



Decorative concrete flooring options available to owners and developers are now greater than ever

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As 2010 comes to a close, it's hard not to notice some attractive changes underfoot. If you have recently visited newly renovated high-end restaurants, retail stores, or offices, you have probably walked on decorative concrete floors. Advances in engineered cement technology have been accelerating despite the recession, and the flooring options available to building owners and developers are now greater than ever.

The first thing you will notice about a decorative concrete floor is its understated beauty - there's a certain timeless "feel" to a concrete floor. The solidity, the sense of permanence, the back-to-basics smoothness - the sensation of new utility from an ancient material pervades. A well-placed oriental rug on the floor only highlights the juxtaposition of "utility and elegance".

This trend may have been kicked off in America with the advent of the "big box" hardware stores - miles of smooth burnished concrete in a retail setting. The trend was then pushed by the architects of national restaurant chains and cafes. But the real advance came with decorative self-leveling wear surface products such as DRYTEK® 9400 (a product of Drytek Flooring Solutions, LLC), which have been installed in more intimate spaces such as 5th Avenue department stores, downtown hotels, high-rise condos, and film studios.

There are several advantages of decorative toppings versus other hard-surface floor goods. First of all, decorative self-leveling cement is poured on-site. This means that the installer can place a continuous surface throughout an existing floorplan without the seams and transitions required with tile or hardwood. Secondly, the designer has a full palette of options for tinting (for color and uniformity), and sealing (for gloss and texture).

The same natural aesthetic variations that enhance the beauty of marble and granite also impart attractiveness to decorative concrete floors. "Swirl marks" left during the pouring of the product as well as other subtle shade variations add to the natural character of the surface. The installer has latitude to modify installation techniques in order to change the look of a floor and achieve a variety of surfaces from uniform to "faux finish".

Last but certainly not least, self-leveling toppings work like the name suggests - they form a level surface "automatically". This means that an uneven, worn, out-of-level floor can be easily refinished to an extremely flat and level surface. Products such as DRYTEK® 9400 are engineered to flow and level during installation. In addition, the material hardens rapidly, allowing for an entire project to be completed - from surface preparation to pouring and sealing - in as little as 1 to 3 days (versus 28 days for a standard concrete floor).

The first step in installing a decorative self-leveling topping is to evaluate the existing floor. The floor (or "substrate") may have old VCT tile which is worn and unlevel. The underlying floor may be concrete or even wood. An experienced contractor should be brought in as early in the process as

possible to determine what substrate preparation is required. Second, after the substrate has been prepared, the floor is primed and the self-leveling cement is mixed and placed. Within hours, the surface is strong enough to be walked on. Once the new floor has dried sufficiently, a sealer can be applied. Since the sealer is "taking the direct impact" of foot traffic, care must be taken to select an appropriate sealer for the intended use (strength, gloss, slip resistance, etc.).

The use of decorative self-leveling toppings is one of the fastest growing segments in the flooring industry. There are a wide range of options for the finished look of the floor, and with integrally colored cement, designers can now integrate the floor into the overall color scheme of the project. Architects and contractors will be sure to be offering decorative self leveling toppings as options for projects well into the foreseeable future.

The Drytek family of products addresses a wide range of flooring needs and situations, making it a natural choice for flooring contractors and design professionals, alike. Visit www.drytek.com for more information.

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