



Customer FAQ Sheet

Who would want concrete countertops?

Concrete countertops are the most unique, personal countertop option because they are made from scratch for each client. If you want something unique and personalized; something that looks natural and has character; appreciate high-quality, hand-crafted items; think granite is too shiny, too formal and too common; think synthetic solid surface materials look and feel like plastic, then concrete countertops may be the right fit for you.

What are the advantages of concrete countertops compared to other countertop materials?

Versatile:

Concrete is extremely versatile. It can enhance any style, from French Country to Contemporary. From Arts and Crafts to Industrial. From Traditional to Modern. The possibilities are endless.

Practical:

Contrary to popular belief, concrete countertops are not stain-prone and difficult to maintain. Concrete sealer technology has progressed by leaps and bounds, and has stringent performance requirements with regards to staining, heat and scratch resistance.

Imperfections:

Concrete countertops are handmade and hand finished. Since concrete is a heterogeneous mixture of many different ingredients, subtle variations in color, shade, texture and overall appearance should be expected. All concrete is susceptible to harmless hairline cracks. This should be considered part of the aesthetic charm of concrete, and not a defect. Concrete exhibits natural beauty rather than plastic perfection.

How much do they cost?

Concrete countertops are comparative in price to other high-end countertop materials, such as granite. The color choice, in-lays, edge and other variables determine the actual price. Pricing is quoted on a per-job basis.

Where can I use concrete in my home?

Concrete countertops can be used for kitchens, bathrooms, fireplace mantles, tables, desks and anywhere else countertops are required. **Oberfield's specializes and markets countertops only for exterior use only.** These horizontal countertops are 2" thick. Oberfield's can make thicker countertops as well as fabricate front edge returns up to 6" deep.

Concrete countertops can be straight, curved, notched, multi-level, etc. Other countertop

materials would drastically increase in cost for curved shapes, creating curved concrete shapes simply involves some extra complexity and labor in forming.

Concrete can also be used in vertical applications such as backsplashes and fireplace surrounds. For vertical applications, concrete is generally 1" thick.

Maximum slab length for standard depth countertops is about 8 feet. Seams are located around sinks and cook tops, or wherever required for structural reasons. Oberfield's, and its partners, will work with you to design seam placement that is both structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing. Seams are typically 1/16" wide, similar to tile grout lines. However, it is important to realize that concrete countertops are hand made and hand processed; they are not machine cut, so tolerances for seams are more generous than with granite. Seam appearances are minimized by using color-matched fillers.

Integral sinks are possible. See the section on sinks for more information.

Concrete countertops can be used both indoors and outdoors. However, Oberfield's only manufactures concrete countertops for exterior applications only.

Concrete floors are a different application. Oberfield's does not handle these types of installations.

What colors are available?

Oberfield's has 10 standard colors with the possibility of every color on the spectrum. In fact, while most of our colors are solid and monolithic in appearance, we also hand-apply stains that can give you the look of a worn leather jacket or a copper patina. And, you can specify embedded stone, glass or other objects. Coupled with the many color choices, you have myriad design options.

What is the process for custom colors?

Oberfield's can produce a special color to fit your design needs. We can customize existing colors or match the color of an item such as a paint chip or fabric. The process takes about three weeks. We can produce two or more 8"x8" samples and submit them for your approval. Please note that a fee will be applied for requested samples.

How much color variation can occur?

Concrete is a natural, handmade material. Many factors such as humidity, sand lot and cement lot can affect the final color and texture of the concrete. All of our color formulas record the type of sand, type of cement and exact measurements of pigments to 1/10th of a gram. We use specially developed software to calculate mix design. However, colors can still vary because of the aforementioned factors.

Another factor that contributes to perceived variation is simply the size of samples. A 3" x 3" sample, or even an 8" x 8" sample, will look different than a whole countertop simply because the small sample does not capture all of the natural, random variations that will occur over a large surface. The color in a 3" x 3" sample may appear completely uniform, but a whole countertop in that exact same color will not appear as uniform. The same situation occurs with other natural materials such as granite. If you are looking for perfect uniformity, solid surface might be a better countertop option for you.

What edges are available?

For concrete, edging is formed and cast rather than cut like granite or solid surface. Therefore, edge choices depend on the availability of appropriate trim molding. For example, Oberfield's can do pencil, beveled, concave and reverse cove edging. Other custom edges may be available. Edging may be placed on top or bottom of the countertop. See edge detail sheet for options.

