

## Brick: Innovations make it enduring and easy

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ter program to help customers visualize a completed job.

"For example, a person punches in a fireplace. Then they punch in the type of stone they are considering, and see how it will look," said Roehrich.

The Concrete Service carries three lines of pavers: Unilock Brick, Oaks and Navastone.

Although they do not handle antique bricks, some pavers that feature an antique look are available.

"Tumbled pavers are a very hot look right now. Bricks are put in a tumbler to give them an aged appearance. This process is also used on retaining wall blocks, and on veneer products that lay vertically on a wall," he said.

The Concrete Service Showroom is located across the street from their the block plant. Their staff have dealt with masonry for 10 years or more and can advise on basic materials, tools and accessories.

The showroom has a number of display panels and sample boards that can be taken home to compare with other building materials.

"Certain mortars should be used with certain projects," he said. "The same is true of sealers that are applied after a project is finished. Some are not intended to change the appearance of a job, but do the masonry good. Others enhance the appearance by adding a sheen or a 'wet look.' People can see how they look in the showroom."

Customers should remember that mortar makes up to 20 percent of a brick wall, and comes in different colors and shades. A minor change in mortar color could affect the finished look of a house. The Concrete Service stocks premixed colored mortar and many match any block they stock. Also available are some mortars that you can mix yourself.

At Western Concrete, Thomack has noticed a growing customer interest in home landscaping. Western

access to reclaimed bricks, such as the popular "Old Chicago" antique building bricks salvaged from historic buildings.

"We try to steer people away from this choice, as it is a soft brick and there could be problems with our northern weather," Thomack explained, adding that it can be used for interior design.

A brick that duplicates the "Old Chicago" look, but is more appropriate



Concrete has supplied materials for both residential and commercial construction since 1946, and has six locations in northern lower Michigan. They stock bricks, pavers, natural and manufactured stones, chimney and fireplace materials, plus products and tools for home building, remodeling and landscaping.

Western Concrete has

to Michigan's climate can be purchased through Western Concrete. Western Concrete also has access to handmade bricks, for a nostalgic Old World look.

Aside from their showroom, Western Concrete has sample designs outdoors to help customers visualize a finished look. Their showroom has samples of brick, natural stone, manor stone,

pavers and flagstones. Granite and stone accessories are also on display, including such items as bird baths, tables and lamp posts. Along with customer photos of finished projects, several companies that deal with Western Concrete have Web sites that can be viewed.

Their Web site is at [www.westernconcrete.com](http://www.westernconcrete.com)  
Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.

Record-Eagle/John L. Russell  
At left are pavers shown in a sample landscape design at Western Concrete Service in Traverse City. Below left is a building using tumbled brick pavers from Traverse City's The Concrete Service. The pavers are tumbled on the two facing sides for a weathered effect and are sized so that combinations can fit despite appearing asymmetrical.

## Knock on wood: One-of-a-kind cabinetry

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And so a business was born.

"I think the work we do adds value because it's so highly unique. You're not going to see it in anyone else's house," he said.

Cabinets, of course, are not found only in the kitchen. Because homeowners today are concerned with maximizing space, there are more cabinets being built in bathrooms, laundry rooms and living areas. Building a storage unit around a fireplace or tucking the entertainment center into a corner of a living room are especially popular.

With a little imagination, even the storage space within the storage space can be well utilized.

"There are Lazy Susans in cabinets, plate racks that pull out and are accessible from both sides, baskets that pull out for storage, and recycling bins that also pull out," said Hiser.

Like everything else, fads in cabinetry go through stages. Once, dark, old-world finishes were once all the rage. Homeowners today frequently opt for lighter stains like honey pecan or sugar maple.

Some are ordering wood like birch for their cabinetry then painting it the

color of their choice. It gives them a fresh look, and offers them the opportunity to change the color as their taste or decorating style dictates. According to Hiser and Smith, shabby chic with its distressed look is big right now, too.

If custom cabinets are not in your budget, most home improvement stores offer kitchen-cabinet consulting services at a reasonable price. Home Depot in Traverse City charges \$60 for an in-home consultation. Measurements will be taken and sent back to the Home Depot staff. Someone on their design staff will then help you decide what you would like for your new cabinets.

If semi-custom cabinets are a bit out of your price range this year, why not consider having your existing cabinets fitted for new doors and trim? Home Depot and other retail stores also offers that service.

And if you just want a fresh look, but don't want the expense of brand new cabinetry, consider painting or stripping and restaining the cabinets you have. Add some hardware and they could look good as new.

Dana George is a local freelance writer.

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