

# RICHARD SMITH CUSTOM CONCRETE

## A LEADER IN THE DREAM BUSINESS

Richard Smith doesn't see himself or his concrete company as a manufacturer of goods or products. Instead, he describes what he does for a living as being in the dream business — helping others achieve a vision, a feeling, or a timeless sentiment that is theirs alone.

"There's nothing that can't be done," Smith says, describing concrete's endless possibilities.

Located in West Hills, California, Richard Smith Custom Concrete is 20 years old and specializes in overlays, rockwork, micro toppings, stained and stamped concrete, saw cuts and etching, and concrete countertops.

The company's impressive client list includes the likes of restaurant giants Red Lobster and El Torito; amusement parks Disneyland California Adventure and Universal Studios (Terminator 2); popular retail stores Pottery Barn and Illuminations; and major hotel chain Embassy Suites.

Smith got his start in concrete after his plans to become a firefighter or paramedic after finishing school evaporated.

While holding the utmost respect for the emergency services professions, Smith knew immediately it wasn't a good fit.

"I wanted nothing to do with it," he recalls.

Instead, he pursued concrete, or, more aptly, concrete pursued him.

Smith's early days involved new-home tracts in which he poured all

the patios. Although he was being hired for bigger home projects upon bigger home projects, he found himself unfulfilled.

"I've always enjoyed sculpting and the artistic side of things ... So at the time, what I was doing didn't quite quench the thirst," Smith said.

Smith quickly absorbed as much as he could about concrete and before he knew it, he was mastering overlays, a process in which worn and aged concrete is topped with a fresh, level canvas styled to match any décor. Overlays, which can be several inches to feather-thin, can be applied indoors or outdoors.

Before he knew it, major-name clients were calling on Smith for their projects. Smith enjoys the anonymity, and he said, it is appropriate because he is merely the

creator — the one who brings the client's vision to life. Anyone who comes in contact with or experiences the like of Pottery Barn or Universal Studios isn't

thinking about the concrete — they're thinking about the experience as a whole.

"You can fly in, get the job done, and fly out," he said.

The low-key approach is often

helpful in working with designers, Smith said.

"It's hard for designers to call in blue-collar workers," Smith said.



"But once they do, I really take time to listen to the ideas ... I look at perfection as the starting point."

Smith says he cautiously guards and

respects each project and client because the final product is so personal, especially for homeowner projects.

"They're ultimately viewing themselves," Smith said.

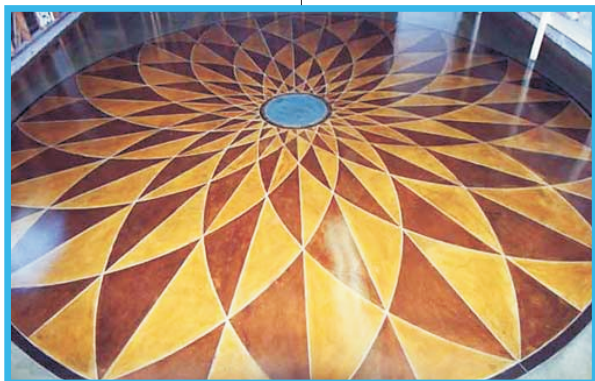
Concrete affords one the opportunity to create and own something that is a piece of him or herself.

For example, Smith recalls his experience with a recent client: a single mom and a professional who wanted a concrete countertop.

"My goal is that when she gets home and hits the kitchen, she sees and feels something that is part of her vulnerabilities and belief system," Smith said. "Indirectly they (those who seek concrete) want something that belongs to them."

Many clients are choosing concrete countertops to achieve that sense of exclusive ownership. Smith describes his countertop creations as functional works of art that take on lives of their own.

He begins with a natural base color and adds pigments to match the client's desires. The countertops combine state-of-the-art reinforcing technology with old-world,



handmade quality.

