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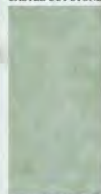
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WEEKLY TIMECARD

NAME: Bill Owen DATES: 13-17

	START	LUNCH	END	JOB CODES	JOB SITE/PROJECT	HOURS
Mon.	7:00	1/2	3:30		Davis	8
Tues.			3:30			8
Wed.			4:00			8 1/2
Thurs.			4:00			8 1/2
Fri.			4:00			8 1/2
SIGNATURE: <u>Bill Owen</u>						TOTAL HOURS: <u>41 1/2</u>

GIVE THEM THE JOBCLOCK.

Employee Report

Bill Owen

Jobsite Name: **Davis Property** Date Range: **2/13/2006 through 2/17/2006**

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 2/13	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Placing	4:57 hours
	12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Placing	2:41 hours 7:38 hours
Tue 2/14	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Placing	4:55 hours
	12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Placing	2:40 hours 7:35 hours
Wed 2/15	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Placing	4:50 hours
	12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Placing	3:03 hours 7:53 hours
Thu 2/16	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Finishing	5:02 hours
	12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Finishing	2:56 hours 7:58 hours
Fri 2/17	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Finishing	4:54 hours
	12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Finishing	2:55 hours 7:49 hours
Employee total				38:53 hours

Signature: Bill Owen Bill Owen

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CIRCLE #24 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Keep your knees bent and your head in the game.

To pay for room and board during my first year in college, I was fortunate to find a job on campus. Seeing the obvious benefits, I quickly found myself pulling staples off dorm room walls for the first few weeks of summer. In spite of that first assignment, life couldn't have been better. I was now living on my own, living comfortably as far as college students go, and I had recently been accepted to the school's rowing team.

During that first week of summer I was feeling pretty comfortable in my new job. The type of work I was doing certainly gave me time to think about other things. All that changed, however, after a certain union worker assigned to the college campus that summer simply had enough of my so-called lackadaisical attitude. Now, don't get me wrong, I've never been afraid of work, but this guy obviously had a higher calling and was determined to teach me a thing or two about getting more accomplished in a day's work.

I've got to tell you that having a boss who played defensive line in the NFL leaves behind an indelible mark on a person. This guy addressed each day and every task like it was his offensive opponent. It didn't matter what type of job it was — his attitude was get it done or get off the field.

You might say that a little pressure from the boss did me a world of good. Over time I started to feel less concerned about my job and more interested in proving my worth. Ironically, the rest of that summer was a blast workwise. Not only did I end up learning a lot about myself, I also began to learn a trade that would later become my career. Best of all, I made a friendship that has now lasted more than twenty years.

Here's the kicker...

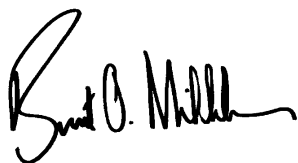
A few weeks ago I took time out to watch my son's basketball practice. Matthew really likes basketball and we both like shooting some hoops together before dinner. At practice, however, I was surprised to notice that he stood out there on court like a soldier in formation, arms straight to his side and knees that appeared locked in position. As you can well imagine, his rigid stance made it hard for him to respond quickly.

Without saying too much on the matter, I encouraged Matthew to work on keeping his knees bent and feet spread out whenever he's on the court. My advice served two purposes: Matthew's new stance would help him to respond faster and would also serve to keep his head in the game at all times. Well, it worked. In fact, Matthew came home from his next practice indicating that his coach told him he was really improving. Man, was I pleased to hear that.

Subsequently, before each practice or game Matthew knows what I'm going to ask: "Matt, what are we going to remember to do today?" And with a big smile, he exclaims, "Keep my knees bent." And what else? "And my head in the game." While I'm pretty sure Matthew knows that's only half the game, he understands better what he's capable of accomplishing.

As an adult, I have realized that I often need to ask myself that same question. Keeping my head in the game helps me to stay productive and focused on the jobs at hand.

Sincerely,



Bent Mikkelsen, *Publisher*



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ON THE COVER: A member of the Carlton Concrete team tosses out color hardener at the new Holy Cross Catholic Church in Porterville, Calif. You'll find lots of tips for using color hardeners on page 20. Photograph by Larry Carlton.



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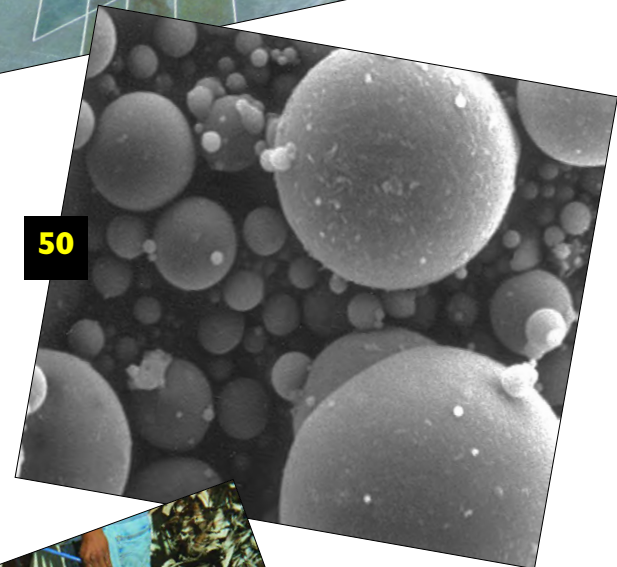
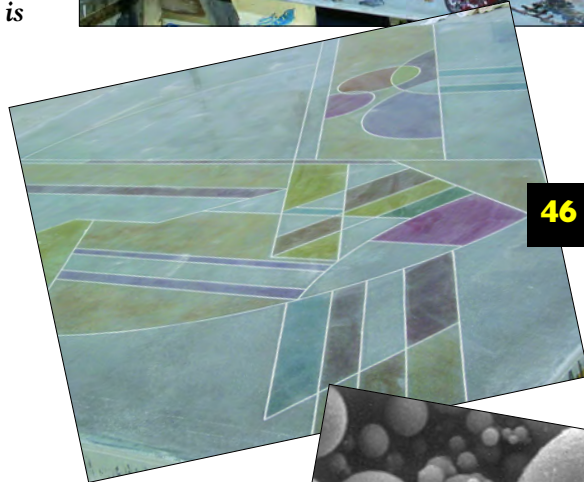
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While online, you owe yourself the pleasure of ordering *Concrete Decor*'s new virtual magazine. The digital magazine arrives weeks ahead of the printed edition. Each issue is stored on your computer for easy reference online or off, the pages turn with a simple mouse-click on your computer screen, and clicking on ads takes you directly to the advertisers' Web sites. Best of all, a subscription is only \$14.95 anywhere in the world.

Concrete Decor is the number one source for information and ideas on finishes for new and existing concrete.

U.S., Mexico announce cement accord

The United States and Mexico announced in January that a duty on Mexican cement shipped to the U.S. will likely be dramatically lowered and, in three years, eliminated.

Under the agreement, imports from Mexico would be capped at 3 million metric tons per year and be subject to a duty of \$3 per metric ton, a significant drop from the \$26 duty now in effect. The deal provides for the institution of a provision to import an additional 200,000 metric tons in the event of a natural disaster. All limits would be removed in 2009 if both sides abide by the agreement, which includes a commitment by the Mexican government to open that country's market to foreign cement suppliers.

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) welcomed the news. "Last year, 32 states experienced cement shortages," said Stephen E. Sandherr, CEO, in an AGC news release. "The strong outlook for highway and building construction in 2006 means this year's shortages could be even more severe and widespread. It is essential to allow cement in from 'next door' on the same terms that we now import it from China, Thailand, and other more distant locations."

More about the AGC can be found at www.agc.org.

CONEXPO 2006 registration opens

Advance registration is open for CONEXPO Asia 2006, which will be held May 15 through May 18, 2006, at the China National Agricultural Exhibition Center in Beijing, China.

Similar to CONEXPO-CON/AGG, the show will be the China-Asia Pacific region's construction industry showplace in 2006, featuring equipment, product and technology exhibits, hands-on demonstrations and networking opportunities. The exposition has the support of key Chinese industry groups.

Industry experts from around the world, including the United States and China, will lead three full days of workshops. The sessions will provide real-world knowledge to meet the needs of industry professionals in China and Asia Pacific countries. "Know-how" sessions will explore the latest in equipment usage techniques while international experts provide market opportunity updates.

Consider This

"It's like showing the bride on her wedding day. It's beautiful and dreamy and all that, but it's not realistic."

Doug Carlton, on the importance of showing potential customers not only just-finished projects, but older ones as well, so they can see how concrete wears and ages.

See our story on marketing, page 66.

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CONEXPO Asia is owned and produced by the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM) and is co-located with World of Concrete Asia. For more information, visit www.conexpoasia.com or call (800) 867-6060.

A half-century of growth

Lafarge North America Inc. is celebrating its 50th birthday this year.

Paris-based Ciments Lafarge entered the North American cement market in 1956 with the opening of a cement plant in Richmond, B.C., forming Lafarge Cement North America (LCNA). The company entered the United States market in 1973 in a joint venture, and a U.S. holding company, Lafarge Corp., was formed in 1983. Lafarge Corp. changed its name to Lafarge North America Inc. in 2001, the same year that its parent, Lafarge S.A., acquired Blue Circle Industries PLC and became the world's largest cement producer.

Today, Lafarge North America is the largest diversified supplier of construction materials in the United States and Canada. Headquartered outside of Washington D.C., the company employs 15,500 people at roughly 1,000 locations.

For more, visit www.lafargenorthamerica.com.

Bulach Construction and Custom Rock join forces

Two Minnesota firms, Bulach Construction Inc. and Custom Rock, have merged to form Bulach Custom Rock.

With more than 40 years of experience, Bulach Construction is well-schooled in architectural concrete, including colored, stamped, stained and textured concrete and overlays. Projects range from commercial exteriors to retail spaces to residential walkways in locations across the United States.

Custom Rock, founded in 1971, also specializes in architectural concrete, producing themed environments that feature simulated rock formations and landscapes. Projects include work for Mall of America, Cabella's, Rainforest Café, Chicago Zoo and MGM Grand.

The new company will operate out of expanded premises at the former Bulach Construction location in Inver Grove Heights, Minn. The site features a comprehensive architectural concrete showroom.

For further information, visit www.bulachcustomrock.com or call (651) 455-3384.



CEMEX helps hurricane fund

Gilberto Perez, president of CEMEX in the United States, delivered a check for nearly \$570,000 to the Bush-Clinton

Katrina Fund on behalf of CEMEX Inc., a leading producer of cement, concrete and concrete products.

As part of the plan to contribute to Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, CEMEX matched, two-to-one, all employee contributions made by Sept. 30, 2005. For employees whose gifts equaled or exceeded 1 percent of their respective salaries, the company made a three-to-one match.

For more information about CEMEX Inc., visit www.cemexusa.com.



Cemstone names new VP

Cemstone has named David Pace vice president of strategic accounts.

Pace will be responsible for the oversight and development of Cemstone's strategic accounts and will supervise all aspects of the customer relationship, including operations, engineering, product delivery and quality control.

To learn more about Cemstone, visit www.cemstone.com or call (800) 236-7866.

Axim promotes Lane to GM

Don Lane, co-founder of Axim Concrete Technologies Inc., has been promoted to the position of general manager.

Lane has a long record of innovative product solutions in concrete admixture technology for Axim, including the only patented air-entraining agent for concrete, Catexol A.E. 260.

For more about Axim, visit www.aximconcrete.com.

One in place, more to come

Jade Pinley is a new Wisconsin distributor for Architectural Enhancements Inc. Her position includes involvement with a training facility near Eau Claire, Wis.

Architectural Enhancements Inc. is also looking to sign up additional trainers and suppliers for its overlayment and decorative concrete products. The company is talking to potential distributors across the United States and the Middle East.

For more information, call (952) 233-2726 or visit www.decorativeoverlayments.net.

Blastrac relauches Web site

Blastrac has revamped its Web site, www.blastrac.com.

The redesigned site contains surface preparation product and application information, online videos and operation tips. A surface preparation overview section informs users about different surface preparation methods and includes links to a prep chart for tips on method selection. A store locator helps contractors find Blastrac products and Sawtec tools.

For more, visit www.blastrac.com or call (800) 256-3440.

Blastrac finds partner for equipment rental

Blastrac is partnering with United Rentals to provide surface preparation equipment for rent. Blastrac is exiting its own rental channel and will direct its rental customers to United Rentals and other new rental channel partners.

United Rentals will offer Blastrac equipment such as grinders, polishers, scarifiers, saws, scrapers, strippers, light-duty shot blasters and heavy-duty dust collectors for concrete.

United Rentals branch locations that are carrying Blastrac equipment can be found using a locator feature at www.blastrac.com. More information can also be obtained by calling (800) 256-3440.

RAG moves on Degussa

RAG Aktiengesellschaft, Essen, Germany (RAG), which holds a 50.1 percent interest in Degussa AG through its wholly owned subsidiary RAG Projektgesellschaft mbH, announced plans to acquire all remaining shares in Degussa.

The 42.86 percent of Degussa's capital stock held by E.ON AG will be divested to RPG effective July 1, 2006. RAG intends to make a voluntary public offer to all other Degussa shareholders via RPG to acquire their shares. Once the public offer has been completed, RAG intends to launch a squeeze-out of minority shareholders in Degussa.

Many Thanks to Lee Tizard

You are one crazy goal-oriented animal! You have made a name for yourself in this industry because of years of constant work, dedication and the commitment to helping others when needed. You are committed to creating the life of your dreams and with all your determination, dedication and efforts, you will definitely achieve those goals and be living the ultimate dream! I am so proud of you and love you dearly.

From your darling wife,
Tamie



Lee and Tamie Tizard

Lee,
Thank you for always being there. You have become the very best at what you do and constantly strive to do better. You are greatly appreciated.

— Scott Wyatt

Lee,
You are the most talented artist in technique and design with any material out there. Rick Meyer would have been proud of your accomplishments and the knowledge you have given the industry.

— Steve Meyer

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CIRCLE #15 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Industry Spotlight

Association News

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CONCRETE CONTRACTORS DCC EXPO time is here

The Decorative Concrete Council (DCC), a specialty council of the American Society of Concrete Contractors, will hold its annual EXPO March 15 through March 17, 2006, in New Orleans.

The EXPO will feature seminars and demonstrations focused on the decorative concrete industry. Seminar topics include "Organization in Management," "Making Money in Decorative Concrete," "Dealing With Last-Minute Changes" and "Surface Preparation." The American Concrete Institute flatwork finisher certification class and exam will be offered on Thursday, March 15, in conjunction with the event.

For more information, visit www.ascconline.org or call (866) 788-2722.

PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION Cement demand will stay strong

After record-breaking cement consumption in 2004 and 2005, Portland Cement Association predicts additional increases through 2009.

Cement consumption in 2006 is expected to reach more than 130 million metric tons, a 3.7 percent increase from 2005, and average annual increases of 2.5 percent are projected through 2009.

An increase in commercial and public construction will drive demand. After several years of decline, 2006 nonresidential construction and public construction are expected to top 2005 levels. Key growth markets include industrial and office buildings, hospitals, water supply systems and public works projects. These increases will offset an expected decline in residential construction as mortgage rates go up and single-family starts decline.

For more about the Portland Cement Association, visit www.cement.org.

AMERICAN CONCRETE INSTITUTE New pubs from ACI

The American Concrete Institute announces the availability of three new publications.

334.3R-05, "Construction of Concrete Shells Using Inflated Forms," provides information on the construction of structural concrete

shells using an inflated form. The publication covers major facets of the construction process, including foundations, inflation, monitoring, and backup systems. The geometric variations of inflated forms, thickness of polyurethane foam, and mixture proportions for shotcrete are also considered.

506R-05, "Guide to Shotcrete," offers recommendations on the applicability of shotcrete for different types of construction. It covers material requirements and application procedures, gives equipment requirements for dry-mix and wet-mix processes, explores testing in detail, and emphasizes the competence of the application crew.

"Symposium Publication 232: Punching Shear in Reinforced Concrete Slabs" contains 15 papers on punching shear in reinforced concrete slabs. It contains a report on issues related to design philosophy, code provisions, contributions of flexural and shear reinforcements, and seismic blast loads.

These publications can be ordered from the American Concrete Institute. Visit www.concrete.org or call (248) 848-3800.

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CIRCLE #23 ON READER SERVICE CARD

NATIONAL PRECAST CONCRETE ASSOCIATION **Precast concrete sales reach \$18.5 billion in 2004**

The precast concrete industry outpaced the growth of the overall construction industry in 2004, according to an Operating Performance Report recently issued by the NPCA.

The report indicates that precast plants in the United States and Canada reported sales volume of \$18.5 billion for 2004, a 13 percent increase from 2003. By comparison, the construction industry as a whole grew 9 percent, according to the McGraw Hill 2005 Construction Outlook.

Big sectors of the precast industry remained steady, while some smaller sectors grew substantially, according to NPCA president Ty E. Gable. "The continued strength in the residential housing kept septic tank sales strong," Gable said in a NPCA news release. "In addition, we saw growth of 26 percent in wall panel components, which indicates that homeowners and

commercial building developers are choosing precast panel systems in increasing numbers." Other sectors reporting strong growth included grease interceptors used in commercial buildings such as restaurants and schools (up 33 percent) and stormwater products (up 10 percent).

While growth occurred in all five geographic regions, the Southeast reported the largest increase (22 percent), with the Northeast following (18 percent). All regions anticipated continued growth in 2005.

Overall, the precast industry used an estimated 13.7 million tons of cement in 2004 and produced approximately 48.1 million cubic yards of concrete.

Visit www.precast.org for more about the NPCA or to purchase a copy of the report.

NATIONAL READY MIXED CONCRETE ASSOCIATION **RMC issues reports**

The RMC Research Foundation today announced the release of two

important Prescriptive-to-Performance (P2P) research projects.

"Preparation of a Performance-based Specification for Cast-in-Place Concrete" includes a comprehensive review of worldwide performance-based specifications and recommendations for transitioning the industry toward their use. "Experimental Case Study Demonstrating Advantages of Performance Specifications" includes technical data from a side-by-side comparison of prescriptive concrete mixtures and performance-based mixtures.

