

# CONCRETE IN THE KITCHEN

## *Countertops & Sinks*



# Table of Contents

## **The Kitchen Remodel:**

*A Recipe for a Great Investment* .....1

## **Concrete Countertops:**

*Versatile and Unique* .....2

## **Color Options:**

*Concrete Offers Limitless Hues* .....4

## **Gaining the Edge with Concrete**

*Details, Inserts, Special Shapes* .....5

**Make it One-of-a-Kind with Concrete** .....6

## **Concrete's Perfect Everywhere –**

*Even for the Kitchen Sink* .....7

## **Kitchen Islands:**

*Concrete is Tops* .....8

**Integrating Concrete Into Your Total Kitchen Design** .....9

**Frequently Asked Questions** .....10

**About The Concrete Network** .....11

**Eight Tips for Hiring a Concrete Contractor** .....12

**Read More Online about [Concrete Countertops](http://www.ConcreteNetwork.com) at [www.ConcreteNetwork.com](http://www.ConcreteNetwork.com)**

*“It’s just basically the natural look and feel of concrete  
that is so appealing to many.  
And the design aspect is limitless. You can manipulate it  
to do whatever you want – you can do things  
you just can’t do with other materials.”*

—SHAWN VAN DRIESSCHE, *Two Stones Design, Port Byron, Illinois*

FRONT COVER  
PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE)  
COURTESY OF:  
BUDDY RHODES STUDIOS,  
GET REAL SURFACES, SONOMA

# The Kitchen Remodel: *A Recipe for a Great Investment*

Americans are remodeling like never before. In terms of dollars spent, the most popular room in the house to remodel is the kitchen.

The kitchen is the hub of the house – the heart and soul, serving a variety of functions. It’s an area where the family prepares meals and the hot spot where your guests will visit and mingle. Kids sit at the island to do their homework and hang out. You pay your bills at the computer nook, island or kitchen table.

Kitchens are easily the most important room of the house. Any real estate professional will tell you that the kitchen can make or break a sale. So it’s no wonder Americans want to make their kitchens as functional and stylish as possible.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEX STUDIOS

Overall remodeling expenditures hit \$214 billion in 2001. More than 4 million kitchens were upgraded or remodeled to the tune of \$14 billion.

Remodeling your kitchen not only provides your family with a source of enjoyment, increased functionality, and a signature sense of style, but it also is an investment – a good remodeling job will return a good chunk of the money you spend on it.



percent of the amount they put into their remodeling upgrades. In some parts of the country the yield is more than 100 percent.

***“For individual owners, investing in their homes this way not only improves their comfort and safety, but also their ability to build wealth and achieve financial security.”***

— FROM THE REPORT,  
MEASURING THE BENEFITS OF REMODELING,  
by the Joint Center for Housing Studies  
at Harvard University.

# Concrete Countertops: *Versatile and Unique*

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When it comes to remodeling the kitchen, one of the major considerations is the countertop.

There are a handful of countertop materials on the market today. But many homeowners feel confined by the harsh limitations of materials like granite or want a more natural, customized look that laminates and other products don't provide.

But there is an answer – many have discovered concrete countertops. What's the appeal?

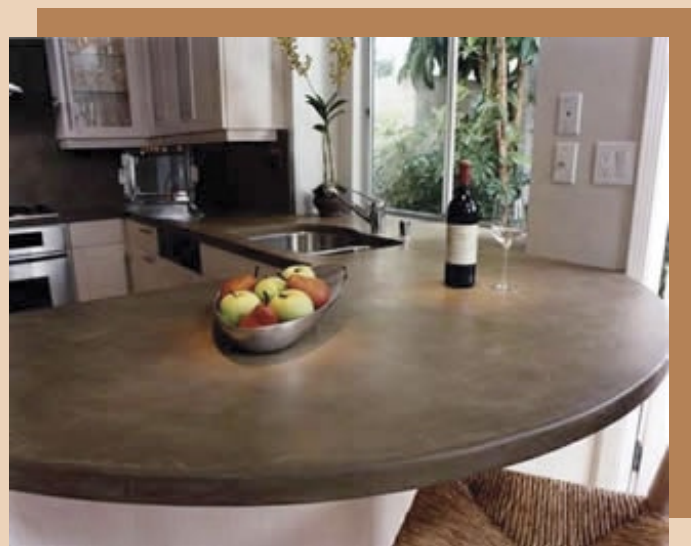


PHOTO COURTESY OF KALDARI

Concrete's irresistible appeal can be attributed to four things: its versatility, its look of distinction, its natural qualities, and the display of superior craftsmanship.

