

# Here are alternatives to the monochrome trend



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interesting visual and emotive effects.

In a lecture that I once heard by Michael Graves he talked about how the twentieth century had worked very hard to diminish the natural qualities of building materials. Whereas plaster has textural variations, drywall has none.

Another example of this is the current preoccupation of ours to paint all surfaces, so where there used to be differing wood species with inherent natural blemishes, now there is the monochromatic dullness of paint.

Introducing some of these materials into one's project could be just the thing that one has

been looking for to add interest to a project. Ideally, though, this interest in materials should be found throughout an entire project thereby uniting all aspects of the work together.

Although not always considered in high regard, the concrete of many families has some beautiful products. First of all, cast-in-place concrete as a vertical wall surface has made some of the more beautiful architectural homes but is rarely used. As a horizontal surface it has been used as a flooring material and as a countertop material.

### Floored

I used it as a flooring material at Barbara's Paper Bag in Birmingham and some other designer uses it as a floor top at Brazil in Royal Oak. It can be dyed and stained and can be formed into virtually any shape possible.

It is also a very low maintenance material and can be subjected to both indoor and outdoor conditions. One other exceptional quality about concrete is its ability to be imprinted with texture. I have seen surfaces that have had leaves scattered into the finish surface; after the leaves

degrade the surface has been sort of fossilized - very nice! I have had modest experience with masonry products but the polished face concrete blocks have always intrigued me. They are refined and have an interesting quality to them. I have also seen glazed face blocks and brick which have a shiny and highly finished quality to them. Perhaps they would be perfect in a bath or the right kind of kitchen.

### Meaning for 'bond'

In addition to selecting the right product for the design objective, the materials can be assembled in a wide variety of ways; this is called its "bond." Depending on which bond is selected the appearance of the wall will be altered; check ahead of time with your mason.

Another big favorite is stone, which would include granites, limestones and marbles. Marbles have tremendous variations from jet black to pure whites. Marbles are fairly soft and easily scratched. Nonetheless, they are used in both vertical and horizontal applications.

Some marbles can be used in this climate for outdoor applica-

tions but most are for indoor use only. Big dollar jobs use marble in slab form (up to 4'-0" x 8'-0") and modest priced jobs use tiles which can be found up to 18" x 18" in size. Once again, a nearly infinite variety of patterns can be created by cutting the marble (slab or tile) into differing sizes and recombining them.

Regardless of size or color, marble remains a "semi-precious" building material and when used it says one of two things: high quality and taste, or ostentatiousness and no taste. Either way, lots of moah is involved so be careful!

### Not a granite fan

Granite also has a tremendous range of colors, nearly that of marble. Granite's virtue is that it is an extremely dense and hard material. Up until recently it was used primarily as an exterior cladding and as a paver where it was unequaled in its durability.

Over the last ten or fifteen years it has found its

way into the kitchen and onto the countertop where it is seen by many as the sign of ultimate quality.

Personally, I am not a fan of the material because it is too cold and too hard. If using it be aware that anything that falls on it will break. For countertops I am a big fan of Maple butcherblock; more on that later. Limestone as a residential building material is more common in European construction. Much of it is quarried in France but we have two large quarry areas in this country - Minnesota and Indiana.

The Indiana limestones look like smoothly cast concrete and are used for windows and door sills as well as important civic and federal buildings.

The Minnesota Kasota limestones are more similar to the European limestones in that there is a rich mottled and varie-

gated coloration which ranges from light grays to warm tans. The older parts of Somerset mall were done in these magnificent stones.

Used as a countertop material they need to be sealed and even if sealed will stain if dark, juice-based liquids are spilled on them.

The Europeans are comfortable with these stains and enjoy the patina that is created; keep that in mind if you decide to go with limestone.

Next week we will take a look at metals, woods and glass.

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## Houses sold even before they're built

(AP) - Twenty houses in Hallett near Lansing, most of which have not even been built yet - have been auctioned off.

The houses were auctioned for prices ranging from \$170,000 to \$270,000. The subdivision developer wanted to sell the homes quickly to avoid the slow, post-September housing market, said Thomas Vetter, president of Accurate Marketing Systems, the Danville, Calif.-

based company that held the auction. The auction also was spurred by the fact some Oldsmobile executives soon will be leaving Lansing as the company relocates in Detroit.

The developer, Heritage Residential Group, "wanted to do it before Oldsmobile caused any more homes to go on the market and increase the available listings," Vetter said.

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