The P2P Steering Committee and the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association's (NRMCA) Research and Engineering Standards Committee, the group that has spearheaded the P2P movement, reviewed both projects.

Both reports are available at www.rmc-foundation.org.



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CIRCLE #05 ON READER SERVICE CARD

COUNTERTOP IMAGES PROVIDED BY PAINT MY WORLD OF JOHNSONBURG, PA

Everlast Concrete Steger, Illinois

by Stacey Enesey Klemenc



If there's one thing Vince Schrementi of Everlast Concrete has never been accused of, it's being normal.

So when it came time to build his dream house, the Bomanite licensee in the Chicago area didn't see any reason to change. It took him three years to build his concrete home, which his brother-in-law dubbed "The Flintstone House."

"It actually looks like the house where the Flintstones meet the Jetsons," Schrementi says. But at any rate, it got that nickname because there is a lot of concrete within those walls ... and on the floors ... and on the countertops ... and the fireplace ... and the stairs ... and just about everywhere you look. Why, there's even a concrete pond out back.

Of course, just like Schrementi, this isn't your ordinary concrete. It's safe to say it's a concrete living environment unlike any other.



Vince at the piano in the foyer of his home.

"I saw the house as an ongoing art project I could work on in my spare time, but my wife had other ideas," he says with a laugh. "She actually wanted to live there." So after three years of putting around trying to get everything just so, he had to give in to some of her demands. That would explain the more traditional drywall treatment in the bedrooms, which are painted and carpeted like most of the other houses in the small town of Crete, Ill., where Schrementi was born and reared. In time, he confides, after he finishes the living room he's been working on (and has been working on during the three years he, his wife and two young daughters have lived there), those will be his next canvas.

The years B.H. (before the house)

Like so many others now in the decorative concrete business, Schrementi first entered the trade (in 1979) as a concrete contractor, doing his fair share of foundation work. Somewhere along in the late '80s, Jim Flamini, a fellow at a supply house where he did business, said his neighbor was interested in this colored and stamped concrete he had read about in a magazine. He was looking for a contractor.

"So I contacted the owner and told him I had never done a stamp job but if he would take a chance with me, all he had to pay for was the materials and the wages of the finisher," he says. The owner took him up on the offer — "which was the deal of the century" — and Schrementi and his helper stamped a garage floor "that was every bit 400 to 500 square feet," he says.

"We poured, colored and stamped with just four stamps," he says. "That's all we could afford. It was an unbelievable experience and the floor came out good. But if you ask me if I would ever do it again, I'd have to say 'no way.' Now I just shake my head and laugh that I did something that crazy, but luck was with us and it worked out."

No one else in the area was doing that type of work, Schrementi says, and it looked like he had found his niche.



Chicago Bears' Team Store.

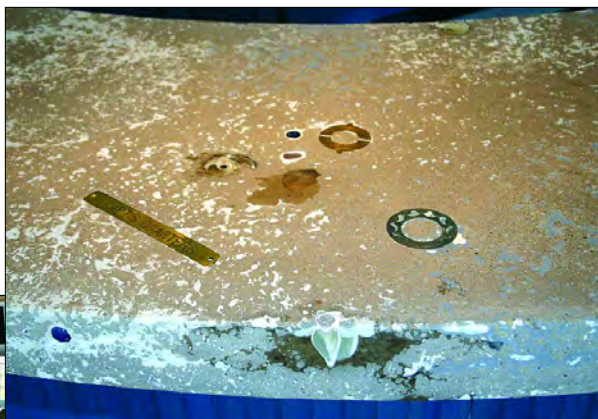


An award-winning stamped concrete floor in The Great Escape, a store in Joliet,



The Field Museum in Chicago.

This is a closeup of a nautically themed countertop found in Light Harbor, a condominium community on Lake Michigan.



The same countertop from a distance.



Soon after, he traveled to the World of Concrete in Atlanta, where he bought four sets of stamps so he could expand his repertoire. On the way home, his plane was delayed and, to make a long story short, he met a seasoned Florida-based contractor originally from Illinois who offered to show him the ropes in the stamping business.

Two months later, Schrementi flew to West Palm Beach to visit his newfound friend, Pat Smith of Custom Stamped Concrete. He ended up staying 10 days and learning enough to successfully launch his own decorative concrete business. "We're still great friends to this day," he says.

Expanding the business

In 1994, Schrementi signed on as a licensee with Bomanite. "At that time, I thought I knew quite a bit about coloring and stamping concrete. I hadn't gotten into doing stains yet," he adds. "At the first technical workshop I went to with the Bomanite folks, I met contractors who had been stamping for 30 years. It was a very humbling experience. They had been stamping almost as long as I had been alive." He soon realized he didn't know as much as he thought he did.

Schrementi says he saw the relationship with the California-based company not only as a way to learn more about the business but also as a good opportunity to break into more commercial work. And the association has paid off. His client roster includes such notables as Crate and Barrel, Starbucks, Eddie Bauer and Harley-Davidson. The small-town contractor has done work at the US Cellular Field, home of the White Sox. He's also done floors for the Chicago Bears' Team Store, the Field Museum in Chicago and the small mammal and reptile house at the Lincoln Park Zoo, to name but a few.

He says that 90 percent of his work is in the Chicago area, but consulting gigs have taken him to such places as New York City, Austin, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Kansas City and Indianapolis.



Vince Schrementi, seen here in his living room (under construction for the three years he and his family have lived in The Flintstone House) working on his mosaic, a wall of faces made out of bits of metal, glass and, of course, concrete.

Big city jobs aside, he says, when it comes down to his all-time favorite project, it's a little closer to home. In fact, it is home. And he's not alone with this partiality. The Flintstone House netted Everlast Concrete the 2003 Gold award for the Outstanding Bomanite Project Worldwide. And more recently, HGTV wants to feature the home on its new series, "Offbeat America." Basically the new "Extreme Homes," the show features atypical housing to awe the audience with the amazing architecture and creativity that abounds in this country.

Yabba dabba do

"When we broke ground on the house, I knew there were some different things I wanted to do with the finishes but I had no idea where I was going with them or where they would end up. It was kind of a 'design as you go' project," Schrementi explains about the 4,000-square-foot home.

A lot of the home's designs, he says, were inspired by pictures in National Geographic. One wall conjures up an aerial shot of rice paddies on a steep mountainside in Thailand. Another simulates a deep excavation where various layers of the Earth are exposed. Some images look like the desert; others like the moon or the landscapes of faraway planets. The fireplace looks like some out-of-this-world stone monolith.

And then there are the whimsical touches. The curved stairway, which Schrementi calls "his spaghetti stairs," have edges that look like twisted strands of linguini, thanks to the creative use of mop heads for texturing. A concrete handrail, being held in place by a group of stick people, is fashioned to resemble bone or ivory. Real leaves from a friend's flower shop were used to imprint a bathroom vanity and sink. The multi-colored concrete countertop in the kitchen features a random-cut pattern soldered together.

The ongoing project in the living room, which has required a scaffold for the past three years, involves scrap pieces of metal and glass fashioned

together to create a sea of faces in an offbeat metal and concrete mosaic.

"Sculpturing walls with different textures is my favorite technique," Schrementi says. "You can make them lumpy and bumpy," he adds, unlike a floor, where flat and smooth are much-desired qualities.

The Flintstone House project wasn't a walk in the park, Schrementi confides, and there were some times of high

tension between him and his wife, Sara. It was hard for him to convey what exactly he was doing when he was trying to turn his concepts into tangible art forms. "It wasn't like I could show her a picture," he explains. But as he completed one section after the other, she became more comfortable with the whole thing.

"She went from all these questions to a quiet acceptance," he says. "The woman is a saint."



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CIRCLE #53 ON READER SERVICE CARD

The Art of Applying Color Hardeners

by Amy Johnson



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One of the most important and overlooked aspects of a successful hardener application is proper strike off. It is important to have a uniform surface without low areas.

Photograph courtesy of Decorative Concrete Institute



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With dry shake color hardeners, beauty is more than skin deep. Not only do these powders offer a range of color options, including colors lighter than natural gray concrete, but they increase surface strength to as much as 8,000 psi or more. The vast majority of decorative concrete applications using color hardeners are imprinted, but the increased durability these materials impart also makes them attractive for large commercial and industrial projects such as warehouse or factory floors.

Concrete preparation

There is no extraordinary preparation required for concrete that will be colored with a color hardener, but as in all architectural applications, it is important to pay attention to details. Concrete for a successful color hardener job must strike a fine balance: There must be enough moisture at the surface to be absorbed by the hardener, but no standing bleed water. Too much air entrainment can prevent moisture from reaching the surface, but concrete with no air entrainment might have excessive bleed water. The color hardener must be applied during a

narrow window of time, after the bleed water evaporates but before the surface starts to crust and lose plasticity. So contractors need to pay attention when preparing concrete for color hardeners.

The first detail to balance is the mix. Experts recommend a slump between four and five to achieve workability without excess bleed water. Admixtures typically used for air entrainment or for accelerating or retarding the set will not affect the performance of a color hardener. In areas of the country where air entrainment is necessary because the concrete will be subjected to freezing, Bob Harris of the Decorative Concrete Institute (DCI) in Douglasville, Ga., cautions that the entrained air should be reduced from 6 percent to 3.5-4 percent to allow moisture to reach the surface so it can react with the color hardener. He also suggests experimenting with the amount of sand in the mixture — reducing sand can allow the hardener to absorb more water.

“Working with your local ready mix producer is the best advice I can give,” says Scott Thome, director of product services for L.M. Scofield Company. “Performing test pours with different mix designs will cost some money up



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A boom lift works well for getting color on to large areas.



Technique is important. Try and throw the material from knee level or lower so the material does not segregate.

front but will save money and time in the future.”

Once the mix has been established, the second detail is placement. Concrete should be placed with the same form work and subgrade preparation as conventional concrete, following American Concrete Institute (ACI) guidelines. If the colored concrete will be imprinted, Thome recommends driving the form stakes flush with the top of the forms so they won't interfere with stamp placement.

Bart Sacco of Concrete Texturing Tool & Supply, Throop, Pa., offers these directions: Place the concrete, strike it off to the proper height with a screed, bull float the surface, then edge the slab and remove the edger marks with a hand float so they won't telegraph through the hardener. The flatter you screed the surface, the easier it is to work the color

in. Then, just before broadcasting the color hardener, send the bull float over the slab and “wake the concrete up” or break the skin forming on the surface so the moisture in the slab can activate the color hardener.

The bull float itself is another detail requiring attention. Both wooden and magnesium floats are used with color hardeners, but it is important to understand the differences. Howard Jancy, business development manager at Butterfield Color, Aurora, Ill., says that while most contractors use magnesium floats, wood has many advantages. “If you want to bring moisture to the surface, a wood float works best,” he says. “Wood tends to drag because it is opening up the surface, so it can feel like more work, but it is more conducive to wetting out the hardener and getting the chemistry going.”

Thome explains, “Wood floats keep the surface open and allow the excess water in the concrete to leave at a more uniform rate than magnesium or steel. The wood float is also very abrasive to the surface of the concrete. When working a color hardener in with wood, the surface is being agitated and the color hardener becomes one with the concrete.”

DCI's Bob Harris believes a wooden float works the hardener into the surface better, but says a mag float is less likely to skip. However, he warns against trapping bleed water, which ultimately leads to weaker concrete. Bart Sacco says, “We've used magnesium floats with success, but areas without air entrainment in the mix do better with wood. Whichever type of float you use, pull across the surface nice, slow and easy, and if needed, put a temporary weight in the channels on the bullfloat. This will help work the hardener into the concrete surface.”

Applying the color hardener

Dry shake color hardeners are most commonly broadcast by hand. Sacco advises contractors to “pre-fluff” the powder to make sure there are no clumps. Then the recommended technique is to hold the hand low and fan the material out gently and evenly, moving the hand horizontally across the body. Throwing the material too far or too high can cause the sand, cement and coloring agents to separate, causing uneven color or, in the worst case, weak spots in the concrete. “To minimize this issue, there are manufacturers that grind their ingredients together instead of blending them,” Thome notes. “This process is more expensive but the chance for these ground materials separating is very minimal.”

Harris reports seeing people on a scissor lift hand broadcasting over a larger area. For most large pours, such as interior warehouse floors, a mechanical spreader fed by a hopper can be the fastest, most efficient method.

The general recommendation is to

apply dry shake hardeners at a rate of one pail (50-60 pounds) per 100-125 square feet to get adequate coverage. A higher coverage rate might be advised when the main purpose of the hardener is extra abrasion resistance. Thome recommends at least six-tenths of a pound per square foot in this case.

Manufacturers recommend the same coverage rate whether the colored concrete will be imprinted or not. "Anything less than the recommended application rate would be considered "flashing" and the durability would only be slightly higher than conventional concrete," says Thome.

Complete coverage is accomplished in two applications or "throws." Anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent of the powder is applied in the first broadcast. The next step is to watch the powder turn moist as it draws up the water. Then, Sacco says, run the float over it and let it become one with the top surface. Edge it, clean up the lap marks and then follow up with the remaining application of hardener

without delay. "Don't call home on the cell phone, it'll kill you! If the first application skins over, you won't get the moisture for the second layer."

Hot or windy conditions can cause the moisture in the concrete to evaporate too quickly. "A finishing aid mixed with water and pump-sprayed on the surface forms a chemical film that holds moisture in," Jancy says. "It doesn't retard the set, but it delays evaporation. It buys time. Then float in the finishing aid to open the surface again for the hardener." Bob Harris uses the same technique, or, alternatively, covers the surface with a 6 mil sheet of Visqueen after the first broadcast and leaves it on for about ten minutes before bull floating. This draws out the moisture and wets out the hardener.

While it is important to apply the color hardener before the concrete surface is too dry and crusted, it is also critical to wait until bleed water has evaporated. "If the concrete is too wet it's going to suck up hardener," Sacco explains. "You will have to use more

material and the concrete will fight you. It will go from liquid to solid too quickly and leave you with a relatively short window of time for stamping."

Jancy says excess water can lead to substantial problems. "Applying color hardeners when the surface is too wet sets up the concrete for deterioration down the road. Working water back into the surface alters the water/cement ratio. That weakens the surface, resulting in dusting and cracking. Don't think you can fix it by adding more color hardener. Make sure there is no standing bleed water before broadcasting the first layer of color hardener."

The second layer should be broadcast at a 90-degree angle from the first, if possible, to fill in any gaps in the coverage. If a light color hardener is being used, a third application may be required to prevent bleed-through of gray concrete, depending on the color of the original mix. In fact, Thome says sufficient coverage could require as much as 1.2 pounds of hardener per



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square foot.

The size of the area that can be effectively treated depends on a variety of factors. Crew size and experience, weather, project configuration and mix design all make a difference. Thome says he's seen some as large as 14,000 square feet. Sacco says projects typically range from 400 to 6,000 square feet. He says, "If the weather's right, go with it. If it's not, do a smaller section and you won't end up ripping it out."

Achieving natural looking color

Concrete imprinted in a tile or stone pattern can achieve a more natural look through the use of one or more

colors in addition to the base color. Natural looking color also depends on the imprinting pattern — slate tiles that are colored brick red will always look jarring. As with all decorative applications, mock-ups are recommended to be sure everyone involved understands and approves the final look.

Complementary colors can be applied by flashing a dry-shake hardener over integrally colored concrete, by using one hardener as a base and one or more different colors as accents, by broadcasting two colors at the same time or by using a colored stamping release agent over a dry shake hardener. Each gives a different effect. For example, Jancy points out that

color hardeners are permanent. "The advantage of color hardeners is the physical/chemical bond with the surface. An antiquing release agent could lose color over time, especially if the surface is poorly maintained." He does add, though, that imprinting always requires a release agent, whether colored or clear.

Thome warns against tossing color hardener in streaks. "Typically, streaks of colors take the shape of the tail of a shooting star and are not natural looking. I like applying a light broadcast over the entire surface and then blending the colors together in a random trowel motion. The ideal flashing project would have every stone a different color. No colors would run



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unnatural. Make the concrete complement the environment instead — give it its own identity. When in doubt, go with gray. Gray goes with everything. Cobblestones are gray.”

Bob Harris likes to work with a blend of dry shake colors — as many as five or six. He starts with an initial layer of 60 percent coverage in a base color and builds up from there. For example, the base may be beige, and then he’ll flash with terracotta and dark brown. “Some contractors claim color hardener is more difficult to use,” Harris says, “but it gives

from one stone to the next.”

Sacco has a similar style. “It takes skill to get the right amount of shading. You can use a base color or leave it gray,” he says. “Then apply one or two colors of hardener, with subtle transitions for one color to the next,

not big handfuls. I think selecting the right color depends on the environment. It should complement other features in the project, like the house. Don’t try to make an exact match, to brick for example, because it will look monochromatic and

you more colors and a more durable surface. It’s just lazy to use integral color for stamping. True pros use hardeners for imprinting projects. There are no rocks to fight — there is less aggregate at the surface so you get a cleaner,

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CIRCLE #50 ON READER SERVICE CARD

White



Photographs courtesy of River Alloy Designs



Concrete



A Brigh

t Idea?

by Loretta Hall

Ninety-nine percent of the cement used in the United States is gray. The other 1 percent is a startlingly bright white color. Because it represents such a small share of the market, many contractors know little about white cement concrete.

Portland cement's ordinary gray color comes from iron oxide and, to a much lesser degree, manganese oxide. These metals are usually present in the limestone, clays, and gypsum used to make the cement, and iron is typically added as a flux during the manufacturing process. To eliminate the gray color, manufacturers select raw materials that are naturally low in iron and manganese, and they process the materials without adding iron. These steps keep the iron content below ½ percent rather than the 3 percent to 6 percent typically found in gray cement.

Why use it?

White cement concrete has basically the same physical properties as gray concrete, so the color difference is the most obvious reason for using the white product. In its pure form, it provides a striking contrast with its surroundings. Coloring it can produce soft pastels or bright blue colors that cannot be achieved with gray concrete.

