

# made **in** sarasota

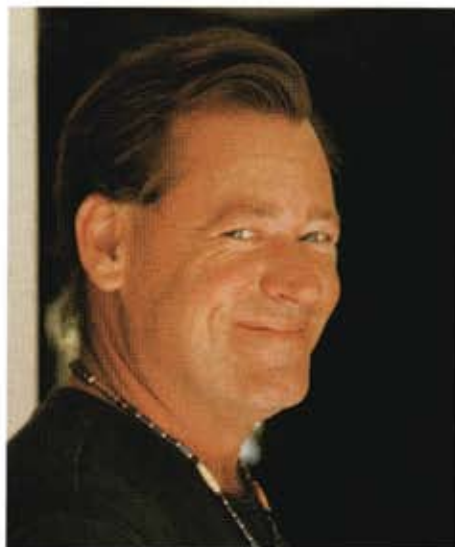
Diane Davidson and Erik Schlake cement their place in the art world.

**I**t was a case of boy meets girl. Two Englewood artists enjoying a smooth latte (and an even smoother conversation) discovered they had much in common. Ideas were tossed around, cups were refilled, and by the time they finished their third cup of coffee, the creative duo had entered into a concrete partnership—and Davidson/Schlake Design Studios was born.

Diane Davidson and Erik Schlake have blended their talents to create tables, pedestals and lamps using cement as the primary medium. While their unique sculptural designs can stand alone as art, they're functional furniture, too. Each piece fuses elements ranging from copper or exotic and recycled woods to



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## STONE AGE ART

Erik Schlake and Diane Davidson, above and right, call the table at top *Evolution*. The channel represents a dry riverbed filled with tumbled stones; the fossil embedded in concrete is millions of years old.

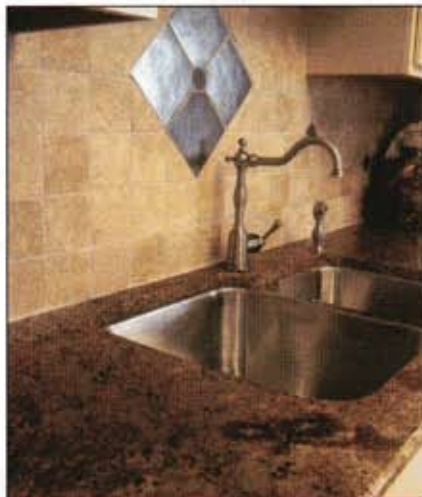


fossils, stone, glass and concrete.

"We design the concrete portion first, then incorporate other elements to enhance the piece," says Davidson, whose background in fine art and architecture lends itself to such expressive designs. "People get a sensation when they look at our work, unaware that we are balancing the elements." Always, earth, fire, metal, water and wood are represented either physically or symbolically.

Davidson says the pieces often cause emotional, visceral reactions. At a recent art show, she says, one woman hugged the "Chunky Monkey" table, pressing her face against its surface while exclaiming, "I love this table!" The one-of-a-kind piece has a sleek, polished top with an inlaid design made of exotic wood. (Each piece is named to reflect its personality.)

Commissioned work comprises a



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### ROCK ON

*The Awakening* is a concrete entry table featuring a fissure filled with molten glass.

think of something heavy, rigid, and not very attractive," admits Davidson. "People are genuinely surprised when they run their hands across one of the smooth, glassy tops." Some pieces are left raw for a natural look, while others go through a laborious buff-and-polish process that counts as the day's workout. All are ground, sanded and sealed for protection.

On some pieces, the finishing work might include fitting

the tabletop with a set of interchangeable trays—for example, a sandbox (think Zen garden) and a metal magazine rack that sits securely inside a cutout in the concrete.

The artists experimented until they achieved the perfect blend of sand, aggregate and cement—their own top-secret concrete mix—and developed their own colored pigments. "You won't get this look using bagged cement," promises Davidson. Before forming a table, they prepare a color mix, a step that often leads them in a different design direction than they originally intended. "The whole process is fluid; we just go where the materials take us," she says. Because they are dealing with natural elements, there's both an element of control and an element of surprise. "When it comes time to unveil a piece, it's always exciting. We can't wait to see how vision, design and the elements have melded together," says Davidson.

To commission a piece by Davidson/Schlake Design Studios or to see more of their work, call Diane at (941) 474-4653 or Erik at (941) 460-1717. Coffee tables start at \$400; other pieces vary. ■