

A Concrete Decision Makes For Artful Results

The recipe for concrete doesn't sound like much. It's just water mixed with rock, sand or gravel, with some Portland cement thrown in. Generally, that's not something to get excited about. But the attitude about concrete has changed over the past several years with the advent of superior techniques and finishes that offer incredibly unique decorative outcomes. In years gone by, decorative concrete equated to the handprint or footprint your Momma and Daddy let you mash into the just-poured sidewalk while it was still wet. Move over, handprints. The decorative concrete of today can only be described as fine artisan work that blends technology, chemistry, geometry, power tools and old-fashioned hard work.

The demand for decorative concrete has been soaring over the years, and a local company, A Touch of Class Concrete, specializes in the craft. The business is owned by Bob and Susan Taylor in Yantis. Neither Susan nor Bob are strangers to hard work, with long-term careers in Dallas under their belts. Bob, after a stint in the Marine Corps and three tours in Vietnam, spent 31 years as a systems technician for Southwestern Bell. Susan worked for 19 years at Lofland, a construction-related products company. In that job, Susan became familiar with the trend in decorative concrete, and she took classes to add to her knowledge when dealing with her construction customers. The more she learned, the more she and Bob became convinced that a decorative concrete business would be a nice segue into retirement near Lake Fork, which they visited just about every weekend.

"My whole life, I spent my whole week working so I could come here on the weekend," Bob laughingly explained.

When they started the business, their goal was to have about one nice-sized concrete job a month. But demand grew, and with the confidence their many contractor friends have in them to perform quality work, their business flourished into a full-time enterprise. "That's with absolutely no advertising, but only word of mouth," Susan said.

In addition to coming into its own as a decorative trend, decorative concrete flooring has a lot to recommend. The color choices and ornamental options are almost endless. Advancements in stains and dyes and varying

to go with concrete flooring for sustainability reasons.

More builders and homeowners are opting to conserve resources and want durable lifetime flooring. Using the foundation as flooring allows it to serve double duty and eliminates the need to purchase, ship and install other materials such as carpeting, tile and wood that may need to be replaced several times during the life of the home. In addition, there is a fabulous economy over the life of a concrete floor.

Others like the choice of decorative concrete because it's easy to clean and



Susan and Bob Taylor of Yantis clearly enjoy their work, as well as the people they meet along the way.

techniques offer wide-ranging textures and patterns for a customized look to match decor from the most formal to the most rustic, or from contemporary or modern to the whimsical, as some of the Taylors' customers have boldly chosen. Beyond design, many choose

maintain. Some also opt for concrete as an option to increase air quality, because once it's sealed, unlike carpeting and other fibrous material, it does not trap dust, mold or pollen that can recirculate through air-conditioning systems. Thus, decorative concrete

floors spell allergy relief for many, without sacrificing design.

Another purported benefit of concrete floors comes when used in passive solar homes—ones built to take advantage of solar radiation. In winter months, the concrete absorbs the heat

can perform any work.

In addition to color, the Taylors also offer scoring options to make a floor look like tile, as well as engraving. Susan says, for design, if a customer can dream it up, they can pretty much engrave it on a floor. They've engraved

on the concrete previously, they may need to patch holes where the carpet tacks were. After any patching and cleaning, the floor is then stained. If ordered, custom-engraved art and scoring comes next. Then, there is a little more cleaning, a sealant is applied, and then there is some more cleaning and industrial finishing. For a job that just requires cleaning, staining and sealing, the cost is about \$3 per square foot. If they have to mask off areas, that's a little extra, and custom engraving and scoring is quoted based on how labor-intensive a design or motif is.

The Taylors say that some of their more enjoyable jobs have been the ones that have let them be creative. In one home, they said, a customer ordered a different design in every single room, including having a four-color faux "rug" designed on her dining room floor. Bob and Susan both say what they enjoy about their craft is that it brings them in contact with so many interesting and nice people, and they've enjoyed learning about their customers' hobbies as well. They've met folks who had a collection of exotic koi and a gentleman who carved exquisite wood replicas of trains and other intricate items, among others. But more importantly, they've also made some very close friends with whom they take vacations, join celebrations and go fishing. And, as Bob simply says, "It's fun doing the work!"

As far as their work ethic, Bob says it's simple: "We do it like we are doing it for ourselves." So, if you call them and you come to terms on a job, expect them to be there every day until the job is done. Expect them to be particular about the outcome. And don't be surprised if you make some new good friends.