"I often use a white cement overlay because you can get really vibrant

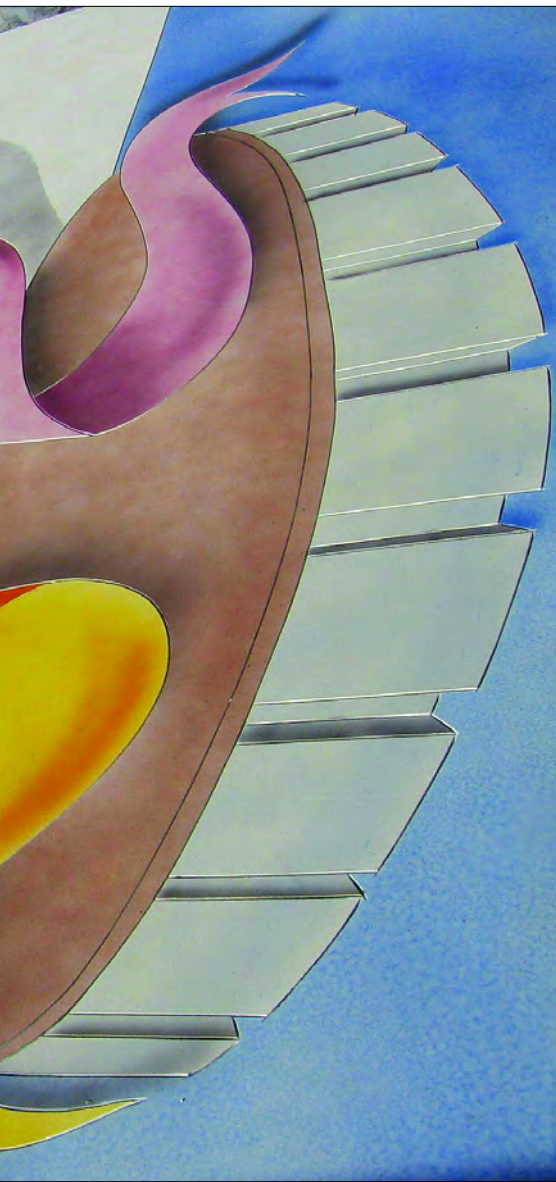
colors with it," says Levi Susoev, owner of River Alloy Designs in Kerman, Calif. Susoev showcased his techniques at the Artistry in Decorative Concrete demo at World of Concrete this January. He created a Mardi Gras mask design featuring iridescent blue, soft pinks and yellows, and transparent gray colors.

"Consistency is one of the biggest reasons that you would want to use it," says Larry Rowland, manager of marketing and technical services for Lehigh Cement Company in Allentown, Pa. The quality of gray cement is carefully controlled for performance characteristics, but not for color, which can vary significantly. When white cement is made, the color is also carefully monitored. "People will even utilize white cement to make a gray product," Rowland says. "They could make that gray product with gray cement, but when they have to go and match it six months from now or a year from now, it may not match."

Besides its visual appeal, white concrete reflects twice as much light as gray concrete. "We use a significant amount for full-thickness concrete floors we install for a large, regional supermarket chain," says Curt Meidling, operations manager for Meidling Concrete Inc. of Spokane, Wash. Along with the white floors, the stores have many skylights. The increased brightness allows the owners to cut their lighting costs significantly. "Those benefits are outweighing the added initial cost," Meidling says.

What are the drawbacks?

The main disadvantage is that white cement is more expensive than gray. Jamie Farny, program manager for





concrete. Finally, Farny says, "Because it is a premium product, manufacturers are asking for money because they have a certain expertise."

Just how much more expensive is it? Differences vary regionally because of local styles and availability of materials. However, Rowland offers some general

comparisons. "If you're just buying a bag off the shelf, it could cost two to three times as much as gray cement. But the labor's the same and the mixing's the same, so the in-place costs dilute that increase. In-place costs for white concrete ready-mix are probably 20-30 percent more."

Mike Cline, owner of Clinecrete, Inc., of Commerce, Ga., uses a couple of alternative techniques to control overall cost. On some projects, he applies a white cement overlay on a gray concrete base. On others, he pours a gray concrete base and then applies a

masonry and special products for the Portland Cement Association, offers several reasons. One is the scarcity of suitable raw materials. Another is increased manufacturing costs. Because of the very low iron content, the raw materials must be processed at a higher temperature and remain in the kiln longer, resulting in higher energy costs and longer production times. Another factor that can increase the in-place cost is the need to use very light-colored — or even white — fine and coarse aggregates to make white

Photographs courtesy of Meidling Concrete




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white color hardener made by L.M. Scofield Company. "You can get a good, clear white that way if you know how to do it," Cline says. "But it's not something you'd just tell Joe Finisher who's never done decorative concrete to do."

For integrally colored concrete, using white cement can reduce the amount of pigment needed by as much as a factor of ten. Furthermore, Rowland says, "It costs the contractor less in comebacks because the color's going to match each time. It takes less time to formulate, and they don't have to go back and fix it because it didn't match."

"The cost also depends on how willing the contractor is to work with that material and how prepared they are," Farny adds. "There's a lot of extra care that is required to make this, whether it's cleaning out trucks or preventing contamination or tying up a truck that's going to have to offload very slowly. If you're doing work where appearance is very important, people are often taking more care, so it might take a little longer."

The extra care that is required for white concrete can be viewed as a disadvantage. Contamination must be avoided, which may mean waiting to pour a floor until after the building's walls and roof are completed. Frequently, larger crews are needed because white concrete sets up somewhat faster than gray and must be hand-finished to get good results. And the finishers must be experienced with white concrete. Because the paste portion carries the color, bringing paste to the surface makes white concrete appear whiter and more reflective, and intensifies the color of pigmented concrete surfaces. "You have to take a lot more special care in finishing, so you don't overfinish it and basically burn it and darken the color," says Meidling. "That can be real tricky, especially during warmer weather conditions."

Curing can also be tricky. Since plastic sheeting tends to not lie flat on



Photography by Matthew Milman

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CIRCLE #31 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Troubleshooting Concrete Countertops:

“Darn those
bug holes!”

“What? Another
shrinkage crack?”

“How are we
going to get this
countertop up
those stairs and
through that
doorway?”

“Why can’t
I get my
seams to
match up?”



Tips from the Experts

by Susan Brimo-Cox

If you’re new to making concrete countertops, you may have encountered any of a number of pesky problems. Even experienced concrete countertop artisans encounter a problem now and then, but they will also tell you that practice makes perfect.

The countertop experts have worked for many years to hone their techniques, which are now so second nature that basic challenges of the medium are no longer much of an issue. Thankfully, for the most part, these experts are willing to share insights into



depending upon application and the number of pieces to be cast.”

In Burbank, Calif., David Cunningham, owner of David Jack Corp., advises thinking through the mold making. “If you’re doing a thick slab, more than 3 inches, use stronger materials or use external bracing. Most people use melamine — we do — but if there’s a chance of bowing I use a piece of angle iron.”

Michael Karmody, principal of Stone Soup Concrete in Florence, Mass., points out that the most dangerous time in the making of concrete countertops is when you de-mold. “The concrete is young and weak. It is not yet of this world.”

After de-molding, it is very important to keep the slab sealed on all sides to prevent curling, Karmody says. In his shop, they “get slabs up on bunks as soon as possible to equalize the amount of air and moisture around the entire countertop.” With curl, he says, 1/8-inch will settle, but 1/4-inch is too much. You need to “train your eye to see ‘level,’” he explains.

Shrinkage cracks

Fu-Tung Cheng, principal designer with Cheng Design in Berkeley, Calif., says, “If it ain’t cracked, it ain’t concrete.” Who hasn’t heard that old adage? But it’s true, and Cheng and others agree that cracks in concrete countertops occur for a variety of reasons.

Buddy Rhodes, of Buddy Rhodes

the process of creating concrete countertops.

Across the board, the experts point out that it is important to first look at the process as a whole, rather than individual steps, because all parts of the process are ultimately related. For example, the physical site of installation will dictate the size and shape of precast countertop sections if the sections need to be transported up several flights of narrow stairs and through narrow doorways; so, in essence, the end affects the beginning.

Here’s a look at some of the more common issues related to concrete countertops, and tips from the experts for avoiding problems.

Molds and mix design

The majority of concrete countertop artisans I talked to do not cast in place, primarily because they have greater

control in their own studios. Of course, by precasting the countertops, transportation and installation then become major parts of the equation. Nonetheless, whether you precast or cast in place, mold making and mix design are very important.

Many experienced concrete countertop makers use different mix designs for different projects. Steve Rosenblatt, marketing director at Sonoma Cast Stone Corp. in Petaluma, Calif., says, “We use one of our 23 batch mixes based upon the application of each project. This is far more scientific than the countertops we made four or five years ago, and vastly superior to the original tops we made 12 years ago.”

Rosenblatt reports that mold-making and reinforcement are also much more involved than in years past. “We use stainless steel, rubber, fiberglass, melamine and mild steel for molds,



Photograph courtesy of Concrete Countertop Institute

Hairline cracks do not pose structural problems.

Studio in San Francisco, says shrinkage cracks occur because there is too much water in the mix, the slabs are left in the molds too long, or when the top of the slab dries faster than the bottom (which also results in curling).

Thankfully, hairline cracks should not pose structural problems. Jeff Girard, founder of the Concrete Countertop Institute in Raleigh, N.C., reports, "Hairline cracks don't compromise the integrity of a properly reinforced countertop, and the only significant impact usually is a minor aesthetic change." Often, he says, hairline cracks are considered inherent characteristics of the material, and not a flaw.

If you wind up with hairline cracks, you can deal with them creatively.

"One of the tricks I have learned is to grind off a little powder from the bottom of the slab to get a very fine dust," Rhodes explains. "This dust should be the same color as the top of the slab. Mix this dust with a bonder and work it into the crack. Most times the color match is so good the crack blends in."

Cracks may also be caused by the reinforcement used in the slab, Cheng says. To avoid cracks, he makes mix design and reinforcement decisions based on each job. For example, in thin slabs, too-large rebar can cause cracks. In these applications, he suggests, you might want to investigate using thinner reinforcement or a mesh.

C-GRID, a carbon-fiber epoxy grid reinforcement, is strong, lightweight, non-corrosive, and provides exceptional crack control, according to John Carson, director of development for manufacturer TechFab LLC. Due to its high tensile strength, he adds, it can also assist with faster mold stripping and less cracking problems due to transportation and rough handling.

Pin holes

Let's face it, some people are just picky about holes in countertops. Well, your countertops don't have to have holes. Proper vibration and finishing tricks can eliminate them.

According to Cheng, the two most

obvious questions to ask if you're getting pinholes are: How dry is the mix? Does vibration work the air out? If your mix tends to be too dry, adding more water isn't the right fix, he says. "If pinholes are your problem, change your mix to use a little more plasticizer. It's okay to let the mix wet out to five or six slump. With plasticizers, you can even push the slump to seven or eight and still get a strong mix."

As for vibration, "Use a vibrating table instead of a manual vibrator. That way you're not relying on the influence of the thing you're dragging through the mud. You're shaking the whole world."

Rhodes says water reducers and super plasticizers can help by making a mix more pourable, and a vibrating casting table also helps, but he has found a way to use pin holes as part of the design. "To fix them we make up a colored concrete slurry/paste and back-fill the bug holes. I developed my 'pressed' look to be able to control those pesky little holes. We fill the veins with three or more colors and polish it smooth to put out a very clean product."

The grout used to fill pin holes can be as simple as a pigmented cement paste, but Girard reports more sophisticated grouts contain admixtures, polymer additives, metakaolin and very fine mineral fillers to minimize shrinkage and aid in working the paste into the small holes. With these products it is difficult but possible to fill even the smallest pinhole, he says. "Diligent efforts and effective grouting practices can virtually eliminate all surface pinholes."

Color

Many concrete countertop makers want consistent color throughout the countertop, so integral color is often chosen. But the degree of consistency is affected by what kind of integral color you use.

"Some people like liquid colors or colors in suspension because they make a very uniform, even product," Cheng observes. "Others like subtle variation that takes place with powdered forms

because it looks less like a machined product."

Maintaining consistent color from section to section and across pours is another matter. Cheng and others agree that you must be exacting to retain consistent color across pours. If your proportions are off by a shovelful, or if you use a little more water, or if you wait longer to pour — any and all of these things can affect the color.

Careful and accurate weighing and dosing of all ingredients, especially the mix water, is critical, Girard says. "Eyeballing" mix-water addition, especially without any way of knowing the exact amount of water added, is the No. 1 reason color inconsistency occurs," he points out.

Changes in ingredients from one batch to another, such as different cement brands, different colored aggregates or different pigment brands, also will ensure the final color of one batch doesn't match another, Girard says.

Using plastic sheeting during the curing process can result in uneven color if condensation accumulates and pools on the surface. There are alternative methods, including misting with spray bottles, using curing blankets or tenting the plastic so condensation drains away from the surface.

Depending on the color you want, integral color may not be sufficient. You may need to use topical staining, too, but remember it is not a replacement for integral color. And it may be difficult to apply if your countertop has elevations and intricate detailing.

"Expediency isn't the idea, craftsmanship is," Cheng cautions.

Transportation and installation

"It seems that every architect and designer would like you to make monolithic slabs. They would like you to cast it as big and long as possible and then put a large sink hole in there. That looks great on paper but you have to be able to transport them," says Rhodes.

Remember all the measuring and strategizing of the installation you did

weeks ago? This is when it all pays off. When you reconnoitered the site, did you think about how you would move around? How many people you would need? Did you double-check all the templates? "Every mistake is days and days of hassling and adjusting and maneuvering," Cheng says. "Take an extra day [up front] to get it right. Don't rush to save an hour and lose four days later."

One trick Rhodes uses is to make a template with $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch plywood and a glue gun on site. "That way we can figure in our seaming and access to the job site. If we can back up the truck and just roll it off onto the cabinet we will make the slabs larger than when we are walking it up a couple of flights of stairs."

Concrete slabs are strongest when they are oriented vertically. So, says Girard, concrete countertop slabs should be transported and handled vertically, exactly as plate glass is transported and handled. "Slabs should be packed on a strong, rigid frame (like an A-frame), leaning against the frame to prevent the slab from falling over on its own. The slabs should be set on padding and separated from each other by soft, non-abrasive padding such as moving blankets." And be sure to strap, clamp or tie the slabs securely for the ride.

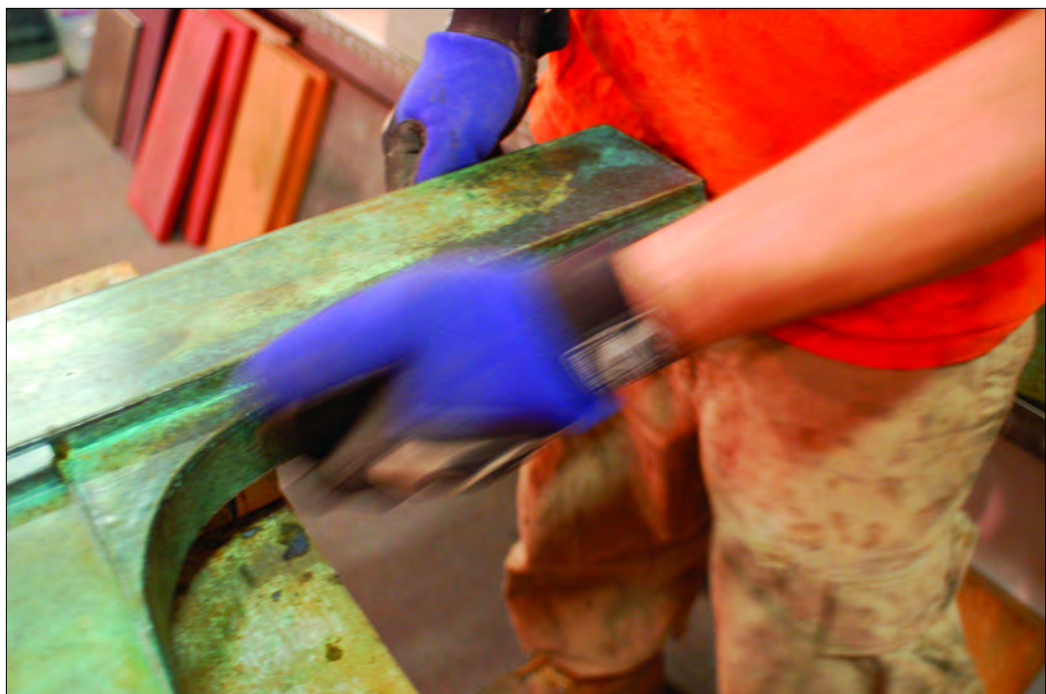
For short distances, blanket wraps often suffice. For long distance transportation, think crates. After all, you are handling fine artwork.

But transporting pre-cast concrete countertops is more than a packaging problem; it is heavy lifting. For some, it makes sense to hire movers for those big jobs.

Rhodes says his studio has learned to make countertops look thicker than they really are to cut down on the weight, by making slabs $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick with a return on the finished edge to look 3 inches thick.

Seams

"There is a feeling that seams are an ugly thing. We think they are an opportunity to make a transition," observes Karmody. Very often the choices are automatic, he



This seam is incorporated into the countertop design.

Photographs courtesy of Stone Soup

says, but each client can have a lot of control picking up architectural details, bias cut, back bevel, curves, and such. "There's always an opportunity to add a design element," he says.

Steve Eyler, owner/operator of Eycon in Myersville, Md., says it is impossible to make joints go away, but he avoids potential seam problems by making them as sharp and straight as possible. He also uses colored caulk that is designed for stone countertops and color-coded to match the top.

Girard recommends that seams be filled with a resilient material, not a hard epoxy, so that they act as control joints. He also suggests leaving a tube of caulk and instructions to reduce callbacks.

Problems with seams can stem from many different causes. "Seaming problems can be caused by uncorrected and improperly installed cabinets,

uneven slab thicknesses, poor or no slab shimming, and poor templating and slab-forming techniques," Girard explains. And don't forget the undersides of the slabs, he adds. "It is essential that the undersides of slabs be flat and fairly smooth so that the slabs sit flat on properly installed cabinetry."

