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by Robert S. Johnson



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August 2008

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On the cover: White cement was used to make this eggplant-colored sink, which was created by Buddy Rhodes Studio and designed by Johnny Grey Studio.

Photo by Matthew Millman

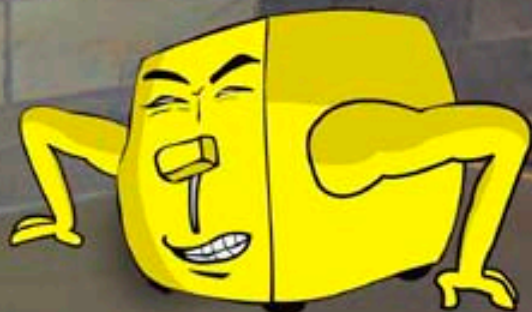
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High-performance concrete

New formulations and systems created for countertops

by Amy Johnson

As decorative options for concrete in countertops and other home elements evolve, mix designs are becoming more sophisticated and specialized. While many fabricators develop their own proprietary formulations, there are also companies that market specialty bag mixes designed to give contractors everything they need to create countertops or other home elements.

Mike Heidebrink, president of concrete countertop pioneer Cheng Concrete, sees this trend as validation of the concrete countertop industry. "There's a whole world of new products out there and it's a good sign that our industry has carved out its niche in the marketplace," he says. "It testifies to our longevity that there are now specific products being developed for countertops."

In the bag

Bag mixes for countertops share some characteristics: They are designed to minimize cracking and shrinking, they are strong enough to be poured in thinner slabs and they are optimized for workability. Most have a compressive strength of 6,000 psi or higher, typically earning the designation of "high performance" from the American Concrete Institute. However, suppliers generally agree that it is not compressive strength alone that is important to countertops. Rather, the same properties that give a mix high psi also make it denser and allow for thinner slabs. High-performance concrete also replicates fine mold details better. Finally, high psi may contribute to preventing damage during shipping and installation.


SureCrete Design Products offers two bag mixes in its Xtreme series for home elements. One is Xtreme Countertop, a two-part fast-curing cementitious composite that can be poured as thin as 1/2 inch, demolded in four hours and polished after eight hours. "This material can be precast and installed the next day," says Damon Hoover, sales manager for SureCrete's CarpenterStone division.

Xtreme Countertop has a compressive strength of more than 10,000 psi. It is formulated with an admixture that allows several pounds of fiber to be added and dispersed evenly, which adds tensile strength to reduce cracking and allow for large spans.

Another SureCrete product, Xtreme Lightweight, is popular for home elements that do not require the same wear surface as countertops. This cementitious composite material is supplied in three components. The vermiculite and cement mix aggregate makes the material 65 percent lighter than traditional concrete. At 2,200 psi, this product is best suited for vertical, nonweight-bearing applications like wall treatments, faux balcony balustrades, exterior cladding and crown molding. At just 44 pounds per cubic foot, Hoover says, "This is a huge advantage for architects and engineers designing for weight. It can save money because designs don't require extra structural support." It can also be cut with traditional woodworking tools.

Xtreme Lightweight can be sprayed, hand-packed or poured into molds. Hoover knows one artist who etches designs onto glass and molds the product against the etched glass to pick up the details of the design. "The material reads the characteristics of whatever mold you pour it into," he says. As for color options, Xtreme Countertop and Lightweight are both cement-based, Hoover says, so any coloring system works the same as it would with regular concrete.


Another high-performance mix for countertops is available as part of the enCounter professional concrete countertop system, sold to contractors through The Stamp Store, based in Oklahoma City. Doug Bannister developed this mix to address the issues that challenged him most in using concrete for countertops. "I wanted a material that would do everything




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like concrete except crack. I wanted it to trowel, color, stain, finish and feel like concrete without the cracking that everybody says is inevitable.”

Bannister first attempted to adapt ready-mix concrete for countertops by adding superplasticizers and fibers. “What I learned was that these interfere with performance,” he says. “Plasticizers can be sticky, which compromises the finish. Fibers come springing to the surface if you’re staining because you’re eroding the paste. They make it hard to seal.”

Bannister’s approach was to precisely blend ingredients in the right ratios to create the characteristics he wanted without additives or fibers. “It is (partly) a matter of reducing water,” he says. “The more water it requires, the more it will shrink and curl.” The result is an 8,870-psi material that he claims will not shrink or crack. To demonstrate, he keeps a span of concrete in his showroom that is more than 18 feet long with no support. “It’s been two years and it hasn’t sagged yet,” he says.