Bob and Susan Taylor are longtime members of Wood County Electric Cooperative, first as weekend fishing warriors and then as full-time residents. You can reach their business, A Touch of Class Concrete, at (903) 383-2589. For more information and to see pictures illustrating various concrete finishes, visit www.ataouchofclassconcrete.com.



Recently, the Taylors completed this decorative detail that now serves as an artistic focal point for all who enter the Wood County courthouse. While working on that job, they took it upon themselves to clean the veterans' monument as a pro bono gesture.

from direct sunlight and then releases it at night to help keep rooms warmer. In the summer, concrete floors are shielded from the sun and help to lower air-conditioning costs by staying cooler much longer.

Many customers want concrete floors for the custom beauty, and the other aspects are just icing on the cake. The first thing the Taylors do when they meet a potential client is to ask them what they'd like to see—whether their style is rustic or more formal. Then they discuss the countless color options. The Taylors also like to inspect the floors that will be worked on. They perform a lot of work on new construction, but existing concrete on older homes can also be customized. The rule of thumb is that the concrete must be stable and level. Minor cracks are not an issue, because those just add to the beauty. New concrete has to cure at least 28 days to neutralize the natural chemical process before the Taylors

horseshoes, four-leaf clovers, floral borders, bucking bulls, family names, enough Texas stars to form a constellation and other decorative items. These emblazon courthouse squares, family homes and businesses throughout East Texas from Paris to Greenville to Tyler and all points in between. The Taylors say their ideal work area is a 40-mile radius from Yantis, but they have done jobs in Dallas and even farther away.

Once a customer has contracted a job, the first thing the Taylors will do is set aside a block of time. "Once we start a job, we are there every single day until it is finished," Susan said.

From beginning to end, they will not take a day off, even for a holiday, if a job is in the works. Part of that is because they like to protect their handicraft during the process, because some unknowing souls have actually walked on their wet coloring mixtures, forcing them to redo their work.

The Taylors' process starts with a thorough cleaning. If there was carpet

A Whim and a Prayer

Brings About A

Wallet Makeover

John and Cindy Randolph, along with their daughters Lacie, 12, and Alyse, 11, were shopping in a big-box sporting goods store when the phone call came, notifying them that they'd won a Texas Co-op Power Home Energy Makeover. Cindy says she was virtually speechless and then she wanted to scream, but of course since they were in the store, she contained herself as best as she could. But she did keep saying "Really? Really?" while she sent the girls racing through the store to find their dad. After all, he was the one who entered them in the contest.

John said he was up late one night reading Texas Co-op Power magazine when he came across the contest and decided to pull out his iPhone and enter. He'd not even told Cindy or the girls what he'd done until he got the first call informing him that his home had been one of four from Wood County Electric Cooperative selected for a home inspection and energy audit, which was a preliminary step in the contest.

John told the rest of the family that night at dinner that they had been selected and for everybody to pray. Then, after they had the home inspection, John said it seemed quite a long time. He and the rest of the family had just about come to the conclusion that they had not won. But when the call came, they knew their



prayers had been answered.

The Randolphs, like many other East Texas families, had constantly been looking at ways to lower their electricity bill. Since they'd moved into

their Grand Saline home in the summer of 2005, they'd noticed a huge spike in their monthly electric costs as compared with their former home. And, the Grand Saline home was much smaller. On average, they found they were paying around \$400 per month to electrify their 1,900-square-foot home. John says they were sure something was wrong, maybe with the electric meter, so they called WCEC to investigate. What they did discover, with WCEC's help, is that there was nothing wrong with their meter but that their home, built in the 1970s, was just extremely inefficient, with inadequate insulation, leaks, poor airflow and an older and oversized HVAC system.

Barry Maines, vice president and general manager of Ben Maines Air Conditioning of Longview, demonstrates to homeowner John Randolph the features of an electronic thermostat that his crew installed to work with the 3.5-ton Lennox 15 SEER heat pump.



Larry Sandifer, who inspected their home, did offer them a helpful solution. He suggested that they sign up for WCEC's SmartPower prepaid electricity program. SmartPower is similar to a prepaid phone card, with consumers buying electricity by visiting a kiosk and downloading credits onto a SmartCard. Then, they take the card home and slip it into a digital SmartPower in-home unit, which accepts the payment. Important to the Randolphs' situation would be the

tracking feature. This feature keeps a running tabulation and can display current power usage and average daily power usage. It even projects the amount of time left before more credits are needed. For those like the Randolphins, this information tells them which systems in their house are the energy hogs, allowing them to better manage those appliances to reduce usage.

With SmartPower alone, the Randolphins began to save.