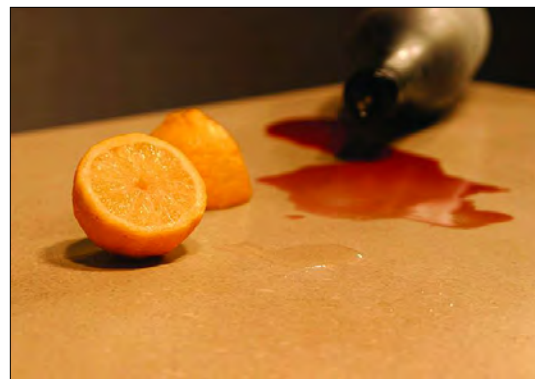
Sealing and waxing

"Sealers have always been the bane of this industry. For years we have been told that there is no perfect sealer and that all concrete will stain," Rosenblatt says. But, through trial and error, the experts have found their preferences. Rosenblatt and many other concrete countertop experts use penetrating sealers.

Nonetheless, Girard points out different sealers provide different performance characteristics, and problems arise when a sealer's



These joints are just not good enough for a countertop.



Countertops must be ready for abuse!

performance characteristics don't match up with a client's expectations. In addition, he says, sealer problems can arise from improper surface preparation, application or material selection. "Just as with concrete floors, proper surface preparation is essential."

Wax provides a sacrificial shield for concrete countertops, but it is not favored by all. Karmody reports that wax that is not buffed out can look uneven. And it offers only temporary protection. When his shop recommends a wax schedule for clients, he finds most of them don't follow it.

Eyler doesn't recommend the use of waxes precisely because it introduces a maintenance issue that may not be necessary. "If the sealer you seal your counter with can cut it on its own, don't use [wax]."

Often, problems with concrete countertops can be avoided long before the template measuring begins. As Rosenblatt explains, communication with the client — spending extra hours fully understanding the client's exact needs — pays off in many ways. "We pay special attention to consistent colors and to making sure that the client understands seams, faucet preparations, supporting structure, delivery and installation problems long before they become a problem," he says.

With concrete countertops, practice makes perfect. Make enough of them and you'll find the little problems disappear, but you may find you encounter a whole different set of



Photograph courtesy of Sonoma Stone

Photographs courtesy of Concrete Countertop Institute

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Liquid or Powder?



Photographs courtesy of Brickform

When a contractor decides to apply a release agent to a wet concrete surface to keep it from sticking to a stamp, there are two ways to go: liquid or powder. Each has advantages, but each also causes problems.

Contractors who use powder release must wash it off afterward, while liquid evaporates on its own, an extremely handy feature to consider when stamping indoors or near a pool. But powder release agents are the only ones that come with color. Liquid release agents are colorless.

So, for a decorative concrete contractor, the choice can be a tough one.

Powder puff

Powder or “cast-on” release agents have the consistency of baby powder, which allows them to resist both wet concrete and rubber stamp but gives them the tendency to get all over everything else.

They’re typically made with paraffin, which resists adhesion to many surfaces. The fine grit of the powder repels water, as well as damp concrete. Powders are typically colored, but can also be white, which leaves no tint behind after the release is washed away.

When a stamp presses into a layer of powder release, the powder will be pressed most heavily into the edges of joints, cracks and pattern lines, thereby creating shading. The paraffin-based particles carry particles of dye, which are absorbed by the moisture in the concrete, explains George Lacker, owner of GLC3 Concrete, a contracting firm based in Plantation, Fla. After the paraffin material is hosed off, the dye remains. “It’s pretty much like staining it,” Lacker says.

Applying two or three levels of powder release on top of each other before stamping creates all sorts of possibilities for natural-looking effects, such as the multicolored look of natural stone. “It leaves a lot of colors and mottling that looks fairly natural,” says Clark Branum, technical director at Brickform Products. “When washing off powder, contractors can control how much of each color to take and leave.”

According to Steve Johnson, marketing and product development,

ready-mix division, for Solomon Colors, powder has no equal in the multicolor effects department. “Powder release is the fastest method to get multiple colors,” he says.

But powder releases are also messy. Hanging clouds of the fine dust will settle in nostrils and on clothes, walls and furniture. And washing it off a stamping project that is indoors, abutting a pool or near an environmentally sensitive area is pretty close to impossible.

If using a liquid release agent, a contractor can see a newly stamped texture right away, fixing it if necessary. Powder must be cleaned off before the contractor knows anything, says decorative concrete contractor Richard Smith of West Hills, Calif. “With a liquid release, you spray it down and see what you get. With powder, it’s hard to tell until you wash the release agent off.”

That can pose particular problems on a big project, Smith says, in which a harried laborer may inadequately pepper a 4-square-foot section and not realize it until too late. “There’s no way of seeing it.”

Powder can also give a false impression of dryness because it floats on top of the slab, Smith says.





moisture, says Lacker of GLC3. On the other hand, liquid release creates a membrane that helps concrete hold its set a little by slowing the evaporation of water.

Lacker adds that these days, great-looking two-color jobs can be completed without the mess of any powders. "I would just stamp with liquid, then tape the slab off and spray it afterward," he says. "I would use acid stain, tints and dyes. It all depends on what I was trying to achieve. We've come a long way."

Liquid assets

Liquid release was initially designed for stamping overlays indoors, where rinsing the surface clean is impractical, says Branum. "I think this is probably one of the biggest applications of it."

Some are called "bubblegum releases," because chemicals have been added to give the liquid releases a bubblegum smell, masking the smell of solvent in malls and casinos. In general, liquid releases cost more than powders.

Liquids present some unique factors to consider during the application process. For one thing, a contractor may want to wait for a moment between applying the release agent and placing the stamp, Johnson says. "Spray it on and let it sit for a minute or two. Let the carrier evaporate a little bit."

After a short time, the initial fumes dissipate, while an oily residue stays to



The decision to go with liquid or powder will also be affected by location and climate, Smith notes. Different parts of the country have access to different base elements — fly ash in California, for example — that will affect both the makeup of the concrete

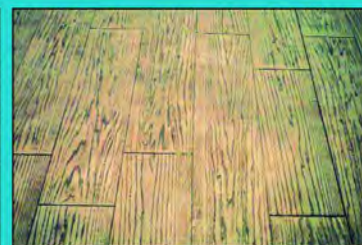
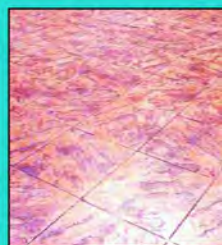
and the availability of powders to pitch onto it. If the weather calls for wind, a powder stamp project will get even dustier.

Powder release does allow a contractor to get onto a slab to stamp a little sooner because it dries out

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aid the stamping process.

However, wet is still wet. When texture tools are pulled away from a surface coated with an oily release, suction could pull on the wet concrete, leaving spotting and blotches, Branum says.

Liquid agents can also become troublesome on driveways or other sloped surfaces, Branum says. Liquid release is slippery by nature, and it will streak and stream off a slanted surface.

Mixing it up

When an indoor job calls for a liquid and a color, one popular move is to simply mix powder release into liquid release and spray the mixture. "Spray a little more over the top after you pull the stamp up," Smith adds.

Mixing the two is pretty common, Branum says. "Adding powder to liquid is one way to speed up the highlighting process. But it's an advanced process. It requires a lot of practice and touch."

Infused liquid distributes less colored powder than a hand or brush will. The color will also flow into cracks differently. Powder release on its own is pressure-sensitive material, Johnson explains. "The stamp is going to force that release agent into the surface of the concrete. If you put even more pressure on the concrete, more sticks to it."

Liquid releases, in contrast, don't rely on pressure to place and distribute infused color. The mixed-in powder seeps into the cracks and crannies of the freshly stamped texture instead of dusting the top, and the deeper, the darker. If more color is needed, more infused liquid can be spritzed on afterward. "They are relying on gravity and evaporation," Johnson says.

He agrees that it's not easy to get it right. Inexperienced contractors might overlap dark areas, or spray too heavily, or simply botch the mixing process. "That's the garage chemistry that's coming in," he says. "There's a lot of practice that needs to be done to get that to look right."

The busy contractor might not have

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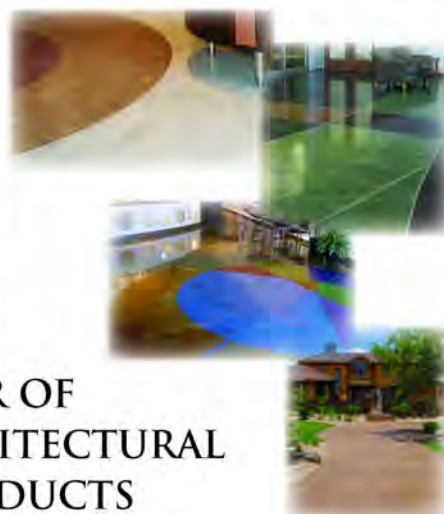
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the time, labor, know-how or patience to pull this off quickly, Johnson says. "Artists eat this stuff up. But guys on the fast track, who pour three or four times a day to keep up with business, they don't want to experiment."

Getting the job done

While throwing powdered release is the most obvious way to get it out over a slab, that method can leave streak marks, according to contractor Richard Smith. One old-school way is to roll the

powder over concrete with large paint rollers, he says.

Johnson of Solomon Colors recommends using a whip brush or thick paintbrush to throw powder release on a vertical surface. "You can control how much you put on with that kind of brush," he says. "You just need a dusting on there."

Then there's the bigger problem with powder: How to get it off?

"Most guys for years have used a pressure washer," says Branum of

Brickform. "I don't recommend this method. You run the risk of delaminating color hardener if you get too aggressive with pressure washers too early, especially in cold climates."

Instead, Branum suggests using a low-pressure hose with a nozzle to make a sweep over the surface. Release can also be removed by dispersing a solution with some kind of cleaning agent: a light muriatic solution, an efflorescence remover, or even dish soap. A cleaning agent and brush will cut release agent right off the surface, Branum says.

Brickform recommends gloves and respirators when applying its powder release agents. "With any stamping with colored release agents, you should mask all adjacent areas," Branum says. "It's like talcum powder. It's that light. When you fling it with a brush, it's going to linger, going to 'poof.'"

Lacker of GLC3 Concrete says he removes powder with a pressure washer or a light acid wash. Sometimes contractors, prodded by customers who

"when results matter, start with Proline"



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like the tint of a coat of powder sitting on their slab, will simply try to lay sealer over the powder release agent without washing it off, he says. Inevitably, the layer of sealer delaminates. "People only try that one time."

But Lacker also cleans up after a liquid release, using a degreaser to counteract the oily liquid, and for the same reason. "You can have the same problem with a sealer sticking," he says. "If you're going to put a water-based sealer on top of a liquid release, it's a good idea to get it really clean."

There are all kinds of things that contractors come up with to disperse powder, Lacker says, from brooms to dust bags. He likes to use "throw brushes," old whitewash brushes with 4-inch hairs that are half the length of the tool. He's done it by hand, but hands require gloves, and the finished result is more uneven. "It was so much better with the brush," he says.

In terms of protection, Lacker says the most essential piece of gear is a respirator. "You've got to wear a

Liquid and powder aren't a contractor's only choices when considering release agents, and Richard Smith's contracting company seems to have explored many of the alternatives.

They've used ground seashells, 120-grit silica sand, and all kinds of aggregates.

Decomposed granite residue is "just dirt, for the most part," Smith says, but as a release agent it gives a slab the varied hues of real stone. Shells, when used with a rough stamp and a limestone color, leave behind concrete that looks like an exposed fossil bed. Making one thing look like another is what decorative concrete is all about, Smith says. "We're trying to simulate and emulate the real thing."

On one job at the home of a famous Hollywood couple, Smith's firm put down thousands of dollars worth of $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch and $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice as a release agent. At one point, the couple asked if every little die could have the same number showing. "We get a lot of weird, weird, weird requests," Smith says.

respirator. You can't breathe that stuff. It's terrible."

Liquid and powder release agents can be stored for a long time as long as they're sealed tight in cool, dry space. But Smith doesn't keep much. "Liquid release, we use it so much, there's no storing. It does have a long shelf life but we typically don't keep it. We blow through it so fast."

His workers usually mix leftover

powder into liquids, particularly powders that are blacks, browns and other earth tones. A release with an eccentric color such as "Venetian pink" will linger around the warehouse for one or two years, then get taken to the dump, he says.

Lacker says well-sealed materials will last as long as the shelf life on the packages. But ultimately, storage is a frustrating topic, he says. "The rule of

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Cheng Design Exchange Chooses



Best of Show:
Mack Perry,
PerryWorks, Chicago,



**Best 3-
Dimensional
Application:**
Betsy Vork-
Howell, Wabi
Sabi
Concrete,



2006 Winners

Cheng Design Exchange announced the winners of its second annual Members Circle of Distinction Design Challenge at the World of Concrete 2006 in Las Vegas. The concrete countertop design competition received 93 submissions, resulting in a total of seven “Best” category winners, two Merit Awards, and 11 Honorable Mentions.

The contest was open exclusively to members of Cheng Concrete Exchange, an online resource and directory providing business professionals, designers, homeowners and do-it-yourselfers with training, design ideas, business opportunities, and a full line of concrete countertop products.

Currently, Cheng Concrete Exchange includes about 250 concrete professionals. Most have taken at least the Concrete Countertop Essentials workshop or Advanced Countertop Design Training from industry expert Fu-Tung Cheng, founder of Cheng Concrete Exchange and author of *Concrete Countertops* and *Concrete at Home*.

“I am so proud of the Concrete Exchange members who submitted their entries in the competition,” said Cheng. “They collectively raised the standard of sophistication and craftsmanship on what is being produced in this growing industry. Our members’ innovations will create a movement — not a trend — toward increasing the appreciation of good design and craftsmanship. Kudos to the winners and all those who entered. The decisions were especially difficult to make this year!”

Members from all over North America attended the Design Awards reception, and many Circle of Distinction award winners were on hand to personally receive their award from Cheng. The announcement also drew a large, curious crowd of WOC attendees interested in observing the presentation of the award-winning concrete countertop projects, more evidence of the growing interest in the craft of countertops and



Best Kitchen Countertop:
Christian Lincoln,
Counter Culture
Concrete, Willow,



Best Bathroom Countertop:
Chris Becker, South St. Paul, Minn.





Best Integral Sink:
 Andrew Simon and
 James McGuire,
 Lokahi Stone,



**Best Functional
 Feature:**
 Carol Miller, Sonoita
 Concrete Design,
 Sonoita, Ariz.

Best Decorative Finish:
Ian Wyndlow, Liquid Stone
Studios, Ladysmith British
Columbia, Canada



the decorative concrete industry as a whole.

Entries are valued on exceptional design, technical skill, and overall aesthetic appeal. The design challenge did not require a fee, but did require membership in Cheng Concrete Exchange.

Award winners are as follows:

Best of Show:

Mack Perry, PerryWorks, Chicago, Ill.

Best Kitchen Countertop:

Christian Lincoln, Counter Culture Concrete, Willow, N.Y.

Best Bathroom Countertop:

Chris Becker, South St. Paul, Minn.

Best Integral Sink:

Andrew Simon and James McGuire, Lokahi Stone, Honolulu, Hawaii

Best Decorative Finish:

Ian Wyndlow, Liquid Stone Studios, Ladysmith British Columbia, Canada

Best Functional Feature:

Carol Miller, Sonoita Concrete Design, Sonoita, Ariz.

Best 3-Dimensional Application:

Betsy Vork-Howell, Wabi Sabi Concrete, Excelsior, Minn.

Merit Award:

Gregg McCallum, Impressive Concrete Surfaces, Charlevoix, Minn.

Guy Chomistek, Rafter C Precast Concrete, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

Honorable Mention:

Mike Moncrieff, New Edge Design, Lynden, Wash, (3)

Jeff Grzywinski, Form Concrete Design, Vail Colo. (2)

Jack Cooper, Cooper's Custom Surfaces, Cardiff by the Sea, Calif.

Preston Addison, Karma Dog Construction, Cloverdale, Calif.

Tyler Oosterhouse, Bay House Design, Traverse City, Mich.

Karen Smith, Countercast Designs, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

Dale Blayone, Concrete Cuisine, Hamilton,

Just Trying to Keep the Customer Satisfied

by Peter Wagner

Hopefully, you are like me, in that I receive great enjoyment out of what I do for a living. My job is to help business owners be successful, and I especially brighten up when I have the opportunity to incorporate color into the equation. In 1996, when RetroPlate first combined the process of densifying with the process of diamond grinding and polishing, the sole purpose was to eliminate dusting and spalling in industrial settings. Today, with the advent of colors, polished concrete is as much a design element as a functional one.

Color and concrete have evolved during the past decade, but especially within the past year. In the early years, when one talked about adding color in conjunction with polishing, first it was integral colors or dry shake hardeners, then acid stains crept to the forefront as it became viable to combine densifying and acid stains. What a relief, acid stain without a topical sealer to apply ... and re-apply. It's true that acid stains brought their own perceived limitations: Either you liked mottling or didn't, and you had to be a fan of earthen colors. How many times has a customer asked why the whole 10,000-square-foot floor doesn't match the 1-square-foot sample? And customers would see a brightly dyed floor of primary colors and couldn't understand why you couldn't provide those colors in conjunction with polishing. It didn't matter how many times you explained the difference between an acid stain that both penetrated and chemically reacted with the slab, and a topical dye that "sat up on the surface." It was frustrating. Now for the past year, with the advent of solvent-based dyes, we too can produce primary colors with polishing — and without topical sealers.

Acid stains and solvent-based dyes each have their own distinct personalities. The final appearance can be similar, but you have to travel different paths to get there. Not only do they succeed for different reasons, but they also have to be treated differently with a polished floor than with a floor that will only be cleaned and topically sealed. Let's evaluate the differences, the similarities and the safety requirements for both processes:



Photograph courtesy of American Decorative Concrete Supply Company

Dye and polish.

Appearance

Acid stains generally deliver a mottled, variegated appearance similar to marble. This effect is created when the metallic salts within an acid stain react with the calcium hydroxide created within the slab.

In polished concrete, the richness of the stain is somewhat muted when compared to a "classic" application that is directly on the cement-rich cream and covered with a topical sealer. In addition, anytime that you dilute an acid stain with water, you will not only lighten the color, but you will also increase the variegation. This occurs because you have altered the percentage of acid to liquid, and with the acid being responsible for opening up the surface to allow penetration of the metallic salts, you have decreased the opportunity for this reaction to occur.