The comprehensive enCounter

system includes not only the complete mix, but also reusable edge forms and premeasured colors.

LifeTime Floors LLC offers three countertop mixes in its Quicktops

“I just don’t believe we should be shipping countertops or raw materials across the country. We want customers to get everything they need within 50 miles.”

— Mark Celebuski, general manager,
Pinnacle Cast Concrete

line. The original product, Quicktops Premium, is a “bag and bucket,” according to project manager Kenton Hove. The kit includes 50 pounds of dry material and a 2.5 gallon bucket of liquid with acrylic to add strength and fibers to

improve tensile strength and eliminate surface cracking.

Two new additions to the line eliminate the bucket — all ingredients are supplied dry and the contractor adds only water and color. Quicktops-One incorporates white marble aggregates that are exposed when polished. Quicktops e mix is the company’s most economical offering at about \$38 per 50-pound bag. “When this material is cast without being colored, the look resembles Indiana limestone,” Hove says. “This makes it popular for fireplace hearths and surrounds. I’ve even seen it used for water features, capstones and furniture pieces.”

All three reach about 3,500 psi in four hours. At that point the products can be demolded and polished. All three can be colored with any iron oxide or liquid color dispersion.

Hove believes these bag mixes offer several advantages. One is consistency. “All components are weighed and measured out so they are identical, bag to bag,” he says. Another is convenience. “Contractors don’t have to add admixtures or fibers. They don’t have to

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spend time shopping for ingredients. We take the leg work out.”

The fact that the formulation is designed for fast cure also makes precast operations faster and more controllable. “These are tested, proven products designed specifically for the four-hour time frame,” Hove says. “You can do countertops in just one or two days. Contractors really increase productivity with a bag mix.”

New uses for a high-end mix

Another product making some inroads into the home element arena is Ductal from Lafarge North America. Ductal is a cementitious composite material with ultra-high strength — up to 30,000 psi. The material was developed to deliver structural performance without metal reinforcement. Not a traditional concrete, Ductal has no coarse aggregate. Plasticizer and reinforcing fibers (PVA or metallic) are included. “We’ve done a lot of work on the geometry of the fibers as well as their physical properties and interaction with the matrix,” explains Vic Perry, vice president and general manager for Ductal. “To get the same tensile strength in all directions the fibers must be dispersed in an isotropic manner. We’ve studied all the materials in the matrix, the aspect ratios, and how they work together.”

Ductal offers tremendous benefits in structural applications, where it eliminates the cost and weight of traditional steel and concrete. Because it can be molded into complex shapes in very thin sections, it is being used in some residential and decorative applications as well. “As long as you can build a mold to the shape you want, you can cast Ductal into that mold,” Perry explains. “Because the matrix is made of fine materials, it replicates the texture of the mold very precisely.”

One group using Ductal this way is Solus Décor Inc., of Vancouver, British Columbia. They use Ductal to create very durable outdoor features like planters and benches. “A standard concrete pot is thick, chunky, rough-textured and weighs a ton,” explains Solus partner Brad Carpenter. “With Ductal the mold can be a lot more elegant and we can cast a much thinner profile. This material is very strong, very robust. It’s going to outlast you and me.”

Carpenter does caution that Ductal is very different from concrete to work with. He describes the viscosity as “almost an oatmeal” and says the quick set reduces working time. The material cost, seven to eight times the cost of regular concrete, means errors are expensive, a challenge compounded by the fact that there is less margin for error with thin molds. The same applies to adding color — pigments react differently with Ductal and the cost of experimenting is high. “We limit our offerings to colors we know will sell better,” Carpenter says.

Ductal does not so much compete with concrete as it allows applications that are not possible with concrete. “Our customers buy Ductal because it enables them to do things that are unique,” Perry says. “My advice is, use concrete to do what concrete does, and use Ductal to do things you can’t ordinarily do.”

Bag or scratch?

Proponents of bag mixes cite ease of use, consistent ingredients and reproducible results as key advantages. But some suppliers and artisans prefer designs for scratch mixes. For example, the Concrete Countertop Plant, part of Pinnacle Cast Concrete, sells

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all the equipment contractors need to set up shop for making countertops. Then they design the mix based on materials available locally to each contractor. Pinnacle general manager Mark Celebuski explains. "We base mixes on materials (sand, stone and cement) that customers can get locally. They tell me what's available where they are and I then what to add. They generally need fiber, admixtures and high-quality pozzolan to achieve high performance." Pinnacle

sets a standard for the concrete and works with the contractor using local materials until that standard is met. "I just don't believe we should be shipping countertops or raw materials across the country," Celebuski says. "We want customers to get everything they need within 50 miles. Plus, contractors can save about \$5 per square foot by mixing their own concrete."

