



Colored Concrete:  
Paving the Way  
for Beauty



# Colored Concrete-Paving the Way for Beauty

Concrete is typically specified for pavements because of its strength, durability, and life-cycle value. Increasingly, it is also selected for another characteristic—its good looks and aesthetic potential. No other paving material offers such a versatile design medium. Concrete pavement can be colored, textured, and patterned to create almost any visual treatment the designer imagines.

With all the discussion of the relative merits of black topping versus white topping, pavement designers sometimes overlook an important point—concrete pavement is available in a wide spectrum of colors. Most people are so used to thinking of concrete as a light gray material that they seldom stop to think about the range of hues possible with colored concrete. Red, tan, brown, black and other earth tones are the most commonly used shades of colored concrete, but dramatic hues of green, blue, and other designer colors are also available. Pavement can be colored to create attractive design features, blend into or contrast with the landscape, or meet a variety of special functional requirements.

Color concrete works in tandem with texture and pattern to express the designer's aesthetic vision. Simple broomed finishes provide a slip resistant and economical finish and can be embellished by using wavy broom lines or by alternating the direction of brooming in adjacent concrete pours. With exposed aggregate finishes, colorful aggregates can be selected to either match or complement the shade of the concrete. Patterned, stamped colored concrete pavement can look like brick, stone, wood, boardwalk planks, and a wide variety of other faux finishes. The possibilities are limited only by the designer's imagination and the ingenuity of the installing contractor.

## Standing Out, Blending In

At home, colored concrete driveways and walkways add curb appeal to a property, and colored concrete patios, terraces, and pool decks enhance the quality of indoor-outdoor lifestyles. For developers, colored concrete can be offered as an upgrade to home buyers, or can be used throughout a subdivision as part of the visual character of the neighborhood.



Above: A picturesque pool deck and patio enhances backyard living and provides a durable, low-maintenance surface.

Below: A red concrete driveway matches the red soil of the surrounding Hawaiian landscape.



Colored concrete can also be used to visually unify a commercial, business, or historic district. Conversely, colored concrete paving can be used to help set commercial or institutional buildings apart from their surroundings by creating a distinguished entrance and beautifying a site's "hardscaping," the plazas, parking lots, service drives, and other paved surfaces. By using the same material for a building's façade, colored concrete visually integrates a structure and its site.

Colored concrete is frequently used to reduce the visual impact of roads constructed in areas where the natural look of the landscape must be maintained. By matching the shade of the concrete to the color of the surrounding earth, a highway can be made less obtrusive and blend into the surrounding countryside. For this reason, the National Park Service and other government agencies frequently use colored concrete for paving in environmentally sensitive areas. The same motivation applies to the construction of colored concrete paths in golf courses and other parklands.

### **Color Follows Function**

While color is most obviously an aesthetic concern, it can also contribute to the functional performance of a paving project. For example, municipal engineers use colored concrete to improve the visibility of safety medians and cross walks in roadways. Compared with coatings that could achieve the same effect, the permanence of colored concrete makes it the lower-cost solution on a life-cycle cost basis.

On college campuses, colored concrete is used to differentiate bicycle paths from pedestrian or vehicular



Above: Colored concrete provides beauty and is economical enough to be used within the budgets of most commercial developments.

Below: The National Park Service specifies colored concrete to reduce the visual intrusion of roads and bridges in scenic areas.





lanes. A similar concept can be used to separate public access areas from service drives at resort complexes or corporate campuses.

Black concrete has its advocates among airport designers since its increased capacity to absorb solar radiation can help melt ice on runways, taxiways, and aprons. Black concrete is also used widely for paving gas stations. The black color keeps service stations looking clean and attractive by reducing the visual impact of tire marks and automotive fluid stains. Furthermore, colored concrete is unaffected by fuel and antifreeze spills which could adversely affect asphalt pavements around fuel pumps and service bays.



Above Left: Polished colored concrete is gaining favor for low-maintenance retail floors

Above Right: Beautification project in Hermosa Beach, CA.

Middle Right: Different colors of concrete and aggregate were cast with shells and other objects for a sea-themed bench.

Middle Left: Colored sidewalks at a municipal service complex.

Bottom: Three shades of concrete at public plaza at Seattle's Key Arena.





Above: Colored concrete forms an intricate pattern to portray the Chesapeake bay at the National Harbor Museum near Washington, DC

Below: This path seems a natural part of the golf course landscaping.



Below: Colored paving creates a distinguished setting for a statue of the Emmy Award.





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