To lighten an acid stain, first make a "dilution solution" of approximately nine parts water to one part muriatic acid, and then dilute the acid stain with that mixture. By doing this you maintain the level of acid in your mixture. Should you end up with lighter, bare areas use the stain has not taken, you can generally utilize the

solvent-based dyes to fix and blend these areas. In addition, the more you grind a floor, exposing more aggregate and decreasing the cream, your final appearance will be lighter and more monolithic.

Solvent-based dyes have brought a whole new richness to the concrete polisher's palette. In the past, the earth-tone colors of acid stains were the only means by which you could add color following the pour, and if done properly, not worry about color walk-off or deterioration. But now the rainbow is an option. Solvent-based dyes, as opposed to acid stains, are formulated to carry the color into the slab through the use of acetone. The size and characteristics of the dye formulations' molecular structure is small enough to be driven below the surface as the acetone "flashes." By nature, the appearance of the dyes will be monolithic, but through practice, if you wish, you can learn how to mimic an acid stain's marbling. You can also plan ahead and use both dyes and acid stains on the same project to achieve different looks that one alone cannot do. Please note that while I have successfully applied dyes over acid stains, I have found that the reverse does not always work, as the dye components can act as a barrier to the acid stain.

Application/timing

Though acid stains and solvent-based dyes can be applied in similar fashion, there are important differences between them. As with any application, the most important rule to follow, regardless of which product you are using, is to be consistent. Whatever steps you take for the approved sample MUST be followed for the actual project application.

The method that you use will be influenced by both the size and type of project. In large, wide-open areas, acid stains will usually be applied with a pump sprayer. It is imperative that the parts are plastic, especially the tip. A brass tip will slowly be eaten by the acid, and without notice, will go from a fan pattern to a stream. In smaller areas, or for graphics, you may use brushes, rollers or sponges. Always test an area ahead of time to establish how the acid stain and floor react. Each color and manufacturer's product will differ, both in the chemical reactivity and in the final color achieved. Should the floor be highly reactive, you can dampen the floor with water first to help buffer and control the reaction. At all costs, you want



Photograph courtesy of Colormaker

to minimize any linear patterns caused by application or brush marks.

In addition, the timing of your application will alter the final appearance. I personally like to apply the acid stain after my 400 grind, and prior to the application of the RetroPlate. In this manner I believe that you achieve both good penetration and reactivity, along with having all of the grinding steps out of the way. Following the proper densification, you can then polish with higher grits while not compromising your colors. Should you choose to apply the acid stain following the densification, you will receive a lighter, more monolithic appearance.

Note: Manufacturer's recommendations for number of applications and "set-time" are based on topically protected applications that have been applied to a cement-rich surface. Introducing diamond grinding to the mix alters the

Dye and polish.

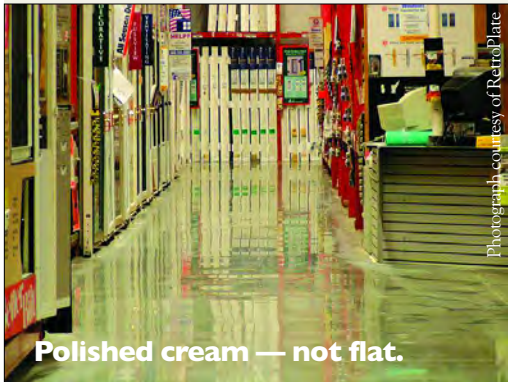
Acid stain and polish.



Photograph courtesy of RetroPlate

Polished Concrete: Hatfield and McCoy revisited, or why it isn't as simple as "you can have it in any color, as long as it's black."

I have been involved in the flooring industry for more than 20 years, and polished concrete going on eight years. My background was in the natural stone restoration and polishing industry. We first utilized floor machines known as "swing machines" or floor buffers in the States, and floor maintainers in Canada. During our first major project, which grew from a 15,000-square-foot "fix some



Polished cream — not flat.

problems project "to over 100,000 square feet of fully polished floor, we outgrew our equipment and had to move forward. Within the RetroPlate

family of Certified Applicators, as within other organizations, we have companies who figured out how to convert a 72 inch-wide American Lincoln floor machine into a concrete polisher for large retail boxes, and we have those companies who from day one have only utilized 30 plus-inch-wide machines with rigid planetary heads. To add fuel to the fire, some companies swear by wet grinding, some by dry, and some combine the two. Who's right? Who's wrong? Whose right is it to call one method right and the other wrong?

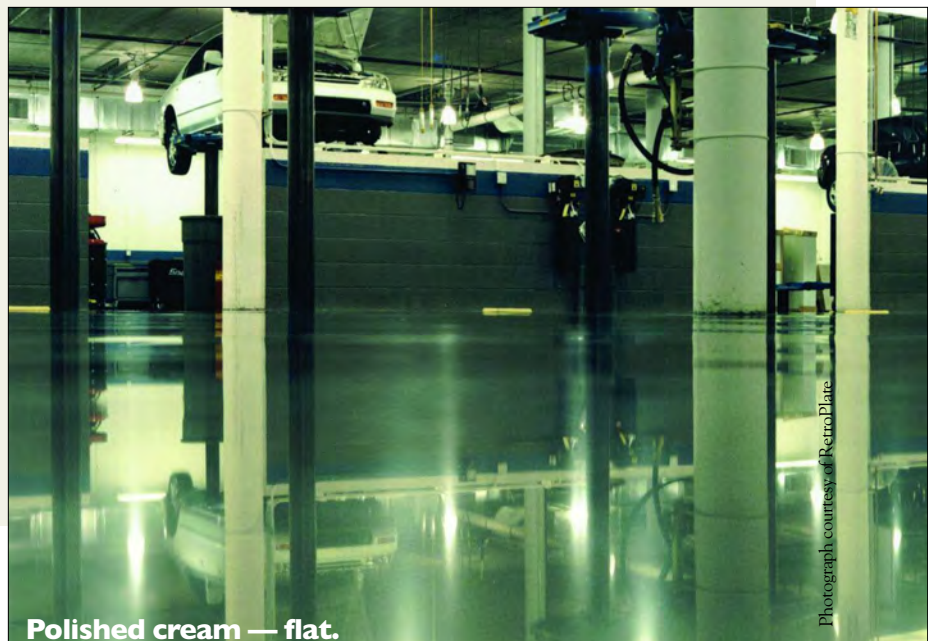
Your approach to polishing is going to generally be influenced by how you got your start, what knowledge you have, who provided your initial training, what equipment is available to you, and equally important, where you have to go for service. On the other hand, the final floor that you deliver to your customer should be based on their needs and abilities, not what you perceive their needs to be, or what you feel most comfortable providing.

If a customer has requirements for flatness five or six levels high, than yes, it warrants extreme grinding as preparation for the final floor. But if the floor is in a retail location or office where the customer neither wants nor can afford a "perfectly flat floor with exposed aggregate," then don't press your pre-conception on them. Another way to look at it is when a customer wants a more "natural, matte finish" and not a highly polished

one. I wish I could say otherwise, but I know that my employees lost my company at least several projects when their ego took over. The customer wanted a lower sheen, but the employee's ego won over and he took the tests to 1800 grit. In the customer's eyes, we didn't listen and we lost the sale — all due to ego.

Polished concrete is the marriage of diamond grinding, polishing and a densifier. There is no law that defines a floor to "be polished" only if you have run through the gamut of metals to resins, or if you perform your work wet or dry. There certainly are differing levels of "polished floors" ranging from flat to wavy, from exposed aggregate to exposed fines to polished cream. The most important step that we as an industry can take is to provide a properly ground floor that is densified and polished to the appearance the customer is expecting, done so with a proper scratch pattern and meeting the functional and design needs as perceived by the customer. Can one company perform these functions better than another? Is one company better at selling the sizzle than another? Absolutely, but that doesn't give one company the right to badmouth another's work as not being "polished concrete." If the company has educated the customer about all their options, and the customer chooses to purchase a Chevy instead of a Cadillac, whether based on price, design or functionality, it's still a car, regardless of how snobbish we wish to be. The equipment manufacturers, the ones who sold us on "flat," have acknowledged the need to accommodate change through belatedly introducing "floating heads" — now it is time for the applicators to embrace the concept of choice in polishing.

— Peter Wagner



Polished cream — flat.

requirements and timing of applications. Always do a test, but I recommend that two applications be applied, with the first being allowed to sit overnight, and the second for several hours. There is no need to remove the residue from the first application prior to making the second.

While I stated that it was imperative to use plastic tips with acid stains, it is generally recommended to use brass tips for solvent-based dyes. Depending on the plastic compound for some tips, the acetone does to plastic what the acid does to brass. Airless sprayers are also an option with dyes, while they are not with acid stains.

The solvent-based dyes open up a whole new world of graphic possibilities for applicators and their customers. In doing so, they also raise different questions as to application. I will address this further under safety, but please note that all open flame must be extinguished prior to application of the solvent-based dyes.

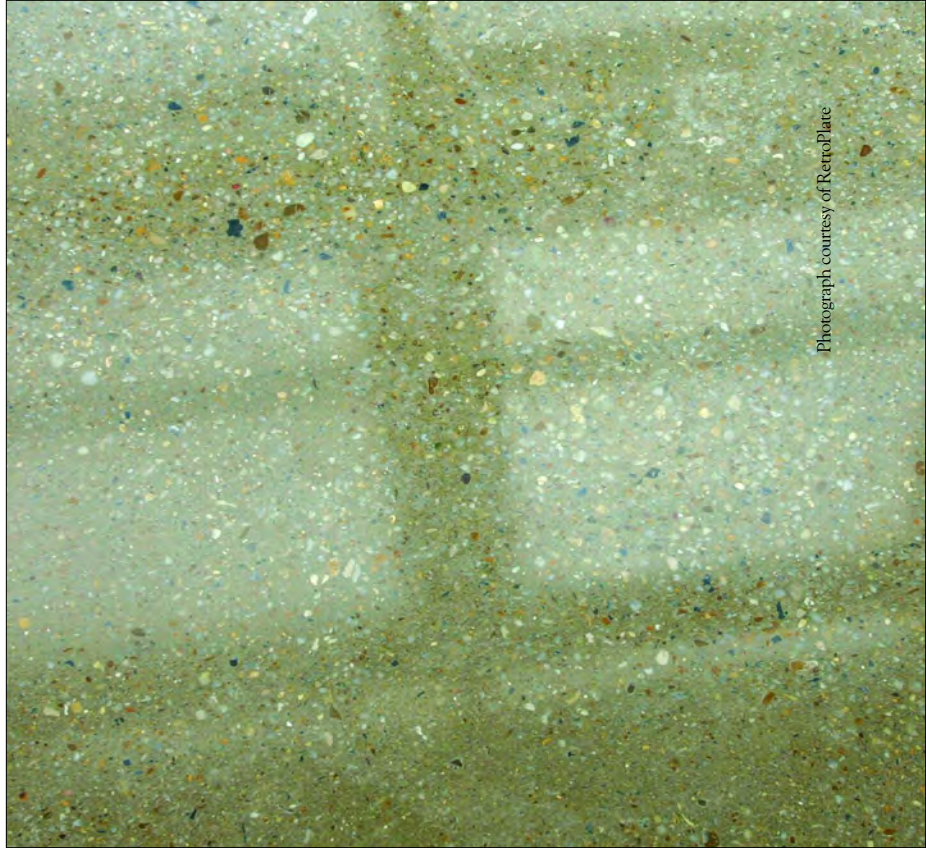
The most common carrier for solvent-based dyes is acetone. Due to the almost instantaneous flashing of the acetone, the dye is driven into the surface of the slab. It is this reaction that allows a solvent-based dye to work with polishing, but to date has not produced a water-based dye that works. You can alter the depth and degree of color through changing the ratio of acetone to dye mixture. A product such as Colormaker's Decographic (www.colormakerfloors.com) dyes is delivered in liquid form, and then further diluted with acetone on the project site. The AmeriPolish dyes from American Decorative Concrete Supply (www.adcsc.com) are shipped in dry, powdered form, then mixed with acetone on the project site three hours prior to being used.

In applying the dyes it is important to know 1) that several light applications will achieve deeper penetration than one heavy application, and 2) to wait at least 15 minutes between applications, otherwise the acetone in the second or third application will destabilize the dyes from the first application. The timing of the application and results are similar to that of the acid stain. Dyes can be applied following the densification, but the resulting color will be lighter.

One major advantage of dyes over acid stain is that you eliminate nearly one day of downtime.

Safety, shipping and handling

Always wear protective gloves, clothing and respirators for either product. Protect the adjacent finishes and floor area that is not supposed to



Photograph courtesy of RetroPlate

receive stain or dye. Maintain your equipment to help ensure proper application and minimize health hazards due to equipment failure.

Acid stains are not combustible, but can cause burn damage to your skin, lungs and eyes at the very least. The majority of the acid stain is shipped in liquid form and is classified under HAZMAT regulations. This is important to know, not just from the handling of the product, but also from the shipping restrictions. It is very expensive to pay for these products to be shipped by air, and quantities are very limited. Plan ahead and work with your distributors.

Solvent-based dyes bring their own cautionary tales. As the acetone flashes, the vapors disperse very quickly into the air, creating a potential fire hazard that can ignite instantaneously. **It is imperative that all open flames are extinguished, that all sub-contractors are aware, and that proper airflow is maintained.**

As with acid stains, the liquid dyes must meet the same HAZMAT standards, but dry powdered dyes can be shipped without these restrictions.



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

Polished aggregate

If you want to keep up with the crowd, you better...

Haul Ash!

by Mike Dawson

When you burn massive amounts of pulverized coal, one of the waste products is an ash that acts a lot like cement in the right recipe. That makes for a great relationship between coal-fired power plants and ready-mix concrete producers who use fly ash as an admixture.

This in turn works well for contractors and their customers, who can save a little on materials as well as take satisfaction in using a “green” building material that would otherwise go up the chimney or back in the ground. Fly ash scores well on the environmental scale not only because it is a recycled material, but also because it supplants the use of cement, which uses energy and raw materials to produce.

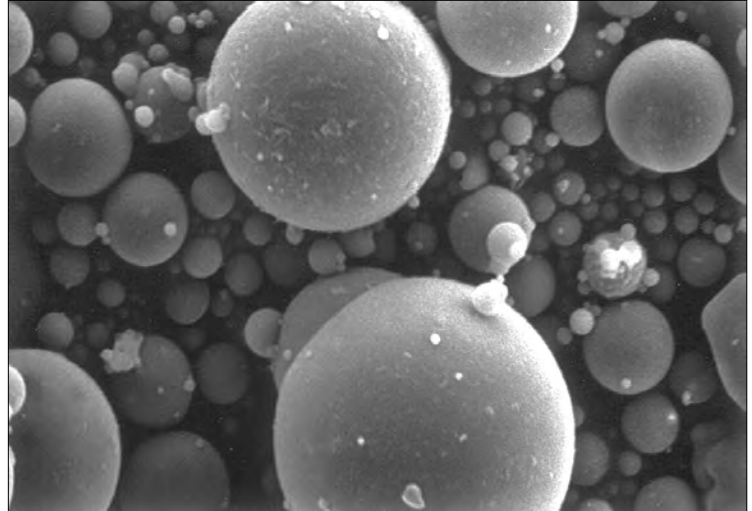
If ever there was a “win-win” relationship,” it’s the one between the industries of coal combustion and concrete.

A stronger, more workable mix

Fly ash is a fine, light, glassy substance, consisting mostly of silica, that floats into the incinerator’s exhaust system. Historically, coal-burning industries have cleaned residual amounts out of their equipment and buried it in landfills or returned it to strip mines. The growth in coal-fired power plants has created hundreds of millions of tons of ash every year.

However, in recent times more and more fly ash is going into concrete blocks, masonry products and ready-mix. Fly ash is a pozzolan — to make cement, just add water. Combined with lime and water, it forms a mixture that is similar to portland cement. But it is just an additive, rather than a replacement for portland cement. It is routinely used in 15 percent to 25 percent dosages in ready mix.

Like slag, fly ash is not a new development in the technology of concrete mixtures. Fly ash was mixed in the pours of Hoover Dam, and has held up just fine for more than seven decades. But it wasn’t until the 1980s that it became commonplace. At first, it was used as a cost-saving measure. But over the years, the concrete industry discovered that it has qualitative advantages.



The spherical shape of fly ash creates a “ball-bearing” effect that fills voids and increases the workability of the mix.

One hundred percent portland cement? “That’s old school,” says Ian Paine, marketing director of the Western Canada Ready Mix Concrete group of Lafarge North America. “It doesn’t perform the way our customers need it to.” Concrete mixes designed with fly ash are better-performing materials for decorative work, Paine says. Setting times are more controlled, they allow more time for finishes such as stamping or carving in summer conditions, and they have less water demand, reducing the propensity to crack and craze.

Consistency is key

Fly ash is a supplementary cementing material (SCM) that usually acts as a water reducer in concrete, according to Steven Kosmatka, staff vice president of research and technical services at the Portland Cement Association. Like chemical water reducers, fly ash can make concrete stronger and more workable. In addition, fly ash enables the mix to flow better in pump hoses and makes it more workable under hand finishing, he says.

According to Kosmatka, there are few disadvantages to using fly ash concrete — even in decorative applications — as long as you work

Building Blocks

FlexCrete aerated concrete used to create cool, stylish homes.

The Navajo Nation has an urgent need for housing and employment on its vast reservation in Northern Arizona. The nearby Navajo Generating Station, a coal-fired power plant, has millions of tons of low-cost fly ash for sale.

The Navajo Housing Authority saw in the mountains of fly ash an opportunity to attack the housing and employment problems at the same time, long-term: by creating a new manufacturing plant that produces FlexCrete aerated concrete construction blocks.

FlexCrete is a form of aerated concrete that contains as much as 60 percent fly ash. Unlike traditional aerated concretes, it is not cured under heat or pressure, so it uses much less energy to produce. The company says the tiny air pockets make it stronger and lighter than cinder block, with greater acoustical and thermal insulation properties than typical wood frame or masonry homes.

The owners, Mary and Kee Augustine, greet visitors.



