

Santa Fe REAL ESTATE Guide

Artisan/craftsman/**builder**

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On the nature of building materials

by Kurt Faust

Your choice of materials is integral to the way your new home looks and feels. Exposed concrete and exposed wood require awareness of issues including the technical difficulty of the installation; how the materials expand, contract, and age; and what maintenance is required to keep them looking their best.

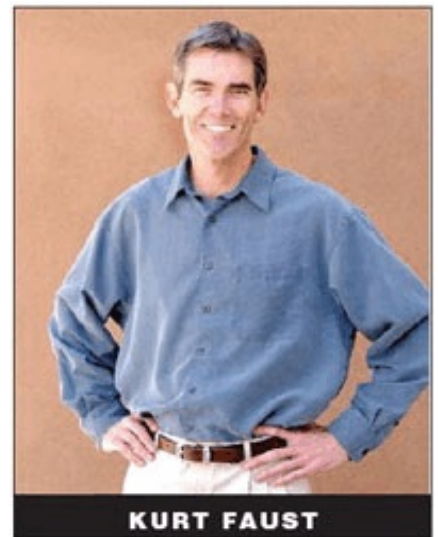
Concrete: Exposed concrete floors can be exquisitely beautiful and very durable and maintenance-free but they need careful precautions to get them right. For instance, when laying out the wall framing, they must be chalked carefully so that there are no lines left over at doorways. They must be protected throughout the construction process from the movements of equipment and heavy materials.

Color can be added directly to the concrete mix or an acid wash can be applied over the gray concrete but the results can vary widely from a given sample. The price can range from as inexpensive as brick floors to more than stone tile depending on the complexity of the color and finish.

Stucco and plaster: Like concrete finishes, these develop hairline cracks over time. Cracks that are an eighth of an inch or smaller are considered normal and are generally not covered under warranty. Larger cracks that grow rapidly could be signs of a structural issue and should be addressed right away.

Cementitious stucco is more prone to cracking than synthetic versions. Vigas and beams will flex as they dry out. This can contribute to the cracking of plaster walls and they will often shrink and leave gaps where they meet the walls. Color variation in these materials also is normal. Plasters may have dramatic color variations. Cementitious stucco will vary with factory batches and it fades and weathers over time, while synthetic is less likely to vary in color.

Wood: Different types of wood and wood surfaces take stains and sealers differently. The window sash and ceiling decking may look different when treated with the exact same stain. Certain species of cabinetry wood, such as Knotty Alder, may have large, visible, open knots or other inconsistencies that don't show up in samples. Be sure to discuss the look you want with your cabinetry supplier to keep surprises to a minimum. The massive timbers common in Santa Fe homebuilding will crack over time and may exude sap for the first while. There is also a



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possibility of pine bore beetles living in the natural wood during the first few months after construction.

Metal: Copper sinks and counters and stainless-steel appliances are very appealing products, though metal surfaces show water spots and must be wiped down frequently to look their best. Patinated copper is extremely sensitive to household cleansers, especially those containing citrus. A drop of lemon juice will leave behind a bright copper spot if not wiped up right away. A patinated metal cannot be scrubbed with abrasive pads, or the patina will rub off.

It's up to you to know what you're willing to live with and maintain. Communicate your expectations to your architect or builder so that they can help you make wise choices that fit your needs.

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