

New concrete finishes get stamp of approval

There's nothing plain about concrete floors anymore.

It used to be that a homeowner who opted for a concrete patio simply wanted an inexpensive, no-fuss floor.

Today, concrete has become a material of choice for homeowners, and decorative finishes have become high style—even on new slabs.

"Now, it's a big upgrade to a house," says Wacey Barta, who owns Second Time Around Custom Concrete Coating in Phoenix. "It gives a floor a nice, finished look."

Do-it-yourselfers and contractors are dressing up concrete patios with acid stains in every color, with overlays that mimic the look of flagstone and other more expensive, natural materials, and with distinctive stamps.

And exposed concrete isn't just for outdoor floors. Homeowners are stripping their carpets and vinyl tiles to reveal the concrete floors underneath in kitchens and even living rooms in homes at all price points.

Some of the most popular ways to turn a drab slab into something fancy underfoot include:

■ **Stamped concrete.** Patterns and textures are pressed into newly poured concrete before it's fully dry. Combined with stains that add realistic color, stamped concrete can imitate the look of brick, cobblestones, flagstone, wood, pebbles or even seashells — at a fraction of the price. Plan to pay around \$6 to \$8 per square foot for stamped concrete with a single pattern and color, more for elaborate designs. This is more a job for a contractor than a do-it-yourselfer.

■ **Overlays.** Another option for turning a scuffed-up, plain-Jane concrete patio floor into a fabulous faux-stone centerpiece for your outdoor room is the overlay. Also a job best left to a pro,



on the house
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an overlay involves laying a scratch coat of a high-polymer modified concrete over your old slab, taping out a flagstone, cobblestone or other pattern with grout tape, and then pouring another thin layer over that for texture. When you remove the tape from the almost-dry floor, it leaves impressions to look like grout lines, and when you add lifelike color, you'll fool most people into believing you have a genuine stone floor. Overlays cost from around \$3.50 to \$6.50 per square foot, depending on how elaborate your design and how large your patio. (Ask your contractor for a discount on a large floor.)

■ **Acid stains.** One of the most popular ways to dress up a concrete floor, acid staining permanently changes the color of concrete, because the pigment soaks deep into its pores. A confident do-it-yourselfer can apply the stain by spraying one to three coats onto the floor, then neutralizing the acid with ammonia and water, and finally, sealing the floor to protect the new finish. Depending on how much prep work your concrete floor needs — and prep work can be the biggest part of the job — you'll pay a contractor around \$2 to \$6 a square foot for labor and materials.

Romero has been in the Arizona home-building and -remodeling industry for 35 years. He has a radio program 8-11 a.m. Saturdays on KTAR-FM (92.3), 10 a.m.-noon Saturdays on KNST-AM (790) in Tucson and 8-11 a.m. Saturdays on KAZM-AM (780) in northern Arizona.