

Hardscape Colors, Textures Liven Up Landscapes



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Henry Ford famously told his car customers, “You can get it in any color you want, as long as it’s black.” For a long time, hardscape designers and installers had to tell their clients something similar: “You can get it in any color you want, as long as it’s gray.” Pavers, blocks, concrete, you name it – they all seemed to be some shade or tone of gray. Obviously a lot has changed in recent years, with product manufacturers now supplying hardscape materials in a wide variety of different hues, and landscape designers taking advantage by using hardscaping as one way to introduce some color to their creations.

“It used to be a lot of grays ... for example a gray patio with a black soldier-course,” says David Ash Jr., landscape designer and president of [David Ash Landscaping Co.](#), which serves southern New Jersey. “That’s sort of gone away, and now we’re seeing a lot more earthtones – browns and beiges.”



And, in some cases, even more vibrant colors. “We find that it varies depending on the manufacturers you’re using,” says Ash. As just two examples, his company uses hardscape products from [Techo-Bloc](#), which he says offer “a little bit more of a natural feel with softer colors...more earthtones,” while the lineup from [Cambridge Pavers](#), which Ash also uses, “has some colors that will just blow your socks off ... they have such a wide variety of colors.”

Personally, he prefers hardscape colors that are a little less vibrant and a little more natural. “We like the hardscapes to be a little softer and to have the plantings bring that color into the landscape,” says Ash, noting that this provides more flexibility in the future in the event that tastes or trends in color palettes change. It’s much easier and less expensive to swap out plantings than it is to tear up a patio. While he tries to steer clients in that direction, some do want “a little more pop in their hardscapes,” he

says.



Photo: Belgard

When color is desired in the hardscape, it's not always necessary to go all the way, adds Ash. "We like to do inlays. If you do your patio more monotone and subtle, you can do an inlay with something that pops a little more," he explains. Ash calls this approach layering or quilting; the same splash of color or texture might be used as a soldier course, an inlay or around the perimeter of a pool. Mixing natural stone with the pavers is another way to add a little subtle variance in color and texture, he notes.

The availability and use of more colorful hardscape materials hasn't necessarily made a designer's job easier or more difficult, but "it makes it more interesting, that's for sure," says Ash.



The same color possibilities can be created in poured concrete hardscapes. "I think we're seeing the use of color as more of a standard than it used to be," says Mike Riggs, manager at [Progressive Hardscapes](#), a specialty decorative concrete installer based in Arizona. "The concrete is being used from a design standpoint to make a statement, rather than, say, just a utilitarian gray walkway so people can get into a building. We're also using color a lot in walls now, and we're using a lot of different color combinations. We're not just using one color, but multiple colors sometimes." Mosaic tiles and colored glass are also increasingly being incorporated into the concrete to add visual interest and color, he adds.



People are looking to make a statement, so choosing different colors and textures to add visual interest is proving popular.

When it comes to introducing color in the concrete, Progressive Hardscapes first meets with the client on the project to clarify the difference between an integral color (which is actually added to the concrete itself) and the use of a dry-shake color hardener (a blend of iron oxide pigment, a silica sand and Portland cement, which is broadcast over the surface of a gray concrete and floated into the concrete while it's still wet). "The big difference visually is that the integrals will be a little bit more muted in color. The thing we can get with the dry-shakes that we can't get with the integrals are really light colors, or we can get more intense colors," explains Riggs. "I'll usually suggest to the design team that we use an integral if they can work with that design palette. If they're looking for something special (an especially light or vibrant color), then we might talk about the dry-shakes."

There are limitations when it comes to colorful concrete. "From a color selection standpoint, there is a little bit of a variable with concrete. It's not like a paint color," Riggs explains. For that reason, he recommends to clients that they include money in their budget for a mock-up, where his crew

pours out 4 yards of concrete with the actual materials that would be used on the project so it's possible to see what the colors will actually look like.



Riggs notes that he rarely uses stain to add color on exterior concrete applications; the color it adds isn't as durable and requires maintenance to restore the desired appearance when wear occurs.

With the increasing use of color, there are similar concerns about the longevity of that color when it comes to manufactured hardscape products. [Belgard](#), for example, recently introduced its Satura color technology, designed to both faithfully reproduce the colors of natural stone (including Pennsylvania bluestone and Midwestern ledgerock), and at the same time preserve and protect those colors against wear and tear. "The color stays rich year after year," says Jessica Foster, brand manager with Belgard. She says this is something that hasn't necessarily been true with all hardscape materials in the past. "If you're driving around, you'll often notice a driveway or walkway that's been in place for 10 years and once was red but now is pink."



Preserving the original color of the product is important for a variety of reasons, including the fact that future repairs or expansions to the hardscape can be made with materials that match those that have been in place for years, Foster notes. And also because the exact hardscape colors that are selected for a given project often help to dictate the look of the entire landscape.

Whether it's in conversation with landscape designers or homeowners, "color is always the first thing that's discussed in making a choice about hardscapes," says Foster. "After color is talked about, they may go to textures and shapes and sizes, but color is always key."



Outdoor entertaining has encouraged carrying the indoor look outside, resulting in different color and texture choices.

Not only are manufactured hardscape products now mimicking the look and coloring of natural stone, but also natural wood. Belgard's new NooN product line, for instance, recreates the look of wood planks in the form of porcelain pavers. The product is available in four different colors, bringing the look of the indoors to outdoor living areas. "I think the growth in outdoor entertaining continues to be on the uptick, so designers no longer treat the backdoor as a gray, poured concrete space," says Foster. "They know that people want to entertain and decorate it to make it feel just as homey and energetic as their interior." She says the trend of "tying together the interior and the exterior" is one of the factors that's led her company to make sure its hardscape products are available in colors that can complement patio furniture and emulate the products being used indoors.