One word: Technology

"Technology." That was the simple answer from one of this year's PCI Design Awards judges when I asked what was hot in the architectural field right now. The gentleman is from a prominent international firm, and he said technology includes everything from building modeling in the design phase all the way through project delivery using state-of-the-art technology, such as virtual reality, on the jobsite. It tells me that PCI members need to continue to improve and adopt new technologies, if for no other reason than to meet our customers' demands. Some recent developments tell us where we're headed and how much farther the industry may still have to go.

Automated plants Industry veterans know how much more prevalent the use of automation in precasting plants is in other parts of the world, particularly Europe. I've heard from many members that Europe's labor costs are a major reason they can justify the capital costs related to implementing automation. A visit with a group of members at a chapter meeting earlier this year included a conversation about how the tightening labor market in the United States might lead to those costs being justified in this country as well.

Curved beams for bridges A recent trip out west allowed me to visit a member making curved bridge beams for the first time for a large and very visible project in Southern California. A number of states have used curved prestressed beams, but they are hardly commonplace. We have a lot of room to expand the use of that innovation.

UHPC Both Florida and California are working hard to make use of ultra-high-performance concrete (UHPC) in bridge projects, to prove that UHPC use can be more than experimental, and also to try to make it more economical. Congratulations to the newest curriculum program funded by the PCI Foundation at Sacramento State University for their interest in UHPC as part of accelerated bridge construction. Partnered with CALTRANS, the first PCI Foundation bridge program seeks to educate the next generation of bridge engineers, with the ultimate goal of increasing the use of precast concrete in bridge construction.

3-D printing of forms We've touched on this item before, but we can't let a discussion about innovation go without talking about the 260 Kent Avenue structure in the Domino Sugar Refinery redevelopment project in Brooklyn, N.Y., using 3-D–printed forms for complicated window panel inserts. After exhibiting at this year's AIA Conference on Architecture in New York, PCI staff members reported heavy interest by the architecture community in this precast concrete innovation. There is more information on this project in the Project Spotlight on page 20 of this issue.

The prestressed concrete industry has long demonstrated its ability to adopt new technologies more quickly than most other construction industries. Let's keep that going.

I am also very pleased to announce that Donn Thompson joined PCI as director of architectural precast systems. Donn is a registered architect who comes to PCI with a wealth of experience, including as a practicing architect, and 13 years of experience at the Portland Cement Association leading promotion efforts for residential concrete buildings. He will be working closely with the Architectural Producers Committee, Marketing Council, and local chapters to promote the use of architectural precast concrete and to oversee PCI's body of knowledge on architectural precast concrete. I'm very excited to have someone with his promotion experience and passion for concrete buildings joining the PCI team.

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