

Concrete evidence on home finishings

By NICOLE MCLAWS, SUNMEDIA

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Granite and hardwood are beautiful products, but they lack that edge, that certain something, that makes them ultra-current and urban.

And that's why today's uber-hip homeowners are gravitating towards another material for their flooring, fireplace mantles and countertops: Concrete.

It's durable, attractive and different, and it's gaining in popularity.

That's why we asked the experts: Why is concrete a good choice for home interiors?

"It's totally custom and durable," says Kelly Falconi of Concrete Innovations.

"It's like a higher end granite — it's around \$74 per square foot and up, and it's about as heavy as granite."

But its look is distinctly different, she adds.

Whether it's typical grey, contemporary white, glittery, coloured, striated or flecked, concrete countertops can suit any home environment.

"You can inlay anything — sports paraphernalia in a bar, fossils, rocks, your kids' hand prints. It's totally custom, and that's what sets it apart from other stone," Falconi says. "It's really come a long way, as well. It's very refined, very contemporary and crisp and clean."

Indeed, atop kitchen and bath cabinets, a slab of concrete is unexpected, yet stylish, but it doesn't have to be sleek and slick, suited only to a contemporary abode.

"You can make it traditional as well," Falconi says.

"You can use cornice moldings as part of the mold building, and we can use different shaped molds to put out a product with a custom, traditional profile."

In fact, that's one way to get a stunning fireplace surround, she says — today, many stylish homeowners are using concrete rather than tile for their fireplace surrounds, mantles and hearths, while others are selecting the material as a flooring option.

"We can pretty much do whatever the imagination wants," says Damian Angelozzi, co-owner of Pantheon Decorative Concrete Products.

"That's the really inspiring thing about concrete — we can do things with it that you can't do with traditional building materials such as hardwood or tile. With concrete, there's nothing holding you back."

He says concrete flooring can be warm to the touch when installed with in-floor heating, and can be just as warm and welcoming as hardwood. A variety of colours, patterns, textures and dyes mean flooring can be obviously concrete or can masquerade as tile, marble, or even an NHL hockey rink.

"Pretty much whatever colour palette you have, we can work with," he says. "The colour palette is as broad as a paint store selection — we can do yellow, blue, green, red. We can mix colours together in the concrete, we can make more variation in colour, we can give it a marbled look. We can warm it up in a coffee-coloured brown, or keep it in the grey industrial sort of look. We've even created a replica of an NHL hockey rink, all using concrete and dyes — none of it is paint, so there is no possibility of it flaking or coming off."

And that's what makes it an ideal selection for any household — it's long-lasting and stylish, and it's customized to boot.

"People are catching on and seeing what the benefits are to using concrete in their houses," Angelozzi says.

"There are so many different options and ways of making it look that it's just a really exciting way to go."

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