

# Add-On Biz

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## Concrete engraving

► Landscape pros can beautify and stain existing surfaces for clients who balk at the cost of pavers

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The customer wanted a hardscape with pavers arranged in circles bordered by flagstone. Had Michael Rodriguez tackled the job the usual way, he would have had to rip out a few thousand feet of cracked and damaged concrete and lay each paver by hand. The amount of manual labor involved would have generated a huge bill for his client.

Instead Rodriguez, president of Santa Fe Springs, CA-based Creative Innovations Landscape and Design, used specially made cutting tools to

etch patterns into the existing concrete. He then stained the concrete to simulate the effect of pavers.

He estimates the cost of the project using pavers at about \$35,000. "With the concrete carving, I was able to do it, for about \$6,000," says Rodriguez, who got his contractor's license in 1979. He delivered the look of pavers and flagstone without removing the old concrete by using patented tools purchased from Engrave-A-Crete, a 15-year-old company based in Bradenton, FL.

### Tools small and large

The tools look like souped up hand and yard tools (think an electric circular saw on

wheels with a vacuum attachment to collect dust), but they can etch any design into a variety of surfaces. The tools come in a variety of shapes — everything from a handheld etcher about the size of a large fountain pen to a walk-behind device called the Super Compact.

Darrell Adamson, president and CEO of the Florida-based company, "spent years" perfecting a methodology and designing machines that could create effects in existing concrete surfaces that replicate any building material, claims Paul DelFino, chief operating officer of Engrave-A-Crete. "You combine stain with our machines and you can take existing concrete walkways, patios, pool decks or anything like that and make them look like tile, cobblestone or pavers," he says, adding that not only does the company sell the machines, but it also trains purchasers in their use.

Rodriguez says he researched different options before settling on this particular solution. "I researched it two years prior to going to their school, workshop," he says.

Etched and stained concrete can mimic the look and texture of pavers and flagstone, and it can be enhanced with designs.

### Lots of options

The tools and training allow creative landscapers to do more than mimic pavers, flagstone and other patterns. Send the company a design — perhaps a photograph — and an artist can turn that into a 3-D template. That template can be laid out and all the landscaper has to do is cut the mold. Add stain and the only limitation is the client's imagination. The process works equally well for large and small jobs, says the company.

Before he had the tools another client wanted a Chinese character set into concrete. But when he priced the job, the client balked. Rodriguez says he's now able to go back and give the client a less expensive alternative — and still make what he feels is an acceptable profit.

Engrave-A-Crete sells a variety of tools and materials. The minimum entry is about \$2,500, says Brandon Adamson, Engrave-A-Crete's vice president and son of the founder. A complete trailer with everything the company makes is available for just under \$50,000.