The Ashby System from Concrete Solutions is a proprietary admixture




All the materials for a pour ought to be ready before mixing begins.

supplied in a two-gallon bucket with a packet of fibers to be mixed into three bags of any concrete a contractor cares to use. The system hinges on maximizing the performance of the ingredients and minimizing water. "If you can use 100 percent of the available cement, you have a denser mix, greater psi and tensile strength and better scratch resistance," says concrete artisan Ben Ashby.

Fine polypropylene fibers are part of the Ashby system. "Most people think the fiber is there for reinforcing, but it actually gives very little reinforcement because it does not bond well with cement," he says. "Instead, the mesh keeps water from migrating and forming capillaries which can weaken the concrete. Also, because the mix is so dry, it must be vibrated hard. The mesh prevents the aggregates from segregating during this process."

Jeffrey Girard, P.E., president of the Concrete Countertop Institute in Raleigh, N.C., has evaluated various bag mixes and appreciates their role in the marketplace. He does not believe, however, that a good bag mix compensates for lack of knowledge. "There is a misconception that all you need to know is in the bag," he says. "That's like saying all you need to know about baking is in the box. A bag mix may be simplified, but you still have to understand concrete — how it cures, the right water/cement ratio, how to reinforce it."

Pinnacle's Celebuski agrees. "Countertops are not just flashy design. Contractors need to take the responsibility for becoming experts in concrete." 

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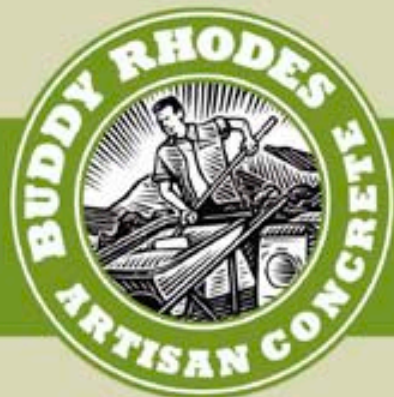
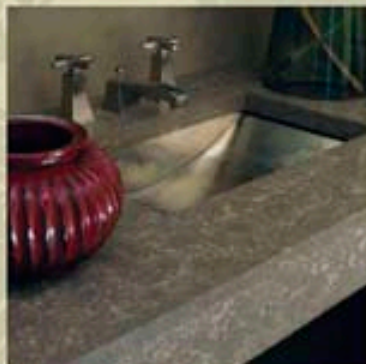
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Noteworthy creators of concrete countertops and architectural elements



Photos by Simone Paddock/Emerald Bay Photography

Cement Elegance, Bend, Ore.

by Robert S. Johnson

With the economy in doldrums, it is commonly accepted that homeowners are looking to stay in their homes longer rather than sell. Therefore, the renovations they are undertaking are seen as representing their tastes rather than what they hope a buyer may like.

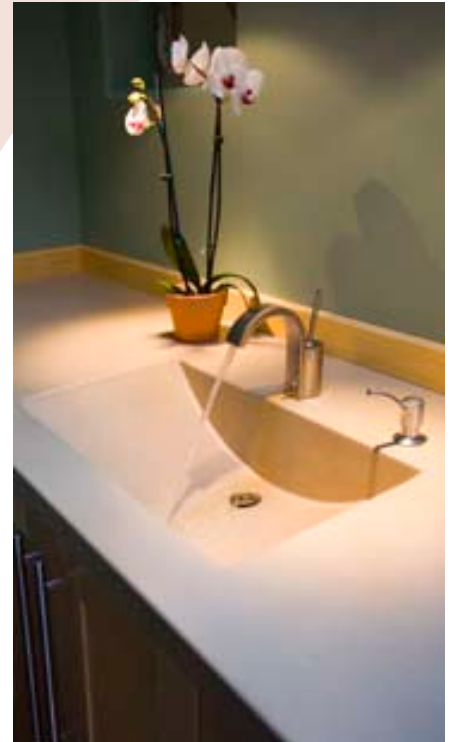
That goes for concrete countertops as well.