What kind of sinks can be used with concrete countertops?

Oberfield's concrete countertops can accommodate all types of sinks including drop-in, undermount and apron front. The minimum lip of concrete around all sides of sinks is 3". Concrete can also accommodate drop-in cook tops. The minimum lip of concrete in the front of a cook top is 3"; we recommend 3" for the back also, but 2" will suffice.

Oberfield's can make integral concrete sinks of almost any shape.

Concrete vessel sinks are also possible, and concrete's versatility means that the sink can be any color and shape.

What about backsplashes?

Backsplashes are cast and finished separately and deck mounted after the countertops are installed. Backsplashes are nominally 1 inch thick and can be from 3 inches high to full height. Outlet openings are cast in, not cut on site.

Will concrete countertops stain?

Oberfield's utilizes an extremely durable three-part sealing system. This leading edge system combines the benefits of both polyurethane and epoxy sealers, and creates a virtually maintenance-free application. Other sealing options are available if a more natural feel is requested. These options typically require periodic maintenance and will allow the countertop to patina over time.

Will they scratch?

While the sealer is durable, it can scratch if cut with a knife or subjected to heavy, sharp objects dragged across the surface. Cutting on the concrete may compromise the integrity of the sealer and allow stains to permeate the concrete matrix. Cutting on the concrete will also ruin knives, requiring a professional sharpening to reshape the damaged edge. Remember, concrete is made with stone; the same thing used to sharpen knives (and will therefore dull them just as easily).

Can you put hot pots on the countertops?

As with almost all types of countertop surfaces, it is best to use protection. Concrete can micro crack if exposed to high heat, and the sealer is elastic enough to "absorb" these micro cracks. The surface will appear "crazed".

How are concrete countertops made?

When it comes to concrete countertops, there are two basic processes: cast-in-place and precast. Cast-in-place involves building forms and pouring concrete in place, directly on the cabinets. While this avoids the hassles of transporting heavy slabs, it does tie up the site for many days (or weeks), and it involves a messy process, in addition, cast-in-place provides fewer options and less control over the finished product. Generally the only finish available is a trowelled surface, which is either acid stained or colored with pigments. The quality of the concrete, the finished appearance and ultimate performance of the countertop are all hampered by the fact that it's all being done on site under a rushed time schedule.

Precast concrete countertops, on the other hand, move all of the processes off site into a controlled environment. In the structural engineering community, it is well known that precast concrete is superior to cast-in-place concrete mainly because tighter quality control can be exercised. Curing, which is a critical step that is commonly misunderstood, can be closely monitored. Moving the process to a shop allows greater flexibility in terms of the look of the concrete. Glass, stone and other objects can now be embedded; these require extensive wet grinding with diamond power tools to reveal the embedded objects and hone and smooth the resulting surface.

What is the lead time?

Although countertops are one of the last items to be installed, concrete countertops should be selected as early as possible. Here is an outline of the process:

1. Color Selection

Oberfield's often performs custom color matching and submits samples for your approval. Allow about three weeks for this process, if not from one of our 10 standard colors.

2. Templating

Templating is done by Oberfield's, and it takes less than one day.

3. Fabrication

The typical time required to fabricate most concrete countertops, depending on their size and complexity, is 4-6 weeks. Note that the fabrication process may not start immediately after templating depending on how full our production schedule is. A good guideline is to contact your sales representative at the beginning of the project, or at the latest one month before cabinetry is scheduled to be installed, both to allow time for custom color samples and to secure a spot on Oberfield's production schedule.

4. Installation

Because Oberfield's concrete countertops are precast and prefinished, installation generally takes less than one day.

How are templates made?

Concrete countertops are templated just like granite. Almost all concrete countertops require physical templates from the finished and installed cabinetry. We will advise on templating requirements for your project, and we provide your contractor with a templating checklist to help him prepare. All fixtures that penetrate the concrete, such as sinks and

faucets, must be available at templating time.

How are the countertops installed?

Concrete countertops are handled and installed just like granite. Seams are finished with a color-matched filler. Your contractor needs to arrange for plumbing and electrical hookup no earlier than 24 hours after the countertop installation.

Are there any structural considerations?

A square foot of 2" thick concrete weighs about 23 lbs; a square foot of 3 cm granite weighs about 18 lbs. Cantilevered slabs, bartops on kneewalls and similar situations sometimes require brackets or other structural supports for the countertops. Oberfield's can advise on support requirements.