

'Our only limitation is imagination'

At Absolute Concrete, fountains and sinks are just the beginning.

At the Absolute Concrete Works design studio, showroom and fabrication facility in Poulsbo, an unusual group of artists, apprentices and one businessman are working together to turn concrete – yes, concrete – into the hottest commodity in home design.

But this isn't your grandfather's concrete. This concrete ebbs and flows into a peaceful tree-top pond to form the sink for a bathroom vanity. It acquires hues of blue and green, complete with seaweed, waves and sea glass to make comfortable garden benches. It succumbs to the golden-orange veins and wrinkles of the giant Gunnera leaves (up to 99 inches across) to create a spectacular trickling fountain.

It is, quite frankly, amazing.

"Because we start with a liquid our design opportunities are endless," said Tommy Cook, the carpenter journeyman turned concrete artist who began his small-scale business designing mantles, kitchen countertops and bathroom sinks out of concrete nine years ago. "Our only limitation is imagination."

Imagination is one way to describe what ACW delivers to its clientele.

"Personalization and customization," is how Steve Silberman, satisfied client turned president and partner in ACW, likes to put it. If



Donna Etchey/Staff Photo

Concrete work becomes artistry at Absolute Concrete Works.

the client wants built-in drain boards or cutting boards on their kitchen countertop, so be it. If they want to include coins from their travels all over the world, or rocks from their father's collection, consider it done. Silberman even has a piece of petrified wood jutting out along the edge of his desktop. There's pretty much an unlimited opportunity for personalization."

And then there is the color. Forget "concrete gray" (unless that's what you want). ACW is ushering in the era of "concrete green" and "concrete gold." Perhaps even "concrete magenta."

Working alongside Cook is Laurie Smith, a former goldsmith who

found her passion "working from the texture up" to add the subtle hues and brilliant veins that bring the concrete to life.

"I like to recreate it how mother nature gave it to us," said Smith, describing the three-color technique she uses in order to create "custom distinctive functional art" that is very popular on kitchen islands, countertops and fireplace mantles and to bring the client's vision to reality.

"We don't disparage marble, granite or any other hard surface," said Silberman. "They're nice for houses. But concrete is warm, beautiful and great for homes. Unlike granite or marble, you need not worry about your countertops looking the same as

Absolute Concrete

To learn more about Absolute Concrete Works, see www.absoluteconcrete-works.com. To schedule a tour of their showroom, call (360) 297-5055.

the folks next door."

And concrete just got even better. In what amounts to a huge step in decorative concrete, SoundCrete™ is lightweight, high-strength and "allows us to lead the decorative arena into even more diversified outlets of design opportunity," said Silberman. "We can pour much thinner because it's so much stronger without sacrificing the stout appearance which we achieve with bold profiles."

Pouring thinner is the difference between a mantle that weighs 600 to 800 pounds, and a mantle that weighs 100 to 200 pounds.

Cook's installation crew has cause for excitement, as does the design world who has taken notice of ACW's work. Their pieces have appeared in feature articles in various glossy-paged, home magazines and not a day goes by that Cook doesn't jump on top of his SoundCrete conference table to prove to a group of architects, interior designers, general contractors or homeowners that, "it really is that strong."

But what really matters most are the testimonials ACW receives from their clients.

"It really is all about customer service for the obvious reason: If the customer is happy, they will tell their friends," Silberman said.