“One of the byproducts of the (current) real estate market going completely south is that people are not rebuilding for resale anymore,” says Rune Borgir, founder of Cement Elegance, based in Bend, Ore. “A lot of our clients, especially those in their 30s and 40s, are getting much, much bolder designing a home, especially for their desires and their needs.”

Recently, he says, one challenging project called for his shop to create a crimson Roman-style counter and island stops that a pair of homeowners had an artist develop. The rust-colored leafy design with wide curves featured patterns that expanded and narrowed into sharp points and were inlaid with pebbles and glass.

Borgir says he was able to meet the design specifications by using “engineered cement,” which includes portland cement mixed with larger sand particles. That approach allows the pancake batter-like mix to be poured right side up and spread evenly. The “cement” also dries much faster than traditional concrete and is just as durable.

To create the leafy design, patterns



were traced and cut out of 4-by-8 wood door skin sheets, which was then placed on top of small steel support bars over the freshly poured cement mixture. The pebbles and glass were dropped through the cut-out pattern in each door skin and pressed into the mixture. After curing, the entire surface was ground down until the aggregate pattern was exposed. A crimson dye was then sprayed over the surface, using the pieces cut out of the door skin to protect the leafy-shaped aggregate pattern, giving the project its color and definition.

"This is not the kind of thing people would do if they were looking to resell their house," Borgir says. "Those colors are pretty bold."

He says that concrete countertops are not the only projects with bold colors that homeowners are doing. They are

also using cobalt blues, purples, bright red orange, amber and mustard colors on walls and floors. Homeowners, he quickly adds, are also using concrete in showers, vanities, bathtubs and decks.

Borgir, a former general contractor, has been providing custom-crafted surfaces and fixtures in the Bend area since 1997.

Businesses are also picking up on using more color, Borgir says. He says restaurants, coffee shops and designer showrooms are using bolder colors in their countertops and transaction areas.

Environmental concerns over fabrication methods are also starting to be noticed by homeowners and the makers of the dyes used in concrete fixtures, says Borgir. Dye makers have been moving away from using alcohol and acid-toned dyes in favor of using water-soluble

materials. "The industry is being very, very responsive," he says.

Borgir says the water-soluble dyes have improved markedly over the past few years, adding that they now bond as quickly as the other dyes. Sealant manufacturers have also started migrating to greener materials. "The technology's really improving," he says.

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countertop pioneers



Photo by Smoot Photography

The Hill kitchen: An olive-colored counter with wall units and a glass bar. The piece includes topographic features, a drainboard, a sliding cutting board and elevation changes.

Reaching Quiet, Charlotte, N.C.

by Robert S. Johnson

Sometimes it takes a little longer for customers to catch on to a building trend.

Mills Howell, a partner in Charlotte-based decorative concrete design-build firm Reaching Quiet, says business was pretty steady for the last couple of years. They were doing well in residential projects, but decorative concrete just was not catching on for commercial projects.

That has changed over the last few months, he says. "Concrete is starting to move toward commercial. We've been seeing a huge jump in commercial applications, as far as bars, nightclubs (and) restaurants being able to appreciate the product."

Countertop work has been part of that boom. The company recently provided white concrete tops on ovular kitchen islands for a high-profile residential project, which saw a former six-story

bank in downtown Charlotte converted into luxury condominiums. Reaching Quiet also fabricated multipiece fireplaces with wrapped corners for the project. "We got to show a little bit of everything," Howell says.

Earlier this year, Reaching Quiet was awarded the "Best Functional Feature" at Fu-Tung Cheng's Circle of Distinction Awards at World of Concrete in Las Vegas for a project that included fabricating a fireplace, art slabs, a floating vanity, party sink, kitchen counters and guest vanity.

Photo by Weinmiller Inc./Indigo Photography





At the Johnston residence: Stone-colored counters, mostly poured in layers to produce stratifications. The kitchen has two bar tops with drop-nose features, and the kitchen counters have integral bamboo cutting boards, trivets and elevation changes.

In 2007, Reaching Quiet won the awards' "Best of Show."

"I think people are starting to catch on to the smooth, one-color, finely finished concrete, and how many colors and how many shades of that color we can create," Howell says.

Over the last year and a half, he adds, granite countertops have been losing favor with designers. "At this point, it's being recognized down to the level of the basic interior design person that (concrete) is the new element, this is the new product. It's got a lot of buzz all around the country."

Howell says he thinks concrete is starting to catch on in his region because interior designers have seen quality concrete work in other parts of the country, such as New York and Los Angeles, and want it used on their Charlotte-area projects.

