



Pattern Pool

Beauty to behold

Decking

by John Petrocelli, P. Eng.

The modern day pool owner has many choices when it comes to selecting the material and finish for their swimming pool deck. Some of the most popular choices today include traditional plain white or grey broom-finished concrete, coloured or tinted broom-finished concrete, exposed pebble finish, stamped or pattern concrete, pavers, and natural stone.

Often many of these different finishes are combined to give a unique look and feel to the swimming pool project. Since first being introduced in the late 1980s, stamped or pattern concrete has been gaining popularity with homeowners and pool contractors for years and today it is one of the most popular options being used for pool decks.

Pattern concrete is by far the most affordable option when considering cost compared to value. In some local markets the cost of plain concrete pool decking is about \$9 to \$11

per square foot based on an average pool deck of around 500 square feet. Interlocking stone can cost anywhere from \$12 to \$20 per square foot, while natural flagstone ranges in price from \$40 to \$50 per square foot or more. Pattern concrete, on the other hand, costs about \$13 to \$15 per square foot. When considering its attractive appearance, it is easy to see why pattern concrete is such a great value for most pool owners.

Colours. Pattern concrete is available in many colours and finishes. Most contractors offer dozens of colours and stamp styles. Today most homeowners prefer to go with earth-tones, such as beige and sand. Grey tones are also quite popular varying from light, medium and dark grey. Bright reds and pinks that were once popular when pattern concrete was

first introduced almost 20 years ago are not that popular any longer. Instead, most homeowners today prefer using the same subtle colours outdoors that they use inside their homes.

Stamp Styles. Although there are many stamp styles, the most popular are square cut flagstone, natural random flagstone and Roman slate or granite. By far the most popular stamp style in use today is the square cut flagstone or ‘Yorkstone’ pattern which has the most realistic look and closely resembles natural square-cut flagstone. It is also a very uniform stamp pattern so the finished product is very flat which makes for a very comfortable walking surface as well as an excellent surface to place outdoor furniture and accessories.

Earlier installations were very simple. One colour and stamp was often used throughout the entire project. Today’s extremely skilled pool and concrete contractors frequently combine different colours and stamps throughout a project to create a true unique masterpiece. The modern pattern concrete pool deck can have different colour borders around the pool edge as well as different patterns and colours to separate different areas of the backyard. The patio area can be different than the pool deck, which can be a different colour of pattern than the walkways and other areas of the backyard. Another option gaining popularity is the use of coloured highlights using coloured release agents.



Popular concrete stamp styles: Top left: Ashler Slate pattern. Top Right: Random Flagstone pattern. Bottom right: Yorkstone pattern. Bottom left: Roman Slate pattern.

Traditionally, a grey or black highlight was used, but today browns and earth tones are gaining some popularity. Be prepared to pay a premium for different colour, stamp and highlight combinations. The use of these details on a pool deck or backyard patio project will add a significant amount of cost to the standard square foot price due to the extra time and labour involved, but the end result is worth it.

End Use. When considering pattern concrete for a pool deck or backyard patio area, you should consider the end use of each area. For pool deck areas, it is best to go with a stamp that will offer added traction through the texture of the stamp. The greater the texture, the more slip-resistant the finished product will be. Also, consider that lighter colours will tend to absorb less heat from the sun and therefore will be much cooler to walk on with bare feet. Pattern concrete pool decks offer very comfortable walking surfaces especially

Grey tones are quite popular, varying from light, medium and dark grey.



around the pools where almost everyone walks barefoot. Unlike rough natural stone or tumbled brick pavers, stamped concrete is very smooth and there is little or no chance of stubbing your toes on uneven pavement.

