

CONCRETE: AN ALTERNATE FLOOR FINISH

By Paul H. Racette, PE



Concrete surfaces are no longer being viewed as a “substrate only” layer for floor coverings in commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings. In the past, concrete has traditionally been covered with a wide variety of materials, including ceramic tile, wood, vinyl tile, carpeting and more. Bare concrete, however, is now being considered as a viable flooring option along with other standard floor coverings.

There are multiple reasons for the resurgent use of bare concrete. Specifically, multiple new look and design options have made bare concrete an extremely versatile and attractive option. Some of the design options that “decorative concrete” offers include color staining, artistic dyes, polishing, stamping (to appear like tile, brick, etc.), scoring and sawcutting, embedded etched logos, and more. From a practical standpoint, colors can be utilized to designate different areas within a space, along with colors and textures mixed and matched for graphic interest. Also for a “regional” feel, exposed rock (aggregate) that is typical to the geographical region can be incorporated within the concrete surface. This option is more often used in driveways and patio settings.

Additional good news is that these options are not relegated to new construction surfaces only. Decorative concrete can also be used with existing surfaces. Staining an existing floor or applying a topping that can be colored, stained, stamped, or stenciled, can infuse new life into an old concrete surface. Combining a variety of floor coverings to manage areas of different traffic is also an attractive and practical option. For example, a lobby which would typically have a high volume of foot traffic is an excellent candidate for decorative concrete.

Business owners are also recognizing a valuable second benefit of bare concrete surfaces in the easy cleanup it affords. Compare the “soap and water” clean up for bare concrete with the additional maintenance requirements of: vinyl covering (periodic re-waxing); tile (grout cleaning); and wood (periodic finish coating and waxing). Carpeting offers its own range of maintenance and health issues including chemicals [both within the carpeting (formaldehyde) and in the cleaning products used], odors, dust mites and other substances which can create allergic reactions.

Concrete offers an attractive, low maintenance, allergy free alternative. Still additional benefits to consider may include a shortened construction schedule, lower cost, and fewer health related issues.

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