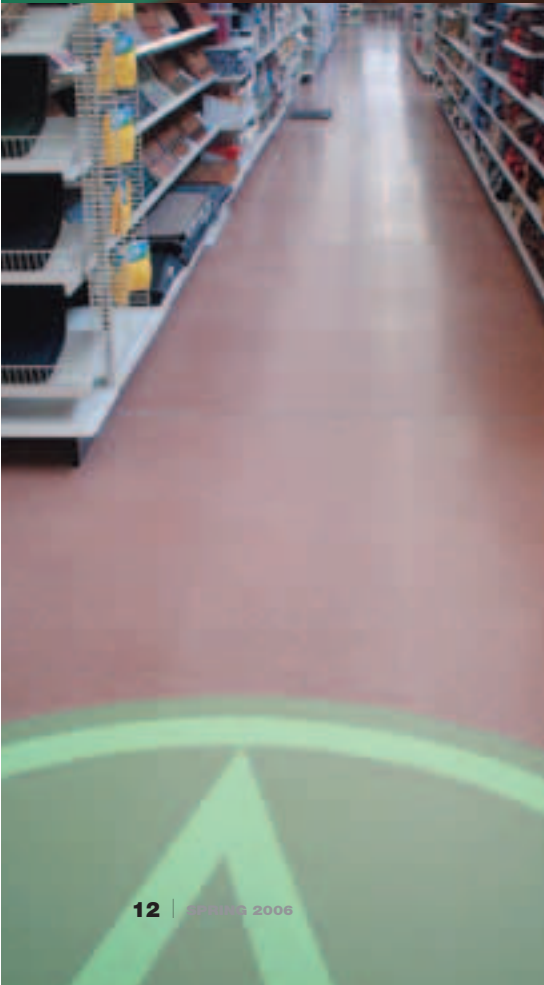


# Concrete

is **Green** . . .

and **Red**  
and **Tan**  
and **Blue**



**By A. Vance Pool, National Resource Director, NRMCA**

**D**uring the last few editions of *Concrete in Focus*, we have written about the numerous advantages of concrete from a sustainable development standpoint. Concrete truly is a green building material. What can be more sustainable than to build the Pantheon in Rome around 200 A.D. and never have to replace it? That aspect of sustainable construction doesn't carry the flash to get most people's attention. But more and more sustainable building advocates are beginning to recognize concrete's inherent "green" advantages.

One of the most often overlooked attributes of concrete being used to improve our environment is decorative concrete. Decorative concrete continues to experience double-digit growth year after year. The onset of computer controlled integral color systems

has accelerated acceptance in the specification community for greater usage of color in both interior and exterior applications. Many also are realizing the significant cost advantage provided by integrally colored floors over competing materials. *On a first cost basis*, colored concrete floors generally are cheaper than the in-place cost of tile, vinyl, carpet, stone or wood flooring. Though less costly, designers using concrete still can evoke any style, color scheme or surface characteristic they can imagine, providing infinite variety. We could talk about design options throughout the entire article, but our real purpose is to express that you not only can design creatively and save money with concrete, but most importantly, have a positive impact on the environment.

Carpet and vinyl tile are two of the leading floor covering choices used in the United States. In most cases, they are made from petrochemical-based compounds and

sometimes are applied with adhesives. All of these materials, from creation to installation to replacement, have effects on our environment. By using integrally colored concrete as a flooring choice, you are eliminating that entire stream of environmental effects. A noted architect with significant sustainable construction credentials noted during a talk I attended at the Texas Society of Architects that carpet should be unrolled in the yard for at least a day so the VOCs can escape into the atmosphere rather than into the air in your home or office. I joked later that I appreciate the concept, but on most construction sites I visit, the carpet would be gone when we arrived the next day.

The quality of indoor air is no joking matter. All the things we put in a home or office can impact indoor air quality, which in turn can affect occupants' health. Many offices today have fixed windows so that the only fresh air coming into a building is the percentage pulled into the HVAC system based on its design. Homeowners run air conditioning or heat the majority of the year in many locales and the same can hold true for them. This means indoor air that is compromised can remain in a structure for extended periods of time. Integrally colored

concrete floors reduce or can completely eliminate this issue from floor coverings. Since floor coverings are such a large percentage of the surface area in a building, this is no small matter.

We have focused on the air quality issues — what about dust, dust mites and other indoor particulate matter that exists later in the structure? With carpet, these types of matter can accumulate in the carpet itself and exist until the carpet is replaced. I heard a speaker once say, weigh your carpet at installation and weigh it again when you remove it for replacement and you will see how much matter is in the carpet. Speaking of replacing carpet, how long does carpet last? I guess that is a quality and wear-dependent issue. I would note it is fair to say it is more often measured in years, not decades. Concrete has lasted millennia in a number of applications. That means a concrete floor eliminates how much carpet or tile that has to be placed in landfills? Think about how much carpet you would have to replace to last 1000 years and how big a landfill it would take to hold it. I think it is a pretty solemn image. That is truly thinking in a sustainable manner.

Another area to discuss is carpet that has

to be replaced due to mildew. Whether it is in a basement in the Midwest or the mountain of carpet being disposed of due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, carpet doesn't like to get wet for long. It would make sense that in basements or low-lying areas, let's say areas where flood insurance is required, that decorative concrete floors would provide an alternative that would make it easier and faster for homeowners to return to their homes. It could also have a positive effect on insurance rates if it was enacted on a wholesale basis.

The beauty of colored concrete continues to be mistaken for much more expensive building materials by many who do not realize what they are actually looking at. Colors; textures like stone, brick, pavers and the like; as well as finely polished diamond-ground finishes all produce outstanding aesthetic value at bargain-basement prices. Maybe that's why businesses like Wal-Mart, Chili's, Kroger and a large number of national chains continue to specify more colored concrete every year. ■

*For more information on NRMCA's promotion program, contact Pool at 281/702-4557 or via email at [vpool@nrmca.org](mailto:vpool@nrmca.org).*



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