Similarly, patio areas should be relatively smooth and level so that patio furniture will sit level on the patio and not wobble around. The Yorkstone pattern (the most popular stamp choice) is the perfect stamp for pool decks and patios as it has a perfect balance of texture and consistency, providing a fairly level surface with excellent traction. Walkways, on the other hand, can incorporate a more aggressive texture

such as a small ashler slate or a cobblestone stamp. Early installations of pattern concrete were fairly slippery, but as the craft has developed, good pool and concrete contractors have come up with non-slip solutions that virtually eliminate any slipperiness. Products such as micronized polymer additives are mixed in with topcoat sealers that create a textured surface very similar to a very fine-grained sand paper which is very comfortable to walk on and is incredibly slip-resistant.

Installation. The installation of a pattern concrete pool deck or patio typically involves the following process: first, the subgrade is excavated to the proper depth. It is extremely im-

portant to remove all topsoil as this material is very soft and compressible and if not removed it can cause cracking in the future. The subgrade is then packed with a heavy roller or diesel plate, again to eliminate any future settlement with time. A gravel base, usually 2 cm (3/4 in.) crushed limestone, is then placed on the earth subgrade. Ten to 15 cm (4 in. to 6 in.) is usually enough, however, more may be required in softer areas. The area is then formed to your desired layout shape. Wire mesh and/or re-bar is then placed inside the formed area. The wire mesh or re-bar is a primary reinforcement that gives the concrete added flexural strength and helps prevent cracking.

Before the concrete is poured, the gravel subbase is sprayed with water, which prevents the concrete from drying too quickly and helps concrete achieve its design strength. The concrete is then placed usually 10 cm to 12 cm (4 in. to 5 in.) thick, and is then levelled and screeded (smoothed). After about 10-15 minutes, some bleedwater will rise to the top surface. At this point, a colour hardener is sprinkled onto the top surface and worked into the top layer of the concrete. The concrete is given a smooth surface with a trowel and is then sprinkled with a powdered release agent that is similar to flour used in baking. This release powder prevents the stamps from sticking to the concrete and also adds the black highlight to the finish.

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Stamping Process. Once the concrete is covered with release powder, the stamping process can begin. Stamps are laid down in the chosen pattern and the stamping process progresses from one end of the pool deck/patio to the other until the entire area is stamped. The next day the concrete is cut with diamond blade saws. These sawcuts are called relief cuts and their purpose is to relieve some of the stress which starts to build up in the concrete as it sets or cures. Minor cracking (which is completely normal) will usually occur inside these sawcuts so that any random cracking is controlled or eliminated. The following day, the release powder is washed off and sometimes the surface is buffed with a floor polisher to bring out the vibrant colours. A cure and seal is then applied and after a few more days or a week, the surface is ready for use. The entire process from excavation to final sealing could take a couple of weeks. This process should never be rushed or the quality will be compromised.



Close-up of Backyard Getaways' exclusive pattern/stamped cantilevered bullnose 30.5 cm (12 in.) pool border.

you can even let the re-seal period go longer for a more natural matte look. It is important to add the non-slip additive each time the deck is resealed to maintain its non-slip surface.

Pattern concrete is truly a beautiful option for swimming pool decks and patios. From its affordable price tag to its beautiful, versatile finish, it is the perfect pavement option. No wonder more and more homeowners are choosing a pattern concrete pool deck for their pool and landscaping projects.

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When properly done by an expert pool or concrete contractor, pattern concrete decking will last a very long time. In fact, concrete can last 20 to 30 years and sometimes even longer with proper care and maintenance. The following year after it is installed, a stronger acrylic sealer can be applied which will give the concrete five or more years of protection from the sun and the elements. A properly sealed stamped concrete pool deck or patio easily resists staining from everything from food to suntan lotions and all other normal backyard threats. The sealed surface is also well protected from chlorine, bromine, and salt water from the pool and is also protected from freeze/thaw damage.

Maintenance. Maintenance is also extremely easy. The pool deck or patio should be washed with a garden hose once or twice a year to keep it looking brilliant, but for better results, a small power washer can be used. Re-sealing can be done every few years or so, however, depending on the look you want,

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