



Acid wash

Adding a new look to your concrete floors

When people thought of flooring options for their homes in the past, carpet, tile and wood planks were the obvious choices. But over the last few years a new choice has become increasingly popular — acid-stained concrete floors. By Charlotte Luongo

All photos courtesy of The Taunton Press's Concrete at Home, photos by Matthew Hillman

Acid-stained floors have a surprisingly rich look that can resemble the finest marble tiles. Of course, for a more modern home, it can also take on an industrial look with the right color and technique. And unlike marble tiles, which are expensive and difficult to maintain, acid-stained concrete is easy on the wallet and extremely durable — a great option for high-traffic areas.

The new book, *Concrete at Home* (The Taunton Press, 2005) by Fu-Tung Cheng with Eric Olsen, reveals beautiful work with concrete as flooring and other applications. It can bring various ideas of how to use concrete in your home — based on its location, its colors and its varying designs.

Scott Creager, the president of Decorative Concrete Supply Inc. (www.increteoftexas.com), has been designing, installing and educating contractors about acid-stained concrete for 16 years. "Consumers are getting more educated about staining concrete and they like the look of it," Creager says. "The design possibilities are really unlimited. Floors can be made to match the layout, architecture and color of the house. Decorative scouring can be used to make any logo or pattern on the floor." Creager suggests using the following steps in order to get the best results when acid-staining your concrete floors:

Clean the Floor

"It is important to have a very clean floor before applying a stain because the acid must be able to enter the pores of the concrete. If the pores are clogged, the stain won't take," Creager explains. To properly clean the floor, Creager says to start with a good floor stripper. A high-quality product to use is Uni-Strip manufactured by ChemCrafters Inc. It is non-toxic and biodegradable, which makes it safe to use inside your home.

After using a floor stripper, Creager recommends sanding the floor with an orbital sander and 20-grit sandpaper.

This will ensure that any chemical residues and other impurities are removed from the surface of the concrete. To make sure the concrete is clean, Creager suggests dropping some water on its surface. The water should soak into the concrete. If it beads, the concrete needs further cleaning.

Techniques for Application

There are an endless variety of techniques available for applying the acid-stain. According to Creager, the best way to get the marble effect is to use a plastic pump-up sprayer with a fan tip. "In most applications, usually one coat is sufficient," says Creager. "You should allow the coat to dry at least eight hours. A yellow powder residue will form, which you will need to remove using clean water and a floor mop. Then let the floor dry another 24 hours." (Note: If you would like the stain to be darker, you can apply a second coat. If you would like it to be lighter, you should use muriatic acid or 20-grit sandpaper to remove some of the stain. If you have really made a mess of the job and want to start from scratch, you can overlay the old floor with a new coat of self-leveling concrete.) >>



Cool concrete floors are especially nice to have when they save you from the cost and effort of having to put down another type of flooring.

If it sounds like too cold of an idea, remember that you can always add area rugs for warmth. And in places like the kitchen, the concrete is a nice option for hassle-free cleaning.



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Solvent- versus Water-based

After the floor has properly dried, use a pump-up sprayer to apply your sealant. Creager recommends only using a solvent-based sealant because they are far more durable than water-based sealants. After applying the sealant, make sure it dries for four hours.

Make it Last

After the sealant, a glaze should be applied, (in the same way as you applied the sealant). "A glaze gives the floor its sheen and makes the surface more durable," explains Creager. He suggests not walking on the glaze for at least 24 hours and not placing any heavy objects on the floor for 48 hours.

The color and general look of the floor can vary based on what tint the stain has - and the base color of the concrete. It's a good idea to do a test run in an inconspicuous area.



Stain Colors

Colors are limited with acid stains to yellow-based earth tones. However, alcohol dyes, which come in bright blues, greens, reds, purples and more, can be used in conjunction with the acid stains. The one drawback of alcohol dyes is that they fade in direct sunlight.

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Hiring a Professional

Acid-staining your concrete floor can be a manageable do-it-yourself project if you are planning to do only one or two rooms yourself. However, if you want to stain a larger area, plan on using a complicated design, or are uncomfortable dealing with any of the steps involved, there are many certified contractors nationwide who specialize in applying this type of flooring. On average, contractors charge around \$3.50 per square foot for staining the floor and around \$1.50 per linear foot for scouring designs into the floor.

Keep it Shiny

Three days after you apply the glaze, you can wax the floor. "The wax is a water-based material. You can apply it with a wood-floor dust mop. Wipe a thin layer of wax across the floor just like you're dusting a basketball court," Creager says. "The wax is a shield on top of the glaze. It keeps the surface of the glaze from scratching and becoming dull."

Creager encourages homeowners to re wax their floor periodically. If the floor is in a high-traffic area, such as a kitchen, you may need to re wax every month. If the floor is in an area that is rarely used, such as a formal dining room, you may only need to apply a new coat of wax once a year.

As a rule of thumb, apply a new coat of wax to the floor as soon as you notice that the surface has lost its shine and is becoming dull. If you're unsure of the process, consult a professional. ■

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