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Creating Las Vegas

Cutting-edge decorative
concrete on the Strip



photo by Sandy Agraifotis

When Pigs Fly, a pizzeria and bread shop in Kittery, Maine, contracted with Maine-based Custom Concrete Design to install a cast-in-place, one-piece curved bar with custom-created integral color and inlaid steel gears.

countertops & precast CONCRETE

PROJECT PROFILES

Raising the Bar in New England

by Stacey Enesey Klemenc

WHILE most New Englanders today are keeping their purse strings drawn tight and few are investing in concrete countertops for their homes, it's a different story for area restaurants that serve drinks, says Michael Littlefield, owner of Custom Concrete Design in North Berwick, Maine.

"The drinking business is booming in these lean times and we've been doing a lot of bar tops," Littlefield says. "In years past, we may have done one a year but last year we did five."

And not just five run-of-the-mill colored concrete countertops either, he adds. All are one-of-a-kind creations with unique features such as inlaid gears, embedded chunks of demolished concrete and recessed wells for floating candles.

Among the five are counters for When Pigs Fly, an upscale pizzeria and bread shop in Kittery, Maine, The District, a restaurant in Portsmouth, N.H., and Demeter's Steakhouse, in the Regeneration Park development in Portsmouth.

"Most of our clients are letting us have free creative rein with our designs," Littlefield says, "but that was not the case in the Pigs Fly project. They had a good idea of what they wanted before we came into the picture. They wanted something simple with clean lines."

Littlefield says he's used a lot of cementitious countertop mixes and other systems over the years with varying results, but for his purposes, nothing beats good old-fashioned traditional concrete. "We've gone back to using the real thing — cement, stone, sand and water — and have had the best results. We try to keep it as real as possible with 4,000 psi ready-mix from the truck and 3/8-inch stone."

The only things he adds to create his standard countertop mix are integral color, a densifier and the know-how acquired



Photo courtesy of Custom Concrete Design

Custom Concrete Design owner Michael Littlefield on a bar top, using a planetary grinder intended for floors.

through 16 years of decorative experience.

Once the mixture is poured, he lets it set for about a month before beginning the grinding and polishing, which normally only takes a couple of days. For that, Littlefield says, he typically uses a small 300-pound stand-up planetary grinder, the same one he uses on floors. "I just stand on the bar and run the machine," he says.

The finish he achieves is highly polished and stain-resistant. "We do have some trade secrets, which I discovered through trial and error," Littlefield says. "We achieve the results we get through a proprietary stain-resistant process used to seal the bar top."

Read more about three of Littlefield's top-notch New England bar tops on the next few pages.

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Bar Top at When Pigs Fly Kittery, Maine

WHEN Michael Littlefield met with the designer of the When Pigs Fly project to show samples of his work, one project with steel gears embedded in the concrete caught the designer's eye. Turned out there were some antique cast-iron gears on hand.

The restaurant's décor is very masculine, Littlefield says of the upscale pizzeria and bread shop in Kittery, Maine, that features microbrews on tap and an extensive wine list. "There's steel showing everywhere you look and gray concrete floors," he says. "I wanted to warm things up a bit but the designer fought me on that. He had a vision

he was pretty well set with."

Even though this project is new construction, it doesn't look that way. Recycled materials are rampant. Exposed steel beams with their dimensions scrawled on them are clear-coated to emulate an industrial look. Recycled rusty steel pieces are incorporated into the cabinetry and new framework is left unpainted. And then there's the bar.

"I used my own blend of color to make it look like concrete used to before they started adding in fly ash and other things that lighten the gray," Littlefield says. Blending an L. M. Scofield charcoal dye with titanium dioxide powder helped him achieve the deeper gray hue he wanted.

Littlefield was able to modify the proposed shape of the bar into one with "a nice clean curve. There were some strange curves in it before," he says. Along with this alteration, the designer also went along with Littlefield's recommendation to increase the thickness from 2 inches to 3. "The thicker, the better," Littlefield says. "It just makes it that much more impressive."

