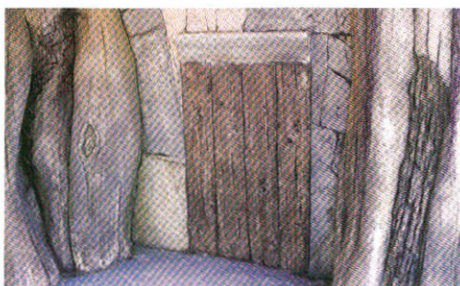




LiquidStone

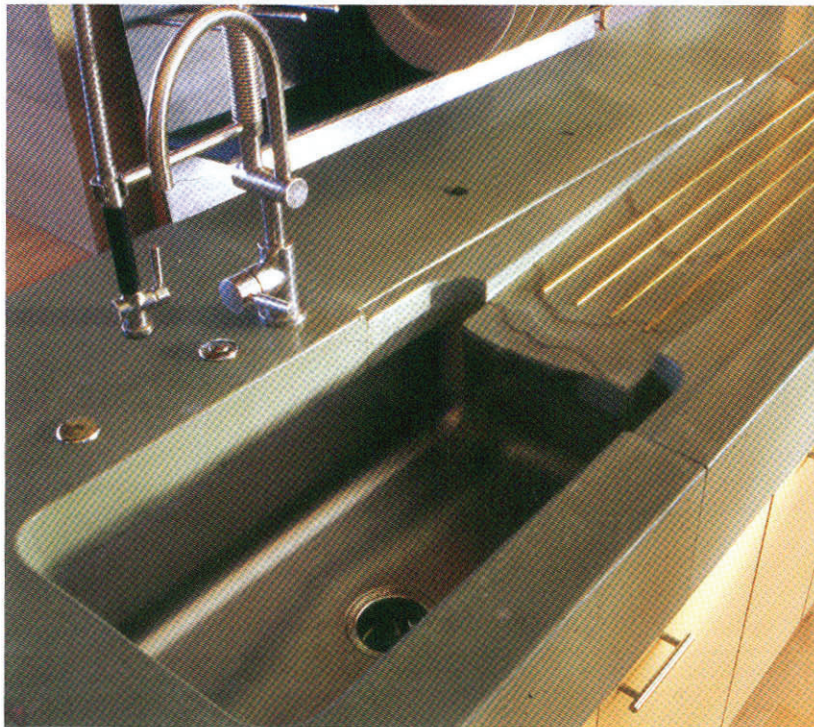
After decades in the shadows, the new face of concrete is finally exposed. Words by Juliet Austin.



Top photo by Matthew Millman Photography.
Above photo by Acanthus Inc.

With concrete enjoying a resurgence as the au courant industry design trend, many are changing their tune in praise of the revolutionary and oh-so-distinctive face of liquid stone.

However hard it is to dispel entrenched associations with inner city 'concrete jungles', rumblings from the world's design studios suggest that concrete has completed its metamorphosis and reinvented itself as one of the most modern, versatile and sustainable materials of the twenty-first century. Due to innovative surface applications and decorative techniques, concrete is finally being exposed, bringing a new lease of life to this traditional substrate. →



Top & bottom photos by Matthew Millman Photography. Middle photo by Acanthus Inc.

No longer content to be cast solely in the horizontal, concrete's design flexibility and relatively low maintenance mean it is well-suited to a dynamic range of alternative applications from countertops, sinks and vanities to furniture, fireplaces or even concrete carpets. Fu-Tung Cheng of Cheng Designs admits being instantly drawn to the virtues of concrete, "It is easily sculpted... and it mimics whatever you pour it into. You can create your own topography, your own landscape." Aesthetically and functionally timeless, what these pieces offer over their natural stone counterparts is a unique ability for customisation, meaning features like draining boards or fountains can be integrated into the design. With concrete's initial liquid state acting as a blank canvas, it allows for limitless possibilities in shape, size, texture, colour and hue.

One of the most exciting aspects of concrete's renaissance is the practically limitless array of colours available as a result of new, non-toxic, water-based stains. Penetrating the surface, these easy-to-apply stains offer UV stability and wear-resistance and can be combined with dyes to produce an even greater range of vibrant, custom hues including a



Top left & top right photos by Acanthus Inc.



Bottom left, middle & bottom right photos by Matthew Millman Photography.



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variegated, multi-tonal look achieved using an acid stain in conjunction with layered dyes. Similarly, experimental faux-finishing techniques using spray bottles, rags, torn paper and feathers to apply the stain, give endless opportunities for artistic expression. According to concrete artisan, Shellie Rigsby of Acanthus Inc. Concrete Stain Designs, "Stunning finishes for concrete are changing the scope of creative options for interior design.... The new avant-garde colour trends are ideal for special-effect finishes such as iridescent, true metals, shimmers, reflective elements and other effects made possible by new products."

To achieve unique, bespoke effects, concrete can also be seeded with any number of inlays from glass chips and semi-precious stones to more unconventional shells, fossils, metal filings or fibre optics. Once embedded, grinding exposes the decorative aggregate while polishing provides a smooth, high-lustre terrazzo effect, giving the illusion of a

highly waxed, reflective surface.

Alternatively, a recent trend in concrete overlays blended polymer resins with cement, sand and other additives to create sumptuous surfaces emulating the type of perfectly imperfect aesthetic that one might expect to see in highly polished marble or even hardwood planking. Coupled with the art of scoring (a practice which uses circular saws to 'etch' patterns into the concrete) and custom stencilling the effects are unthinkable lavish – testament to how far concrete, as a luxury design medium, has come.

It would seem that concrete has emerged victorious as an industry leader, giving non-renewable, mined materials a serious run for their money. From soft, graceful curves and warm, soothing tones to the more crisp, bold lines and vivid colours of contemporary chic, concrete offers decorators a rare freedom of form, function, concept and design in one durable package. In concrete terms, liquid stone is writing its own future in stone. 