## *Versatility*

Few materials are as versatile as concrete. You can mold concrete into any shape, color it to match virtually any hue, and you can make it smooth or rough. Its versatility lends to a range of design styles from contemporary to classic.

Concrete countertops can be left looking natural to complement materials like wood, stone, and brick. Or, concrete can be treated with chemical stains, coloring pigments, aggregates, and epoxy coatings that allow concrete to mimic popular materials like marble, granite, and limestone.

*“The best thing about concrete is the versatility of shapes and colors you can make. Concrete holds characteristics that can enhance any interior design and become a centerpiece in any home or office.”*

—STEVE EYLER, *Eycon Surfacing, Myersville, Maryland*

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*“Concrete is versatile, rugged, elegant and unique.*

*We use it as our medium because it is an adaptable and natural material with a wonderful, silky feel ...*

*We consider each finished product an original work in an unusual medium, created to fit your needs, aesthetically as well as functionally.”*

—ROBBIE HARRISON, *Concrete Canvas, Greenville, South Carolina*

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## *A Look of Distinction*

Concrete's creative possibilities are endless. Each concrete artisan approaches his or her craft personally, achieving a distinct look by building their own forms, developing special casting techniques, and using proprietary materials and coloring methods.

Because each piece is usually made to order, customers can be a part of the creative process.

***“We’re doing something different  
all the time.  
Each project is a prototype.”***

—GERRY SANTORA, *Soupcan Inc.*,  
Chicago, Illinois

## *Natural Qualities*

While products like Corian are popular, many opt for concrete because the look is more natural. For some people, concrete has more tactile appeal than granite, marble, or ceramic tile.

***“We have been told by many of our clients  
that the end product exceeded  
their original expectation.  
They often comment on the depth of color  
and how the finish is smooth to the touch.”***

—CRAIG SMITH, *DEX Studios*, Macon, Georgia

## *Superior Craftsmanship*

Most concrete artisans are passionate about their work and take great pains to achieve superior results.

To make sure clients are pleased with the final product, many artisans will produce samples for customers so they can evaluate the color, texture, and finish. This great care and attention to detail cannot be duplicated in mass-produced products. But even though the work is custom, quality control and consistency in the manufacturing process are not overlooked.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COUNTERCAST DESIGNS, INC.

***“We have created textures, edge treatments,  
embedded objects and even made  
terrazzo-style countertops.  
We custom make our products from drawings  
and make specialty molds.  
We make the designs and ideas  
of our clients come to life.”***

—HANNAH BLACK,  
*Architectural Concrete Specialties*,  
Scottsdale, Arizona

# Color Options: *Concrete Offers Limitless Hues*

One of the many benefits of concrete is the wide range of colors and hues available. Is it cobalt blue you're after? Maybe a spicy pumpkin or deep eggplant, an earthy terrazzo or rich jet black? Whatever your pleasure, concrete can accommodate.

Concrete countertop contractors offer their own unique standard and premium colors.

Samples will always be different; each contractor has their own secret recipe for constructing the countertops and employing different types and amounts of cement and aggregates. There are different brands of pigments, stains, and aggregate colors, so concrete countertops will always be unique.

Color matching is in no way an exact science. Samples of custom colors or requests for matching a particular color will always be more expensive than samples of standard colors. In most cases, the price of samples is applied against the cost of the order.



