

# Get your home inspected to save headaches

Continued from page 5C

they performed the home appraisal. Since the VA and FHA appraisers are not licensed home inspectors, their home inspection will be limited in scope. Once again there may be a need to have the purchasing property

inspected by a professional.

Buying a home is usually our biggest financial investment. That's why you should consider hiring a licensed and insured professional to make sure that the property being purchased is a good investment.

A home inspection is not considered a closing requirement. It is a strongly encouraged optional expense of the buyer. Therefore, the buyer will incur the expense of the home inspection. However, if included in the contract, the seller can reimburse the

buyer's home inspection expense at closing.

Don't squander your rights to have the property inspected prior to closing. Just because the seller's property disclosures do not reveal any deficiencies it does not mean

there aren't any. If there is a hidden defect, the seller may not be aware of the problem. Remember: once you close on your new home, any and all defects that exist or surface are now yours.

Make sure that your dream home is a good investment;

get a professional home inspection.

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## Low-flow toilets work and save water



Courtesy of ARA Content

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Water is one of our most vital and precious resources, yet it's being used up at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Americans consume more than 450 billion gallons of water each day.

The majority of water is used for either irrigation or generating power, but an alarming 4 billion gallons are flushed down toilets in the United States every day. And that water usage figure used to be a lot higher. In 1992 Congress passed the

Energy Policy and Conservation Act, which mandated that by 1994, new residential toilets use 1.6 gallons of water per flush, dramatically less than the old standard of 3.5 gallons per flush.

When the first batch of new toilets came off the assembly line, consumers had numerous complaints. They were upset that their new toilets had to be flushed two, sometimes three times to get rid of waste, which defeated the purpose of saving water.

"Today's toilet is nothing

short of an engineering marvel when you consider that you still need to effectively flush the same amount of waste with less than half the water," says Kathryn Streeby, product manager of toilets at Kohler Co. With water conservation top of mind, Kohler just introduced a new toilet and flushing system that uses even less water than 1.6 gallons, and still provides an answer to consumers who have expressed the need for a gravity-fed toilet that effectively removes extra bulk

waste without ever plugging. Streeby says the Cimarron Comfort Height toilet with Class Five technology — inspired by the raw power of class 5 whitewater rapids — can save a family of four over 2,000 gallons of water per year over standard 1.6-gallon toilets. The water savings are derived from the new toilet's 1.4-gallon flush setting.

"Even though a smaller amount of water is used, the Cimarron toilet will still flush effectively, due to the excellent design of its internal working components, including an industry-leading 3 1/4-inch flush valve and direct-fed jet technology," says Streeby.

When they first came out, low-flow toilets looked alike, but now that technology to make them work effectively has been perfected, engineers are focusing more on design, easy installation and ergonomic factors. With a patented DryLock system, the Cimarron toilet installs much faster and easier without the fear of breaking the vitreous china tank or leaking water onto the bathroom floor. And, as a Comfort Height model, the toilet offers comfortable, chair-height seating for people of all ages and statures. In fact the Cimarron toilet complies with the height requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The new toilet has only been available since January 2004, but is already being requested by numerous plumbers, builders and do-it-yourself homeowners. For more information on Kohler's Cimarron toilet, log onto [www.kohler.com/class-five](http://www.kohler.com/class-five) or call (800) 4-KOHLER.

## Concrete let homeowners' creativity surface

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Concrete: it's practical, sturdy and has been used in the construction of buildings since the early Roman times.

However, let's face it: few of us would argue that most concrete patios, driveways, walkways and garage floors are attractive. In fact, more than likely, they're drab, dull, even boring. But, as many homeowners and do-it-yourselfers are discovering, through the use of decorative finishing concrete treatments, those gray, cold outdoor slabs can take on a unique, stylish look that reflects homeowners' particular tastes.

### Why decorative concrete treatments?

Decorative concrete treatments, such as staining and stenciling, have gained in popularity during the past few years, although the idea of decorative concrete is not new. Concrete stamping tools have been around since the early 1950s and concrete coloring has been in existence even longer. However, the selection of finishes, colors and textures have grown, offering homeowners more options when choosing to add a little oomph to their outdoor décor. According to Pete Donati, product manager for H&C Stain, a leading manufacturer of concrete care products, the desire for concrete décor among homeowners is an extension of their interior design-sense.

"Consumers want the ability to express their own style, not just inside their

homes, but on the exterior, as well. Concrete décor is emerging as a newly discovered form of easy-to-complete landscape design that allows homeowners to 'dress-up' something as mundane as a bare concrete driveway."

Donati goes on to say that in addition to adding beauty to a home's exterior, decorative concrete allows homeowners to create vibrant colors and intricate designs at half the cost of installing real stone or other natural materials.

"Rather than spending thousands of dollars on replacing concrete walkways, patios or driveways, at a cost of approximately \$6 a square foot, the same beautiful effect can easily be accomplished by using decorative techniques on existing concrete."

### DIY friendly decorative concrete treatments

The majority of decorative techniques involve changing either the color or pattern of a concrete surface, or both. The most common treatments make concrete appear more like expensive material such as tile, cobblestone, brick and keystone. These illusions can be accomplished through a number of applications. The following are two of the easiest and most popular DIY treatments:

- **Staining** If you're looking to add some pizzazz to your dreary driveway, patio or garage floor, or cover up some unsightly oil stains, staining will serve to change

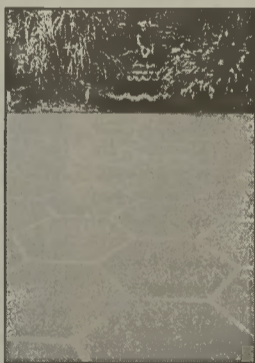
the color or look of your concrete, as well as add lasting protection against the outdoor elements. In several simple steps, you can transform an outdoor concrete surface into a colorful creation.

In most cases, you'll begin by cleaning the area with a concrete de-greaser to help alleviate oil and grease spots. After rinsing off the de-greaser, you should apply an etch cleaner. This step should make the surface feel like 120 grit sandpaper and allow the stain to easily soak into the concrete. After waiting for 24 hours, you can apply the first coat of stain with a brush or roller. A second coat can usually be added after the first coat of stain dries for at least another 12 hours.

Today, concrete stains span the color spectrum. They're offered in colors ranging from traditional browns and grays to racy reds, greens and even hues of purple.

- **Stenciling** If you want to take staining one step further, stenciling is the simplest way to place brick or stone patterns on a concrete surface. Stencil templates can be purchased in rolls of water-resistant plastic.

The "stone" pattern is created by rolling the template out on the concrete and applying a spray base color through the stencil, much like the staining procedure. Stencils come in a variety of patterns, including cobblestone, herringbone, hexagon tile and natural stone. Cost



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varies by pattern, but Donati adds that in addition to the staining costs, most stencil systems cost between approximately 20 to 25 cents per square foot.

- **Helpful decorative concrete treatment tips**

Although decorative concrete projects are very DIY friendly, if you're thinking about incorporating color or patterns into an upcoming concrete project, there are some tips that will help you successfully accomplish your goal.

First, know that no colored slab will perfectly match any color chart. Expect some slight variations in coloring, even when working with newly poured concrete. If you are working with new concrete, be sure to let it cure for 30-45 days before attempting to stencil or stain the surface. Once completed, your new concrete creation will require some maintenance to keep it looking its very best.

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