

Decorative Painting Tools

Painter's Tape Update

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Finding a *Niche* In Concrete Overlay

Selecting Airless Sprayer
Accessories



Finding a Niche In Concrete Overlay

by Rebecca E. Parsons

Concrete is a natural and durable finish that is as comfortable in old-world decor as it is in modern and contemporary design. This versatile finish is an integral part of exterior hardscaping, taking on a more artistic look and feel in recent years, while its architectural elements are gaining popularity in interior spaces.

Concrete decoration is a natural progression for decorative artisans, as it blends architectural elements, artistic interpretation and creativity. Colored and stained concrete combined with decorative masking patterns, or stencils, has moved plain gray concrete into the world of art. Concrete overlay is a creative way to add interest to a front stoop; provide a new focal point to a family room; create an updated look on old kitchen countertops; or transform a bland basement wall into a lively work area.

If you are intrigued by the beauty of today's concrete samples and are considering adding handcrafted concrete overlay techniques to your portfolio of services, you are not alone. However, before investing in a how-to class on concrete overlay, it is best to find out more detailed information on the products and techniques involved.

What Is Concrete Overlay?

Concrete overlays, introduced to the architectural concrete and commercial flooring industry in the early 1980s, are a mixture of cement, various aggregates and hybrid polymer or acrylic resins. Adding polymer resins and aggregate to the cement significantly increases the performance and versatility of conventional cement and concrete materials.

There are many overlay products available today. Each system has a proprietary blend of ingredients and different application requirements. Some include oxidizers and colorants for hundreds of effects.

Overlays are applied as thin veneer to existing substrates of cement, wood, vinyl or any rigid surface. They can be mixed in small amounts and applied with a trowel. Furthermore, they can be colored, stained, stenciled or hand painted to achieve endless design possibilities.

Concrete work requires a big commitment in time and energy, but it can be worth the effort if one learns the medium and develops an expertise that is marketable. However, you must be willing to put in the time it takes to educate yourself and gain experience in the medium. Advanced training is necessary before attempting to sell an overlay job.

Rick Fischer of Deco Illusions in Fort Wayne, Ind., an expert in these systems, says, "The learning curve is steep. You have to learn where it will work and make good, informed choices for your clients." He

warns that one must have a thorough knowledge of how the product reacts in different situations, especially in adverse weather conditions. You have to be willing to experiment and test the product in a variety of environmental conditions.

Fischer recommends connecting with a reputable concrete contractor in your area. This individual can be a great source of information and advice. If you are not fully comfortable with the process, you can design the project and outsource the prep work to experienced concrete contractors. Then you can perform the artistry.

If you find the work to be too physical, there are other job opportunities for a well-trained professional. Many flatwork concrete contractors want to expand into art concrete. You can become a technical consultant, resident expert or pattern designer. Be creative with your skill set.



Concrete overlay is a creative way to add interest to a front stoop.



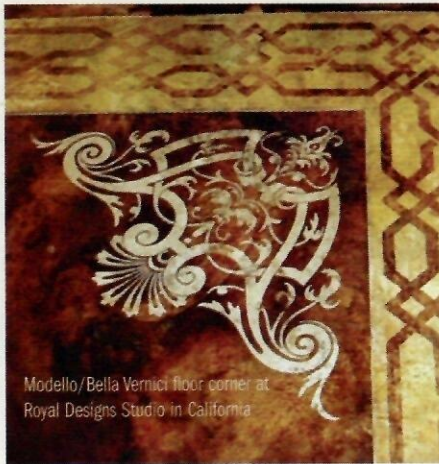
Bidding the Job

To fully understand all that is involved with decorative overlayment, Fischer agreed to share his insight and explain the process. Following are factors he recommends considering when bidding a concrete overlay job:

- For exterior applications, consider freeze and heat conditions; sunlight exposure; traffic and wear; the use of snow shovels and salt in freeze zones; the condition of the substrate; preparation; the best sealer available for the conditions; and the maintenance schedule.
- For interior jobs, most of the suggested exterior considerations apply, plus make sure to educate the homeowner on maintenance and care.

Fischer concentrates on sunrooms and porches, wine cellars, columns, back-splashes, fireplace hearths and mantels, entryways, kitchen countertops and interior floors. "A wine cellar floor is the ideal place for concrete overlayment," says Fischer. "It gets little traffic and little or no sunlight."

- Concrete is porous. It breathes, shrinks and expands. Sealers must allow these natural processes to occur. Also, the hydrostatic pressure must be factored in. There are a variety of sealers available, and they are continually being improved upon. It is important to understand the working of each one and where best to use it.
- Some colors are more susceptible to fading in sunlight, with red being the most sensitive. Furthermore, some colors wear better and are more lightfast than others. You must be able to make good recommendations based on the conditions of the job. Fischer suggests leaving driveways to the flat-work contractors. They can pour colored concrete that takes wear better.



• There are many overlay products available today. Each works a little differently, so be sure to get trained in the proper use of the products you choose.

Resurfacers provide a clean slate. "If you do a textured surface, be aware that it will wear more," Fischer warns. "Flat surfaces are best in high-traffic areas."

- Wood substrates are different from concrete surfaces. So be sure that you are trained in the specific skills necessary to perform the work over wood surfaces.
- In some areas of the country, cement overlayment is a seasonal treatment. In colder climates, jobs might need to be scheduled in the spring and summer.