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
GET REAL SURFACES



PHOTO COURTESY OF EYCON

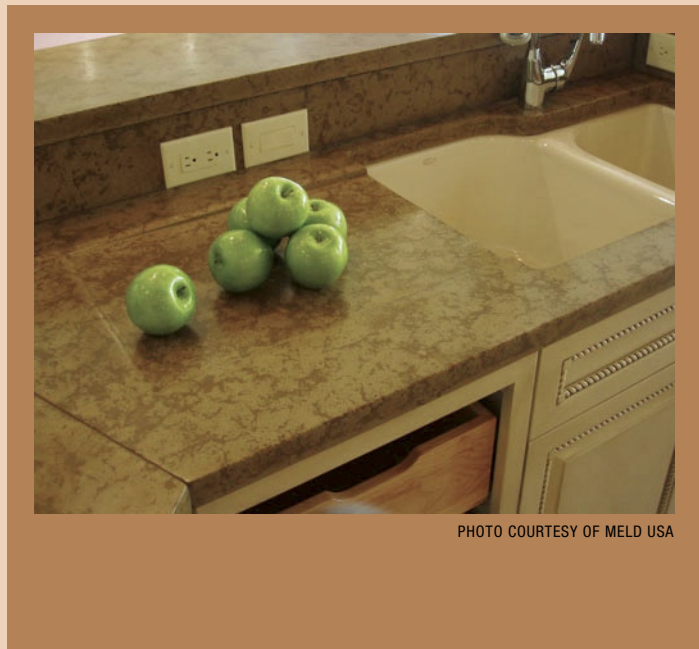


PHOTO COURTESY OF MELD USA

## *How To Get Samples*

Each concrete countertop contractor has standard samples and offers custom color samples.

Standard color samples (and remember, each contractor's samples will be different) run in the \$25-\$50 range. Custom color samples run from \$75 to \$150.

*“We offer unlimited colors, textures  
and finishes ranging from the cool gray  
industrial and designer-sleek taupes  
to rustic multi-colored slabs ...  
Our latest new colors include ‘Electric Blue’  
and ‘Think Pink.’”*

—STEVE DVORAK,  
*Spirit Ridge Concrete Creations*

# Gaining the Edge with Concrete: *Details, Inserts, Special Shapes*

Another one of the many benefits of concrete countertops is the broad choice in the types of edging. Many concrete contractors offer a selection of standard edging, like these six below from Buddy Rhodes Studio. Many contractors will also work with you in achieving a custom look.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUPCAN INC.

Trivets or stainless steel heat racks (top photo) can also be built into concrete countertops.

In addition, most concrete contractors can make L-shaped, V-shaped, and curved countertops. Buddy Rhodes studio created this curved countertop (bottom left photo).

*“Many of our customers have challenged us to find ways to incorporate concrete in places where you’ve never seen it before. We’re continually working with our clients to deliver a functional and aesthetic result that truly exceeds expectations.”*

—MICHAEL BUSTIN, *Meld USA*,  
Raleigh, North Carolina



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUDDY RHODES STUDIOS



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELD USA

# Make it One-of-a-Kind with Concrete

Because concrete can be molded into virtually any form and shape and comes in an unlimited palette of colors, you can have a unique countertop - one that none of your neighbors will have. You can even custom-tint your concrete countertops to match an existing color scheme. But one of the most special attributes of concrete is the ability to express your individuality through personal embellishments like embedded artifacts and personal mementos or special treatments.

Buddy Rhodes' signature is creating a "veined" surface on his countertops. These resemble two-toned marble, achieved through pressing the concrete into a special mold, then filling the veins with different colors. He then grinds the concrete down to reveal the aggregate and the veins.

Jeff Girard of FormWorks often works with homeowners who want metals, seashells, broken bottles, and even staples from moving boxes embedded into their countertop. He even had a unique project in which the homeowner wanted old bottle fragments excavated from the historic home's backyard to tie the rich past with the new countertop.

Craig Smith of DEX Studios specializes in terrazzo finishes. He brings his countertops to life by integrating colored glass and aggregates, and then polishing the surface down to reveal the color. Below, Soupcan Inc. creates a beautiful leaf impression in a countertop.

