

# housetrends®



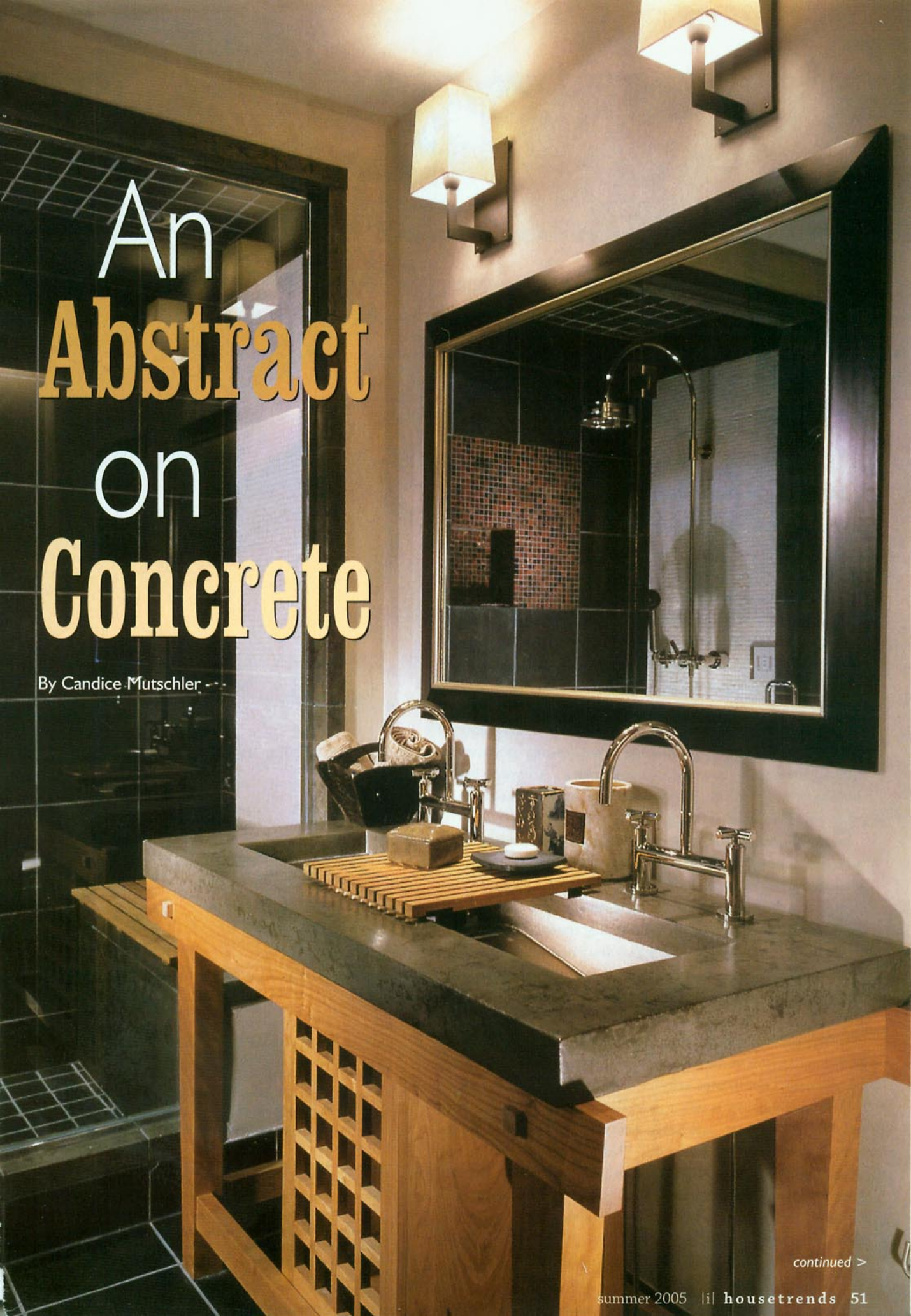
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## Tools of the Trade

