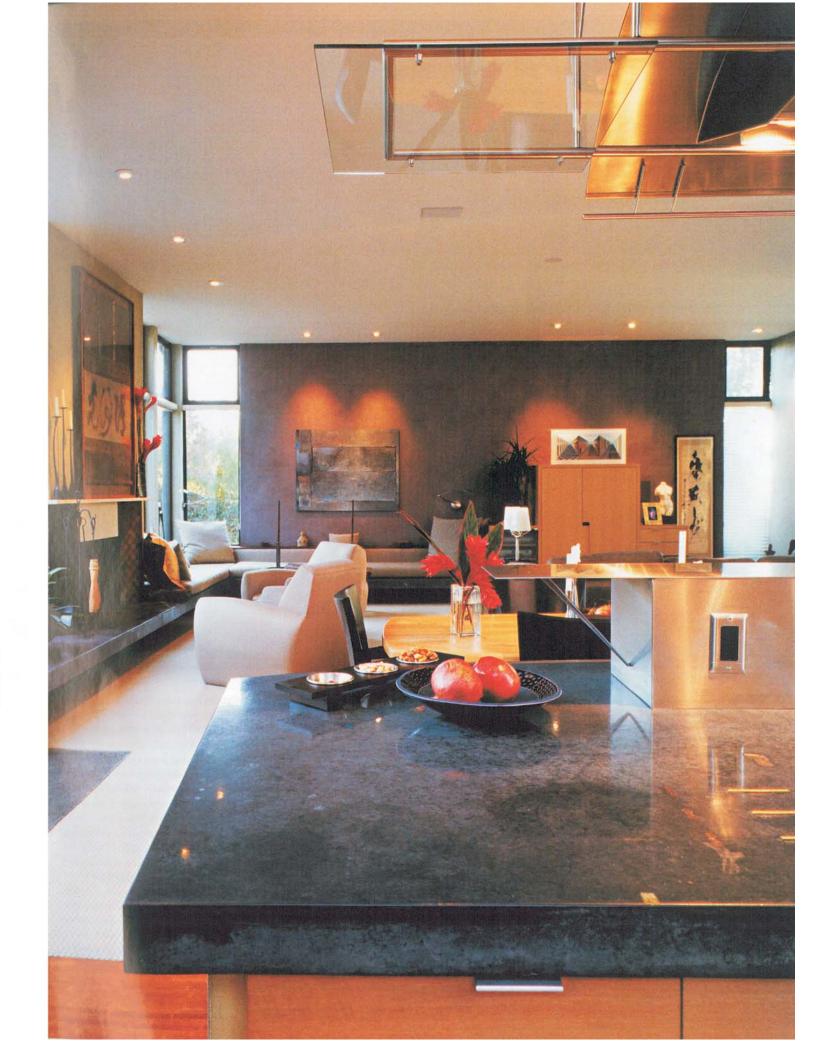


Chic concrete

Photos by Kerry Paul

By Allison Serrell DON'T OVERLOOK THIS MODERN MATERIAL THAT'S AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT IS ADAPTABLE

Forget those visions of rough, gray cement — concrete has come up in the world. Once relegated to sidewalks and driveways, the versatile material is now being put to sophisticated use in the home. Countertops, floors and hearths are a few common applications, but concrete can be found in unexpected places such as walls or planters as well.





PREVIOUS PAGE / THIS PAGE: Sandra Slater called on designer Fu-Tung Cheng when remodeling her Palo Alto home, which incorporates concrete in unconventional settings such as the entry, kitchen and living room fireplace surrounds. omposed of water, a gravel or sand aggregate and a Portland cement binder (a process of chemical heating), concrete's density and hardness make it especially durable. It's surprisingly beautiful, with the additional benefit of costing less than marble or granite.

Palo Alto environmental designer Sandra Slater loves the adaptability of concrete. "You can color it, stain it or polish it to a high gloss for a sexy, sleek look without losing the inherent earthiness," she says. Plus, it works indoors and out.

Moreover, it can be very evocative, according to Fu-Tung Cheng of Cheng Design in Berkeley and author of "Concrete Countertops" and "Concrete at Home." Because it is cast and shaped, concrete can feel smooth like stone, or it can be textured. It can even evoke the patina of timeworn tile.

For all its practical uses, concrete can be just as artful. Slater wanted to keep the kitchen and a small

office from public view in her Palo Alto home. "When you say goodbye to guests, you stand around the door a lot," she says. "I wanted all spaces in the house to have a quality of beauty, so I wanted a wonderful place to stand." She decided on a concrete water sculpture and enlisted Cheng to design and manufacture it. Comprising a floor-to-ceiling wall with a waterfall and a "pond" in the floor, the piece has a serene presence while also anchoring the space. The sculpture is textured in places and smooth in others, and has an abstract geometric design etched into the surface. "I love the serenity of listening to water," Slater says, who appreciates that the element gives life and movement to the house.