Michael Bustin of Meld USA, is redefining the way the public thinks about and experiences concrete by casting its own architectural material - extremeconcrete™. Utilizing a proven manufacturing process that blends state of the art concrete technology with hands-on forming and finishing, every product Meld makes is engineered to deliver years of predictable performance and stunning visual appeal. The company is the nation's exclusive manufacturer of extremeconcrete™ products, an architectural material that is manufactured from a mixture of concrete, and fused with color and textures. "We really embrace technology from the selection of our raw materials and ad mixtures to the use of computerized systems," says Bustin. Computers are used to design, transfer information, and create the shapes out of concrete.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COUNTERCAST DESIGNS, INC.

*"Concrete is just getting stronger,  
lighter weight and the selection  
of colorants is phenomenal.*

*We are going to see more and more  
concrete which will be available  
and affordable to everyone."*

—WANDA ELLERBECK,  
Grotto Designs



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUPCAN INC.



# Concrete's Perfect Everywhere – *Even for the Kitchen Sink*

As many homeowners and designers find that concrete countertops are a perfect fit for achieving a distinctive-looking kitchen, the next question that follows is what type of sink to install.

One option is to extend the concrete to the sink. Because concrete can be poured to shape any form, concrete fits the bill for any type of sink imaginable, whether it's integrated into the countertop or farmhouse-style sink.

Some companies, like Sonoma Cast Stone, offer numerous styles of kitchen concrete sinks.

The Farm Sink has become the rage. These large and deep sinks can hold several of the largest pots and pans and still have room for a party full of dishes.

With the Chef Sink you get all of the beauty of a hand crafted concrete sink, and you get the clever utility of a sliding drain board. The stainless drain board slides over the sink to become a large strainer. Pasta, vegetables and fruits can be rinsed and prepared directly over the sink.

And Sonoma Cast Stone's latest offering is the prep sink – a secondary sink dedicated to food preparation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUDDY RHODES STUDIOS

PHOTO COURTESY OF INTERIORS

# Kitchen Islands: *Concrete is Tops*

If you're reluctant to make the plunge and commit to concrete completely, a great way to try it out is by installing a concrete countertop for your island. Or, create a new small island with a concrete top to use as additional prep and storage space.

Kitchen islands are more popular than ever, serving as multi-functional, aesthetically pleasing must-have features for a growing number of homeowners.

The National Kitchen and Bath Association says more than half of the kitchens created today have islands.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEX STUDIOS

Along with sleek appliances, simple cabinetry, and plenty of custom touches, the island is among the requirements of today's ideal kitchen.

One of the great things about a concrete island is that it blends well with other materials. So you can select concrete textures and treatments to complement your existing kitchen materials.

Designers and manufacturers are even touting more than one countertop surface in the same kitchen.

*"We're also encouraging the use of a variety of countertop materials in the same kitchen."*



PHOTO COURTESY OF TTD DESIGNS

*With the different materials out there, there are many opportunities to use more than one."*

—ANTHONY MCGILLVREY,  
Vice President of Marketing,  
Valley Countertops Industries



PHOTO COURTESY OF KALDARI

# Integrating Concrete Into Your Total Kitchen Design



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUDDY RHODES STUDIOS



PHOTO COURTESY OF CONCRETE INTERIOR



If you're undergoing a total kitchen remodel, then it's a perfect time to work in concrete, whether it's a countertop for your primary work space, a top for a new or existing island, or a concrete sink.

You can select concrete colors and textures that will blend well with new appliances, new flooring, and can be the inspiration for new wall colors and lighting fixtures.

Many companies that specialize in concrete countertops have the added advantage of experience in kitchen design.

For example, Soupcan Inc., began as a mill-work kitchen and bath company. The company introduced concrete, which is now the mainstay of the business. This background provides the benefit of peripheral kitchen and bath issues, like the electrical, plumbing, and design issues related to countertops and sinks.