“We immediately started seeing savings, and now save about 30 percent on our bill because of SmartPower,” Cindy said. “It allows us to budget for the month, and we can watch the monitor and see exactly how close we are getting to using up our credits.”

John added, “What we like about SmartPower is we make our power purchases on the 15th and 30th of each month. It helps us budget as we go, instead of paying one lump sum that was not planned for at the end of the month.”

The Randolphins also say their girls have gotten into the spirit of things as well, almost making a game of conservation. Once, when the family was getting close to using up the budget they had allotted, Cindy told them they really needed to see if they could conserve until the scheduled time they were to revalue. So, Lacie and Alyse systematically went through the house, and even outside, turning off lights and other items until they gleefully got the consumption down to 3 cents an hour.

“As kids, they need immediate gratification to help with lessons,” John said. “If they can see results, they can believe them. SmartPower gives you that and changes the way you look at electricity consumption. Seeing, for us, made a really big difference.”

For the Randolphins, lowering their consumption through awareness soon became a habit. But, that still did not change the fact that their home was still a huge energy waster. Before the makeover, they’d pretty much done all they could do with their existing resources to lower their bill. Until, that is, the Home Energy Makeover Team arrived on the scene. When Solar Solutions and Energy Attic came out to perform the comprehensive energy audit, they recommended beefing up the attic insulation to R-49. Garland Insulating of Dallas performed that task, using state-of-the-art materials provided by Johns Manville to



Cindy Randolph is an outspoken advocate for SmartPower, which she credits with helping her family begin a culture of electricity conservation. Here, she shows off the in-home display with which she gathers information about her family’s kilowatt-hour usage.

add insulation and seal ceiling leaks.

“The Insulation Contractors Association of America states that there are 45 million attics in America that are under-insulated,” said Dale Cox of Garland Insulating. “In 10 to 15 years, attic insulation can be displaced or settle, reducing the energy efficiency of the home. The process of adding insulation is quick, easy and affordable, and the results on energy efficiency, sound reduction and comfort level are immediate. And, insu-

lating offers one of the quickest returns on investment.”

Another focus was the inefficient HVAC unit, which was actually oversized for the square footage of their house. Ben Maines Air Conditioning installed a Lennox 15 SEER heat pump, replacing the existing 4-ton unit with a 3.5-ton one.

“When you do the calculations, many times the units are oversized for the square footage,” said Barry Maines, company vice president. “More is definitely not better for efficiency.”

The company also replaced the attic’s deteriorating ductwork system, which was leaking air. In addition, ductwork was installed in the garage that had been converted into a living space. About his crew’s work, Maines said, “It gives me a great sense of accomplishment to take a home that is not very efficient and turn it into a home that is comfortable and saves the customer money on their utility bill. That’s the way we run our business.”

The converted garage is used as a schoolroom where Cindy homeschools Lacie and Alyse. When the room was converted, little attention had been paid to insulation, and there were no ducts tying in the HVAC. However, the room was open to the kitchen/living room area. With inadequate airflow, the room stayed uncomfortably cold in the winter and hot in the summer. So the Randolphins had resorted to using a supplemental window air conditioner for the summer and a space heater in the winter, which was helping to drive up their utility bills. New ducts to that room made all the difference in allowing efficient and cost-effective comfort and eliminated the need for the extra heating and cooling appliances.

Next, the home energy team focused on another one of the Randolphins’ prime energy users: the water heater.

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Holey Plumbing installed a 40-gallon Rheem Marathon high-efficiency water heater that was donated by Texas Electric Cooperatives.

The Marathon line boasts the highest energy factor of any water heater with help from its trademark Envirofoam insulation. To accommodate the new water heater, some carpentry work needed to be done. Grand Saline Lumber graciously stepped in with the donated materials for that, and Heath Gregory Custom Homes kindly volunteered to donate the design and labor.

"All of the crews were so very efficient," Cindy said. "They did great work. Garland Insulating was in and out within an hour. Barry Maines' crew was phenomenal. We could not have asked for a better outcome. We just want to thank everybody! They were all so gracious and nice."

Of the makeover itself, Cindy said, "The whole process made us look at things completely differently; it has put us in a position to look at what else we can do."

John added, "One of the things this has done for us is changed the way we think. Before, we looked at electricity as a fixed cost. You think that you can't make a difference. You think the cost is what the cost is. But, you really can

make a difference!"