"Somewhere along the way, about three or four months ago, I feel like we broke a big gap, because we've had nothing but nonstop calls for commercial applications," he says. "I think people are starting to realize there's a lot more options as far as color, size and function."

Howell says Reaching Quiet's residential work has also helped push its work into commercial. "We have a lot of designers finally seeing the residential work, seeing what we could do and getting ideas on a broader scale, saying, 'Wow!, if they could do this, what could they do with the space in my nightclub?'"

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Stone Soup Concrete, Florence, Mass.

by Robert S. Johnson

Bright colors are not usually what come to mind when thinking of concrete, even for concrete countertops in kitchens and bathrooms.

However, Stone Soup Concrete has noticed a lot of orders being placed with the company for just that. "We're surprised at how much color we're seeing in the kitchen," says company cofounder Mike Karmody.

A homeowner couple recently hired the Florence, Mass., company to match a bold yellow-orange color for an island top. Stone Soup's color specialist matched the color exactly, says communications director Jeanine Lioce, and some crushed glass was added for effect. "The final product was really intense, but it fit perfectly into the space they had created," she says.

Stone Soup is no stranger to commercial work either. The outfit recently did tile work for a mosaic of Disney's Buzz Lightyear character to be displayed at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla. "The colors are just out of this world," Karmody says. "Really bright, yellow, really bright purple, really bright blue."

"We never thought we'd see those colors come into the home. But lo and behold, we are."

In addition to concrete countertops, the company creates sinks, tubs, vanities and fireplaces. Those projects sometimes include colored glass terrazzo, scribed surfaces and drainboards, inlays and acid stains.

Karmody says the housing slump has not had too much of a



Photo courtesy of Jon Whitney Studios

negative impact on Stone Soup Concrete's business. "If you're going to stay in a place, it will degrade. You'll have to upgrade it," he explains. "As soon as the people realize the sky's not going to fall, then we'll see the return of those people."

He has also noticed that middle-class client orders have fallen sharply, but higher-end projects have picked up the slack. "We're seeing a lot more large things," he says. Those larger pieces include countertops and islands for the kitchen.

Stone Soup Concrete is also being kept busy by orders for tiles for both indoor and outdoor use.

The shift in the workload, Karmody says, means he has more time to spend on other kinds of projects, including artwork that is to be part of an exhibit scheduled to travel all over New England in the coming years. "That just means we're not so crazy at this time of year," he says. "I'm really okay with it."


The custom residential sector is still accounting for 70 percent of Stone Soup Concrete's business, Karmody says, but the company is taking on more commercial jobs. He says the commercial work is chiefly for upscale and chain restaurants and some retail.

One high-end, high-profile project was for the .406 Club at Fenway Park in Boston, which is named after the Hall of Famer Ted Williams' milestone batting

average in 1941. Stone Soup created a warm black bar top with a light grind that is installed partly indoors, partly outside.

The company offers workshops to the public at its facilities, showing attendees its techniques, processes and business practices. Participants also get hands-on experience designing and fabricating an actual project.

Stone Soup Concrete grew out of a

construction company that Karmody and his business partner, Mike Paulsen, formed about 12 years ago. Karmody says he handles more of the production while Paulsen deals with the clients. The company serves customers throughout all of New England as well as in New York, New Jersey and parts of Pennsylvania. 

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First Place, Residential Hollow Rock Designs Inc. Bar top in a condominium, St. Paul, Minn.

Judges:

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Michael Eastergaard,
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Jeff Girard, Concrete
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The condo is very upscale contemporary. The client wanted a very rough counter wall/top combination with a polished top. The back of the concrete wall was used to incorporate a stainless steel trough sink. The top was grey.

The bar top is used for entertainment on one side and cleanup on the other side.

The piece was given to us with a suggested size and it was left to us to create the aesthetic. The combination of a formed bridge abutment with the sleek top finish adds a campy flavor.

The piece weighed more than a ton and had to be formed and poured up against a wall. The piece was

hoisted into a truck for delivery, and with the use of a crane, and an entire city block barricaded, it was raised five floors and ramped through the balcony deck doors. Then, it was jacked up with hydraulic jacks and wheeled carts to a point where it was flipped end over end across the living room to its resting place using huge solid foam bumpers to absorb the tumbles.

From the Judges:

Fantastic design. The top looks gorgeous; nice contrast between polished top and rough face.

—Jeff Girard

Concrete Countertop Institute

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From the Contest Entry:

This job was for a reception countertop at a mortgage brokerage firm. It has an inlay of their business logo along with integrated slots for their business cards, plus radius edging.

