Gensler Designs Blend Global, Local Expertise

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Architects call on skills at 28 international locations to create designs that achieve client success in a variety of markets — which are now expanding

Designers at Gensler don't consider their architectural designs to be a success unless the clients inhabiting the buildings use the facilities successfully. "One of our key strengths is that we build great relationships with our clients," says Craig Taylor, design director for the firm's South Central region. "We learn how they use their buildings, so we can help them to function better. Our goal is to build an environment that leads to their success." Today, those successes include many markets that the firm is developing — and projects that often include precast concrete components.

Design must function to be a success, Taylor stresses. "We collaborate with the client to help them stretch their ideas and see things from a variety of perspectives, so they can be better at what they do," he says. "Our deep expertise in key practice areas helps us to know how our clients function in their markets and what facilities they need to make best use of their own talents. Clients come to us because we understand their business."

13 Markets Developed

A total of 13 practice areas dominate Gensler's commissions. Two established areas in particular are coming on strong: Education, which has been expanding for about three years, and Hospitality, including hotels and restaurants. "There is a lot going on in those areas, and our commissions are growing in those fields." That work comes from a strong push into those areas, often branching off from existing projects, he notes. "Sometimes our clients branch into new directions, and we go with them, and other times we partner with people who know the relationships and need architectural talent."

The approach is both opportunistic and planned, he notes. "We have identified areas that are growing and for which we believe we have something to offer. Then we find collaborations and clients that can help us grow in those fields."

'Organizations always are either growing, moving or shrinking.'

Aiding that process is Gensler's ability to access the firm's expertise regardless of where it's located. Twenty-eight office locations offer a lot of resources to draw upon. "We don't worry about where the expertise is located, because we can gather people from any location. We take a global perspective on our projects, but we act locally."

Each practice area has a team leader, with those individuals spread throughout the firm's locations. "The managing principals in each office know the expertise in their office and in others. When they have a project come up, they contact leaders who can help and ask for their collaboration on the project and in assembling the team." Members may

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— Craig Taylor, design director, South Central Region, Gensler

Gensler Today

Founded by Art and Drue Gensler and Jim Follett, Gensler opened its first office in San Francisco in 1965. Focusing initially on interior design, it then expanded into architectural services, building and site evaluation, graphic and signage design, facility management and strategic planning, tenant development, master planning and feasibility studies.

Today, the firm has office locations in 28 cities and focuses on 13 key practice areas: Airports, Branding & Graphic Design, Buildings & Campuses, Consulting, Education, Entertainment, Hospitality, Master Planning, Mission Critical, Product Design, Professional Service Firms, Retail and Workplace. The company has 1,800 employees servicing 1,400 active clients around the world.

For two years in a row, Gensler has been voted the Most Admired Firm by readers of *Contract* magazine. In 2000, it won the Architecture Firm Award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), America's highest award to a collaborative design practice. AIA cited the firm as "a model for the design profession in the 21st century." Since 1998, it also has won three *Business Week* Design Awards for work that exemplifies how great design is informed by great strategy.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Sherman Oaks Galleria
Location: Sherman Oaks, Calif.
Project Type: Shopping mall
Area: 1 million square feet
Designer: Gensler
Developer: Douglas Emmett & Co.
Contractor: Peck/Jones
PCI-Certified Precaster: Clark Pacific, Fontana, Calif. (For technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)

Description: Following a major renovation, this shopping center was transformed from a closed-box retail structure to an open-air center consisting of 700,000 square feet of office space and 300,000 square feet of theater, restaurant and retail space. The three-building complex is clad in cream-colored limestone and glass-fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC), which was used for wall panels, curved spandrels and hanging soffit panels.

The new design emphasizes pedestrian access and circulation along with a stronger integration with the surrounding street grid. A dramatic rotunda creates a vertical node for two levels of restaurant/retail, capped by a movie theater. The renovation included gutting a majority of the existing mall, redesigning the entire first and second levels of the skin of the adjacent Imperial Bank office tower and adding an updated lobby.

The tight job site created a challenging erection for the precaster, with many panels being hung underneath portions of the building's overhang. Another challenge came in creating the huge artistic "G" logo for the Galleria, which faces the freeway and includes neon lighting. The embellishment stands about 45 feet tall and extends over six GFRC panels. In all, 382 panels encompassing 61,500 square feet, were used.

Precast concrete components also were used to create the stairways. They incorporate 35 precast concrete pieces that encompass 700 square feet. A separate water-wall feature includes 57 panels totaling 1,100 square feet.

