sidewalks, pool decks, pavers, garage floors, porches and patios as well as driveways. One bottle, when attached to a hose, cleans about 500 square feet, and the cleaner won't harm grass.

For more details, visit [www.gardner-gibson.com](http://www.gardner-gibson.com) or call (800) 237-1155.

## Lock onto good coverage

Sherwin-Williams Co. has introduced Loxon XP, a direct-to-concrete, high-build masonry coating that requires no primer and provides exceptional coverage.

Designed for use on tilt-up, precast or poured-in-place concrete, as well as CMU, cement block and stucco surfaces, Loxon XP resists alkali, efflorescence and moisture penetration. The coating tolerates pH levels of up to 13 and can be applied to concrete less than 28 days old. And it delivers results without a primer coat.

Also new from Sherwin-Williams is Armorseal 1K Waterbased Urethane Floor Enamel, the newest addition to its environmentally friendly EnviroSpec





coatings line. The one-component system features polyester water-based urethane. It offers a high-gloss finish, delivers performance comparable to that of a two-component urethane, and is formulated for industrial and commercial applications.

For more, visit [www.sherwin-williams.com](http://www.sherwin-williams.com) or call (800) 524-5979.

### Shield your concrete

Dever Enterprises LLC has introduced All-Shield Concrete & Masonry Sealer, a water-based coating that stops water

penetration and damage for up to eight years after a one-step application process.

This clear, nonyellowing sealer lets water vapor

escape the substrate, resists mold and fungi and protects against freeze-thaw cycles, efflorescence and alkali. The coating is compliant with VOC

regulations, covers 100 square feet per gallon and comes in one-gallon and five-gallon containers.

For more details, call (888) 293-7951 or visit [www.deverenterprises.com](http://www.deverenterprises.com).

### A 1,200-pound gorilla

The new Gorilla Slide from Highway Products Inc. slides a load of equipment out of the back of a work vehicle for easier loading and unloading. It can be installed in pickup trucks, vans, service bodies, motor homes and fifth wheel trailers.

The Slide is made of heavy gauge 1/2-inch aluminum and is rated to handle 1,200 pounds evenly distributed. The heavy-duty slide glides on sealed roller



bearings on a galvanized steel track system, and it can be safely locked and fixed in place in 10-inch increments.

Installation kit and instructions are included.

For more details, call (800) 866-5269 or visit [www.800toolbox.com](http://www.800toolbox.com).

### Meters keep track of pH in concrete

Extech Instruments has received apparatus approval from ASTM International for its Waterproof ExStik pH meters. Models PH100 and PH110 were approved for use under Standard D4262-05, the method for testing the acidity or alkalinity of chemically cleaned or etched concrete surfaces.

Extech's meters measure pH in liquids, semisolids and solids. They are the only stick-style pH meters with flat surface electrodes, and they feature a digital readout with an analog bargraph displayed on an LCD. Renew indicators monitor calibration and tell the user when to replace the electrodes.

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CIRCLE #52 ON READER SERVICE CARD

## Looking for metakaolin?

We've received many phone calls from readers who want to know where they can get metakaolin, a mix additive featured in the Feb./March issue of *Concrete Decor*. Here is a list of sources:

**MetaMax, Engelhard Corporation,**  
[www.engelhard.com/metamax](http://www.engelhard.com/metamax),  
(800) 758-9567 x5654

**Optipozz, Burgess Pigment Company,**  
[www.burgesspigment.com](http://www.burgesspigment.com),  
(478) 552-2544

**PowerPozz, Advanced Cement Technologies,**  
[www.metakaolin.com](http://www.metakaolin.com);  
(360) 332-7060

**Kaorock, Thiele Kaolin Company,**  
[www.thielekaolin.com](http://www.thielekaolin.com),  
(478) 552-3951

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Photography by Matthew Millman

CIRCLE #08 ON READER SERVICE CARD



# The Final Pour

## Fish Story

We've all seen decorative concrete countertops before, but a decorative concrete fish-cleaning table? A commercial fisherman in Newport, Ore., boasts the prettiest one in town.

The table was made by Michael Dahl, who precast it in a foam mold and used small mixes of different integral colors to create the mottled effect. The top is ground to expose the aggregate.

And the fish? A ling cod, caught off the Oregon coast.



Photograph courtesy of Michael Dahl



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