From the Judges:

Very nice piece. Simple but elegant. The placement of the logo ties nicely with the positioning of the business cards.... Good job on the curves. They are clean and true.

—Jeff Girard

Concrete Countertop Institute



First Place, Commercial

New Edge Design

**Neighborhood Mortgage countertop,
Bellingham, Wash.**



Runner Up, Residential

Absolute ConcreteWorks

**(tie) Rotter residence kitchen,
bathroom and patio work,
Olympia, Wash.**

**Hayvaz residence kitchen and
espresso bar work, Shelton, Wash.**

From the Contest Entry:

(Rotter) The BBQ surround was stained to complement and accent the colors in the stone surrounding it.

(Hayvaz) A multipurposed three-dimensional art piece also serves as a removable end wall panel, providing access to lighting controls for the adjacent glass block wall. Embedded keepsakes included espresso cups, a wine bottle and corks from the client's winemaking business, and representations of vines and leaves from the vineyard.

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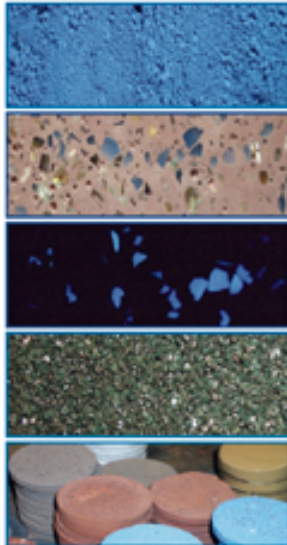
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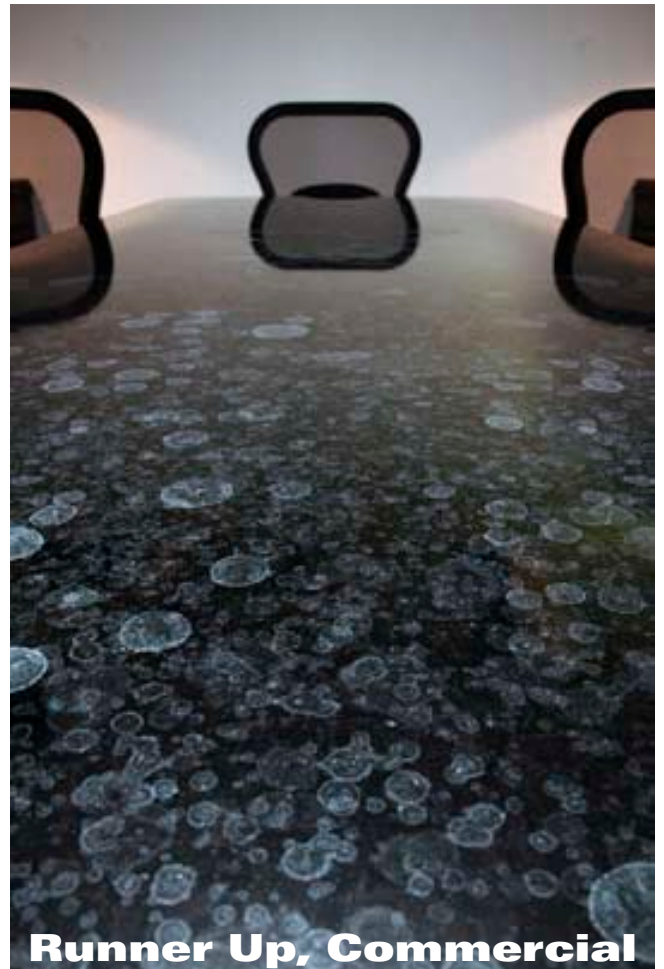
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Runner Up, Commercial Hard Topix Precast Concrete

Master Precision Global conference tabletop, Greenville, Mich.

From the Contest Entry:

The work top is 40 inches by 96 inches by 2 inches thick weighing in at almost 600 pounds. The precast mold was built using melamine, and Master Precision's custom logo was then set in the mold. A GFRC concrete mix was tinted with black integral color sprayed on in three heavy coats and then backed with black standard concrete mix reinforced with fiber mesh and No. 4 rebar. The concrete top was cured for four days before the pearl color shift was applied.



true to form



Photos courtesy of J&M Lifestyles



The Trout Sink

When J&M Lifestyles LLC was contacted to create a hunting-lodge theme in a New Jersey home, product manager Jeff Kudrick figured the creative possibilities were endless.