The Sherman Oaks Galleria was renovated to create a mixed-use facility of offices, theater, restaurants and shops. The three-building complex features limestone and GFRC panels to create a distinctive and upscale look.

relocate to that office for the time needed to complete their portion of the project, moving between offices as needed.

Several practice areas focus on services within the various markets, including the firm's Studio 585, which focuses on graphic design and brand strategies, and Workplace, which includes interior design. "Workplace will always be strong," he says. "Organizations always are either growing, moving or shrinking. They're going to change, and we help them achieve the best space effectively and add value to the change. We help them organize their work space."

The Workplace practice is enhanced through collaboration with the architectural groups, he notes. "We don't create a building and then just stick everyone into it. We don't design the space and put a wrapper around it. It's an inside-out/outside-in process, so we can address everyone's needs and meet the specific program needs of the client."

Image Vs. Investment

Meeting a client's needs sometimes means addressing exit strategies for the project, which affects both the exterior and interior. "Sometimes we look at whether the design is attractive as a real-estate investment as well as a building," he explains. "How the architecture works for others also is important. If it's too specific to that client, it can make it difficult to reposition the property in the future." Clients understand that while they are creating their own space, they also are investing in a built environment that must be attractive to others. Otherwise it will sit empty after the organization moves out, wasting resources.

"Designing this way doesn't make the building less efficient, it's just a different way of looking at the design and the image. Our strength lies in our broad range of expertises. We can find different ways of looking at the design, using ideas that have been successful in other fields."

Precast Concrete Aids Designs

Architectural precast concrete panels are a great help in achieving a look that provides distinction. "Precast concrete is such a plastic material, and we can manipulate it in so many ways to create interesting building exteriors."

Although the firm has focused more on architectural precast for its cladding systems, structural precast concrete com-

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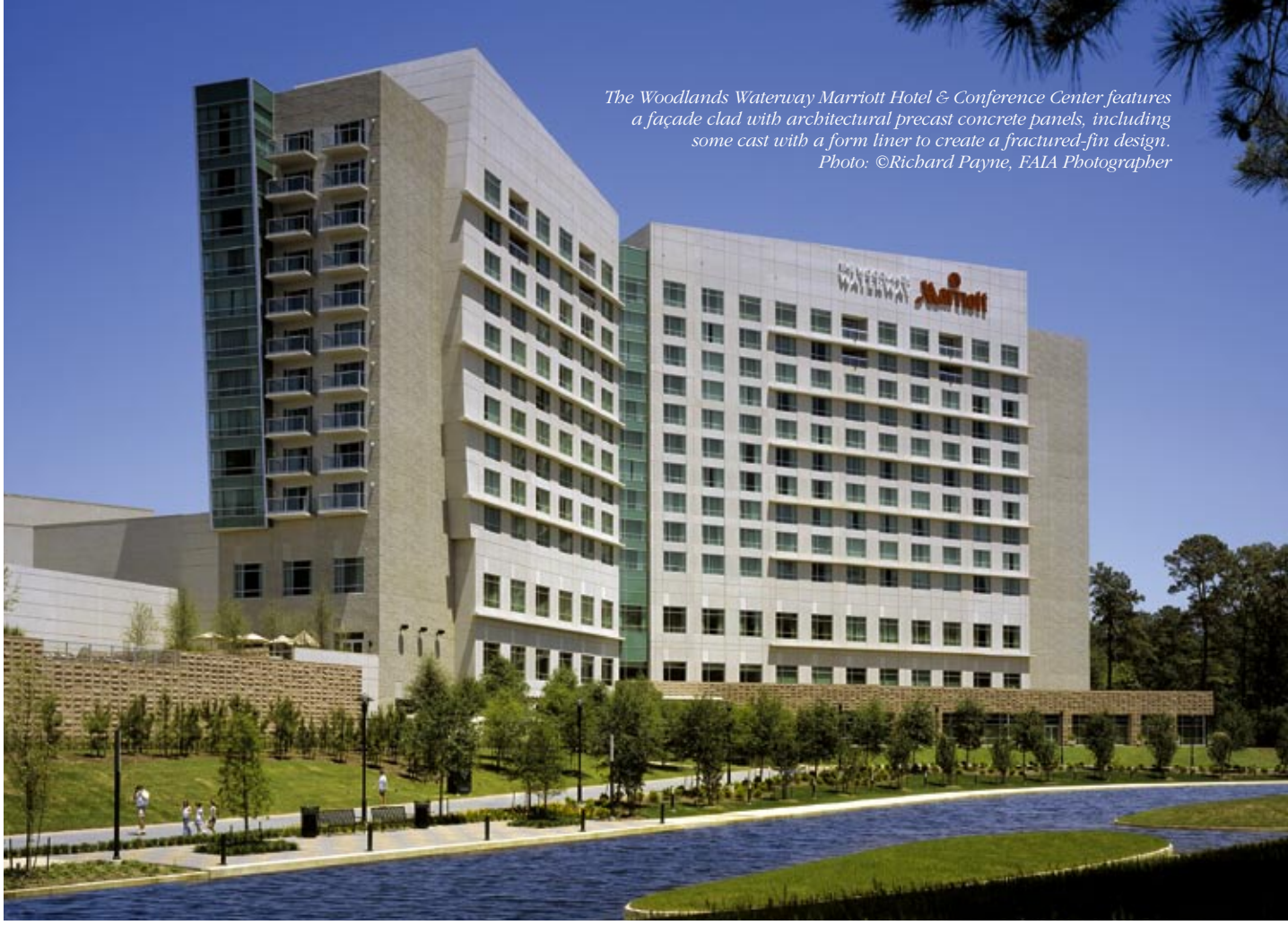
Moscone West Convention Center
Location: San Francisco
Project Type: Exhibition and meeting center
Area: 773,000 square feet
Designer: Gensler, Michael Willis Architects and Gwan Henmi Architecture, a joint venture
Owner: The City and County of San Francisco
Contractor: The City and County of San Francisco
PCI-Certified Precaster: Clark Pacific, Fontana, Calif. (For technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)
Description: While most convention centers offer a closed face to the outside world, Moscone West features a transparent façade combined with architectural precast concrete wall panels and other materials to integrate the building and its functions with its surroundings.

