

# Clarington man brings California home

*Resident Rob Bryant trained at the Buddy Rhodes Studio in San Francisco*

By Julie Cashin-Oster  
Special to The Statesman

**ORONO** -- Next to a car, for most people a home is their most valued possession. We want it to be many things -- beautiful, different, artistic, functional and maybe down the road, sellable.

Today's interior designers, architects and home owners have rediscovered the beauty, functionality and integrity of concrete for kitchens and baths.

And that's good news for Newcastle's Rob Bryant. His company, Concrete Countertops Canada, manufactures custom concrete pieces including countertops, sinks, tiles and table tops for residential and commercial use.

"I'd been working in concrete for years, making ornamental and structural pieces for my own use. When we decided to replace our kitchen counters I surfed the Internet and discovered the incredible strides art-

ists and manufacturers in California had been making with concrete," said Mr. Bryant.

"We knew we wanted something natural and unique for our kitchen and something that would add to the resale value of our home. The kitchen is the centre of our family life. And with four teenage boys at home we needed something that could withstand the rigours of our non-stop eatery. We loved concrete's architectural integrity and warmth," said Mr. Bryant.

Concrete is not for everyone though. Like leather, stone and wood materials, concrete countertops are a living surface with hairline cracks and imperfections. It is precisely these features that make concrete the choice for many projects. Concrete countertops are highly valued by consumers who appreciate natural materials, functionality and craftsmanship.

"You can tell right away when someone loves concrete -- they can't keep their hands off the countertops. They come right up and feel it and run their hands over it. You don't see that with granite. It has more of a 'don't touch me' look to it, in my opinion," he said.

Concrete is similar to granite in terms of physical properties. It's hard, durable and weighs about the same. It's templated and installed like granite and very practical in heavy use areas like kitchens and bathrooms.

Concrete Countertops can be created two ways -- pre-cast, created in studio and installed; or cast in place, poured and created on site. Because of the mess, pouring on site is primarily done at time of (house) construc-

tion.

Every countertop is unique, no two are exactly the same. The process begins with clients picking a shape, colour and size. A template is then created from which Mr. Bryant builds a mould.

Some people have the idea it is mixed like the aggregate that is poured to make sidewalks. "It is actually a dry mix hand-packed into the mould; I take handfuls out of a bucket and push it in."

As this sandcastle-like mixture is hand-packed rebar and mesh are used to reinforce each piece. The dry mix comes in a variety of colours; however custom colours can be created. "All pieces are different -- the construction, reinforcement, finishing, it's creative right from square one."

The countertops can be as unique as the homes there are created for. The bottom (of the mould) is actually the top of the countertop. As it is being packed objects can be placed and set in the concrete.

Concrete takes days to cure. The mould is removed and cured before it is sanded. After the piece is sanded a diamond grinder is used to polish the surface. Grinding can make the surface like glass. Every finish is differ-

ent; it depends on the kitchen. If it is a cast in place, then it will involve a trowel finish.

Although there are no regulations on bathroom countertop sealants, kitchen grade sealers are used (on kitchen countertops).

The main difference is in the natural look and matte finish of concrete and the fact that it's customizable. There are more than a dozen choices of countertop materials with various attributes and disadvantages.

Granite adds a formal and opulent look to a room although it offers few colour and design options.

Marble offers a more natural look than granite. It's porous and fragile so not generally recommended for kitchens but has been a popular choice for bathrooms.

Solid surface materials offer a seamless installation but come with a plastic look and feel -- scratching and burning occurs with usage.

Tile is relatively inexpensive and versatile, however frustration may arise with the uneven surface and maintenance of grout lines.

Laminates are inexpensive and offer a range of colour and pattern options when budget is a driving factor.

Clearly sold on the attributes of concrete, Mr. Bryant trained at the internationally renowned Buddy Rhodes studio in San Francisco. Buddy Rhodes is a true craftsman and a pioneer in the industry.

Six months later, impressed with the results and demand for his product, Mr. Bryant and his partner Judy Mead founded Concrete Countertops Canada with the studio located in Orono. A true artisan and craftsman in his own right, Mr. Bryant now creates



Walter Passarella / Metroland Durham Region Media Group

**Rob Bryant describes the work involved in producing the unique cement countertop he's currently working on. He started his business about a year ago after learning his craft from a craftsman in California.**

custom pieces for local residential and commercial commissions.

"Each piece is completely unique. There are common properties but many choices -- colour, finish, aggregate, in-lays, shapes and integral design components to suit individual tastes. What we can do is help guide the client -- whether that's a homeowner, designer or architect, to the options that will best suit their

intended use," explained Ms. Mead.

"And for those who want to try their hand at making a concrete creation, we now offer a 2-day training course several times a year for do-it-yourselfers and contractors. We're getting inquiries from other provinces as well as across Ontario," she added. "I don't know of anyone else in Canada currently offering this training."

Both Rob and Judy have art back-

grounds and use their talents combined with engineering principles to create unique, functional pieces of art for homes. Standard sink shapes are also available; however custom shapes can be created.

For more information contact Mr. Bryant or Ms. Mead at 416-450-7716 or e-mail them at [infor@concretecountertopscanada.com](mailto:infor@concretecountertopscanada.com). Studio location is 150 Princess St., Orono.