

# HOME & GARDEN

Antiques/G4  
Heloise/G4  
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SECTION G



**Michael Littlefield fashioned** this stained concrete countertop for Popovers Cafe in Portsmouth, N.H., just prior to opening Melange Studio in Kennebunk. The 10-foot-long top to the cafe's coffee station weighed in at about 700 pounds and took 10 people to install.

Photos courtesy Melange Studio

## heavy duty

Concrete meets chic in countertops, coffee tables and more.

By RAY ROUTHIER  
Staff Writer

**S**ome makers of home furnishings try to use practicality as a selling point. Michael Littlefield does not. It would be pretty hard for Littlefield to extol the practicality of one of his concrete coffee tables. Thought-provoking, stylish and different, yes. But at a couple hundred pounds or more, the tables are not exactly practical.

"Overall they're pretty impractical, they're difficult to move, even though we make them lighter by using a foam core and creating an illusion of mass," said Littlefield, whose decorative concrete business, Melange Studio, is located in Kennebunk's Lower Village. "We're trying to push the limits. To me, the possibilities of working with concrete are endless."

Littlefield, 32, is already pushing the limits with his custom-made, decorative concrete pieces.

Since starting Melange last year, he's made a range of concrete coffee tables, side tables and end tables, as

well as lamps, fireplaces, mantles, vanities and decorative concrete floors for homes and businesses.

Up to this point, everything Littlefield has made has been a custom job for specific customers. His tables have ranged in price from about \$350 to \$1,200. A fireplace with mantle and surround was about \$5,000.

Decorative concrete, while not on the tip of most homeowners' tongues, is a fast-growing segment of the concrete industry, said Wendy Ardolino, editor of Concrete Decor magazine.

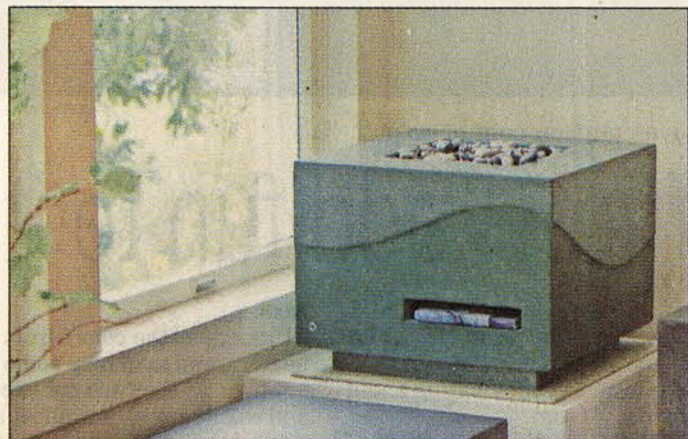
There are more concrete artisans every year focusing on countertops, floors and other decorative uses of concrete, she said.

But Ardolino said there are still few enough so that Littlefield, with his particular niche in the industry, is considered a pioneer in the field.

The Eugene, Ore.-based magazine recently featured Littlefield in its "Artisan in Concrete section."

"People are trying new things with concrete more and more. Adding color, being creative with floors, using de-

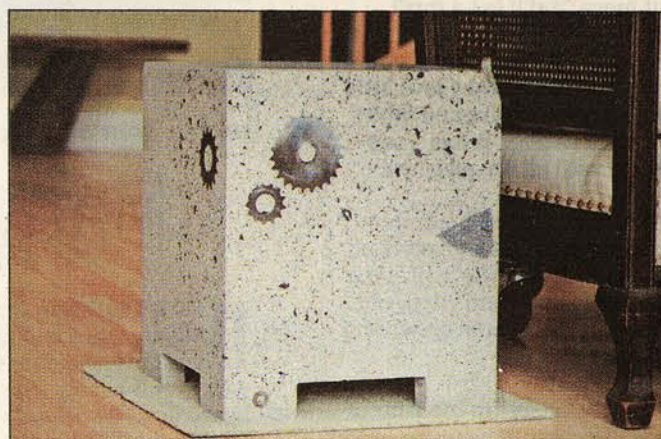
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**Left:** The Wave table has beach rocks embedded into the top, with the profile of a wave visible along the sides - and a slot for a book.



**Middle:** The Long Zen table, with its low profile and hollow core, is Melange's most popular table design.



**Right:** Gears is a concept table dreamed up for a design show in Boston last spring.

## CONCRETE

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signs on retaining walls," said Ardolino. "It used to be that only a small corner of (concrete contractor supply stores) had decorative concrete supplies, but now it's becoming a huge industry."

It's an industry with plenty of potential. Look around the neighborhood and you may see concrete foundations, retaining walls, and maybe a concrete patio that is "stamped" with a pattern that makes it look like slate or brick.

But concrete countertops? Concrete tables with liquid pigments to color the concrete? Concrete fireplaces with whimsical designs?

"There are shapes you can get (with concrete) that you can't get, for the same cost-effectiveness, with other materials," said Littlefield.

### EXPERIMENTING WITH MOLDS

Littlefield has recently been working at a Montessori school in New Hampshire to create a 50-foot long concrete water feature that will look something like an above-ground river. It will be used as teaching tool, and concrete will help in that, Littlefield said.

For instance, the concrete will have layers of color - either through pigment in the concrete or through the use of acid stains. And the various colors will represent layers of sediment in the Earth. Littlefield said he might embed some

### ON THE WEB

■ [www.melange-studio.com](http://www.melange-studio.com) is the Web site of Michael Littlefield's concrete decor business in Kennebunk.

actual fossils in the concrete.

Littlefield said he is able to create imaginative shapes, which look seamless to the observer, because he experiments with different molds. They might include fiberglass, Plexiglas or whatever he can get the right shape.

Some more traditional concrete molds, made from wood and metal, will leave tell-tale marks in the finished product, and Littlefield does not want that.

The use of colored pigments and the idea of imbedding things in the concrete come up in Littlefield's home furnishings as well. For one homeowner, he created a small table with beach rocks embedded into the top. The side of the table had a profile of a wave built into it.

Below that was a slot for a book. The beach makes people want to read, after all.

### BUSINESS HAS EVOLVED

Another creative thing Littlefield does to get different looks out of concrete is to grind it to various degrees, he said.

Littlefield grew up in North Berwick and said he owes a lot of his creativity to his parents. His mother was always doing craft projects, finding uses for things. And his father was an inventor who created a telescoping seating platform system

used in arenas and stadiums, and who eventually started his own business.

Littlefield can recall vividly his first encounter with poured concrete, during the construction of his family's new home when he was about 5 years old. He remembers the smell, and he remembers being amazed with how it poured out of the truck.

In high school, he worked for concrete contractors, doing standard concrete jobs. As an adult, he began his own business, Custom Concrete Design, which focused largely on stamping, which is a method of using patterns to make concrete look like slate, tile, brick, cobblestone or something else. It's often used on patios and around swimming pools.

A few years ago, Littlefield went to the World of Concrete convention in Las Vegas and came back with a book on concrete countertops by Fu Tung Cheng, a San Francisco artisan who is known nationally for his work with concrete.

The book inspired Littlefield to branch out and do more than stamping. He did some countertops for a cafe in Portsmouth, N.H., and has steadily evolved his business by doing tables, lamps, fireplaces and more.

"I really like modern design, and what better to use than concrete. It's really a lot more than just a raw building material," Littlefield said. "We have a prototype for a chair actually, but it's only in the design stage."

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Clockwise from top: Coffee table; countertop; Michael Littlefield at work.



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