The three-story facility features a south elevation with 45-foot-wide, two-story bay window, coupled with an 11-foot-wide movable-wall partition pocket on one side and a 34-foot-wall precast concrete stair enclosure on the other side. On the west side, which provides the end closure for the center, the design was formulated to express the internal functions of the building. Precast concrete stair towers form bookends that flank an articulated wall of alternating, corrugated and smooth metal panels, expressing the service zone and the structural rhythm within.

Architectural precast concrete panels and stair towers work in harmony with a large glass curtain wall and metal panels to give the Moscone West Convention Center a distinctive look that welcomes visitors rather than presenting the more typical closed-off face.



The Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel & Conference Center features a façade clad with architectural precast concrete panels, including some cast with a form liner to create a fractured-fin design. Photo: ©Richard Payne, FAIA Photographer

ponents are used frequently in parking structures. More applications will be coming, Taylor predicts. "Structural precast is growing in many parts of the country, especially for parking structures, where it dominates," he says. "We may be exploring structural uses in the future because we're learning that more can be done with it."

One of the reasons for the growing interest in precast concrete is its use in projects addressing sustainable design. "Sustainability is a very high concern for many of our clients," he says. "Especially interested are those who are developing buildings as long-term investments, where the clients are responsible for operating costs. They are very cognizant of long-term costs, and they realize that sustainability is not only the right thing to do, but it also creates lower operating costs through the life of the building."

Institutional clients in particular see the positive aspects of this approach. Their set locations mean they won't be moving to new locations, so they are ready to commit to lowering operating costs. Their long-term position in the community also brings a desire to create sustainable designs. "They see the reduced operating costs, but they also realize that a by-product is that the public sees that they're doing the right thing." Corporate clients also see the advantages of sustainability due to the advantageous return on investment, he notes.

Owners of investment properties are beginning to see the advantages of sustainable design, he says. But because these facilities often are sold to a new owner, there is less of an interest among

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel & Conference Center
Location: The Woodlands, Texas
Project Type: Hotel and conference center
Area: 461,500 square feet (hotel: 257,000 square feet; conference center: 204,500 square feet)
Designer: Gensler
Owner: Woodlands Operating Co.
Contractor: D.E. Harvey Builders
PCI-Certified Precaster: Coreslab Structures (TEXAS) Inc., Cedar Park, Texas (For technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)
Description: The challenges for this combination hotel and convention center included creating a cutting-edge design with a unique aesthetic while producing the job on a fast-track schedule. The hotel also had to be operational before the center was ready for business. To help accomplish this, architectural precast concrete panels were used to clad the facility, with the precaster working closely with the designer early in the project to simplify the connections to speed erection. That work allowed an average of 20 precast panels per day to be erected.

