

Sisters transform metal and concrete

AT HOME

By **MEDA KESSLER**
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For Tessa Crow and her sister, Venessa Brown, nothing satisfies their creative souls like a discarded piece of steel and a ready-to-be-molded mixture of cement and water.

The sisters, of Arlington, Texas, weren't always "concrete nerds," a term fondly given to them by their family. Tessa originally worked in retail and Venessa was a bookkeeper.

A home improvement project, namely the need for a new floor, gave them a chance to experiment with polished and stained concrete, a look that was more economical than tile and more interesting than carpet.

"It literally was a do and learn kind of situation," Brown says. "Our clients were friends and they let us experiment."

One friend, the owner of the hair salon DV8 in Grapevine, Texas, hired the women to create a unique look, including stained concrete counters embedded with pieces of copper.

They learned the ins and outs of running a business as well, with the goal of leaving their day jobs to do something they truly love.

And although floors and countertops remain their bread and butter, the two found another outlet in creating unique tables suitable for indoors or out. "Once we discovered the scrap yard, we were in heaven," Brown says. "The guys there thought we were a little nuts at first until they saw what we were doing with the old bike gears, pipes and all this other cool stuff. Now, they actually pull aside some pieces they think we might like."

Sleuthing through piles of discarded metal might not sound glamorous, but the transformation from junk to treasure is an amazing one.

An old metal rim from a barrel lid becomes a table top base complete with ratchet-style handle.

Rusty gears and sprockets find their way into table

bases, as well as a line of weatherproof clocks the women make. And metal washers are used to create circular patterns in the acid-stained concrete.

Discarded metal tables with missing tops are especially prized, as the sisters simply create a new base form and add a layer of the concrete. Their pieces can even be hung as wall art.

Brown does most of the hands-on work and also has become an experienced welder. Both sisters use their garages as their workshops. It's definitely gritty work, although the designs reflect a deft touch for color and design.

Brilliant aqua swirls combine with earthy rust tones to create an organic look that accents, instead of detracts from, a lush patio. The designs invite touching and closer examination. And even the small side tables are sturdy, safe from storm winds or a boisterous dog.

"I had a customer purchase the tall cocktail tables for her high-rise balcony," says Mark

Criswell, owner of Home to Garden in Fort Worth, Texas, and the retail outlet for the tables. Criswell and the two sisters share a love of organic design, and the landscape designer thought the pieces would enhance the outdoor garden that serves as a showcase for his work.

"We're still refining our work," says Brown, who even uses plant growth stimulator

to create interesting colors in the concrete. "Acid stain is like watercolor. You can control the design and look, even if the final result looks freeform. It's fun and, to us, it's always beautiful."

To see the women's work, go to www.sublimesurfacedesign.com. Prices run from around \$150 for a small side table to four figures for a large patio table.



Sisters Tessa Crow and Venessa Brown create beautiful patio tables consisting of concrete tops and scrap-metal bases.

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