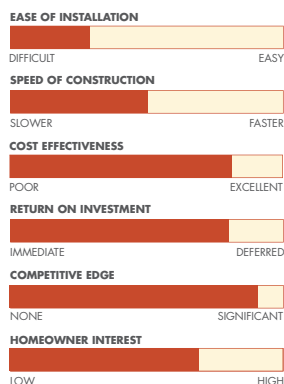


Concrete Beauty: *Builder Finds Niche with Concrete Floor Finishes*

Builder's Experience



Challenges: Introducing the benefits of concrete to consumers; developing an appropriate construction timeline for subcontractor work.

Would he do it again? Yes

PATH Attributes:

- Affordability
- Quality and Durability

Builder Tips: "If you can find a niche that nobody else is doing—something that is attractive to purchasers and can make the sale—then it has the potential to be a great benefit."

Builder:

Sammy Herrell
Sammy Herrell Builders and Development
Villa Rica, Georgia

Builder Type:

Production Builder

The Technology:

Concrete Floor Finishes

The Project:

A one-story, 1,864-square-foot, single-family home in Carrollton, Georgia, with decorative concrete floors throughout the home and on the driveway.

"I certainly have a lot of people who are interested in decorative concrete. It has a great look and a great feel. And there's no real maintenance."

— Sammy Herrell

HERRELL'S STORY

After experimenting with decorative concrete finishes in his own home, Sammy Herrell decided to try them in one of the new homes in his subdivision, Northpoint Grand. Herrell believes the features of concrete floors—durability, low maintenance, and the absence of allergens that are typically found in carpet—will interest many homebuyers.

"Decorative concrete is a product that a lot of people haven't seen," Herrell says. "I wanted to test the 'sell-ability' of it, and to discover how the customers would react. This is a new product for homes in this price range. Here was my opportunity to gauge the level of interest."

As part of an agreement with Bob Harris of the Decorative Concrete Institute, Herrell would complete one home at Northpoint Grand with decorative concrete that Harris installed at cost. In exchange, Harris, who



Herrell increases the drive-by appeal of this Northpoint Grand home with decorative concrete in the driveway.

also teaches decorative concrete methods, made a video of the installation process and uses the images in his marketing and educational materials.

CUSTOMER APPEAL

Decorative concrete covers the foyer, dining room, living room, kitchen, and bathrooms—and the driveway and sidewalk, which attracted buyers right away.

"So far, people have been very excited. I've been getting a lot of nice compliments. They really appreciate the unique look," Herrell says. "They tend to be most interested in the driveway, since it's right out in front and really catches the eye. The entire home is drawing interest."



Sammy Herrell, owner of Sammy Herrell Builders and Development, began building homes in 1978. About 70 percent of his business is in spec homes in Northpoint Grande, his development in Carrollton, Georgia. Herrell's homes sell for \$190,000 to \$280,000.

Why he offers a concrete floor finish:

"It's another product to offer along the cost baseline of ceramic tiles or hardwood floors, which helps differentiate me from other builders. Some people are tired of wood and tile, and concrete offers less maintenance and greater longevity than carpet and vinyl."



After having decorative concrete installed in his personal residence, builder Sammy Herrell wanted to demonstrate the attractive and durable finish to homebuyers in his Northpoint Grand development.

PATH FIELD EVALUATIONS

Read four PATH Field Evaluations:

- Carl Franklin Homes: Dallas, TX
- Hopke Buildings & Grounds: Sturgeon, MO
- K. Hovnanian Inc: Freehold Township, NJ
- MADE Project: Bowie, MD

"Sometimes, we do need to educate homebuyers a little bit. They tend to ask about what sorts of styles are available and what sort of maintenance is required. Those are the types of questions you like, because then you can tell them about how little maintenance is needed and how concrete has greater longevity than carpet and vinyl."

"Also, sometimes there's a misperception that concrete floors are cold and uncomfortable. However, in Atlanta, I would say it is actually the opposite. I have experienced this first hand in my house. Once you get the house to its temperature, the floor in that home is going to stay the same temperature. People will be surprised how comfortable it is to walk on."

LIMITED ONLY BY IMAGINATION

Concrete can be treated with stains or colorants to create a rich variety of hues and textures, or stamped with patterns to mimic natural surfaces from marble to wood planks. Clients can also choose elaborate combinations of stamps and coloring. Subcontractors can work with existing concrete or newly poured slabs.

When pouring new concrete, you can add colorant during the mixing process, which will provide consistent and uniform tinting. There are also plenty of options for using color hardeners on pre-poured and existing concrete.

At Northpoint Grand, the slab was already poured and set when Bob Harris of the Decorative Concrete Institute went to work.

"We used five different types of cement-based toppings throughout the interior and exterior surfaces," Harris says. "Many coloring methods were used, including integral color, stains, dyes, and tints."

However, the more complicated the design, the more difficult it may be to find a qualified subcontractor.

"On the lower-end application, such as a spray overlay system, builders in many markets have resources to draw from," Harris says. "But on the higher-end applications, it may be more difficult to source qualified contractors because of the skill level required. Decorative applications are often competing against mid- to high-range products like granite, hardwood floors, or marble. It takes a special contractor to either mimic or compete against high-end natural materials."

Find qualified contractors online at PATHnet or the Concrete Network.

TECHNOLOGY HIGHLIGHTS

This project included the following PATH-profiled technologies:

- Concrete floor finishes
- Windows with high-performance glazing

"For some homebuyers, the hardest thing to decide might be the style and look they want. There are a lot of options out there."

PROFIT AND SUBCONTRACTOR MANAGEMENT

Herrell estimates that an entire concrete floor package would add \$12,000 to \$15,000 to a \$225,000 home at Northpoint Grand.

While the work came at a big discount for Herrell this time, there's plenty of room for builder profit at those prices in other homes as well. Costs range from as little as \$5 per square foot for basic tints to \$40 per square foot for the detailed Modello stencil in the foyer area. However, Harris says most decorative concrete costs \$6 to \$10 per square foot, depending on the system you choose.

For this first project, the decorative work did impact Herrell's construction timeline.

In this case, he had to keep other subs off the floor for two days until Harris could complete his work, but Herrell says he can correct these minor delays as he gains experience with installation and managing subcontractors.

"I suspect I will be able to trim the time down quite a bit and be pretty close to what it takes for other floors."

"In the end, I may not use decorative concrete throughout every house I build, like I have here, but I plan to offer it in individual rooms, such as the foyer or the dining room, as an option. Obviously, there are a lot of homes on the market, and it's quite competitive. If you can find a niche that nobody else is doing—something that is attractive to purchasers and can make the sale—then it has the potential to be a great benefit."

The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH) brings together builders, manufacturers, researchers, government agencies, and other members of the housing industry. PATH partners work to improve the quality and affordability of new and existing homes. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Policy Development and Research.

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The detailed Modello stencil in the foyer has an immediate impact on homebuyers.