The 1,115 precast components, encompassing 116,000 square feet, featured light- and medium-sandblasted finishes, which were complemented on some pieces by the use of a fractured-fin design created with a form liner. The concrete mix consisted of white cement with an integrated pigment, along with granite aggregate and granite sand.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Waterway Plaza Two
Location: The Woodlands, Texas
Project Type: Speculative office building
Area: 150,000 square feet
Designer: Gensler
Owner: The Lion Stone Group
Developer: Woodlands Operating Company
Contractor: D.E. Harvey Builders
PCI-Certified Precaster: Coreslab Structures (TEXAS) Inc., Cedar Park, Texas (for technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)
Description: A six-level office building, Waterway Plaza Two relates closely to its neighbor, Waterway Plaza One, through an intimate plaza. The structures were planned to provide a high design standard with economical construction in the master-planned community. Precast concrete architectural panels were used to clad both office buildings, as well as several other structures in the vicinity, using the same concrete mix to provide complementary designs.

The panels feature a mix of white cement with integral color, along with granite aggregate and sand. Some 204 pieces of precast concrete, encompassing 24,632 square feet, were used in the project, which offered an elegant but simple design for the precaster. The casting and erection on the project went smoothly.

A precast concrete parking structure provides 1,314 parking spaces for the facilities. It is connected to the surrounding building complex via a freestanding seven-story precast concrete stair and elevator tower that is accessed via a connecting bridge from the upper levels.

some of these companies. "But that perception is changing, because companies are realizing that lower operating costs can help in leasing the building. These companies want a high ROI rather than a payback."

Sustainable design also is being helped by the influx of new products to the market and the lowering of costs. "You may pay a little more upfront for systems, but the benefits in lower costs quickly recover that," he says. "There also are considerable benefits for which

Waterway Plaza Two complements its companion office building, Waterway Plaza One, thanks in part to architectural precast concrete panels, which were used to clad the two buildings as well as an adjacent parking structure and freestanding stair and elevator tower. Photo: ©J. Aker, FAIA Photographer

measurements have yet to be developed, such as increased employee productivity, less sick time and higher employee retention rates. Those are difficult to quantify, but they're very valuable to a company."

Meeting LEED Criteria

Precast concrete is also beneficial for projects that go beyond sustainable design and want to achieve certification by the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) standards of the U.S.

Gensler Offers Specifying Tips

A lot of information has been published about the advantages of architectural precast concrete. But that doesn't cover the entire spectrum of architect's needs, according to Timothy Taylor, director of specifications for Gensler. "There is a paucity of print that guides a specifier through his or her task of converting what are esoteric or obscure architectural concepts into biddable specifications," he says.

To address that need, Taylor produced a series of four articles on specifications that were published as part of *ASCENT* magazine's Designer's Notebook series. "Both specifications and drawings are needed to describe a project," he said in the series. "There should be no gaps between them, nor should they overlap; the specifications and drawings should be complementary."

The specifier's responsibility is to select and document the aesthetic and functional objectives for the architectural precast concrete design, he said. Getting the right mix is the most critical task in specifying panels. "Architectural precast concrete mixes, textures and veneer-cladding selections are made after considering the site context of the structure, glass and glass-retention framing materials, limitations in available precast concrete materials and product capabilities, as well as the project schedule and budget."

The articles covered architectural samples (Summer 2002), specifying textures (Winter 2003), specifying clay-faced finishes (Spring 2003) and specifying stone veneer-faced finishes (Summer 2003). For a complete listing of Designer's Notebook articles, visit the Designer's Knowledge Bank accessed from PCI's Web site at *www.pci.org*. Use the Advanced Search for "Designer's Notebook" in the Office Building category.

Green Building Council. "We're very fortunate in that our projects typically are well within 500 miles [the maximum allowed] of many precasting plants that we work with regularly."

Precasters are creating more energy-efficient designs that include fly ash and other admixtures that reduce the amount of cement required in the mix. Fly ash can extend form times for curing, requiring close communication on scheduling to ensure form use is maximized. "The great economy of precast is the repetition and scheduling that precasters can provide. You have to be sure that adding fly ash to meet sustainability standards doesn't cost more by requiring more forms or slowing your schedule."

Color and texture can be affected by admixtures, requiring designers to work closely with precasters to find the best balance. For more ideas on creating successful panels, see the sidebar on Gensler's Timothy Taylor and his suggestions on page 14.