*Chef Serves Up  
His Ideal Kitchen*

**The Perfect Blend**  
*Contemporary Home  
Finds Comfort in Color*

A modern bathroom vanity with a thick, grey concrete countertop and a light-colored wooden base. The vanity features two rectangular white sinks with chrome faucets. A wooden slatted soap dish is placed between the sinks. On the left sink, there is a black soap dish with a bar of soap and a small basket. On the right sink, there is a white ceramic soap dish with a bar of soap. A large, dark-framed mirror is mounted above the vanity, reflecting the shower area. Two square, illuminated sconce lights are mounted on the wall above the mirror. To the left, a glass shower enclosure is visible, showing a shower head and a tiled wall. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

# An Abstract on Concrete

By Candice Mutschler

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Once relegated to the exterior, concrete is moving indoors—to kitchens and bathrooms, floors and walls, fireplaces and furniture. It is fast becoming the preferred medium for designers and artists alike and has moved center stage as a versatile alternative to marble, granite, wood and tile.

Known for its durability, low maintenance and environmental advantages, concrete has been used for centuries in countries such as Mexico and Greece, and by visionary architects like Frank Lloyd Wright whose use of concrete is well known. The floors of the famed Price Tower, for example, are made of poured concrete incised with parallelograms that are the basis of the floor plans and furniture designs. However, in the United States, concrete has typically been passed over in favor of more refined products. That all changed in the 1980s when the rugged, nondescript construction material took on a more sophisticated appeal. Concrete began showing up in residential interiors—and not only in swanky apartment remodels, but in cottages and luxury estates as well.

Buddy Rhodes, whose name is synonymous with designer concrete, is considered a pioneer in this arena. Originally a ceramist, he developed a product that expresses the warmth and charm of pottery but has the industrial strength and versatility of concrete. He quickly earned a reputation for outstanding concrete countertops, in part due to his high-profile work in Pottery Barn stores and other commercial projects. As word spread, the demand for residential kitchen and bathroom counters grew, and Rhodes' business prospered.

Today, homeowners seeking an alternative to highly polished granite and marble or the sterile look of Corian and Formica are driving concrete's rise in popularity. "Concrete has an earthiness. It is made by artisans, so it has a natural, artistic feel. That's what makes it so appealing," says Susan Andrews, vice president of California-based Buddy Rhodes Studio. "The advantage is that we can create almost any color and it goes well with virtually any décor, everything from old fashioned farm-style to ultra modern," she explains. That natural feel is enhanced by integral color—coloring the mix rather than slapping color on top. Color and texture will vary. Depending on preference, surfaces can appear two-toned or

**Overleaf:** Shower entry bricks complement this stylish vanity's concrete countertop in a Telluride, Colorado residence. Photo courtesy of Buddy Rhodes Studio

**Top left:** A game room features a scored-pattern floor with a showcase hand-painted fish.

**Top middle:** A grooved pattern softens the surface of a pool deck.

**Above:** A great room floor is scored with big blocks and acid stained in a soft buckwheat color.

*Above photo courtesy of Classic Concrete Design*

**Right:** "Evolution"—This inlay fossil on a Davidson/Schlake Design Studios table represents the ocean or riverbed and evolution of the elements.

*Photo courtesy of Davidson/Schlake Design Studios*



mottled, be monotone and smooth, or have exposed sand aggregate. It's a terrific alternative to tile and those repetitive grout lines.