Other companies, like Countercast Designs Inc., specialize in integrating concrete countertops into the total design of a kitchen.

***“Eighty percent of the work is in the mold-making and design process.”***

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***It really has very little to do with concrete.”***

—KAREN SMITH,  
Countercast Designs,  
Surrey, British Columbia

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## *How are concrete countertops made?*

Every concrete countertop contractor has his or her own proprietary construction method. Some of the common points and issues include:

- Countertops are sometimes made on site, but more often they are produced in a shop, where conditions are controlled. Contractors use special casting tables and then keep the countertop in their possession while it is curing and until it can be adequately sealed. These “pre-casters” say they can produce higher quality products and flatter surfaces, which are then easier to install.
- Countertops are made of cement, lightweight aggregates, and a combination of additives.
- Additives such as fiber reinforcement, silica fume pozzolan, and acrylic are often used.
- Some type of reinforcement is used, usually structural steel, wire mesh, fiberglass, and/or fibers. Sometimes more than one type of reinforcement is used.
- The countertops are cured.
- Countertops are often ground. For example, Jeff Girard, owner of FormWorks, grinds off the surface “skin” with a series of progressively fine diamond polishing stones. This achieves two important objectives – durability and beauty.
- Countertops are always sealed. The type of seal, method and number of coats of sealer is unique to each concrete contractor.

*“The aspect of our tops  
that are the most attractive to people  
are that we hand finish  
all of our countertops in place  
giving them a truly unique  
and imperfect look.”*

—PATRICK M. ROGERS,  
Summit Professional Builders Inc.,  
San Rafael, CA

## *How thick are concrete countertops?*

The standard slab thickness is 1.5 inches. Two-inch slabs are also quite common. It is possible to make a thicker countertop, and is usually done for aesthetic reasons. If a 6 inch slab is desired, the back and center are still 1.5 inches thick and the front “grows” to the desired thickness. So it still looks 6 inches thick, but is only 1.5 inches thick in the front.

## *How much do concrete countertops weigh?*

A 1.5 inch thick standard concrete countertop weighs about 18.75 pounds per square foot. (Granite is approximately 18 pounds per square foot.) The countertop weight can be less if lightweight concrete is used. But some countertop contractors will not use lightweight concrete because it has less strength.

Standard cabinetry will support the concrete slabs as the weight of the countertops is distributed over a large area.

## *How much do concrete countertops cost?*

Concrete countertops are a custom-crafted material for high-end use.

Some consumers think of concrete as being a cheaper alternative to other available countertop surfaces. But when you think about buying a concrete countertop, you should do so based on its beauty, artistry, and customization.

The price of the concrete countertop is broken down into countertop construction, shipping (if required), and installation.

Standard 1.5 inch thick concrete countertops range from \$65 to \$125 per square foot.

These items add to the cost:

- Irregular or curved shapes
- 2 inch thick concrete
- Integral drain boards
- Custom edges
- Back splashes

## *What about shipping and installation?*

Countertop contractors in almost all cases install their own product in their market area, eliminating shipping expenses. Shipping method and carrier, for those firms that do ship, varies by contractor. Discuss this with the contractor.

Installation, when done by the countertop contractors, runs in the \$40-\$50 per hour, per person, range.

Other installations, such as those when the countertop has been shipped, should be done by a contractor experienced in installing countertops. Rates vary by region. The countertops arrive to the site in a completed state and no modifications should be needed.

Most of the concrete countertop contractors provide detailed installation instructions. Request these instructions and make sure your installer understands the installation instructions prior to the countertops arriving on the jobsite.

## *Will my concrete countertop stain?*

Concrete countertops have sealers applied for water and stain resistance. (Left in its natural state, unsealed, concrete is porous and will stain.)

Soupcan Inc. makes their countertops more permeable —meaning less stain resistant - by adding water conditioners to their countertop mix formulation. This affects the capillary structure of the concrete itself.

Jeff Girard at FormWorks has created a countertop that doesn't stain. His sealing system uses a heavy-duty industrial-grade sealer that is food-safe, colorless and non-yellowing.