"One advantage precast provides for sustainable design is how it works with other materials," says Craig Taylor. "One of the outward manifestations of sustainable design in our use of precast concrete has been to use sunshades on windows." A recent project used an 18-inch shade that projected out from the wall at a 90-degree angle. "It was nice to be able to cast that right into the precast panel instead of having to attach it to the window-wall framing, as we would have had to do with other materials."

Architectural precast concrete spandrels and column covers were cast to match the Luna Pearl granite used on the lower levels of the Anadarko corporate headquarters. Photo: ©Richard Payne, FAIA Photographer

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT
Anadarko Tower
Location: The Woodlands, Texas
Project Type: Office building
Area: 800,000 square feet
Designer: Gensler
Owner: Anadarko Inc.
Contractor: D.E. Harvey Builders Inc.
PCI-Certified Precaster: Coreslab Structures (TEXAS) Inc., Cedar Park, Texas (for technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)
Description: Designed as a corporate headquarters, this 30-story tower is located adjacent to a major entrance to The Woodlands, a master-planned business, research and residential community 30 miles north of Houston. The building was designed with a distinctive curved façade that responds to the geometry of the nearby lake's shoreline.

Precast concrete spandrels and column covers were cast to match the Luna Pearl granite used on the lower floors. The components feature a mix of white cement, black aggregate, limestone aggregate and sand, along with a blue tint that produced a bright white color. The panels have either a smooth or medium-sandblast finish, creating contrast. The precaster worked with the designer early in the project to work out connection details and create a color that ensured a perfect match.

The precast concrete components, consisting of 671 pieces encompassing 71,551 square feet, were erected at night to free up the cranes for the contractor to continue work during the day. This doubling-up offered key advantages for meeting the scheduled completion date.

'One advantage precast has provided for sustainable design comes in how it works with other materials.'

Angled sunshades are only one way that Taylor uses precast concrete in creative ways, he says. "We really try to push precast beyond being a square panel." Curved panels, unique textures, selected aggregates, pigments and attention to detail are signature elements of some of Gensler's most distinctive projects using precast concrete. (For examples, see the accompanying Project Spotlights.)

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT
Patriot Square
Location: Washington, D.C.
Project Type: Speculative office building
Area: 280,000 square feet
Designer: Gensler
Owner: The Trammell Crow Co.
Contractor: Helix Contractors
PCI-Certified Precaster: Gate Precast Co. (for technical information on this project, contact the precaster; see the Plant Certification Listing at the back of this issue.)
Description: Patriot Square is a speculative office building that used texture and three-dimensional architectural precast panels to create a distinctive look. The project uses two colors of precast, replicating a limestone finish and a white, contrasting shade, to help create layers on the building and make the plaza areas (in white) stand out. The result makes the building seem even more crisp in color and design. The textured approach was emphasized by the use of thin strips of precast beneath the ribbon window, adding additional shadow lines.

Beyond the typical performance requirements of designing wind and seismic loads, the precast panels and connections had to resist directly applied blast loads plus the blast loads collected by the adjacent window systems which were superimposed on the panels.

Patriot Square used two textures and colors of precast concrete panels to create a layered look for the speculative office building. The textures were emphasized by the inclusion of thin, jutting strips cast into the panels that run beneath the ribbon windows.

Three Key Benefits

Precast concrete offers three key advantages over other types of materials, Taylor says. "Time and schedule are key benefits because of the very effective erection process." The variety of aesthetic options also stands out. "Precast doesn't have to be straight — it can be curved, create corners and help in many ways to achieve the best design." It also offers an economical solution. "Precast can be competitive for the building's cladding."

Gensler typically uses lighter textures and colors when specifying precast panels, he notes. That preference derives from both the reflectivity of lighter panels and their aesthetic appeal. "We've found through experience that lighter panels provide great consistency of appearance, and they are very compatible with glass and metal as an integral part of the overall building," explains Taylor. "A key aspect to any building's success is how well the materials complement each other, and precast is one material that possesses this characteristic."

Precast components also can benefit projects that require higher security measures, he notes. "Government projects in particular today require higher levels of blast-proofing. It can be difficult to develop that capability while maintaining the aesthetics that the clients desire can be difficult. Precast concrete has a 'stealth capability' to look good while meeting blast resistance." The firm currently is working on several designs in which panels provide high blast resistance and resist progressive collapse.