The plant, which the Housing Authority owns and operates as Navajo FlexCrete, is essentially a franchise of FlexCrete Building Systems of Jordan, Utah, which is a subsidiary of Headwaters Resources, which also owns the power plant. Navajo FlexCrete celebrated its grand opening in April 2005 and is focusing on building homes for the Housing Authority, but leaders hope to branch out into Southwest construction markets in the future.

Architect Daniel Glenn says Navajo FlexCrete's system works well with the Southwest climate, where insulation from the desert heat is a top priority. Glenn is design director of Arizona State University's Stardust Center for

View from the east.



Affordable Homes and the Family, which is working with the Navajo Housing Authority on special projects on the reservation and in the Phoenix area.

Because of the high percentage of fly ash and the low amount of energy involved in production, FlexCrete makes a low-cost alternative for building materials, Glenn says. Furthermore, homes can be built without the added expense of furring and insulation between the exterior and interior wall. In fact, stucco can be applied directly to the interior as well as the exterior FlexCrete wall for a complete finish. The ASU program recently designed and built a FlexCrete home in this manner for a Navajo family. Glenn hopes to prove with monitoring this summer that even in the heat of the day, the inside temperature will remain below 80 degrees without air conditioning.

The product works well in decorative designs, Glenn says, particularly with Southwest home styles. "Because it cuts so easily, there are a lot of options for design," he says. The blocks come from the plant in lengths of up to 20 feet, and can be sawn like lumber. Glenn said that he even used a router and successfully molded edges without chipping.

—Mike Dawson



Courtyard.

within guidelines established by the ACI and your local ready-mix producers.

One issue to watch out for is color. For example, Kosmatka says that buff-colored ash can impart a tan color to the concrete. Although rare, some fly ash has a form of iron that can result in an orange or red color in the concrete. But as long as the ash or slag are uniformly distributed and all batches have equal amounts of the same ash or slag, there shouldn't be any problems with acid staining, Kosmatka says.

He advises contractors to follow the lead of their local ready-mix supplier, who knows the advantages and limitations of local materials. "Work with dosages and materials that the concrete producer is used to," he says. Typical fly ash dosages range from 15 to 25 percent of the cementing materials, and some communities use up to 40 percent (usually a Class C ash). Higher percentages of fly ash used for the purpose of saving money can affect workability, finishability, rate of

hardening, durability and strength. "Go with what the local industry has experience with," he says.

There are always exceptions, but he advises contractors to do their homework before trying to break any new ground with mixtures. One thing that is of utmost importance: Be sure that the mix is exactly the same throughout the duration of the job.

The "green" advantage

Fly ash usually provides a little cost break, depending on the geographic location. If the source of portland cement is significantly closer than the fly ash, the cost differential may be minimal. However, there is a distinct marketing advantage. Fly ash gets high marks from advocates within the green building movement. Contractors in various parts of the country are getting more requests for green building materials, and some are making a proactive effort to offer earth-friendly products to their customers.

The beneficial properties of fly ash and the need for consistency have put more demand on the product in recent years, says Paine of Lafarge. This has led coal plants to treat the ash less like a waste product and more as a profit center. They have invested more in recovery and distribution, leading to higher grades of ash and more even consistency.

At least one energy company has taken the additional step of investing in sizable concrete companies as a means of maximizing profits on its fly ash production. One of those is Headwaters Resources, which operates numerous coal combustion plants around the country. A major fly ash producer and distributor, this corporation has acquired concrete companies that use fly ash extensively, including FlexCrete Systems of Jordan, Utah; Eldorado Stone of Carnation, Wash.; and Southwest Concrete Products of Houston, Texas.





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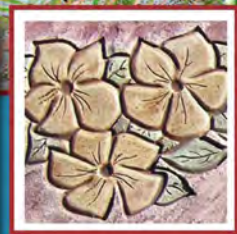
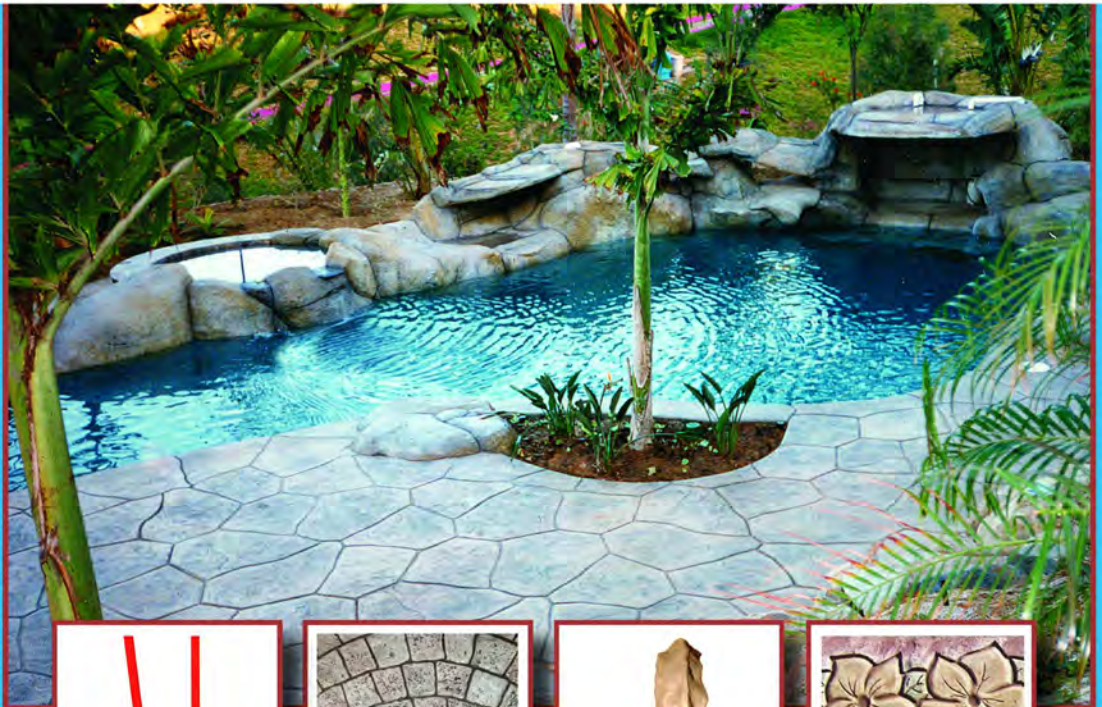
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Tooling Concrete Saws

Soff-Cut International Inc. has a number of products to serve decorative contractors. The **X-150 Prowler**, **X-150D Decorative Prowler**, **X50 Handheld saw** and the **ProEdge line of beveled blades** are all ideal for decorative applications.



The **X150 Prowler** gas saw, with its 4.5-horsepower engine, is the lightest push saw in the Soff-Cut lineup. The unit's patented low-noise and low-dust blade block system allows workers to use it in residential areas with minimal disruption to homeowners. Unlike any other finish-cut saw, the **X-50** works in conjunction with Soff-Cut blades and skid plates to facilitate very early-entry cutting. It can take a finish cut up to less than 1 inch away from a wall and perform a 2-foot radius cut on freshly cured concrete.

The **X150D** is designed especially for the contractor who wants a no-hassle way to make decorative cuts.

It has a 4.5-horsepower Robin engine and weighs less than 100 pounds. This saw is set up to handle the full line of **ProEdge** beveled blades, which create beautiful decorative looks on control joints.

The little **X50** handheld saw can be used for scoring and finish cuts. It also works nicely with the full line of **ProEdge** beveled blades.

Finally, there are the **ProEdge** blades themselves. The V-line and radius beveled blades are designed for making decorative and sealed saw joints and deliver a hand-tooled joint look without the labor. A variety of sizes of both types can be used with the **X150**, **X150D** and **X50**. Using **ProEdge** blades allows for more versatility in the saw joint contour than does hand tooling.

For more about Soff-Cut's offerings, visit www.soffcut.com or call (909) 272-2330.

For decorative concrete jobs in enclosed spaces, **MK Diamond Products Inc.** has introduced the **MK-110** and **MK-150 air-powered concrete saws**. They are safe indoors because they give off no gas or engine fumes.

Designed for production flat sawing, these saws can be used for joint widening, floor sawing, trenching, concrete repair, decorative concrete scoring, patch jobs and other applications. Features include a quick-change locking blade guard, direct-drive motor, easy-to-use depth control, 20-inch blade capacity and a wide wheelbase. The 107-pound saws cut wet or dry, and the low-maintenance air motor and gearbox eliminate the need to service belts and carburetors.

For more information, visit www.mkdiamond.com or call (800) 845-3729.

The **Stihl TS 400** is a popular cutter from one of the world's leading names in cut-off saws.

The **TS 400** promises extremely long running times using either a 12-inch or 14-inch cutting wheel. It offers many features that are exclusive to Stihl, including a semi-automatic belt tensioner and the **ElastoStart** shock-absorbing starter handle and decompression valve.

The machine is powered by a 3.2 kW engine with a speed of 9,700 rpm. It also features a three-stage advanced air filtration system, an **IntelliCarb** compensating carburetor, reliable electronic ignition, a fully enclosed starter mechanism, a precision cylinder and two-ringed piston, a standard water attachment, a reversible cutting arm for inboard or outboard cutting, an antivibration system and balanced top handle design.

With the help of an adaptor kit, the saw can be mounted on the **Stihl Cutquik Cart**. The cart comes with handle-mounted throttle control, an optional water tank and an optional depth wheel that permits cut depth adjustments.

For more information, visit www.stihlusa.com or call (800) 467-8445.

The new **K 750 power cutter** from **Partner** has been developed from scratch inside and out.

The cutter's most innovative feature is **Dual Charge** engine technology that delivers a powerful engine with 5 horsepower, but 70 percent fewer emissions and excellent fuel economy. The secret behind the **Dual Charge** technology is the use of twin scavenging ducts, one for clean air and one for air mixed with fuel. This technology allows the motor to start more quickly, as





only the duct with concentrated fuel mixture is used at start-up. A newly developed vibration damping system and a larger muffler suppress vibration and noise levels.

Active Air

Filtration, with its centrifugal cleaning feature, adhesive filter and paper filter, increases the service life of the cutter. The first system uses centrifugal force to separate 80 percent to 90 percent of the dust particles from the intake air. The second stage is an oil-impregnated three-layer adhesive filter that catches any remaining dust particles. The third stage, a traditional paper filter, adds an extra level of security. As a whole, the system extends the cleaning interval for the fixed filters three to five times.

SmartCarb, a carburetor with automatic compensation for clogged filters, allows the engine to maintain the correct mixture of fuel and air, even when the filter is slightly clogged, so the engine retains full power for longer cutting periods.

The modular build of the K 750 includes anti-vibration springs and other features that allow the operator

to be closer to the machine, making it easier to control. An automatic decompression valve helps the saw start more smoothly. DuraStarter is a dust-sealed starter with a hard-wearing starter cord.


For more information, visit www.partnerusa.com or call (800) 323-3553.

The **Partner K3000 Electric** offers new possibilities for cutting, both outdoors and in. Based on the older K2300 EL, the new cutter adds electronic overload protection, new electronic SoftStart and a new ergonomic handle system.

One of the market's most powerful electric handheld cutters, the K3000 Electric has a strong 230-volt electric motor and a 14-inch blade capacity for a maximum cutting depth of 5 inches. Thanks to the electronic SoftStart system, the machine can utilize power from a normal wall outlet.




Partner is also launching the **K3000 Spray**, which can operate as a wet cutting saw either indoors or out. This model includes a backpack spray kit system that




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sprays the blade with an extremely small amount of water under high pressure, forming a mist underneath the blade guard. The water tank and pump are carried on the operator's back and hold enough water for 20 to 30 minutes of cutting.

The Partner K3000 Electric and K3000 Spray are both equipped with Elgard, an advanced electronic overload protection with a built-in warning function that uses rpm variation to indicate when the machine is approaching overload. A built-in quick-lock on the spindle makes it easier to change the blade.

For more information, visit www.partnerusa.com or call (800) 323-3553.



Multiquip has introduced the **PS Series pavement saw** for high-production cutting jobs.

The PS Series saw is the only one on the market with patented Stay Level Handles (SLH) that remain level no matter what angle the saw is positioned. The handles

minimize operator fatigue and significantly reduce the risk of back injury.

The low-maintenance saw is driven by a fuel-efficient 60-horsepower diesel engine and has a maximum blade capacity of 36 inches. It also features a patent-pending clutchless blade shaft disengaging system that allows the blade shaft rotation to be stopped or started with the flick of a switch while the engine continues to run. A vibration control mounting system reduces handlebar vibration, and automatic parking brakes and an electrical depth stop come standard.

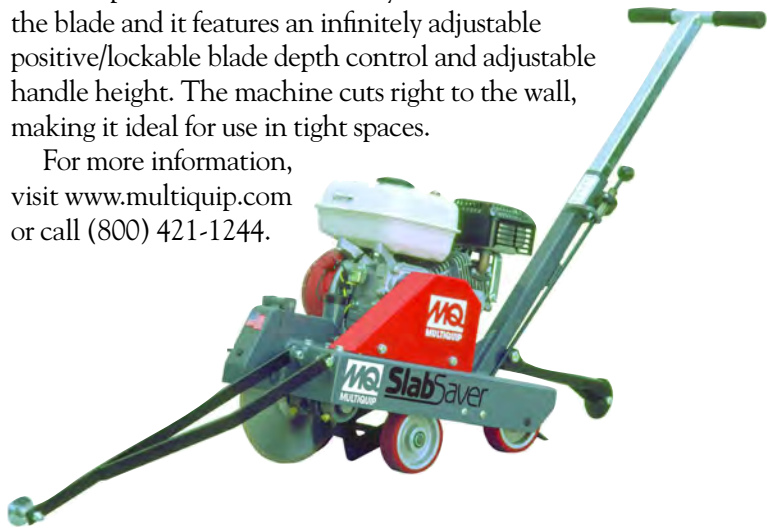
For more information, visit www.multiquip.com or call (800) 421-1244.

The **SlabSaver concrete saw** from **Multiquip** complements the company's larger SP Street Pro Series concrete saws. It's small enough to suit a job requiring pinpoint accuracy yet powerful enough to slice through any number of materials.

The 102-pound FCG-1 SlabSaver offers a front and rear pointer that drops into the cut to ensure a straight line, polyurethane wheels with permanently sealed ball bearings, a 3/4-inch blade shaft with greaseable bearings and a 1/8-inch steel plate frame that won't bend or warp. Powered by a 6.5-horsepower Honda GX200 engine, the saw cuts up to 3 1/4 inches deep with a 10-inch blade. It also accepts 5-inch, 7-inch, 8-inch and V-groove (crack chaser) blades.

A simple PosiLok control easily raises and lowers the blade and it features an infinitely adjustable positive/lockable blade depth control and adjustable handle height. The machine cuts right to the wall, making it ideal for use in tight spaces.

For more information, visit www.multiquip.com or call (800) 421-1244.



Two new handheld saws from **STOW Construction Equipment** are designed for extended use in the toughest conditions.

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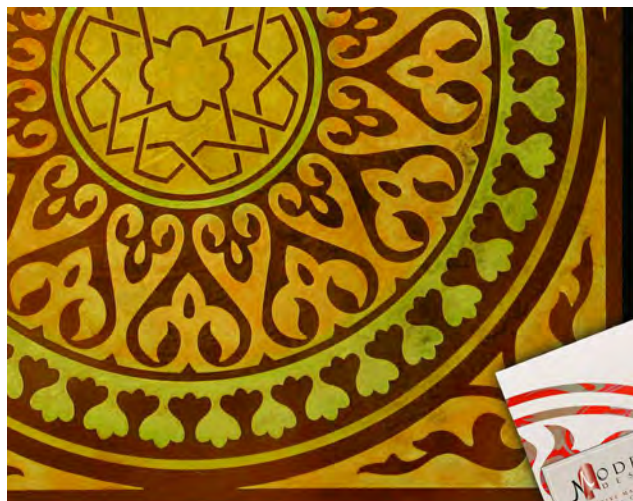
Shave Away, Europe, the manufacturer of The Saw Muzzle for circular saws, has introduced the **Saw Muzzle Type E**. The new heavy duty, fiberglass-filled ABS dust collector is



designed to remove silica dust and other pollutants created by Bosch, Hitachi, DeWalt, Milwaukee and other 14-inch electric cutoff saws. It adjusts to any depth of cut.

Type E complements the original Saw Muzzle, which is designed to fit the Skil, Milwaukee, Makita and Bosch industrial worm drive circular saws as well as some DeWalt models. Both are lightweight, easy to install, unobtrusive and will collect more than 95 percent of the dust created when used with a standard industrial shop vacuum.

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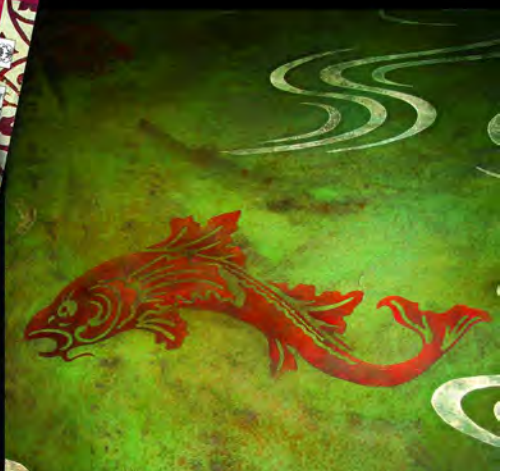
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Technique Applying Sealers

There are many different types of sealers out there, and choosing the right one is not always easy. But once you've made your choice, then it's crucial to pick the right applicator. Read on for some expert advice on this topic from Scott Wyatt, director of technical sales for Floric Polytech.

Polyester rollers: Use only with water-based products. If you use polyester with solvent base or oil base, the polyester will nap out or flatten.

Mohair or Delron rollers with a chemical-resistant or phenolic core: Use with solvent-based products of all different solids content. Mohair (which is actually goat's hair) will



flatten or nap out if used with water-based products.

Squeegee: A Floric-preferred method of applying coatings is to squeegee and backroll. However, there are many types of squeegees. The ultra-soft neoprene (like a wetsuit) is good for medium-low viscosity coatings at a rate of 400 square feet to 800 square feet per gallon; however, if the product doesn't have a low enough viscosity or has a matte agent in it, the surface may have a slight orange peel effect at higher spread rates. In some cases, this will aid in slip coefficient.

