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Beauty and versatility in a breakfast room

photo by Beth Robinson

Getting to the Bottom of Stained Floors

By Caren Elizabeth Austen

LOOKING FOR THE LATEST in floor and counter top design for your new or soon-to-be remodeled home? Those following the trends are going back to the basics. They are stripping everything away, right down to the concrete. Concrete floors have been around for years, especially in businesses, but have become popular in residences only recently.

When you think of concrete floors and counters, put the dull, gray driveway look out of your mind. The possibilities with concrete are almost endless according to Little Elm interior designer, Robyn Petelski of RKP Designs. "Concrete offers everything you get with granite and more. It's heat resistant, easy to care for and can be customized to your specific taste." She adds, "In fact, concrete, as a countertop or as flooring is the only surface that can be truly customized. With tile, granite, wood or carpet, homeowners must choose from the selections offered by the

manufacturer. Concrete can be stained to a specific color, custom designs can be added, and the homeowner determines even the amount of sheen on the surface. If you're looking for a rustic feel, you can choose an informal, stone look with low sheen. But, if you want a formal look, you might choose a more solid-color stain with a very high sheen. Concrete is truly the most versatile of any surface currently available."

According to Suzette Spina, owner of Tembo, "Concrete is an economical alternative to tile or carpet, and it solves the problems of pet dander, dust and mold that plague allergy sufferers and that are common problems with carpet." Ms. Spina also appreciates the "green" aspect of concrete. "It's never going to go out of style and be thrown away to end up in a landfill. Part of the economics of concrete is the fact that in Texas, nearly every home is built on a concrete slab, so the surface

is already there. All that's required to make it a comfortable, living space is color and design. And, as far as that's concerned, you're only limited by your imagination."

Chris Sorenson of The Concrete Stain Experts works primarily with new homebuilders. He says, "I love my work because I'm allowed to be

creative. I get to take the homeowner's vision and turn it into reality. I had one client who wanted a Texas star with his ranch brand imprinted in the center of it. He was really happy with the result and I had fun doing it!"

Concrete floors are not just for new homes. Existing homes can be updated with the look as well. "Doing a remodel is somewhat more difficult and more expensive because we have to remove the existing floor covering, the glue, nails, paint and whatever else may be left behind before we can begin work on the new floor," says Ms. Spina, whose business is about 80 percent remodels. "But, it's not a huge deal because the concrete's always there under the carpet, tile or whatever. We just have to clean it up."

One factor that Ms. Petelski advises homeowners thinking about concrete flooring to consider is that cracks are an inevitable part of homes in Texas. "Ask yourself if you can live with that or if it will be a distraction. Consult your floor designer about making it a part of the overall look and design of the floor."

Both Ms. Spina and Mr. Sorenson address that issue. They agree that cracks



Granite looking concrete floor (left);
Intricate tile like design (inset)
photos by Beth Robinson



will be a part of your floor and believe that if done properly, it can add to the character and charm of the floor. Mr. Sorenson comments, "Instead of being a detraction from the beauty, the cracks can actually add to it."

Ease of care and durability are two of the main attractions of concrete flooring. It simply requires mopping and an occasional waxing, similar to wood floors. Mr. Sorenson says, "If you have carpet and spill grape juice, you've got a stain. If you have tile and drop something heavy, you've got a chip. If you have wood and you drop something, you're likely to create a dent. But if you drop something on concrete, you don't have to worry about the floor."

Ms. Spina's home is a showroom of what can be done with concrete flooring. From the casual, textured stone look of the kitchen to the black, high-shine marble style of the living and dining rooms, it demonstrates the versatility of concrete. It also shows how scoring in the concrete can create the illusion of separate tiles or slabs of marble. Her entry has wood floors, which pair beautifully with the black concrete. "I was able to create the right look for my home and it's durable and easy-care. Who can ask for more?"

So maybe you're convinced that concrete flooring is right for you and you

even have the color and style in mind. What happens when you want to sell your home and a prospective buyer wants to change the interior design completely? Not a problem. "It's easy to go darker on the stain, going lighter is more difficult, but not impossible," says Ms. Spina. "If the new homeowner wants a drastically different color, we can always remove the top sealer, add a thin overlay of concrete and create a completely new look." Ms. Petelski agrees that reselling should not be a problem, "The new owners have choices. They can keep it the way it is, or cover it with flooring of their choice."

Cracks will be a part of your floor and if done properly, it can add to the character and charm of the floor.

As living spaces expand to the outdoors with patio kitchens and fireplaces to complement the garden and pool areas, stained concrete has become even more popular. It adds flair and a personalized

touch to the outdoor areas instead of the drab, unfinished concrete that has been common until now. Stained concrete creates a sense of purposeful design to spaces that have been merely functional in the past.

The only limitation with concrete flooring is that it's only practical for the first floor. According to Mr. Sorenson, "It's easy to do it on the upper floors of commercial real estate because of the design of the structure. Homes are designed differently. The homeowner would have to arrange for extra support and then use a thin concrete overlay for the surface. Most people just opt for hardwood or carpeting on upper floors."

It's obvious that Mr. Sorenson enjoys his work, "My favorite part of working with concrete flooring is the opportunity to be creative. I'm a creative person by nature – a music major turned concrete artist. I love to create a personalized, one-of-a-kind design for a homeowner and see their pleasure in that creation."

So the flooring trend of the future? It's back to the basics – that basic gray slab under every Texas home. Just strip down to it or start with that bare concrete and let your imagination run wild.

Caren Elizabeth Austen is a freelance writer living in Plano.