Because the Randolphs have SmartPower and can get real-time reports of their usage, even though the makeover has just finished, they can already see enormous savings. Cindy said that depending on activities like clothes washing and the like, they are now averaging between \$5 and \$9 a day in electricity costs, where before they used \$10 to \$15 a day. Some families might rest at that, but not the Randolphs. Now that the makeover team is finished with their work, the Randolphs are still thinking about what other usage they can control.

Cindy has her eye on a more efficient clothes dryer, and the family is also talking about solar screens for the windows, or possibly lined drapes. A great example for the rest of us, the Randolph family began their own quest for energy savings and then wholeheartedly embraced the good fortune of the makeover and its lessons.

Fortune did smile on the Randolphs when they won the makeover. But their successes in efficiency started long before their involvement with the makeover team. And from the looks of things, they'll take that knowledge and their fuller wallets onward to even greater energy-efficiency stardom.

WINTER WILSON REPRESENTS WCEC IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Winter Wilson, a sophomore at Mineola High School, won Wood County Electric Cooperative's essay contest to represent WCEC at

which was judged on quality of content. She did an outstanding job of outlining ways consumers can reduce electrical consumption while lessening environmental impact.

Winter is the daughter of Jerry Wilson of Mineola. She is active in the choir and also participates in the Youth Group at Smith Chapel United Methodist Church.

Of her achievements, Winter's father said, "I was so surprised and thrilled for Winter that she won this trip. I'm proud of all of her accomplishments and the young lady she has become."

Winter traveled to Washington, D.C., during June with approxi-

mately 100 other Youth Tour winners from other Texas electric cooperatives. She had the opportunity to meet congressional representatives and visit historic memorials and cultural centers in our nation's capital. About her trip, Winter said, "It was so much fun. I now have a new appreciation for our monuments and the history they stand for. I also met many new lifetime friends. I would like to thank WCEC for the opportunity they gave me."

WCEC CEO/General Manager Debbie Robinson said, "Each year, those of us at WCEC have the pleasure of knowing the contest winners, like Winter, will receive positive lifelong memories from Youth Tour. Winter represented WCEC and East Texas well, and we will watch with interest and encouragement as she continues her education."



Mineola student Winter Wilson enjoyed the trip she earned to Washington, D.C. She visited many important sites, including the U.S. Capitol.

the 2010 Government-in-Action Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.

A panel of judges chose Winter based on her essay submission,



ETREYS 2010 delegates sponsored by Wood County Electric Cooperative were, from left, front row: Jonathan Ladd, Jenelle Milam, Lauren Benton, Emiley Wilkinson and Rachel Backer, and back row: Cole Huizinga, Ryan Fisk, Alex Johnson and Danielle Sanders.

THE MAKING OF LEADERS

2010 ETREYS Attendees and Scholarship Winners

Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) sponsored 10 youth delegates at the 2010 East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar (ETREYS) held June 21-25 at Lon Morris College in Jacksonville. The students arrived home with a new perspective on electric cooperatives, and of the 13 scholarships awarded at the camp, two went to WCEC students. The youth delegates joined approximately 100 other participants, each sponsored by one of nine East Texas electric cooperatives, to participate in the ETREYS program, which is intended to promote positive ideals, improve leadership skills and teach the cooperative philosophy.

The schedule consisted of many teambuilding exercises, as well as presentations by 10 outstanding speakers, including, among others, Keith Davis, former NFL champion football player; Tommy Engelke, a longtime cooperative advocate; and Cain Schuler, who presented an inspiring program called America's Forgotten Heroes and History.

The delegates who represented WCEC for ETREYS 2010 were Rachel Backer and Lauren Benton, Mineola;

Ryan Fisk, Jonathan Ladd and Cole Huizinga, Mount Vernon; Alex Johnson and Danielle Sanders, Quitman; Jenelle Milam, Grand Saline; and Emiley Wilkinson, Alba. Returning student and Youth Director Chad Cleere of Grand Saline led the group. The delegates were chaperoned by Jay and Laura Murdock, Winnsboro; Paige Eaton, Alba; and Lindsey Weems, Quitman.

During ETREYS, Ladd was awarded a \$750 scholarship and also, by popular vote, earned the title of Mr. ETREYS. He was also chosen to represent WCEC next year as the youth director. Additionally, he was recognized with the Happy Feet award for his dance participation. Huizinga was awarded a \$500 scholarship, Sanders was recognized for being the most punctual, and Fisk received the Megawatt Award for being the most energetic.

"This leadership program opens many doors for the students, and my hope for each delegate is that he or she will carry the lessons learned at ETREYS forward to the benefit of both themselves and others," said WCEC CEO/General Manager Debbie Robinson.