



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
with Tim Goom

Harden up and take a concrete pill!

The sun is out and it is time to start moving the entertaining from indoors to out! As the cold weather abates, turn your mind to contemplating your outdoor spaces. Warmer weather is not only conducive to planting - it is also the perfect time for hardscaping projects. Concrete is an incredibly malleable material and presents countless design opportunities.

Some shy away from concrete because of an outdated perception it is ubiquitous and drab compared with other hardscaping options such as decking and paving. However concrete is having a renaissance. It is increasingly appreciated for its innovative aesthetic potential, its functionality and its structural strength.

Some of the benefits of concrete include:

- **Versatility:** Concrete can be shaped and poured in to many different forms. It provides great versatility as it can work to levels and be poured for specific falls. Tiles and pavers are limited to an extent by their dimensions which also changes the aesthetic compared with the seamless flow of concrete. The potential for creativity with concrete goes well beyond patios, paths and driveways - think precast panels, floating steps, curved steps, stepping stones, fire hearths, and floating benchtops! Integrated lighting can be set into your concrete (for example step lights) so the surface is illuminated at night but remains uninterrupted.
- **A variety of surfaces:** It used to be that you could have any shade of concrete - as long as it was grey! This is no longer the case. There are now a multitude of finishes, colours and textures. Finishes can range from having an effect created by sponges, rollers or brooms. Concrete can also include shots of colour when poured for a vast range of coloured effects. Oxides incorporated into the concrete before it is poured will darken its tone. Exposed Ag creates a wonderfully textured appearance - some complain it can be tough on bare feet, but we have perfected our own specialist brew to minimise this.



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Another increasingly popular finish is exposing the concrete with acid for a stunning marbled effect.

- **Easy care:** The maintenance required for concrete is minimal. It can be sealed or not depending on its location. If you are concerned about staining (for example from vehicle oil on a concrete driveway), applying a sealant will be beneficial. At times, sealant may make the surface more prone to slipping, especially if it's in an area prone to surface water, such as round a pool - so adding grit to the sealant will give the surface grip. If concrete needs refreshing it is as simple as water blasting and resealing - and this should only need doing every couple of years.
- **Durable:** Concrete is incredibly durable and offers structural stability to hardscaping. The appropriate mix of the concrete will depend on the area in which it is being used. Concrete used in driveways will need to be of a higher quality mix than in pathways due to the extra loading and will require a longer curing time before use.

Compared with paving, decking and brickwork, concrete is a significantly more economic option, especially for larger areas. Pouring and preparing concrete is however more of an art than a science. Factors such as the weather on the day, the temperature and the mixture of the brew will all affect how fast the concrete sets and the result you achieve. Goom Landscapes can discuss how the specific features of concrete can be incorporated into your landscape to enhance its functionality and aesthetic.

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