Press release

A far cry from grey-in-grey – even the foreign intelligence service is fond of Fabrino

Fabrino Produktionsgesellschaft: a company based in the Allgäu region offers niche products to add diversity to concrete

According to an expert, “concrete offers a wide range of design options to specifiers and architects”.

“Concrete” – many people associate this term with multi-storey apartment blocks, colourless Costa Brava hotels and industrial buildings. Yet concrete has been experiencing a revival for several years. Not only specifiers and architects but also young furniture designers and artists have increasingly come to see concrete from a new angle. In Germany, a company located in the Allgäu region has also contributed to the glorious comeback of the material: Aitrach-based Fabrino Produktionsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG produces and distributes chemicals for the treatment of concrete. More recently, the business created its second mainstay by launching glass granules, which have been patented worldwide, to add diversity to concrete.

Concrete is often referred to as the building material of the 20th century. Yet numerous innovations in concrete technology prove that concrete has the potential to also become the material of the 21st century: “We have long gone past the times when concrete was a simple mix of cement, water and aggregate,” says Dr. Klaus Hörmann, Managing Director of Fabrino. State-of-the-art high-performance concrete mixes include six or more constituents. “By varying and modifying the constituents in an intelligent manner, concrete may be given new characteristics for its placement and use,” explains the concrete expert. Some examples of this trend are ultra-high performance concrete, fibre-reinforced concrete or self-cleaning concrete. Even translucent concrete has been developed in the meantime.

Unlike steel or wood, concrete provides a virtually unlimited plasticity. Due to its thermal and physical characteristics, it also offers a high degree of soundproofing and fire protection and acts as an effective moisture barrier. Concrete offers a wide range of options to specifiers and architects: “Today, even the established properties of many concrete mixes are being utilised only to an insufficient extent. The same is true for the large number of options provided by state-of-the-art precast construction,” Hörmann adds. Project planners currently favour finely washed or acid-treated concrete surfaces again, as demonstrated by the example of the Düsseldorf Arkaden.

BMW and BND

Founded by Dr. Klaus Hörmann in 2005, the company has expanded its business to a worldwide scale: “We were three people when we started the business. Today, 15 people work in Aitrach alone.”

Together with his employees, the concrete expert has been specialising in niche products that are in particularly high demand in the construction industry. These products are specified by architects, engineers and draughtsmen – mainly in the precast concrete, cast stone and concrete products industries. One of the well-known references is the BMW World in Munich, where Fabrino products were also used in the course of its construction. Yet the Fabrino product offering has long gone past being a well-kept secret: Just recently, the company was awarded the contract to design the surface of the building of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), the German foreign intelligence service, in Berlin.

Fabrino generates the largest portion of its revenue from chemical products to be used in the cast stone, precast concrete and industrial flooring industries. “For instance, our products can be used to make the small stones visible that are contained in the concrete, or to create certain patterns,” Hörmann explains. Whether rough or smooth, with timber texture or an exactly defined pattern: Betogel, one of the Fabrino products, opens up a virtually unlimited range of options to design concrete surfaces. Coloured concrete does not pose any problem either. The former monotonous, grey-in-grey appearance is replaced with an increasingly colourful pattern as the coloured design of architectural concrete has become a serious trend in the past few years. The company based in the Allgäu region is pushing this development forward by its Fabrino Ferox pigments and Fabrino Color liquid paints.

Indistinguishable from natural stone

For instance, the façade of the Dresden synagogue shows a sandstone appearance as a result of added pigments. “When using one of the numerous natural stone varieties and applying appropriate pigments to the concrete, elements can be produced that are, at first glance, indistinguishable from natural stone to which stonemason techniques were applied,” Hörmann explains. To keep the desired shade during the service life of the building, concrete is coloured by special pigments that provide a high resistance to light and weather exposure. This treatment is governed by the EN 12878 pigment standard.

Currently available technologies open up an increasing number of options to colour concrete or to finish architectural concrete surfaces after casting. Various effects can be achieved in this regard, including surfaces that show the pattern of smooth formwork or roughened surfaces with exposed aggregate. “Until about three years ago, black had been in especially high demand to lend a more slender appearance to bulky elements,” Hörmann reports. According to him, red, yellow and green shades are currently the most popular options.

Leading the market worldwide

Using Fabrino products, concrete characteristics such as colour, strength and hardening behaviour can be adjusted effortlessly and according to specific needs. “A high-quality architectural concrete feels as if one were touching the gentle skin of a baby,” Hörmann enthuses. Some of its products make Fabrino a market leader on a

worldwide scale: “There are only a few competitors.” Despite this fact, the company does not intend to rest on its laurels. The latest Fabrino development are glass granules that provide new options for the design of concrete surfaces.

“Previously, it was difficult to integrate glass in concrete because concrete cracks or spalling on the surface may occur as a result of chemical reactions, which may ultimately destroy the glass completely,” Hörmann explains. This is not the case when using the recently developed glass granules that are being marketed as Fabrino Color Coats: The particular feature of these granules is a certain type of plastic coat that avoids any contact between the glass and the concrete, which, in turn, prevents unwanted reactions. For this purpose, the external surfaces are coated either transparently or in a distinct colour in a multi-stage process. Just recently, an affluent Swiss client had the façade of his villa designed with the premium concrete containing Fabrino glass granules.

Fabrino is determined to further expand its market position and to raise the awareness in the industry by launching at least one innovation per year. “We are currently working on phosphorescent glass in concrete that is being charged during the day to provide an attractive illumination at night,” Hörmann explains, pointing at a cube that looks like ordinary white concrete at first glance. Once the light has been switched off, however, the cube begins to glow.

Another argument in favour of using concrete is that concrete is one of the building materials with the lowest environmental impact. Raw materials are available in virtually unlimited quantities and mainly come from areas in close proximity to where they are used. Today, state-of-the-art recycling methods are applied to re-process and re-use old concrete buildings and road pavements. Also, the aspect of energy efficiency is becoming increasingly important: “In sandwich construction, concrete easily achieves the functionality of ordinary masonry,” Hörmann adds.

Environmental protection plays major role

At Fabrino, too, environmental protection plays a key role: “With all our products, we take responsibility for our future by implementing environmentally friendly, resource-saving, smart production processes that are subject to continuous improvement,” Hörmann states. In some cases, the outcome is seen with great astonishment: “In Germany, we are getting a lot of praise for our commitment but in Italy, for instance, many prospects adopted the view that a product that neither smells nor causes stinging in the eyes cannot be particularly good.” In all of these cases, local distributors were able to convince them otherwise.

(Fabrino Produktionsgesellschaft: www.fabrino.eu)

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Concrete is a mix consisting of cement, mineral aggregate (sand and gravel or chippings) and water. The base mix may also contain concrete additives or admixtures. The strength of the concrete is created by the crystallisation of the cement clinker parts, which results in the formation of tiniest crystal needles that are firmly interconnected. Mixes can be varied to adjust the properties of the concrete to most diverse requirements.
The Romans already knew this stable mix without which the dome of the Pantheon in Rome would have been unthinkable. In the modern age, the development of concrete began in England about 250 years ago when Roman and Portland cement were invented. Another quantum leap was the invention of reinforced concrete by Joseph Monier in the middle of the 19th century. This material combined the high compressive strength of the concrete with the tensile strength of the steel, and thus created the basis for the success that concrete has been experiencing ever since.