Concrete Overlay 101

Following are the basic steps to doing concrete overlay:

1. Rate the substrate. Make sure it is in good condition. Crumbling concrete cannot be fixed. New concrete must be more than 30 days old before you can work on it.
2. Condition the surface. Remove grease and oil with a trisodium phosphate (TSP), ammonia and water mixture in a pressure washer with a scrubber attachment. Wash and rinse the substrate three or four times. There are other, more advanced techniques available with advanced study. Make sure you know how to use a pressure washer before you attempt to use it. The substrate can be damaged with too much pressure.
3. Sand or grind the surface to level 3 or 4 to create a tooth. Level 5 surfaces must be scratched. Dry the surface overnight.
4. Prime. Bonding primer polymer will mix with concrete to bind. Again, dry the surface overnight.
5. Prime again. Apply a second coat of

primer and immediately mix overlay. When the primer is dry to the touch, the overlay is ready to spread.

6. Apply the overlay. This is best done with two people, one to pour and the other to spread. Do only a workable area, usually between expansion joints. If the material settles in the joints, clear it out. Allow the overlay to dry.
7. Screen/sand the overlay. Use a drywall screen to remove burrs, not scratch, the overlay. Scratches will telescope through to the surface. Some products are more prone to scratching, so be sure to experiment.
8. Apply art layers. Concrete can be colored with dye stain to achieve depth. Stencil or freehand a design. You can also use stain with water, similar to a glaze. Several layers may be done at this point. Earth-friendly stains and dyes are all the rage. Allow the color to dry thoroughly.
9. Mask the walls 2 to 3 feet high for protection.
10. Apply a sealer. It is best to spray the sealer. A garden sprayer or pump sprayer made for concrete is fine. Spray a 360-degree area. Three coats of sealer are best, although the second and third coats can be rolled. Epoxy sealers are good for countertops.

Conclusion

Fischer advises anyone interested in performing concrete overlay work to become a professional student first and learn all you can. "Knowledge is the key," he says. "Educate yourself. Study your field to the fullest. Never feel like you are knowledge-proof."

The increase in demand and popularity of decorative concrete has brought about many new products to aid the process. The most fascinating are the stencils or decorative masking patterns that allow many possibilities. A wide variety of designs are available, and Modello Designs (see sidebar) will cut your custom design. **APC**

Rebecca Parsons, entrepreneur, artist, author, teacher and lecturer, is owner of Rebecca E. Parsons Studios Inc. in Athens, Ga., and San Diego, Calif. She conducts Do What You Love, Faux Finish and Faux Business workshops and is the author of "Do What You Love—Love What You Do, The Step-by-Step Guide to Faux Business." Visit Rebecca's Web site at fauxisme.com.

Rick Fischer's Overlay Samples

The following images are examples of Rick Fischer's decorative overlayment work. All patterned concrete examples were designed with the use of Modello Decorative Masking Patterns.



Close-up of demo floor

Demo floor

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Countertop overlayment

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Concrete over bricks before



Concrete over bricks completed



Front porch decor

What the pros are saying about Bulls Eye 1-2-3®:

**“We've never had a complaint.
So I know it works.”**

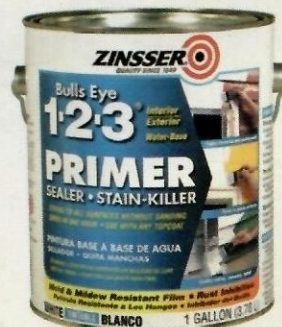
—Vince Warrenburg,
Superintendent, Reece Rebholz Co. painting
Indianapolis, Indiana



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Garage floor



Floor sample made with Modello pattern



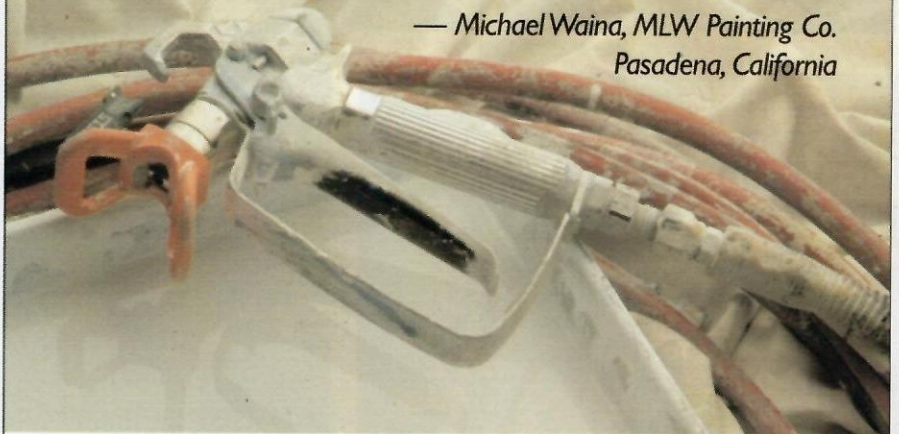
Floor samples with Modello pattern



What the pros are saying about Bulls Eye 1-2-3®:

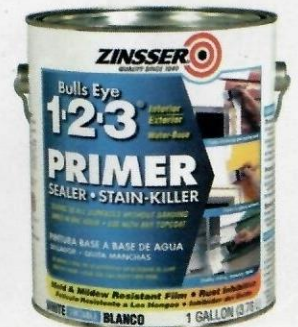
“I only keep one water-base primer in my van. Bulls Eye 1-2-3® is universal.”

— Michael Waina, MLW Painting Co.
Pasadena, California



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American Painting Contractor • April 2007 33