He's even put the sealer up to a grueling test, slathering turmeric spice and oil, ketchup, mustard, balsamic vinegar, coffee, and lemon juice all over the sample, letting it sit for more than 100 hours. The sealer did not stain. He's also placed a 450-degree pan directly on the sealer without scorching, burning, or bubbling.

### *How should I care for my concrete countertop?*

- Don't cut on concrete countertops. It won't hurt the concrete, but it will damage the sealer, which keeps out water and stains.
- Always use cutting boards when chopping and preparing foods.
- Avoid placing hot pans on concrete countertops. Concrete is very heat resistant, but, again, the concern is damaging or discoloring the sealer.
- Consider asking your contractor to build in trivets (before the countertop is installed). Some will build in steel, brass or copper. These type of trivets not only contribute to the total design of your countertop and kitchen, but they're functional, too.
- Avoid abrasive soaps or cleansers. ConcreteWorks Studio recommends a mild, non-abrasive, non-ammonia soap for daily cleaning. They suggest Simple Green (diluted as instructed) or Dr. Bronner's natural soap (five parts water, one part soap). Soupcan, Inc. recommends a neutral pH cleanser and warm water. They say you should avoid using abrasive pads.
- Follow the instructions provided by your concrete contractor.

### *What else should I expect with a concrete countertop?*

Like any other material, concrete has properties that require special care and attention. One of the biggest questions that comes up is whether concrete countertops will develop cracks. The answer: Not always, but concrete countertops can develop hairline cracks. The cracks tend to be non-structural and result from the natural shrinkage of the concrete.

But many view this unpredictable, imperfect quality as one of the many assets of concrete.

Each concrete countertop contractor has his or her own reinforcement method. For instance, Soupcan Inc. uses fiber reinforcing technology. They believe their proprietary formulation drastically reduces the chances for both structural and hairline cracking. The conventional wire mesh and rebar reinforcement acts only after cracking has occurred.

Other contractors have success using rebar, mesh, fiber reinforcement, and/or other methods of reinforcement.

No matter what reinforcing method is used, hairline cracks, which are non-structural, may still occur.



## **About The Concrete Network**

*The Concrete Network (www.concretenetwork.com), located in Yucaipa, Calif., is the largest and most comprehensive resource online for concrete information. Over 1 million people visit the site each month to read articles, get design ideas, and to search its extensive directory for a concrete contractor in their area.*