Sustainability and blast resistance are surely two areas that will continue to grow in importance, leading to the further specification of precast concrete materials by the firm. That also will be true as education and hospitality, as well as retail, transportation and corporate-building markets, grow for the firm. "We intend to hold onto the practice areas where we are strong and grow new areas, too. In any market, three key drivers will always be scheduling, cost and image. That's true especially in education and hospitality markets. And those are the areas where precast concrete really helps us with our designs." ■

— Craig A. Shutt

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For additional information on this story, visit **www.pci.org/pdf/knowledgebank/gensler_05.pdf**. (Adobe Acrobat version 5 or greater required.)

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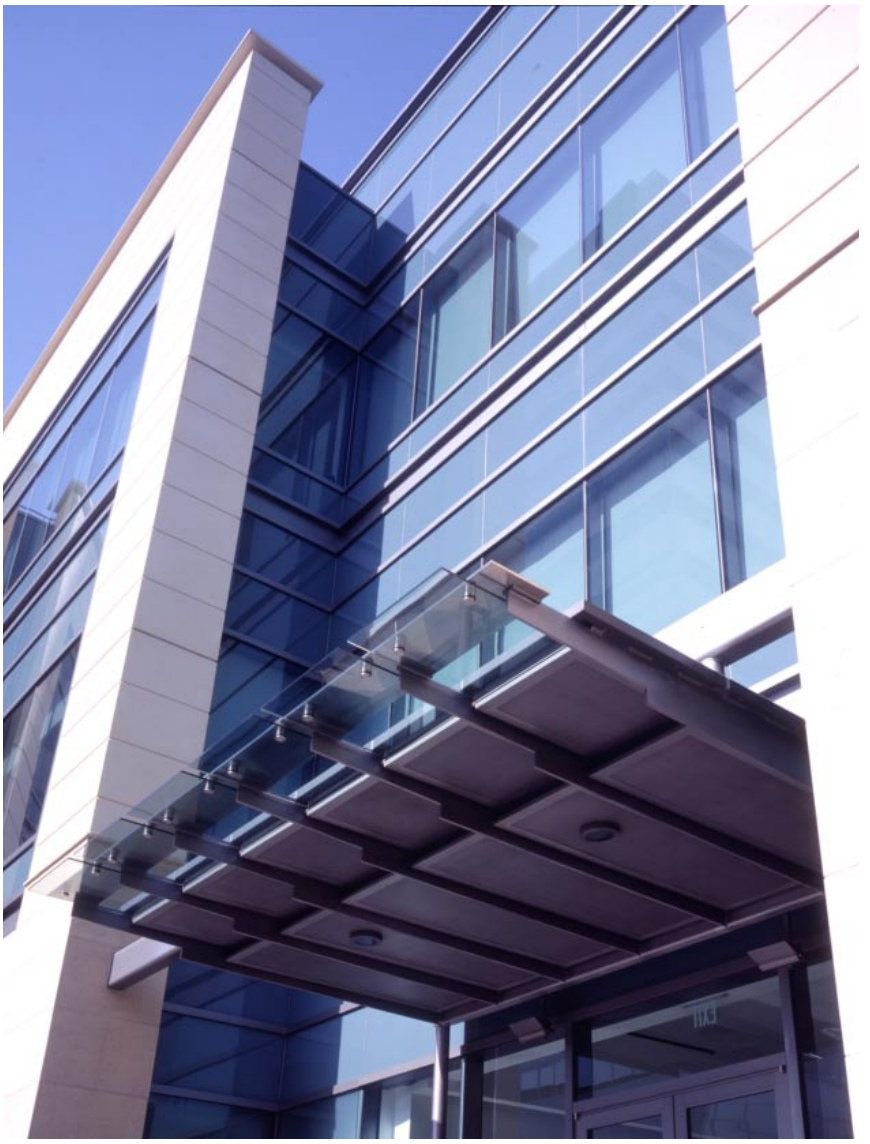

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Sherman Oaks Galleria
Location: Sherman Oaks, Calif.
Project Type: Shopping mall
Area: 1 million square feet
Designer: Gensler
Owner:
Contractor: Peck/Jones
PCI-Certified Precaster: Clark Pacific, Fontana, Calif.
Description: Following a major renovation, this shopping center was transformed from a closed-box retail structure to an open-air center consisting of 700,000 square feet of office space and 300,000 square feet of theater, restaurant and retail space. The three-building complex is clad in cream-colored limestone and glass-fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC), which was used for wall panels, curved spandrels and hanging soffit panels.

The new design emphasizes pedestrian access and circulation along with a stronger integration with the surrounding street grid. A dramatic rotunda creates a vertical node for two levels of restaurant/retail capped by a movie theater. The renovation included gutting a majority of the existing mall, redesigning the entire first and second levels of the skin of the adjacent Imperial Bank office tower and adding an updated lobby.