Littlefield had the designer's three-dimensional cast-iron gears planed by a machinist to create flat-top pieces that were inlaid into the bar top. "That part was a bit of a challenge," he says. "We had to get the gears as close to the surface as possible as

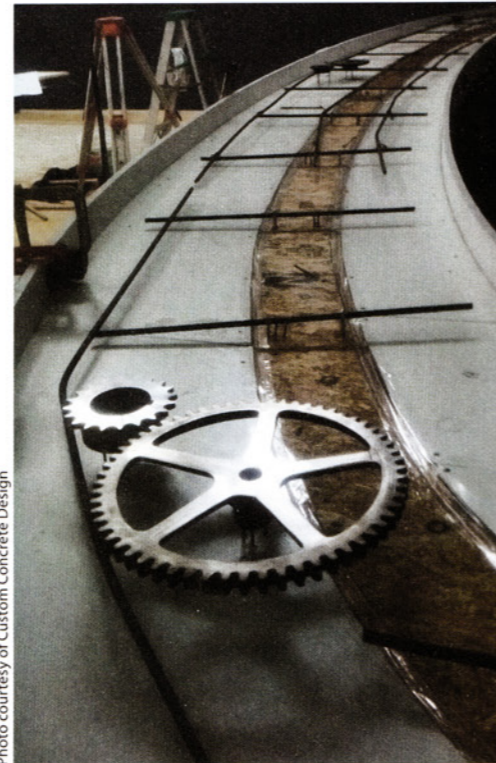


Photo courtesy of Custom Concrete Design

the designer wanted a minimal grind with very little aggregate showing on top."

As for the grinding process, he started with a 50-grit resin diamond and took it up to 1,500. "We did a 50, 100 and 200 wet and then slurried to fill in the voids. We finished with a 400, 800 and 1,500 dry. We didn't use any metal diamonds."

The cast-in-place 35-foot-long bar top was completed on time without a glitch. The hardest part, Littlefield says, was doing the initial wet grind in an almost finished space. "That was probably the most challenging aspect of this job. We had to mask everything off and contain all the water. We should have been in there sooner. Besides that, it couldn't have gone any better."



photo by Sandy Agrafiotis

Bar Top at The District Portsmouth, N.H.

ABOUT a 10-minute drive from Where Pigs Fly, The District is a restaurant specializing in contemporary American cuisine. Its owners conceived The District as a venue that proudly supports local agriculture and sustainable, local fishing practices. It only made sense to include as one of its focal points a concrete countertop made from local natural resources to complement its overall ambiance.

For this renovation project, at an existing site that had previously housed a restaurant, Michael Littlefield was given free rein. The client agreed to his recommendations to polish the existing floors and color them with a penetrating walnut dye. For the bar

top, Littlefield used an integral sand-colored pigment on a 4-inch-thick, 30-linear-foot bar. He used the same grinding and polishing technique for this job as he did on When Pigs Fly.

"Redoing the floors and bar top totally changed the look of the place," Littlefield says, "and really makes it what it is."

As a special touch, Littlefield included four little wells along the edge of the bar to hold mirrors and floating candles. The client has since found multiple uses for them, using a variety of décor to fill them based on seasonal themes or special events.

Project at a Glance

Client: The District, a Portsmouth, N.H., restaurant

Contractor: Custom Concrete Design Inc., North Berwick, Maine

Project Specs: Renovate an old restaurant by dyeing and polishing the existing floors and building a seamless cast-in-place 30-linear-foot bar top with four built-in circular recesses to hold floating candles

Materials Used: Local ready-mix concrete with 3/8-inch aggregate; L. M. Scofield Co. integral-coloring dye in a sand color

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Project at a Glance

Client: When Pigs Fly, an upscale pizzeria and bread shop in Kittery, Maine

Contractor: Custom Concrete Design Inc., North Berwick, Maine

Project Specs: Build a seamless 35-foot-long by 30-inch-wide by 3-inch-thick cast-in-place bar top with inlaid antique gears

Materials Used: Local ready-mix concrete with 3/8-inch aggregate; L. M. Scofield Co. integral-coloring dye in a charcoal color blended with titanium dioxide

U-Shaped Bar Top at Regeneration Park Portsmouth, N.H.