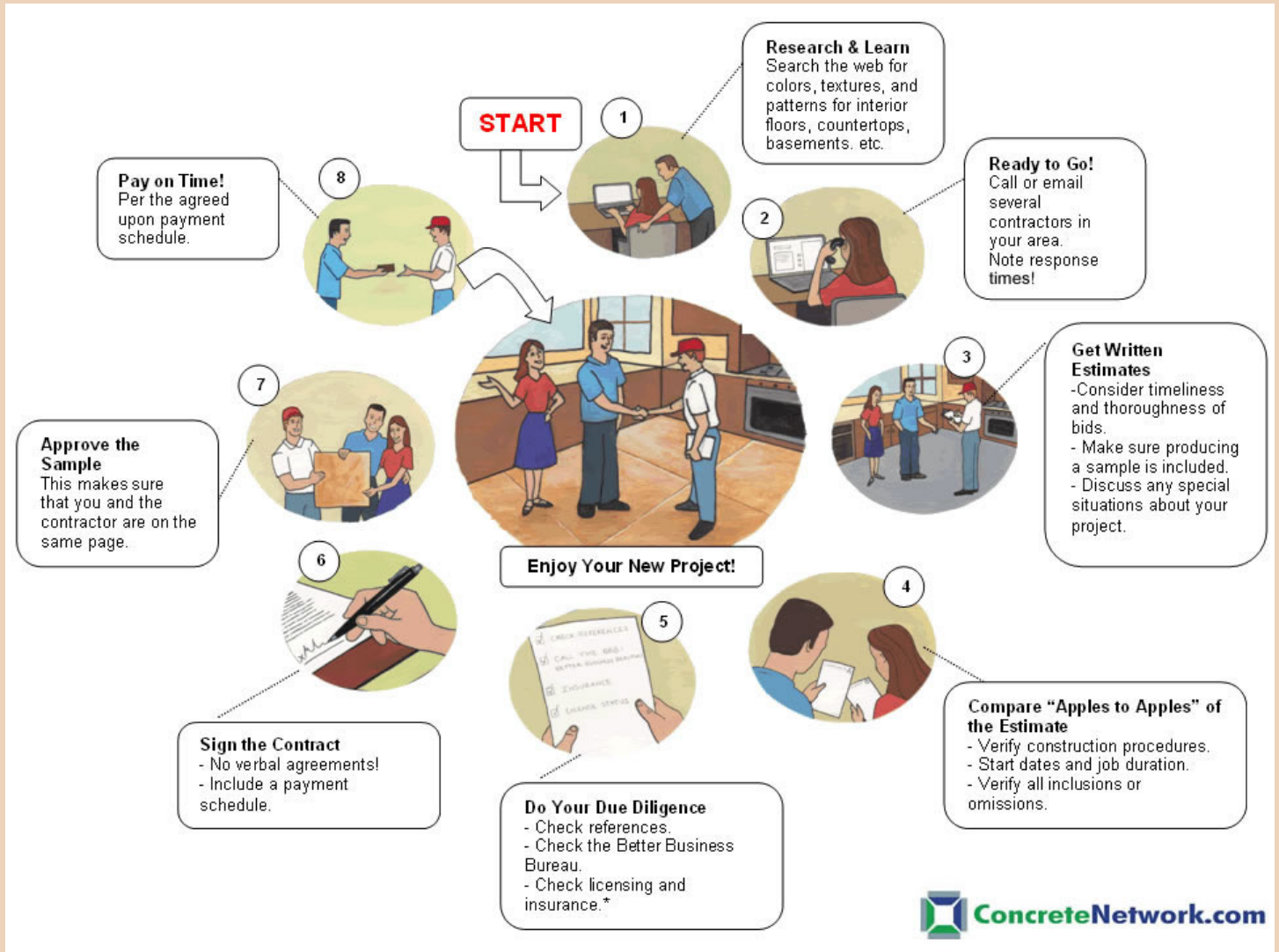
*Established in 1999, The Concrete Network's purpose is to educate homeowners, contractors, builders, and designers on popular decorative techniques and applications. With thousands of articles, photographs, and a comprehensive directory of concrete contractors, The Concrete Network is a repository of information about the industry's products and services, including stamped concrete, stained concrete floors, concrete countertops, polished concrete, and much more.*

*The site excels at connecting buyers with local contractors in their area through its Find-A-Contractor service. The service provides visitors with a list of decorative concrete contractors throughout the U.S. and Canada, and is fully searchable by 23 types of decorative concrete work and 200 regional areas throughout North America. The directory is organized by area and specialty, such as patios, pool decks, driveways, countertops, floors, stamped concrete, and water features, among many others.*

*Site visitors can choose their local area and view concrete contractors and concrete products, obtain full contact information for the listed businesses, and contact them directly.*

*The Concrete Network was founded by Jim Peterson, a former Vice President of a major concrete company in Riverside, Calif. During the 1999 World of Concrete Trade Show in Las Vegas, Peterson had the idea to create an industry portal on the World Wide Web for all things related to concrete.*

# EIGHT TIPS FOR HIRING A CONCRETE CONTRACTOR



Use this guide to make sure you're prepared when it comes to hiring a contractor. These 8 simple steps are your key to knowing what information you should look for, what questions you should ask, and to understanding some vital do's and don'ts during the process. Your preparedness can make a difference in how smoothly your project gets installed. Print a copy of this diagram and refer to it through each step of your project. Before you know it, you'll be enjoying your new concrete too!



[WWW.CONCRETENETWORK.COM](http://WWW.CONCRETENETWORK.COM)

