

TIPS FOR RENOVATORS WHEN CONSIDERING CONCRETE FLOORING SYSTEMS

With home renovations and building repurposing becoming more common, smart builders are thinking of long term installations. So it's no wonder that polished concrete and concrete coating systems have started generating a high volume of interest. This fact sheet has been put together with the renovator in mind - Someone who has an existing concrete slab on the interior of an existing structure and loves the one of our concrete flooring systems and is not quite sure where to start with the how's or additional pros and cons to consider.

Here are a few of the most common things we are asked about and things that are often overlooked.

1. PRICE

We will not be able to provide a fixed quote until we see the concrete floor – with all the coverings removed (carpet, tiles, floor boards etc.).

At that time are we able to see the condition of the concrete and know:

- Condition
- Potential repairs needed
- If the concrete is flat
- Suitability for the desired system you want etc.
- Time allocation required etc.

Before existing coverings are pulled up we can give ball park figures or estimates only. Apart from potential prep there are many different systems and products to choose from. It is best to think of 'polished concrete' (or the polished concrete look) like tiles with many different prices and qualities available. **See our website for more information on options.**

2. LOOK

We are often asked what the concrete will look like if it was not poured specially for polishing or coating. In very general terms – all concrete has aggregate in it. The size and colours can vary from mix to mix, area to area however generally there will be a combination of different coloured stones in a range of sizes throughout the concrete mix. When we grind the surface and remove approx. 5mm from the surface most of the aggregate should be showing. There is a high chance, given that it was not specially poured, that the concreters would not have given much thought to things like walking back through the slab or taking the extra time to get the floor 100% flat. This being the case it is very common in older slabs to find areas that have little to no aggregate showing next to an area with a lot of aggregate. This does not affect the performance of the system being installed but rather the overall look and feel the varied exposure levels create. Best described as rustic and natural the floors tend to have a lot of character and look loved rather than perfect.

3. PREP

When renovating we require the floor coverings to be removed first. If you are able to pull them up yourself this can save you a fair bit of money however care and thought should be taken in the removal process. Tiles, carpets, and other coverings that have been fixed to the concrete with glue or nails need to be removed with care so as not to damage the concrete. Keeping in mind only 5mm is removed for a full exposure finish – any damage deeper than that will require repairs. Many of the products suitable for use when the finished floor is to be polished are solid colours. If there are holes the filling can often look like stones and go un-noticed however if there are gouges in the concrete they may still be visible after polishing. We also ask that skirting boards and door frames be removed to allow us to get close to the walls and provide the most consistent finish possible. It is impossible to get the machines right against the walls so there will be up to a 20mm area where even our hand machines can not grind (*corners can have a slightly larger area*).

4. DUST

We use vacuums on our machines to minimise dust however even with this method, unfortunately the process of grinding concrete does create some airborne dust. If the floor is your current home with your belongings already in it we recommend sealing off areas not being polished and covering furnishing to minimise the impact. We also recommend moving out while the work takes place. Noise, dust and potential cure periods (depending on your system of choice), limit access and hinder work if there are other people on site while we install concrete floor finishes.

5. ADJOINING AREAS

Consideration should always be given to the rest of the house. Removing 5 mm off the concrete may not seem like a big deal however – if you have a tiled bathroom you are leaving tiled and it is currently the same height as your carpeted hall there may be an issue. By the time the carpet and underlay comes off there may be a step of up to 10mm, add another 5mm to that once we grind the hall and you have a 15mm toe kicking hazard and you may need to think of a creative way to blend the areas. Removing height off the slab also affects things like door heights door frames and skirting boards. None are huge issues but can cause a few drafts and headaches if you had not considered how you will deal with them.

6. ACCESS

Our machines are very large and heavy, over 400kgs. Running top of the range machines enables us to produce quality floors. We always need to assess if we are able to physically get machines onto the floor. While we do have cranes on our vehicles, when we are working in already constructed homes the crane may not be suitable to successfully manoeuvre the machine onto the floor level. This being the case, several stairs, steep driveways or multi-story buildings can be challenging and in some cases impossible to access. The size of the machines can also limit access to small areas or through narrow doorways. While hand grinding is still possible in small areas this can add to the time and labour component of the job. The machines require 3 phase power and while supply our own generators to run the machines, we must be able to park the truck close to the access point to run the leads.

7. SHOWERS AND WET AREAS

There is a bit more to consider if you want to convert your bathroom into a polished concrete flooring system. The fall on the concrete beneath the tiles, the drain set downs and the waterproofing of the wall/floor joints are three of the most common challenges. Nothing is impossible however there are a lot more steps (and approvals required) to successfully achieve this type of flooring in an existing area.

8. TOPPING SLABS

If a renovation is virtually a complete rebuild or the environment is suitable, topping slabs may be possible in an existing building. The slabs need to be thick enough (approx. 100mm) to ensure the the concrete won't curl or crack excessively and it needs to be secured properly to the base slab. There are usual cure periods involved (*see our fact sheets on recommendations for new slabs*). Topping slabs can be an effective way of achieving a specific look and floor colour albeit a more expensive option. We recommend engaging the services of a qualified engineer if you are considering going to this degree of renovation.