DURING the last year, Michael Littlefield has been working on rehabilitating a 1971-vintage Toyota dealership in Portsmouth, N.H. The building's owner, a "green realty trust" called Regeneration, is converting the 15,000-square-foot space into an ecofriendly 2011 facility with office space for green-minded businesses and a new locally owned restaurant, which opened in late 2011 as Demeter's Steakhouse.

The uber-green project, called Regeneration Park, features a wide array of ecofriendly building techniques, from the new solar thermal system that satisfies almost all its heating, cooling and hot-water needs to the old gray concrete floor ground down and polished to a 1,500 grit.

Littlefield's work at the building has included grinding and polishing floors and casting vanities and bar tops for



use throughout the project. His crown jewel is a U-shaped bar for the steakhouse.

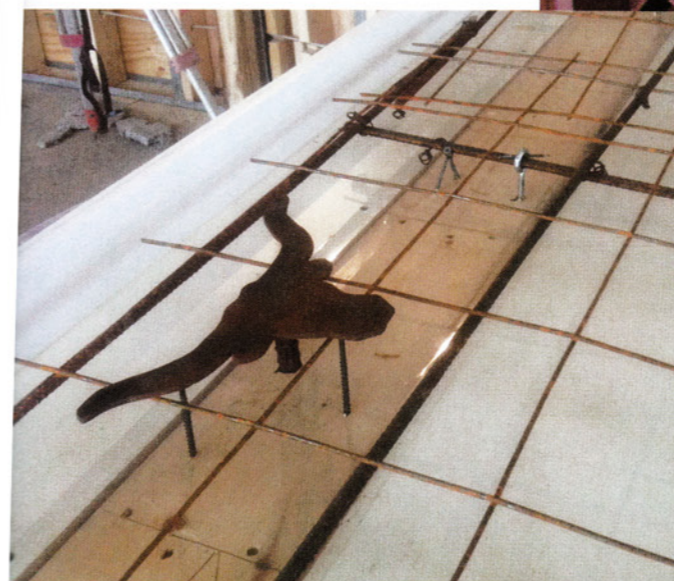
The owner, Littlefield says, is committed to donating, recycling and repurposing every leftover from the demolition process. So when Littlefield cut trenches in the floor to accommodate new electrical wiring and plumbing for the new restaurant, the remnants remained on-site. "We kept the concrete from the demolition and put bands of broken-up pieces in the bar, as well as in the bathroom vanities," he says.

Originally, marble was specified for the curved bar, but Littlefield, who was already doing the floors, won over his clients with one of his polished samples and a suggested design.

The 3-inch-thick, 50-linear-foot bar top is integrally colored a charcoal tint by a custom blend of dye and titanium dioxide.

"About 40 of the 50 feet of the bar is one piece without a single saw cut," Littlefield says. "And it's dead-on — no hairlines, no curling. It's a really tight piece for its size."

As with the other bar tops he has cast during the past year,



Littlefield used 4,000-psi ready-mix concrete and polished the surface using his standard, yet somewhat unorthodox, techniques.

Besides the chunks of concrete used throughout, Littlefield also incorporated branding irons to beef up the steakhouse connection, a 1971 car key to drive home the car dealership days, glass from old wine bottles as a nod to the restaurant's state-of-the-art wine dispenser, and ammonite fossils. (Ammonites are ancestors of the nautilus.)

Why ammonite fossils, you may ask? "It's an old element used throughout the project to help tie the design concept together," Littlefield says. "It's just another thing that's being recycled and reused."

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Project at a Glance

Client: Regeneration Park, a "green realty trust" dedicated to promoting sustainable business through the purchase and renovation of commercial properties in Portsmouth, N.H.

Contractor: Custom Concrete Design Inc., North Berwick, Maine

Project Specs: Renovate an abandoned 15,000-square-foot car dealership into office space and a steakhouse restaurant. Work entailed all the concrete inside and out, from the floors to the sidewalks, including a cast-in-place 50-linear-foot U-shaped bar top that featured inlays of demolished concrete from the original floor and antique branding irons.

Materials Used: Local ready-mix concrete with 3/8-inch aggregate; L. M. Scofield Co. integral-coloring dye in a charcoal color blended with titanium dioxide