Another way to customize concrete is to embed it with personal or symbolic items. Slater's water sculpture contains a miniature replica of Mont Blanc in France — one of Cheng's favorite images — extending from what appears to be a rectangular sea.

Coins, fossils and gems are other items often cast into concrete.

Interior designer Carol Woodard of Saratoga helped South Bay clients add impact to their 1970s-era home. "They wanted to update the home, turn it into a 'now' house and a 'wow' house," she says.

Since the home boasts views of the Saratoga foothills, they also wanted it to have an organic look plus an elegant feel. To accomplish this, they created a dramatic, 22-foot fireplace surround in the living room. Made of granite on one side and a massive slab of concrete on the other, the surround is edged with birch that's been faux-finished to emphasize the warmth of the grain. They also tinted the granite midnight blue to subtly suggest water, then treated it to evoke the feel of erosion. "We wanted to make it more like a sculpture than a fireplace," says Woodard, who worked with Mark Concrete in Moss Landing. "The concrete was the perfect complement to the

granite. It allows for a lot of creativity, so you can get just the colors and textures you want."

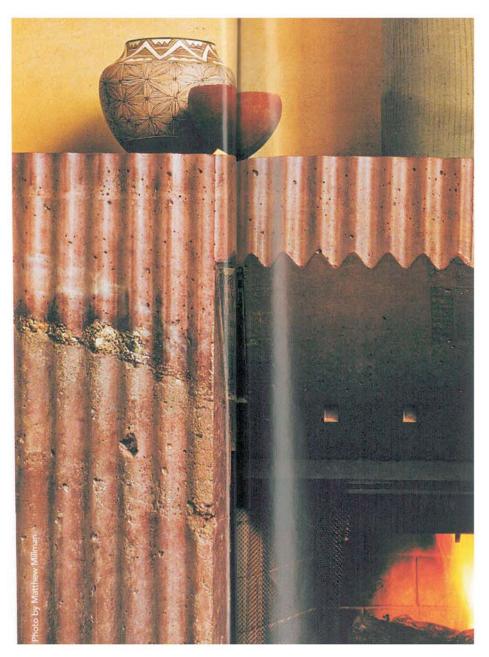
Martha and Bob Falkenberg chose concrete for several rooms in their Woodside home. The Mexicanstyle house is dramatic in scale, and makes bold use of contemporary materials, textures and offbeat colors. "A traditional kitchen wasn't in the cards," Martha Falkenberg says. "I was tired of the cold, shiny look of granite," and concrete has warmth, personality and depth.

She and her husband chose charcoal-colored concrete countertops for the kitchen, offset with raspberry-colored wood cabinets. They also used concrete for two bathroom vanities — one in avocado and one in jade green. Off the kitchen, a soaring fireplace surround in rose-tinted concrete complements the kitchen's colors. In the living room, dark mahogany floors offset a concrete hearth and bench.

Continued on page 50

Woodside residents Martha and Bob Falkenberg eschewed simplicity for drama in their Mexican-style kitchen, employing rich, bold colors and nontraditional materials such as charcoal-colored concrete paired with raspberry-hued wood.

24 SILICON VALLEY HOME • FEBRUARY 2006 • SILICON VALLEY HOME 25



CONCRETE — Continued from page 25

A number of local concrete manufacturers make beautiful home applications possible. Buddy Rhodes, who created the concrete for the Falkenberg home, is one of them. Though he was originally trained as a potter, the San Francisco designer has been working in concrete for 20 years. "Instead of plates and bowls, I design countertops and planters," he says. "I was looking for a material that I didn't have to fire in a kiln. I took concrete off the sidewalk and refined it for the home."

To Rhodes, the handcrafted aspect of concrete is what appeals the most. "It is a handmade product. The best thing about it is that it shows the hand of the craftsman. It's not manufactured like granite: It has irregularities to it and that's what makes it beautiful."

Cheng agrees. "Concrete is at once

Fu-Tung Cheng added rock and sea glass to this custom fireplace surround in colored concrete.

earthy and sophisticated," he says. "It has a presence you just can't get with other materials." n

RESOURCES

Buddy Rhodes 877.706.5303 www.buddyrhodes.com

Cheng Design 510.849.3272 www.chengdesign.com www.chengconcreteexchange.com

Mark Concrete 831.632.0970

www.markconcrete.com

Woodard & Associates 408.867.5085