Kudrick did work on the home's kitchen countertops and two bathrooms, but it is the trout sink in one of the bathrooms that leaves the biggest impression.

"Jeff thought some sort of physical detail in the sink would match the hunting lodge theme of the house and blend well with the textured tiles in the shower," says Michelle Radley, managing partner for J&M Lifestyles.

The sink, which contains three-dimensional depictions of a brook trout and a rainbow trout, was created by carving a mold from clay.

Originally, Kudrick had planned on simply creating a relief carving of a trout and placing it in the back of the sink.

However, the project quickly took on a life of its own. "It's really hard to make clay perfectly smooth," Kudrick says, "so I started adding water and stones."

Once the water and stones were added, he decided the relief was still too boring and the sink needed imagination.

"I went over and above just because I didn't think the relief carving would do it justice," says Kudrick. "We had the opportunity to do something that was very special."

Kudrick went all out, even adding a fly lure and fishing line near the mouth of the large brook trout.

Because of all the detail in the sink, one of the challenges Kudrick faced was making sure water wouldn't collect anywhere. Also, he had to make sure the mold would be strong enough to keep its shape despite the weight of the cement, but also be flexible enough to pull off and

not ruin the mold.

Both Radley and Kudrick say there was a lot of finger-crossing when it came time to pour the mold. But it turned out perfect.

A subtle acid stain was given to the scene to give it the final touch.

Now that the sink and the rest of the lodge are complete, the owners couldn't be happier with the work. "The client and the designer both went out of their way to call and leave detailed voice mails to tell us how impressed and happy they were to have this artwork in their home," Radley says. "That is what is most satisfying for us, to have people see it as art." 🐟

www.jmlifestyles.com

true to form



Photos courtesy of Surfacing Solutions

Ahead of the Curve

by Emily Panter

When Shawn Halverson, president of Surfacing Solutions Inc., agreed to create a few conference tables for First Team Real Estate in Newport Beach, Calif., he had no idea what the final product would look like — or what challenges he would endure along the way.

Halverson originally signed on to the project because he was intrigued by the slight curve design that architectural firm Fraser McClellan & Associates Inc. had incorporated into the tables. First Team wanted a more modern-looking office, which is one of the reasons they chose concrete. After multiple meetings to

determine the look of the table, Halverson and Fraser McClellan decided on a 4-inch bull nose edge.

Halverson and lead concrete counter artist Chris Johnson were also interested in creating a new look using unusual glass pieces. They obtained a small sample of glass from an acquaintance and used the entire amount they had to make a sample, which the architects loved.

“Usually when you buy glass it’s ground up into small, little chunks and is all the same color. This was a mixture of reds, yellows, oranges and green and all different sizes,” says Halverson. “This



The glass pieces in the countertop are a mixture of reds, yellows, oranges and greens. They are a range of different sizes, giving the piece a more natural look.

looked like broken bottles in their more natural state.”

Once Halverson and his crew realized these were the glass pieces they wanted to use, an extensive search began to track down the original source, eventually leading them to a company in the Bay Area. They bought the company’s entire stock not knowing if the material would be available again.

With the glass in hand, Halverson and Johnson got to work, using enCounter as their basic mix.

“We love the ground-down look of enCounter and how it exposes the white limestone aggregate,” says Halverson.

Surfacing Solutions faced yet another small challenge with the enCounter mix. Halverson says it is difficult to buy on the West Coast, so they ended up having 128 bags shipped from Florida.

In order to create the slight curve in the design, Halverson went to his local foam cutter to develop the perfect mold by using sheet foam and a wire cutter.

Surfacing Solutions made three tables,

two that are 6 feet in length and the other 12 feet. The smaller tables weigh around 750 pounds, and the larger weighs in at 1,500 pounds.

Obviously, flipping a 750-pound table for grinding and moving it to its permanent home is no easy task. “All I can say is, lots of manpower, a fork lift and one big mistake,” says Halverson.

When the crew attempted to flip the first of the 6-foot tables, it broke and fell to the ground. “The lesson here is that cure time is your friend,” Halverson says.

The crew had to wait two weeks for a new form to be built, as well as losing 750 pounds of concrete. “I saw \$1,000 sitting on the ground in an instant,” says Halverson.

