



[CONCRETE COUNTERTOPS]

Cook Up a Conversation Piece

If you entertain often, concrete counters in kitchens and bars will give your guests something to talk about, not to mention announce your style savvy. You can enlighten curious friends with a complete knowledge of concrete: that it allows for thick counter edges, that it's easy to shape into curvy designs, that any color is possible, and that the porous surface may require waxing and sealing a few times a year to ward off stains.

- 1 Last summer, after four years of cross-country travel and research, Concrete Countertops of Indianapolis began fabricating counters with Concre, the company's own mix, available in any of the thousands of Benjamin Moore paint colors. CCI also developed a heat-resistant and extra-stain-resistant sealer. "We put red wine, vinegar and mustard on the concrete and let it stand for 48 hours, and nothing stained," says CCI's Denny Knipp.
- 2 Top concrete designer Buddy Rhodes, based in San Francisco, has released a product line of mixes and color agents to help homeowners across the country get his sought-after look without commissioning a countertop from afar. Unlike most concrete formulas, Rhodes' mix can be cast vertically without collapsing, allowing for designs like this cone-shaped kitchen island. RCS Contractor Supplies of Noblesville is the only Indianapolis distributor of the Buddy Rhodes line and fabricates one-of-a-kind interior features.
- 3 New bar tops by Concrete Artisans sparkle with inlaid glass tiles. Almost anything can be inlaid into a concrete surface, allowing for extra visual interest or personalized touches—Concrete Artisans once embedded a piece of Mt. Everest for a client who had climbed the mountain. Other embedded objects serve a purpose. For instance, a metal trivet anchored into the surface provides a place to set hot dishes. Here, the sloped trough sink is cast from concrete, an example of the unusual designs possible. Because of the possibility for stains, Jeff Ware of Concrete Artisans wasn't a fan of concrete countertops in kitchens until he found what he calls the "ideal seal," a product that never needs to be reapplied. Still, plenty of homeowners—like those who don't cook often—are adding concrete counters to main-level kitchens for looks, regardless of any drawbacks.

CONCRETE MISCONCEPTIONS

It cracks.

Yes, most concrete cracks, but not like a sidewalk or driveway does. Cracks will be imperceptible and harmless.

It's cheap.

The new design-oriented projects aren't for the thrifty. High-tech mixes, custom molds, time-intensive processes and labor-heavy installations hike up the cost of concrete projects to about the lower end of granite and marble. However, acid-staining a concrete floor costs about half that of tiling it.

It's cold.

Long associated with urban jungles, concrete has had a hard-boiled image. Actually, the natural material (it's made from sand and cement) has the warmth of stone. In fact, staining methods are so advanced, concrete floors are often mistaken for stone tiles.

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