Concrete, Smith said, is one of the best mediums for people to own a piece of themselves because it offers warmth and beauty.

“Concrete has a mystique that’s unattainable — that’s beauty.”

A good example of playing off the personality and style of a client lies in the concrete overlays created for his local Illuminations store, a shop devoted to candles and accessories that often is illuminated only by candles and dim lights and has soft, soothing, yet modern music streaming in the background.

“You’re creating an atmosphere ... It feels like you’ve left the mall,” Smith says.

Another one of Smith’s favorite projects involves the acid staining floors he developed for the Irvine Spectrum Center, a dining, shopping, and entertainment center in Orange County.

Although Smith has had a bevy of top-name clients, he insists it’s not about the money. Likewise, he finds it difficult to work with clients or partners who put money

first, sacrificing, he says, integrity and creativity.

“Money follows passion,” he said.

And for Smith, the passion is accompanied by a strong commitment and kinship he develops

with his clients.

“When you get to know the client — that’s when the magic starts,” he said, adding that he’s never been to court, been sued and says hello to

each and every client he may happen to see in the supermarket.

Meanwhile, Smith also enjoys creating artwork and sculpture-oriented projects,

whether it’s a three-dimensional piece of art for a zoo or fabricating rocks to synthesize into a pool and patio setting.

Smith is also seeing an increasing demand for stain projects. Smith is continuously looking for innovative ways to transform concrete into functional works of art. Some of his applications include acid stains that etch and give concrete an old-world,

patina look.

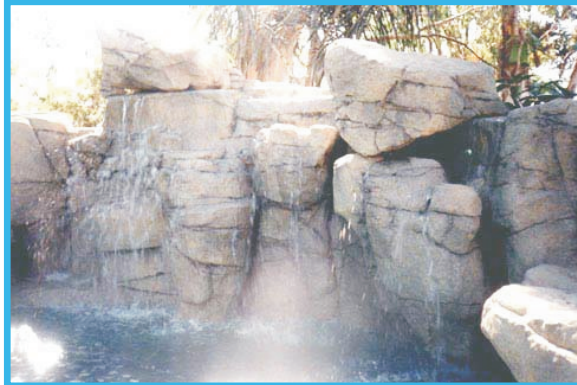
Smith also offers sawcuts and etching — artistic sand blasting — that expand concrete’s possibilities beyond imagination. By cutting

patterns in new or existing concrete, a new layer of depth is added and unique signatures, logos, or personal depictions can be created

But one of the biggest current concrete booms, Smith said, is floor

texture of all kinds.

“Designers are waking up to the fact that there’s more than wood, carpet, and tiles ... There’s nothing that can’t be done,” Smith said.

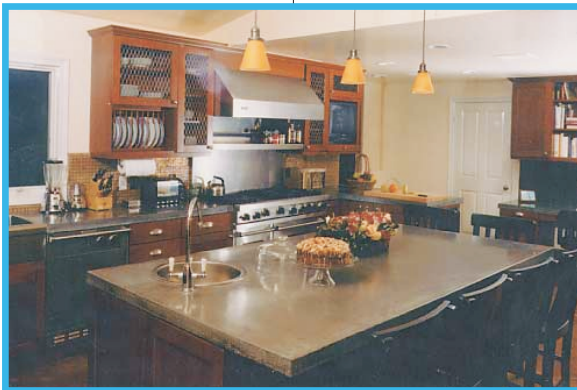


And that’s what keeps Smith invigorated day after day — pursuing new challenges, fulfilling dreams, and fueling the outlet for his

inventive energies. And that’s why concrete is Smith’s medium of choice: It is timeless, full of possibility, and enveloped in a shroud of mystery that simultaneously provides function and the ability to meld into any design and form imaginable.

Even after 20 years Smith is still in awe of concrete and has learned a very important rule in always letting concrete take the lead.

Says Smith, “We don’t tell concrete what to do — it tells us what to do.”



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