



These new toppings go down easy and look great!

by Amy Johnson

Painters and concrete contractors used to have little in common. Painters generally concentrated on walls and ceilings, while concrete contractors stuck with driveways and sidewalks. But growing demand for new decorative techniques and explosive growth in materials technology have blurred the distinction between the two specialties.

Take, for example, sprayable concrete toppings. These materials offer painters new tools for refreshing old surfaces, applying faux finishes and creating unique textured surfaces.

Concrete toppings

Ordinary concrete is composed of fine aggregate (sand) and coarse aggregate (stone, gravel), cementitious materials such as portland cement, and water. Sprayable concrete toppings are variations on this recipe. These toppings are based on cement, with various other ingredients that make them sprayable and give them texture. The product, ready to apply, is about the same consistency as paint or fine plaster.

For example, Sgraffino, made by Colormaker, a manufacturer of cementitious toppings located in Vancouver, B.C., is a polymer-modified concrete composed of cement, sand and acrylic. The acrylic makes it possible

to spray Sgraffino in "paper-thin" layers, according to sales manager Victor Pachade, while the sand imparts texture.

Bella Vernici Overlay Compound from Bella Vernici Studios in Texas is similarly based on portland cement. Rodney Ray, the company's art director, says the compound is specifically designed to prepare any rigid substrate to accept a coloring stain.

Another polymer-modified cement product, Ultra Surface Spray-Top System from Concrete Solutions in San Diego, clearly straddles the line between paint and concrete. The product is promoted for refinishing traditional concrete applications such as driveways, but a key feature is that it can be applied like paint.

What are the capabilities — and benefits — of these materials? They offer painters a way to renovate and add color to existing concrete, a widely used building material for which, until recently, there have been few color coating options.

These toppings allow a virtually unlimited color palette. They can also be troweled and textured for added dimension. They can be sprayed through a stencil to create intricate designs. And because they are applied in such a thin layer, dimensional details from the original surface are reflected, making sprayable concrete toppings ideal for rehabbing stamped or saw-cut concrete. Ray points out



This fireplace and table were both created with sprayed Bella Vernici overlays and then colored with stains. Grout lines on the table were created with masking tape



Photographs courtesy of Bella Vernici