

Concretist Mike Miller delivers kickoff address

The first day of the first annual Concrete Decor Show & Decorative Concrete Spring Training, held in March in Phoenix, came to a close with an early-evening talk by Mike Miller, founder of The Concretist, a decorative concrete artisans' collective.

Miller, who is also a regular columnist in *Concrete Decor* magazine, was joined onstage by two of his colleagues: concrete and fabric artist Emily McClintick and real estate consultant Steve Crocker.

"We are an industry that attracts a lot of new people to it," Miller said. "A lot of people here in this room came to learn and see people learning. That's something we have in our favor."

Miller spent the bulk of his talk discussing his approach to decorative concrete. He called his work "sensory

concrete," which he distinguished from "decorative concrete," which involves incorporating decorative flourishes such as images of leaves, fish or grapes, and "architectural concrete," which involves using disciplined approaches to add color and patterns within set boundaries. It's this latter type of concrete that tends to invite raised expectations and court disappointment, he said.

"What I try to embrace is variegation and lack of control more than anything else," he said.

Miller showed slides of some of his most creative projects, many of which he has described in columns for *Concrete Decor*, including work at a winery and several natural-food stores.

"I revel in the choreographed steps and serendipitous missteps of the placement process," he said.

He also revealed a few of his colleagues' favorite tricks of the trade,



Photo by John Strieder

describing how a colorant-filled balloon disperses color like a little atom bomb when dropped onto a nail and exploding just above a surface.

"Most people in this business are artists — they're just not quite ready to say that," he said. "You need to think of yourself as an artist."

Women's luncheon aids networking

Nearly one dozen women gathered for the Women in Concrete Luncheon, held on Friday, March 19, the final day of the Concrete Decor Show & Decorative Concrete Spring Training. The group discussed what it was like to be a woman in the concrete industry, as well as general business issues that affect both genders.

One thing the women took advantage of was an opportunity to discuss the challenges of running a business.

"What intrigued me about the roundtable was how quickly we kept veering off the topic of male versus female and began discussing the business questions which always arise with my male colleagues," said Gaye Goodman, of Faux Real Floors, after the event.

They discussed being a "guinea pig" for new products, how to photograph and publicize their business, the importance of word of mouth, Web sites, and pricing their work.

"It is so important for us as women to remember to network, check out Web sites of what other women are doing, read articles about them, and keep in touch with what is happening out there," said Tamryn Doolan, president of Surface Gel Tek. "If an opportunity comes up and you need some insight or even to share the project, you have a list of women you are already networking with to call on. Most of us do not have much time leftover after earning an income and raising our families, so the only network alternative is through quick e-mails, not attending a girls' night out."

The women agreed to stay in touch, and a special chat board has been set up at Goodman's Web site, GayeGoodman.com, for that purpose.

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