At Floric we prefer a long-blade, rounded-edge squeegee that pivots forward and back. Depending on viscosity and porosity, this will allow you to spread most products at a rate of 150 square feet to 350 square feet per gallon.

Conventional pump up sprayers: The typical uses for these are densifiers and penetrating, low-evaporation solvent acrylics (Oxal-100, xylene-based).

Chemical-resistant pump-up sprayers: Used for low- and high-evaporation parameter solvents (xylene, Oxal-100, PTCBF, acetone, Aromatic 100, etc.). Will typically yield 150 square feet to 350 square feet per gallon.

HVLP sprayers: 300 square feet to 800 square feet per gallon. These can spray thin, solvent-based products;





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pigment to tint faux-finish stain or antiquing.

They may also be used for solvenated/VOC-compliant CRV aliphatic urethane, if the product is low-viscosity or may be thinned with a VOC-compliant solvent, i.e., acetone, Oxal 100, PTCBF.

Gear-driven and or piston-driven pumps: The variables with these pumps are so vast, the equipment manufacturers must be contacted. These pumps are used for high-viscosity materials.

low- and high-EVP (evaporation parameter) water-based products; products with low to medium viscosity and solids; solvent-based urethanes and epoxies; water-based polyaspartics, and solvent-based acrylics.

Airless sprayers (3000-psi): 350 square feet to 600 square feet per gallon depending on tip size. A 611 tip will give you about 600 square feet per

gallon. A 521 tip will allow you to spread about 350 square feet per gallon.

Airless sprayers may be used for solvenated acrylics and lacquers (gloss and matte); water-based acrylic and water-based MMAs; water-based epoxy with low solids content; water-based urethanes (gloss and matte); water-based polyaspartics (gloss or matte).

Airless sprayers may also be used when adding small amounts of color

Lambs wool applicators and other synthetics: Generally used for low-viscosity sealers that have long open times and good flow, generally on interior terrazzo and wood floors.

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Business Strategies

Marketing Your Business

by Christina Camara

Decorative concrete contractors are artisans, not necessarily salespeople.

Many contractors believe that their workmanship will sell itself, but too often, they depend on referrals, says Doug Carlton of Carlton Concrete in Visalia, Calif. "If you're just relying on word of mouth, you're really selling your company short," he says.

Carlton is a true believer in marketing decorative concrete. Potential clients need to learn more about the versatility and design potential that concrete can bring to their projects. "The thing that blows me away in this industry is how little emphasis people put into marketing," he says. "If you can't market it, you're very limited in how much you're going to be able to sell. It's a visual product that has to be presented to people."

Decorative concrete contractors are generally far more comfortable working on the job site than they are dealing with Web sites, advertising and promotions. But just a small investment — say 5 percent of a contractor's time — can pay off in a big way, Carlton says. "It's just unbelievable the return they'd get on their time and money."

Concrete Decor talked with four successful contractors about how they market their business: what works and what doesn't; which techniques generate the best return; and how startups can make small investments to raise their profile in their communities.

Here are some suggestions:

Create a sophisticated website — An enticing website, constantly updated with attractive photographs of new projects, is critical to success, says Michael Karmody, co-founder of Stone Soup Concrete (www.stonesoupconcrete.com) in western Massachusetts. Stone Soup is a major fabricator of concrete countertops, sinks, vanities and tubs in New England and New York, and the company attracts customers who are looking for custom colors and unique designs. These discriminating homeowners can't find what they're looking for at kitchen centers, so they turn to the Internet to research the possibilities.

Karmody says the site gets about 130 visits per day, and users click through an average of 13

pages of photographs and text, fully researching what Stone Soup has to offer. By the time they pick up the phone, "they've already decided we can do something to fulfill their dreams,"

Karmody says.

Carlton warns, however, that a photograph can be misleading. "It's like showing the bride on her wedding day. It's beautiful and dreamy and all that, but it's not realistic," he says. While his site (www.carltonconcrete.com) gives customers their initial look at decorative concrete, Carlton also brings clients on a tour of older projects so they have a chance to see how concrete wears and ages. "When we do that we never — and I mean never — have people call back and say, 'That's not what I expected.'"

Pool your resources — Mark Donaldson, of Skookum Floor Concepts, says his Seattle company is teaming up with other concrete artisans to advertise with ConcreteIdeas.com, a website that bills itself as "the best site for ideas, information and resources for residential and commercial decorative concrete." The site pools the resources of hundreds of industry professionals to create advertising and marketing campaigns that an individual company might not be able to afford on its own. For a monthly fee of \$100, Skookum will be listed in its "find a pro" section as a way to steer potential clients to his business. The site should launch sometime in the spring. Skookum's own sophisticated website, www.concrete-design.com, has played a major role in Donaldson's marketing strategy, with nearly 60,000 visitors.

Show off your work — Stone Soup Concrete does not rely upon its website alone. The company requires potential clients to visit its 3,000-square-foot showroom to see projects in progress. Karmody says he wants homeowners to know exactly how concrete feels, looks and performs. Concrete should inspire passion. "If the substance isn't absolutely to your liking, we don't want any part of that."

Build partnerships — Three years ago, Carlton hired a full-time salesperson, a well-known and



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well-respected member of the community, who introduced architects, contractors and homeowners to the wide range of possibilities offered by decorative concrete. Making those connections with other craftsmen in the community has paid off handsomely. "It's doubled our gross sales. There's no doubt about it."

Donaldson, of Skookum, sends flyers to architects, contractors and designers with attractive photos of his latest flooring projects. The increase in business is noticeable. "If we slow down, and then we do a mailer, you can hear the difference in the amount the phone is ringing."

Donate your time — Contractors just breaking into the decorative concrete field don't have an advertising budget, but they should have the energy to promote their products through some sweat equity. For example, Carlton suggests working out an arrangement with a builder to transform a plain concrete walkway into a stamped design at no cost. Take lots of photographs at different angles and with different lighting and "you're off and running" to building a portfolio, Carlton says.

Ask your clients how you can improve — Chris McMahon, CEO and founder of Architectural Concrete Design in Levittown, Pa., sends surveys to each client after the job is complete. It asks big questions — about the sales process and installation — and more detailed ones — covering the appearance of the trucks and worker uniforms. McMahon says the surveys keep the company in touch with its clients, and they use the information to improve service.

Looking for commercial work? Get listed in the Blue Book — It's not hard to find *The Blue Book of Building and Construction* on just about any job site, Donaldson says. Similar to the Yellow Pages, the Blue Book (www.thebluebook.com) lists more than a million company display ads, listings and profiles in more than 500 classifications.

Think about radio ads — Contractors have reported mixed results. Carlton says decorative concrete is so visual that it's hard to get across its benefits in a radio ad. His firm hasn't had much luck. Stone Soup, on the other hand, began generating more local business with its radio advertising, whereas they had previously drawn from the more-distant New York and Boston markets.

While contractors should not depend solely upon the strength of word-of-mouth advertising, there's no question that top-quality workmanship generates more business.

McMahon, of Architectural Concrete Design, says 80 percent of his business comes from referrals. "Above all else, stand by your product," he says. "Put it in and warranty it. If you can't warranty it, you're doing it wrong," he says. Taking care of your customers after the job is complete helps maintain a good flow of referrals and repeat business.

McMahon says his company has paid for advertisements on TV, radio and newspapers and put up exhibits at trade shows. "Still, nothing compares to doing the job well and standing behind your product."

Karmody concurs: "The most important thing is to put out a good product. Based on that, everything else will work."



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PRODUCT PROFILES

TX Millennium photocatalytic cement

Essroc Cement Corp. has brought concrete that cleans itself — and the air around it — to the United States.

Essroc recently began North American production of its photocatalytic cement, TX Millennium. The cement line consists of two products: TX Arca cement, which gives concrete the capability to self-clean, and TX Aria cement, which adds the ability to combat environmental pollution. Both cements are available in grey and white.

The science behind the products involves a hydraulic binder with photocatalytic properties. As photocatalytic cement responds to the UV rays in sunlight, oxidation accelerates in the concrete, ultimately speeding up the rate the concrete will decompose pollutants that come into contact with its surface. Organic molecules are broken down, while inorganic materials have a tougher time sticking to the concrete.

TX Arca is billed as an “architectural line” of cement designed for the construction of striking high-end architectural works. Photocatalysis gives Arca the power to destroy organic and inorganic contaminants that are discoloring the concrete surface. The cement dramatically enhances the looks of a beautiful building over the years by empowering it to keep itself clean using only sunlight and chemistry.

TX Aria is an “environmental line,” marketed for use in regions troubled by smog and other urban pollutants. Aria is self-cleaning, but on top of that, it responds to and destroys airborne pollutants.

Essroc Cement Corp. is a North American subsidiary of the Italcementi Group, an Italian company. The technology for TX Millennium was developed with more than a decade of research by Italcementi’s Technical Research Center in Bergamo,

Italy. TX Arca debuted in 1996 when it was used in precasting three “sails” that are a key feature of the Dives in Misericordia Church in Rome, designed by Richard Meier. TX Aria is a new product.

Photocatalysis is attracting attention from researchers and industry experts worldwide for its air- and water-purifying and antibacterial properties, and the possibilities extend far beyond clean concrete. In Japan, where the first products featuring photocatalytic properties were launched, the technology has been used to make self-cleaning lamps, car coatings and construction materials, fog-resistant mirrors and glass, antibacterial tiles and fibers, and air purifiers.

Contact: Essroc Cement Corp., a subsidiary of the Italcementi Group



SpeedCove Precast Cove Base Systems

You find them on the floors of restrooms, kitchens and hospitals, among other places: curved, angle-free baseboards called “rolled radius cove.” They’ve been called “ship’s cove,” too, because they were invented for use on ships to make floors easier to swab clean.

Why the curve? Doug Standal explains: “With square corners, junk gets stuck in there.”

A seamless epoxy floor with a cove base is the most sanitary, easiest-to-maintain floor a concrete contractor can install in a “high slop and mop” area, he says, which is why the baseboards are mandated by environmental health codes across the country.

Traditionally, epoxy floor contractors have constructed radius cove base on site by painstakingly wiping a thick paste of epoxy and sand along the wall, a method called “mechanical troweling.” The problem is, mechanical troweling is difficult and labor intensive to do, and it can take years to learn how to do it well.

That’s where Standal, a general contractor, comes in. About three years ago, he began selling pieces of precast cement trim that curve like a mechanically troweled corner and take epoxy like a concrete floor.

Now, after more research and market testing with epoxy flooring contractors, SpeedCove Precast Cove Base Systems are on the market in earnest.

The cove base moldings are 48 inches long and have matching 90-degree and 45-degree inside and outside corners. To install the cement pieces, just fix them to the wall and floor. Designed for commercial and residential high-performance concrete floor coatings, the pieces can be coated with any type of finish as soon as joints and transitions are patched. When topped with resinous epoxy finishes, they provide a uniform, seamless job that looks beautiful. And unlike tile, these baseboards have no grout lines to collect unsanitary matter.

The preformed moldings meet the shape and height requirements for cove bases mandated in California environmental health codes. This state’s codes are the strictest in the nation, Standal notes. “For this product, if you meet the California code, you pretty much meet everywhere else.”

SpeedCove is made from GRG (glass-reinforced gypsum). The 7,200-plus psi proprietary gypsum cement formula includes polymer and fiberglass to add tensile and impact strength.

Standal’s company, Solid Rock Enterprises, manufactures the systems, which come in 4-inch, 6-inch and 1-inch heights. The 4-inch and 6-inch systems are actually $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch shorter than their names imply, so they fit easily under standard 4-inch and 6-inch cabinetry toe kicks. The pieces can be set in any tight spot where mechanical troweling is impractical or not cost effective.

Standal patented the concept when he developed it more than three years ago. “A couple other people have tried it but nobody else has ever taken it seriously.”

His project is faring better because it came out at just the right time, as epoxy-coated concrete floors are becoming more and more popular, he says.

“It’s one of the stupidest, simplest things in the world,” he says. “I have to laugh. I’m in business because crap sticks in corners.”

Standal will be traveling around the country this spring and fall doing demonstrations and answering questions about how to use the product. His company also has a few second-generation products in the works that will be more cost effective and easier to apply than the current version.

Contact: Solid Rock Enterprises

(530) 344-9000

www.speedcove.com



Soy Sauce soy-based concrete products

Dunk a roll of sushi in a Soy Sauce product and you're asking for one heck of a stomachache. But use the soy-based materials to strip, stain and seal concrete, and they are about as healthy as it gets.

Concrete artisan Dana Boyer is selling the soy-based line through her concrete contracting outfit, Concretizen. Developed by friends of hers at New Century Coatings and sold by several "private label" resellers, the products have been personalized by Boyer to fit her vision. She had been developing her own series of polymer-and-water-based stains, but when she saw what New Century had cooked up, she decided to sell theirs instead. "I liked their product, I liked the soy, I liked what it did," she says.

The Soy Sauce line includes a soy-based stripper and two clear sealers, one gloss and one satin. But nearest to Boyer's heart are the concrete stains, a proprietary blend of soy and water-based elements. Twelve Soy Sauce colors are available now, with six more on the way. "I'm tweaking and adjusting the colors to make them look more unique," Boyer says.

The line is comprised of four "Transparent Colors": white, terra cotta red, amber yellow oxide and bornite black; three "Earth Tones": burnt umber brown, earthy yellow and rusty red oxide; and five brighter "Jewel Tones": magenta, green, bright yellow, blue and red. Among the six stains still under development, one intriguing standout is cement gray, which can be used to bring the tone of two concrete floors closer together, such as two floors poured at different times. It's designed to deepen the tone of gray concrete when people just want natural gray, she says.

The colors can create a wide range of looks depending on the strength at which the contractor mixes them, Boyer says. Going easy leaves a look as soft as that left by an acid stain, but without the unpredictability. But at full strength, Soy Sauce is one of the more vivid water-based pigmented stains on the market, she says.

There is one unique thing about using Soy Sauce that contractors ought to keep in mind: The stain must be rolled or brushed on thin. If a job calls for a more intense hue, the directions call for several thin coats, not one thicker coat. A coat that is too thick will puddle and take a disconcertingly long time to dry, Boyer says. "They are applied in thin, even transparent coats you just work up until you are happy with the level."

Regardless, contractors working in schools, hospitals, or homes of people sensitive to allergens are among those who may embrace Soy Sauce. "It's a totally green product," Boyer says. "There are no polymers or water-based resins, unlike water-based stains."

Artists will love it too. "As an artist, I always create glazes and lay textures just like the faux painting skill I use," Boyer says. "This is just a little nicer product in that spirit, I think."

Soy Sauce stain can be used to touch up an existing acid stain floor, helping the contractor fix flaws and imperfections. It's not reactive, but it will penetrate, and in fact, it can even lend the acid look to a slab that is too tightly burnished to take acid stain. It can also be used on plaster or clay.

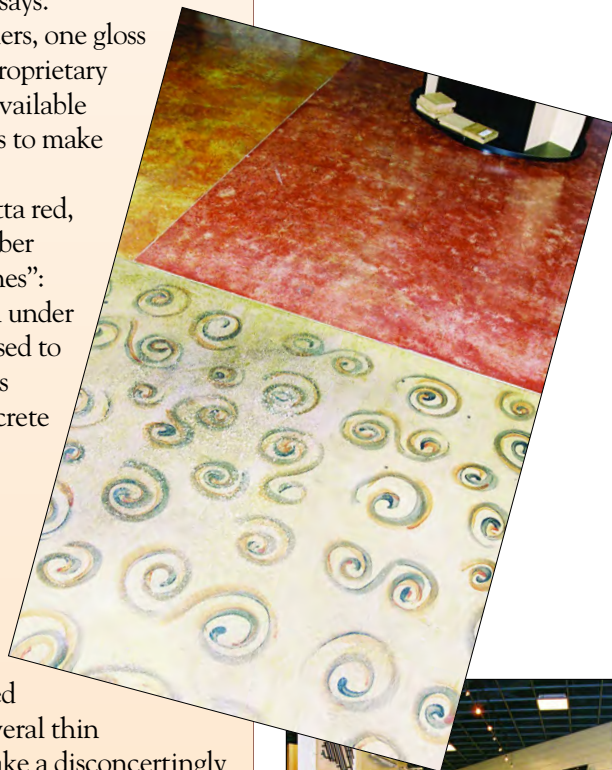
The Soy Sauce sealers and stripper complement the stains. The sealers, like the stains, go on thin and penetrate effectively. The stripper is less greasy and easier to clean up than other soy-based strippers, Boyer says.

Soy Sauce is only the first release in what Boyer expects to be a group of new decorative concrete products she is calling the "Boyer Line." Besides more Soy Sauce colors, she is currently developing water-based and solvent-based concrete dyes.

Contact: Concretizen Decorative Concrete Surfaces

(480) 983-4990

www.concretizen.com



The Billy Banger

Among the quirkier success stories of World Of Concrete 2006 is a little texture-mat tamper that manufacturer Proline Concrete Tools dubbed "The Billy Banger."

The Banger is a high-density urethane hand tamper with a 7-inch by 7-inch base. A 6/12-inch pole at its center has a grab-friendly knob at the top and a 7-inch handle that extends to one side.

The tool actually wasn't Proline's idea. They whipped up a Banger at the request of one of the company's biggest clients, Bill Shorey, sales associate with Spec-West Construction Supply in Sacramento. Shorey had asked Proline a few months ago if the company could develop a hand tool for tamping in corners and on borders.

The guys at Proline didn't expect much from Billy's banger — they only made one, and they didn't prepare any brochures or online marketing materials for it. "It was more of, let's give it a try and see what happens at the World Of Concrete," says Proline vice president of sales and marketing Larry Freeman.

It turns out their customer was onto something. They plunked the Banger down at their booth, and were immediately swamped with demand. "Within the first hour of World Of Concrete we just got besieged," Freeman reports. "Everybody went nuts over it. I can't believe we made it through the whole show without it 'disappearing.'"

The Banger is ideal for stamping stairs, pressing down borders that abut walls, or tamping in any other tight spot. Its main competition, Freeman says, is not another tamper but the good old human hand. "Everybody ends up putting the mat on there and slapping it with the palm of the hand," he says.