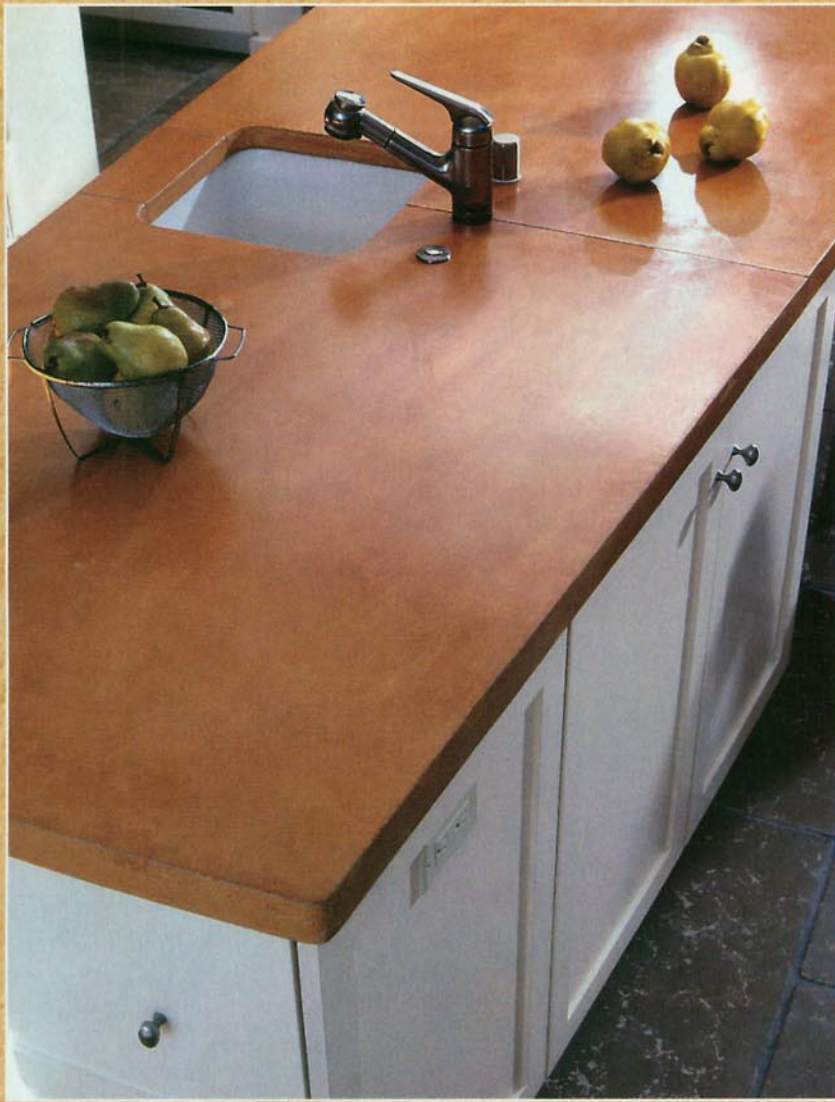
Most concrete counters are custom manufactured in a studio (precast) rather than onsite (cast in place) for practical reasons. The labor-intensive process requires vigorous activity that



would be disruptive and produce considerable dust in the home—not the ideal manufacturing environment!

While Rhodes has perfected a mix that he sells online and through distributors, other designers get creative with their blends. Concrete Studios in Columbus, Ohio commonly adds items such as glass chips, seashells, metal or

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special aggregates. Even so, the surfaces are smooth to the touch. The finished product is nothing like the concrete normally associated with pavement.

### Functional fashion

While concrete counters are the hottest trend—not because they cost less; the price is now comparable to other high-end materials—the substance is also being used to form dramatic fireplace surrounds, architectural elements, furniture and decorative art.

In Englewood, Florida, artisans Diane Davidson and Erik Schlake of Davidson/Schlake Design Studios are creating a buzz with their functional art. “People are starting to appreciate concrete’s natural beauty, and they’re looking for ways to incorporate this earthy element into their homes without remodeling,” says Davidson, whose background is in architecture and fine art. “Concrete lends itself to furniture design because it is durable, and it is a fabulous artistic

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Far left top: Color and texture help soften the concrete’s look on this kitchen island counter in a Glen Ellen, California residence.

Photo courtesy of Buddy Rhodes Studio

Far left bottom: A galaxy black countertop with mirror glass embedded in the concrete creates a highly-polished appearance.

Photo courtesy of Concrete Studios

Left: Curved corners on the kitchen counters and a kidney-shaped island are featured in this San Francisco residence.

Photo courtesy of Buddy Rhodes Studio

Above: A soft-charcoal countertop picks up on the stainless-steel accents in this contemporary kitchen.

Photo courtesy of Concrete Studios