The tight job site created a challenging erection for the precaster, with many panels being hung underneath portions of the building's overhang. Another challenge came in creating the huge artistic "G" logo for the Galleria, which faces the freeway and includes neon lighting. The embellishment stands about 45 feet tall and extends over six GFRC panels. In all, 382 panels encompassing 61,500 square feet, were used.

Precast concrete components also were used to create the stairways. They incorporate 35 precast concrete pieces that encompass 700 square feet. A separate water-wall feature includes 57 panels totaling 1,100 square feet.

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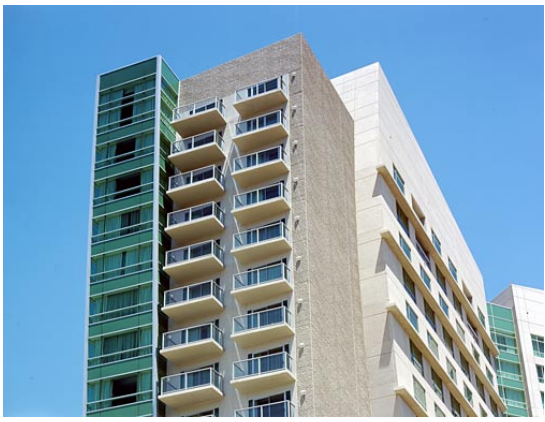
Owner:
Contractor:
PCI-Certified Precaster: Clark Pacific, Fontana, Calif.
Description: While most convention centers offer a closed face to the outside world, Moscone West features a transparent façade combined with architectural precast concrete wall panels and other materials to integrate the building and its functions with its surroundings.

The three-story facility features a south elevation with 45-foot-wide, two-story bay window, coupled with an 11-foot-wide movable-wall partition pocket on one side and a 34-foot-wall precast concrete stair enclosure on the other side. On the west side, which provides the end closure for the center, the design was formulated to express the internal functions of the building. Precast concrete stair towers form bookends that flank an articulated wall of alternating, corrugated and smooth metal panels, expressing the service zone and the structural rhythm within.

The precast erection was made challenging by the site's location on a busy intersection on one side and a narrow alleyway on the other that services one of the city's busiest parking structures. Overhangs also created unusual erection situations that were handled smoothly. In all, 384 precast panels, totaling 85,000 square feet, were used with a medium sandblast finish. Fifty interior column covers also were included.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

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Project Type: Hotel and conference center
Area: 461,500 square feet (hotel: 257,000 square feet; conference center: 204,500 square feet)
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Owner: Woodlands Operating Co.
Contractor: D.E. Harvey Builders
PCI-Certified Precaster: Coreslab Structures (TEXAS) Inc., Cedar Park, Texas
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The panels feature a mix of white cement with integral color, along with granite aggregate and sand. Some 204 pieces of precast concrete, encompassing 24,632 square feet, were used in the project, which offered an elegant but simple design for the precaster. The casting and erection on the project went smoothly.