The setback did not hurt their relationship with their client. Surfacing Solutions was also hired to create a receptionist counter, fireplace and coffee bar for the real estate office. ☺

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product profile



Photo by Victoria Web

NuCrete and EarthCrete from Sonoma Cast Stone Corp.

by Robert S. Johnson

People are looking to go green in their homes and businesses, and not just through energy-efficient appliances and solar power. Sonoma Cast Stone Corp. is right there with them.

The Petaluma, Calif.-based company offers lines of concrete mixes that employ recycled materials but are as versatile as regular concrete.

Sonoma founder and president Steve Rosenblatt says NuCrete and EarthCrete are taking off and giving customers more options in going green.

Sonoma Cast Stone introduced EarthCrete earlier this year. It's a family of concrete mixes that utilize recycled paper fibers, ceramics and industrial

by-products, as well as clays and other minerals available near the Sonoma Cast Stone factory.

The EarthCrete formulas vary according to the application. For instance, SonomaLite is an EarthCrete product that is used for wall cladding and surrounds. It uses almost no portland cement, incorporating recycled materials instead. SonomaLite also weighs less than half of what conventional concrete does.

A second Sonoma product, NuCrete, is a precast concrete surface that comes with a five-year warranty against staining and a 5-year guarantee against cracking. In addition to countertops, sinks and other concrete products, NuCrete's reach



The EarthCrete family of concrete mixes incorporates recycled paper fibers, ceramics and industrial by-products.

has stretched to include public restrooms, dining tables and commercial kitchen work tops. NuCrete is available in 20 colors and can be matched to most other colors.

Rosenblatt says restaurants and office building operators have really taken to NuCrete. "They don't have to worry about staining," he says. "They loved concrete but were always concerned about staining."

So far, Rosenblatt says, NuCrete has been used for high-end work in kitchens and bathrooms.

Since the mid-1990s, Sonoma Cast Stone has developed a reputation as a leader in using recycled materials in its high-end products, as well as in manufacturing precast concrete.

The company says it is trying to develop a patented process to replace portland cement, which environmentally is the worst ingredient in the concrete recipe. Currently the mixture used by Sonoma Cast Stone averages 30 percent recycled consumer waste.

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Photo by Peter Crouser

NuCrete, a precast concrete surface, is primarily used for high-end work in kitchens and bathrooms, but is gaining in popularity in other areas.



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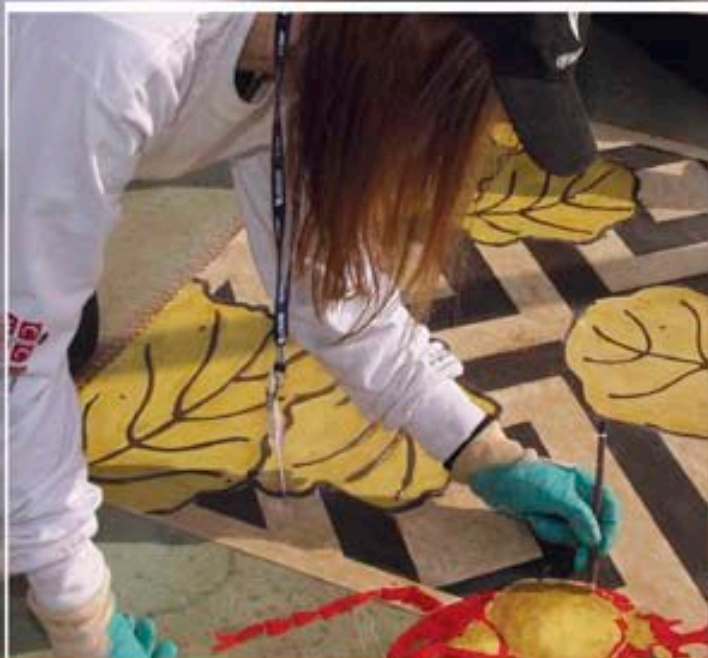





In addition to countertops and tables, Sonoma Cast Stone's products are used in floor tiles, bathtubs, surrounds and landscaping.

Commercial landscaping in particular has kept Sonoma Cast Stone busy recently, Rosenblatt says. A number of hotels have ordered tiles and 24-inch paving stones for walkways at their facilities, he says. That is in addition to tile flooring for indoor areas, such as lobbies and reception areas.

Sonoma Cast Stone also does special projects. Rosenblatt says he is now at work on a two-ton fountain that is eight feet in diameter for the new Marin Health and Wellness Campus in Marin County, Calif. The fountain will be a bowl within a bowl, with the water overflowing from one well to another. Around the base will be inscriptions of famous quotes from such luminaries as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. ☺



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