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Timeless Appeal

THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF CONCRETE DÉCOR

by Khai Foo Photos courtesy of Solus Decor

Concrete mantels. Concrete flooring. Concrete countertops. Over the last decade or so, these words have assumed a prominent place in the lexicon of interior designers and architects. The demand for concrete as an interior design element has seen remarkable growth. Precast manufacturers and artisans alike are answering the call, creating new and innovative incarnations of the ubiquitous and oft-maligned grey stuff. The boundaries of technology, esthetics, and even our perception of concrete are being pushed in directions never seen before. The rough and heavy industrial esthetic, promoted by staunch urbanists and loft-dwellers has given way to warmer colour palettes, more delicate forms and softer textures.

Like wood or stone, concrete has an intangible "natural feel." But more so than other materials, concrete offers endless possibilities for formal expression and colour range. Advances in concrete forming and mix technology have allowed for greater control over surface texture, which may range from coarse exposed aggregate to surprisingly smooth surfaces reminiscent of soapstone. Further, the use of post-industrial recycled by-products such as fly ash from the coal burning industry, has not only made concrete "greener," but it has also improved its strength, durability and ease of use.

Long a feature in custom homes, concrete décor has begun to make its way into the interiors of large-scale residential developments, often in the form of precast fireplace surrounds and tiles. On these larger projects where cost-effectiveness, consistency and value are primary concerns, the bene-

fits of concrete are clearly felt. Cast concrete also lends an organic feel to professionally designed interiors, complementing other natural materials and creating a much sought-after sense of esthetic timelessness.

Concrete's potential as an interior finish is only beginning to be realized. With its wide industrial use, proven history and design flexibility, there is no reason to doubt that cast concrete décor will find a permanent place in the homes of today and the designs of tomorrow. ♦

Khai Foo is the founder of Solus Decor. Solus designs and manufactures home decorative concrete products, including fireplace surrounds, tiles and vessels. For more information, please visit www.solusdecor.com or call Solus toll-free at 877.255.3146.



Above: The elegance of concrete.

Left: A precast fireplace.