

PRODUCTS

Deck Design Software

For material takeoffs and 3-D renderings

by Scott Gibson

Earlier this year, Simpson Strong-Tie acquired DeckTools, an estimating and design software that builders can use to specify the right deck connectors and to show prospective clients what their new deck will look like.

DeckTools produces three-dimensional images that can be viewed from any angle. Clients can change decking and railing options as well as layouts and see instantly how cost and appearance are affected. Simpson says builders can design directly in 3-D with the software.

The program identifies connectors required by code and suggests the appropriate Simpson part number and the necessary fasteners. DeckTools also generates drawings for permit applications, working drawings



for crews, and finished views that might be required for homeowner associations. Plus, material takeoff lists and cost estimates can be produced.

The software retails for \$1,895. Simpson says one-on-one training, online classes, and instructional videos are provided with each software license.

Scott Gibson is a writer in East Waterboro, Maine.

■ **Simpson Strong-Tie**, 800/999-5099, strongtie.com.

Deck Lighting

Kits make it easy to add LED accent lights

Deck builders interested in adding outdoor lighting without the hassle of ordering a pile of individual electrical components might be interested in an LED lighting kit from Aurora Deck Lighting.

Kits have the non-electrician in mind. They contain 10 1¼-inch lights with color-coded wiring, connectors that require no wire stripping, 100 feet of cable, a transformer, and other controls. To install the lights, a builder needs only common tools: a drill and bits, a screwdriver, two wood screws, a pair of pliers, and caulk.

Power should be provided by an outdoor-rated 110-volt outlet. Lights can be operated with either a switch or a remote control that's provided with the kit. Each 1-watt light produces about 200 lumens, which the company says is equivalent to a conventional 10-watt night light. The company recommends placing one light every 3 feet.

The transformer mounts on the wall near the outlet and can power as many as 40 LED lights, making it easy to expand the system. Additional lights can be



purchased in pairs or in bundles of 10.

Aurora says the kits grew out of requests for small but bright recessed lights that could be used for decks and stairs. LEDs (short for light-emitting diodes) draw relatively little power and last much longer than either incandescent or compact-fluorescent lamps.

Phoenix Recessed Lighting Kits are available through Aurora's Web site for about \$200 each. — S.G.

■ **Aurora Deck Lighting**, 800/603-3520, auroradecklighting.com.

Finish for Ipe

Low-VOC finish preserves the exotic look

The Ipe Clip Fastener Co., which markets a type of hidden deck fastener, has added a deck finish to its product line. Ipe Oil Hardwood Deck Finish is designed to penetrate the surface of ipe, cumaru, and other oily exotic hardwoods that may not respond well to conventional deck finishes, the company says. It has little odor, and levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are less than 250 grams per liter.

Ipe is a hard South American hardwood that is naturally resistant to rot and insect damage. It needs



virtually no maintenance, but in direct sunlight, the wood fades from a deep reddish brown to a gray-brown color in a year or two. Ipe Oil preserves the original color and appearance of the wood while making it more stain resistant.

The company says the oil should be reapplied a year after the initial application and then every other year.

Ipe Oil retails for about \$52 a gallon. It's available through lumberyards and the company's regular network of dealers and distributors. — S.G.

■ **Ipe Clip Fastener Co.**, 866/427-2547, ipeclip.com.

Self-Cleaning Pavers

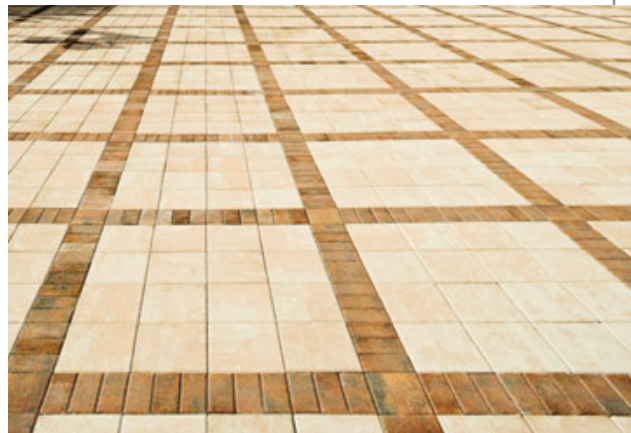
Concrete with a special additive cleans itself

Concrete pavers make an extremely durable surface for patios and walkways, and now they can help reduce air pollution while keeping themselves clean.

Hanson Hardscapes has started selling pavers made with a 1/4-inch-thick facing containing a titanium-dioxide compound called TX Active. The company says the photocatalytic material reacts to natural or artificial light and speeds the breakdown of a variety of organic and inorganic pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, and volatile organic compounds.

The material gives pavers a tighter surface, better wear resistance, and higher strength. TX Active also prevents the accumulation of soot, mold, algae, and bacteria. The company says it is the first in the industry to offer a paver with these properties. Most Hanson pavers are made with recycled content and make it easier, the company says, to win credits under the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system.

TX Active was developed by Essroc, a cement man-



ufacturer, as a way of keeping the concrete face of a new church in Rome sparkling white, and it has since been used in a number of architectural applications. TX Active accelerates the breakdown of pollutants into oxygen, water, and nontoxic salts before anything has a chance to stick to the surface. It was named one of the Top 50 inventions of 2008 by *Time* magazine.

At least for the time being, Hanson offers the pavers only in Florida and Canada. — S.G.

■ **Hanson Hardscapes**, 800/273-7084, hansonhardscapes.com. ♦