Obviously, the Banger cuts down on hand wear and tear, but it also leaves a more consistent impression when whacking a stamp mat. It can be used vertically and horizontally, and its high-density urethane makeup makes for heavy-duty sturdiness. It's lightweight, and its handle boasts a nonslip rubber grip.

After its surprise success at WOC 2006, Proline has rushed the Billy Banger into production and posted promotional materials on its Web site.


Contact: Proline Concrete Tools Inc.

(800) 795-4750

www.prolineconcretetools.com



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Self-leveling floor underlayments

USG Corp.'s Tile and Flooring Division has introduced Ultraflow Floor Underlayments, a new family of poured, self-leveling cement underlayments. All four products come presanded.

Ultraflow G-1.0 Floor Underlayment is a fast-setting, nonshrinking underlayment designed for use in residential, light commercial and renovation construction. It can be applied over wood and concrete subfloors from $\frac{3}{8}$ inch to 2 inches thick, and features a compressive strength of 3,500 psi to 4,200 psi at 10 to 14 days.

Ultraflow 2.0 Floor Underlayment is an economical portland-based cementitious underlayment designed for fast application and setting. Ideal over concrete and over wood substrates with metal lathing, it provides a crack-resistant surface that can handle light construction traffic 24 hours after pouring. It can be applied from feather-edge to 2-inch thicknesses and offers a compressive strength of 5,500 psi at 28 days.



Self-drying and moisture resistant, Ultraflow 3.0 Floor Underlayment is a polymer-modified engineered cement that is designed for leveling or topping rough and spalled concrete when downtime is critical. The product permits light traffic within three hours and will accept floor coverings after 24 hours. It can be poured from feather-edge to $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thicknesses, and offers a compressive strength of 4,350 psi at 28 days.

Ultraflow 4.0 Floor Underlayment is a premium, self-drying cementitious wear surface designed to act as either a final floor surface or high-performance underlayment. The polymer-modified product permits light trade traffic within 24 hours. It can be poured from feather-edge to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thicknesses, and offers a compressive strength of 4,350 psi at 28 days.

For more, visit www.usg.com or **circle #61 on the Reader Service Card.**

An acid stain repair kit

Brickform Spectrum Stain is billed as a "repair kit" for acid stain projects.

All 10 colors in the series of translucent waterborne stains are matched to acid stain colors in the Brickform catalog. With Spectrum, users can leave a look similar to acid stain in places where acid staining is not practical. They can also rejuvenate acid-stained floors and correct flaws in acid stain projects. The penetrating

stains leave behind a translucent appearance that reduces glare, and they are durable enough for commercial use. Spectrum comes in one-gallon bottles that should color about 240 square feet of concrete surface each.

For more information, visit www.brickform.com or **circle #62 on the Reader Service Card.**

More from Brickform

The busy folks at Brickform have added several recent product releases to their catalog.

Four new border stamp patterns, "Swirl Border," "Whale Border," "Grapevine Border" and "Autumn Leaf Border," will help Brickform keep abreast of current stamping trends. The "Autumn Leaf" stamp is 12 inches by 36 inches, while the other three patterns are 48 inches long.

Brickform Integral Color is a pigment designed to color cement paste in concrete. It is sold in liquid or powder.

Two new colors of Blush-Tone Acid Stain, "Olive" and "Walnut," are Brickform's ninth and tenth acid stain colors. The acid stains produce variegated, natural looks that are UV-resistant and easy to maintain.

For more information, visit www.brickform.com or **circle #63 on the Reader Service Card.**

New products from MAPEI

MAPEI has introduced seven new products that provide applicators with more complete solutions for concrete repairs and renovations.

The new items include two repair products. Concrete Renew, a vertical and horizontal polymer-formulated resurfacer, lends a new finish to worn concrete surfaces in depths from feather-edge to $\frac{3}{16}$ inch. Mapecem Quickpatch is a horizontal patching material for restoring interior and exterior concrete that can be applied from feather-edge to 3 inches neat. Both light gray materials are compatible with most sealers, dyes and stains.



MAPEI is also transitioning technology from its European research facilities with the

Stateside introduction of Mapelastix, an industrial-grade waterproofing and protective coating for concrete, masonry, ceramic and marble surfaces. Mapelastix Smart is a brush- or





roller-applied version of Mapelastic for easy application on curved structures and in tight corners. Mapecofinish Fusion, a one-component, water-based aliphatic polyurethane sealer for interior and

exterior surfaces, is designed to offer outstanding slip resistance and preserve the integrity of colored concrete surfaces. Mapecofinish 1K is a silane-modified epoxy primer with strong bonding properties.

Finally, MAPEI Spraytop RS

provides unique textured finishes to vertical and horizontal concrete surfaces. The one-component, fast-setting decorative resurfacer can be applied in feather-edge to 1/8-inch depths and is

appropriate for interior and exterior use.

For more information, visit www.mapei.com or circle #64 on the Reader Service Card.



Floor Underlayment, designed for use in buildings with light-gauge steel frame construction.

The underlayment is the first poured underlayment that can be applied over metal framing systems or corrugated steel decks. It utilizes a proprietary gypsum-based concrete formulation that is up to 55 percent lighter than three-inch concrete while offering compressive strengths of 3,500 psi to 4,000 psi. With a typical pour thickness of just 1 1/2 inch, the self-leveling product can be applied at much lower thicknesses than poured-in-place concrete. The strength of the system allows more floors to be added without requiring additional support. The product also allows light trade traffic to resume the following day.

For more information, visit www.levelrock.com or circle #66 on the Reader Service Card.

Forming in the rain

Sonoco has re-engineered its water-resistant Sonotube concrete form with new RainGuard technology.

The new-generation Sonotube forms incorporate a proprietary, high-strength, water-resistant paper that allows contractors to set them in wet weather and pour concrete the next day. The fiber forms boast improved strength,

toughness and durability in wet conditions, resulting in superior strength-to-weight properties and the virtual elimination of "blowouts" — the most frequent mode of failure of wet fiber concrete forms. What's more, fiber forms are cheap compared to other types of column forms.

RainGuard technology has been incorporated into all existing types and sizes of Sonotube brand forms, including both round and

square forms, as well as Sonotube Finish Free concrete forms.

For more information, visit www.sonotube.info or circle #65 on the Reader Service Card.



Gypsum underlayment is strong choice

The Industrial Products Division of United States Gypsum Co. has introduced Levelrock CSD (Corrugated Steel Deck)

Urethane coating rolls with the changes

Rust-Oleum's new ThermaKrete Urethane Concrete Coating provides extreme protection for concrete in the harshest industrial environments. Ideal for concrete floors that are subjected to dramatic temperature fluctuations or thermal shock, ThermaKrete seamlessly expands and contracts to resist cracking.

Available in 3/8-inch or 1/4-inch varieties, ThermaKrete shields against thermal shock from temperature fluctuations between minus 10 degrees F to 240 degrees F. The coating withstands caustic washdowns, heavy traffic, high impact, abrasion, chemicals and standing water contamination. A three-component batch of the water-based material cures in less than 72 hours, even in cold conditions, and requires no primer or sealers. ThermaKrete product lines include Self-Leveling Slurry, Trowel and Cove Mortar, which come in either Tile Red or Light Gray.

For more information, visit www.rustoleum.com/industrial or circle #67 on the Reader Service Card.



B.E.P. does windows

B.E.P. Forming Systems Inc., manufacturers of the popular Big Panel aluminum forming system, has enhanced that line with two new products aimed at the residential concrete construction market.

The B.E.P. System-HG is the world's first hand- and gang-set aluminum form panel system. Designed primarily for use in residential or light commercial construction, the System-HG can be



set in an individual or gang-panel format and is compatible with all other forming systems on the market today. It comes in smooth, all-brick finishes, Georgian stone, and adobe brick, and it is available with popular hole patterns. Its heavy, flat 2-inch side-rail construction wards off concrete leakage and bowing, while lift handles make the system easy to work with. Every

panel features B.E.P.'s reusable Power Taper Tie System.

The B.E.P. Quick-Tach Window Buck Panel and Frame System allows the contractor to install egress or above-grade window frames in seconds. The new window system slides into position and locks into place, eliminating pour shift and the need for nails, self-tapping screws and other traditional securing methods. The frame is fully adjustable up to 4 feet in either direction and can be easily installed from one side.

For more information, visit www.bepformingsystems.com or **circle #68 on the Reader Service Card.**

A blast to use

The new Blastrac 1-9DEZ shot blaster strips, cleans and profiles in one step. The portable, lightweight machine boasts a 9-inch blast pattern. Perfect for smaller jobs or tight areas, the 1-9DEZ

runs on 120 volts of power and can prepare up to 275 square feet per hour.

For more, visit www.blastrac.com or **circle #69 on the Reader Service Card.**

You oughta be in pictures

Reckli has patented an innovative technique for displaying photo-quality images in concrete using Vectogramme form liners.

The Vectogramme form liner consists of a series of vertical lines of varying widths and depth for achieving 256 controllable shades of grey. Thanks to this process, Reckli is able to reproduce a photograph or continuous tone image directly into the form liner. Single liners can be manufactured in single forms up to 4 feet by 8 feet. Larger images can be produced by breaking the original picture into sections.

Distribut Inc. is the exclusive distributor for Reckli products in North America.

For more details, visit www.distribut.ca or **circle #70 on the Reader Service Card.**

Finisher made for wet concrete

LR Tools Inc. has begun including combination slip-on float blades with every purchase of its Power Pole Finisher.

The Finisher is designed to allow workers to start finishing wet concrete. It weighs only 24 pounds and is pole driven from outside the pour area. The four-blade tool has a trowel diameter of 34 inches, is powered by a Honda 4-cycle 22 cc engine and achieves blade speeds of 65 rpm.

For more information, visit www.lrtools.com or **circle #71 on the Reader Service Card.**

It's a Bon new year

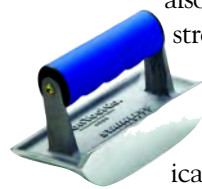
Bon Tool Co. has released a slew of new products to tempt decorative concrete contractors in 2006.

The company has expanded its line of Bullet Groovers with the addition of four new hand tools and four new

walking tools. The durable, corrosion-resistant stainless steel groovers are four times more wear-resistant than bronze and provide excellent torque and tensile strength. The new walking groovers come in bit sizes that match the most popular hand tools.

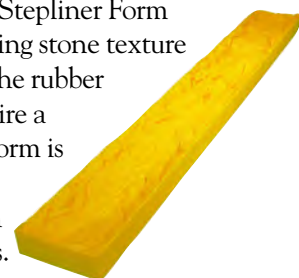


A premium Stainless Steel Edger also offers excellent tensile strength and resistance to corrosion. Available in five sizes with a choice of ergonomically designed comfort grip or wood handle, the tool sports a polished, mirror-like blade.

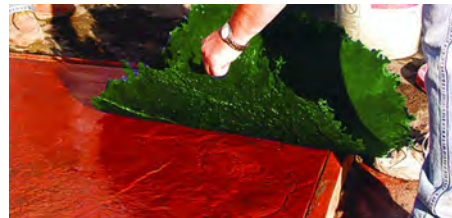


A new Stainless Steel Edger is a more durable masonry jointer than one made from carbon steel. The corrosion-resistant tool comes with four replaceable barrels ranging in size from 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch.

A new urethane Stepliner Form gives a natural-looking stone texture to concrete steps. The rubber blend does not require a release agent. The form is 6 inches high and available in 48-inch and 72-inch lengths.



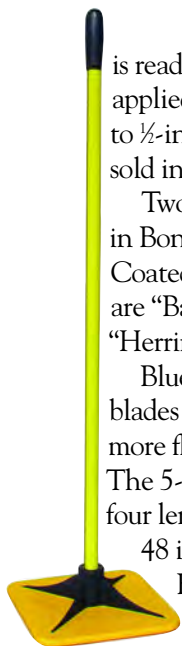
A series of new Seamless Texture Skins are lightweight urethane mats with feathered edges.



They come in three square sizes — 12 inches, 36 inches and 48 inches — and four patterns: "Slate," "Roman Slate," "Texas Sea Shells" and "Blue Stone."

A Urethane Tamper is coated to protect the texture mats it helps to set. The tool has a 12 inch by 12 inch base and a 50-inch fiberglass handle.

The high-strength Spread-Tex Resurfacer quickly restores and improves the look of existing concrete. Just add water and the self-binding mix



is ready. It can be applied from 1/16-inch to 1/2-inch thick and is sold in five colors.

Two new patterns in Bon's line of Plastic-Coated Paper Stencils are "Basketweave" and "Herringbone."



Blue Steel Fresno Trowels have blades that are thinner, cheaper and more flexible than stainless steel.

The 5-inch-wide blades are sold in four lengths from 24 inches to 48 inches. They are fitted with

Bon's universal mounting system to accommodate a two-hole fresno, swivel or single-post swivel bracket.



For more information, visit www.bontool.com or circle #72 on the Reader Service Card.

Two cool covers for curing concrete

UltraCure NCF and EZCover, two new slab-blanketing products from McTech Group Inc., are designed to get cozy with curing concrete.

UltraCure, a wet cure blanket, is a proprietary Natural Cellulose Fiber (NCF) material that incorporates the absorption technology used in hygienic applications to wick and hold moisture for long periods of time on concrete surfaces. It is disposable, lightweight, requires less material overlap than most other curing methods and can hold moisture for up to seven days.

UltraCure was designed for use on SOG, RCC, and pervious concrete applications. The clear backing helps the user easily determine the moisture content present in the blanket.

EZCover Protective Covering is a natural-colored cellulose product designed to help protect new concrete slabs, gray and colored, during the construction process. The material protects concrete as well as marble,

hardwood, and terrazzo flooring without condensation or floor discoloration. As a high-friction coefficient holds the blanket in place, its soft bottom layer helps prevent surface scratches and allows new slabs to continue to breathe and harden, while the harder top layer shields against contaminants. The product is available in rolls of 8 foot by 4 foot sheets.

To learn more about UltraCure and EZCover, visit www.ultracure.net or

circle #73 on the Reader Service Card.

Lithium gets the job done

Prosoco has introduced Consolideck LS and LS/CS, two new lithium silicate floor hardeners designed as an alternative to hardeners with sodium silicate or potash.

Consolideck LS is a premium sealer, hardener and densifier that creates insoluble calcium silicate hydrate

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within concrete pores. It's easier to apply than conventional sodium or potassium silicate hardeners, penetrates without scrubbing and needs no flushing after application. The material helps floors resist water, salt and chemical impact. Finally, lithium is the only chemical element known to suppress surface alkali silicate reaction.

LS's economical cousin, Consolideck LS/CS, boasts similar properties but is made with lithium silicate and colloidal silica. Floors finished with LS/CS test out at more than four times the hardness of untreated floors, compared to LS, which is more than five times as hard.

Both products are applied as a nonexpansive gel that will not absorb water, and both leave a surface sheen. To learn more, visit www.prosoco.com or **circle #74 on the Reader Service Card**.

New "green" products from US Spec

Two new products from US Spec Engineered Professional Products are designed for environmental friendliness. Both products are GreenSpec listed.

Ezkote Green is a multipurpose, petroleum-free form release that provides easy, clean detachment from wood, aluminum, plastic, BB plyform and other kinds of formwork. The material increases the lifespan of wood forms and cuts down on metal form maintenance by forming a protective rustproof film. It is biodegradable and will not discolor concrete.

Industraseal is a liquid sealer, densifier, hardener and dustproof for concrete and masonry that can be buffed to impart a natural sheen. It works indoors and out without yellowing, scratching or peeling.

For more, visit www.usspec.com or **circle #75 on the Reader Service Card**.

Better vibrations

Multiquip has announced the new MVC-80 Series of four vibratory plate compactors that reduce vibration by 50 percent when compared to predecessor models. The reduction comes courtesy of an innovative new

antivibration handle system (AVS) that significantly reduces operator fatigue while boosting productivity.

With centrifugal force of 2,925 pounds, the economically priced MVC-80s are ideally suited to compacting granular soils and asphalt. At maximum speed, the unit can compact up to 72 feet of material per minute.

These forward plate compactors are offered with 5.7-horsepower Honda and 5.5-horsepower Robin gasoline engines and have exciter speeds of 5,580 rpm. The MVC-80 Series is fitted with a long-lasting and easy-to-clean steel baseplate.

Other standard features include a 13.7-quart plastic water tank that is easy to remove and a lifting bale for pickup. The four models in the MVC-80 Series range in weight from 177 pounds to 180 pounds.

For more information, visit www.multiquip.com or **circle #76 on the Reader Service Card**.

A new look for Newlook

Newlook International LLC has introduced a new logo for its Newlook line of concrete stain products.

The logo, a stylized "NL" in an orange and white circle, is intended to draw attention to the company's water-based stains, which are opaque, VOC-free and sold in more than 80 standard colors. Newlook's Transparent Color Enhancer Kit can be used to achieve an antiqued look or other effects.

For more about Newlook, visit www.getnewlook.com or **circle #77 on the Reader Service Card**.

Brushes resist acid stain

Riviera Brush Co. sells its acid-resistant brushes primarily for concrete equipment cleanup. But the company has also begun marketing them as brushes that can be used with acid stain products. The brushes come in a range of sizes and shapes.

To learn more, visit www.sonoco.com or **circle #78 on the Reader Service Card**.



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The Final Pour

Tumblin' Dice

It wasn't just luck of the draw that brought so many visitors to SuperStone's booth at the 2006 World of Concrete show.

Of course, the booth featured the famous Super-Krete girls, who were quite an attraction unto themselves. But the floor got just about as much attention — and everyone wanted to know how it was done. Here's the scoop:

After the floor was constructed with Super-Krete's waterproof deck system, two coats of Super-Krete Micro-Bond were applied over the company's Bond-Kote and sanded down to achieve an ultra-smooth finish. Then, Super-Krete Ure-Kote (paint) was applied to the floor, and the decorative hand-cut designs were brushed in detail.

After the first coat of Clear Seal, automotive paint glitter was broadcast over the floor. After it dried, the excess glitter was blown off and the floor was sealed with two coats of Super-Krete S-8900 Two Part Urethane Sealer. The sealer proved itself industrial grade as it held up to the thousands of attendees who visited the booth.



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