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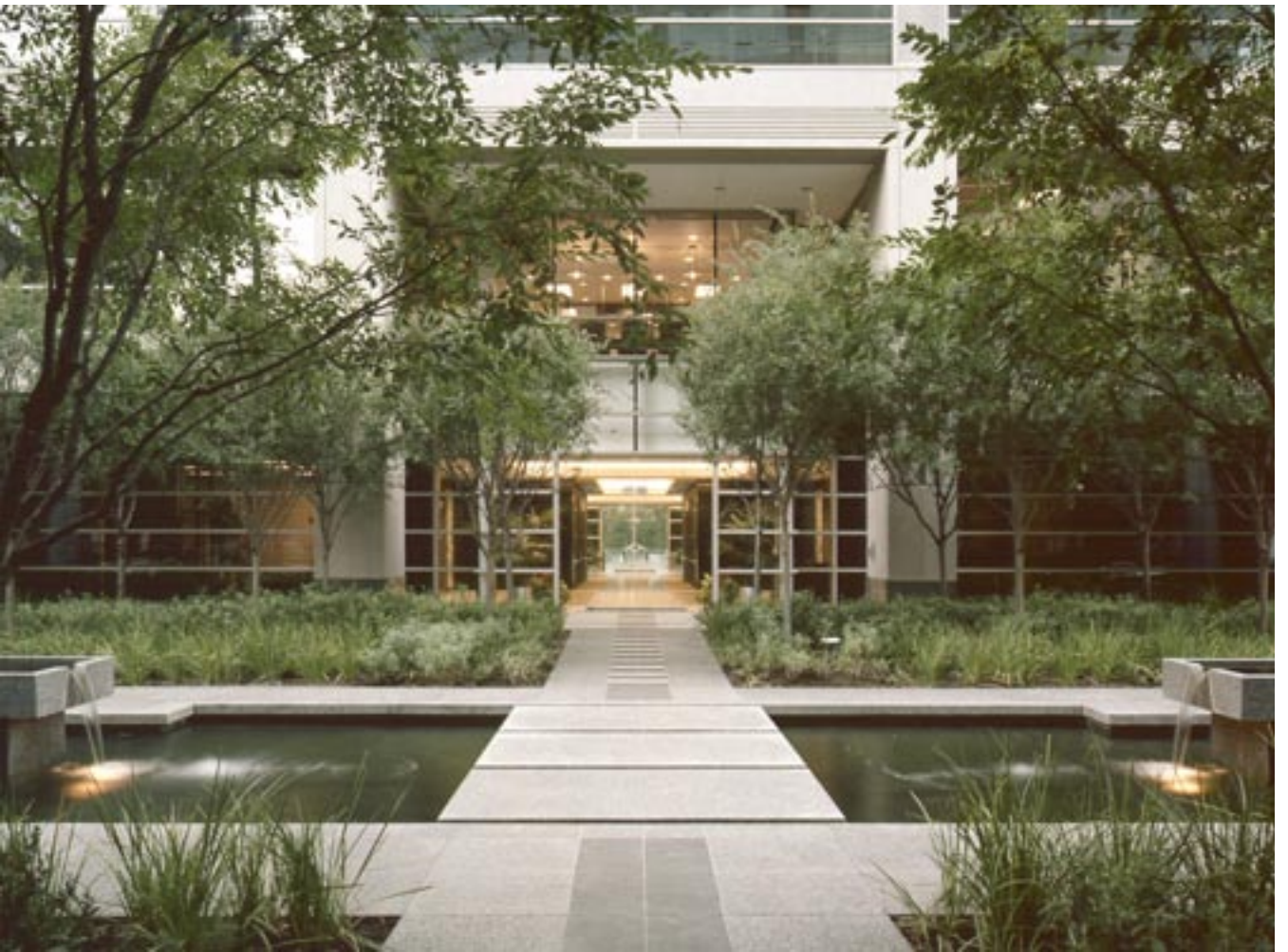

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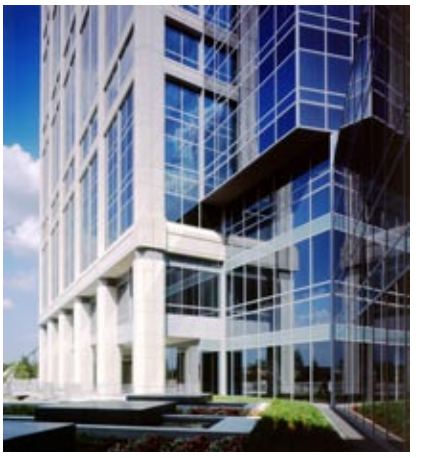

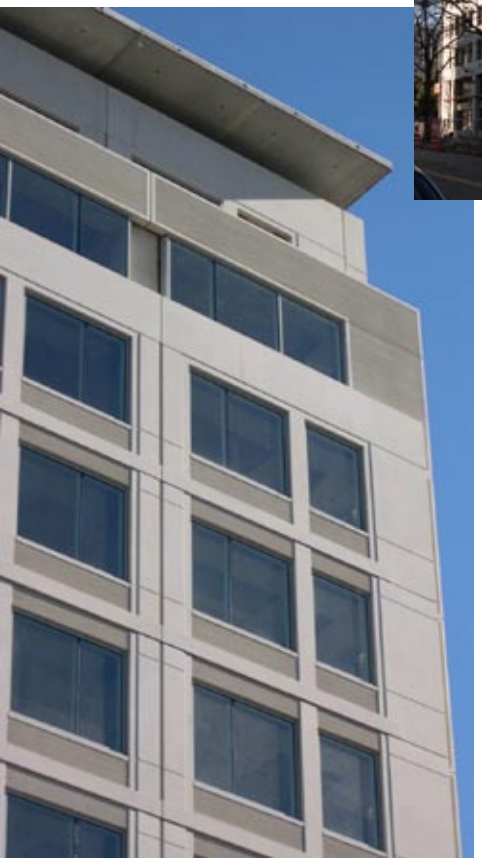

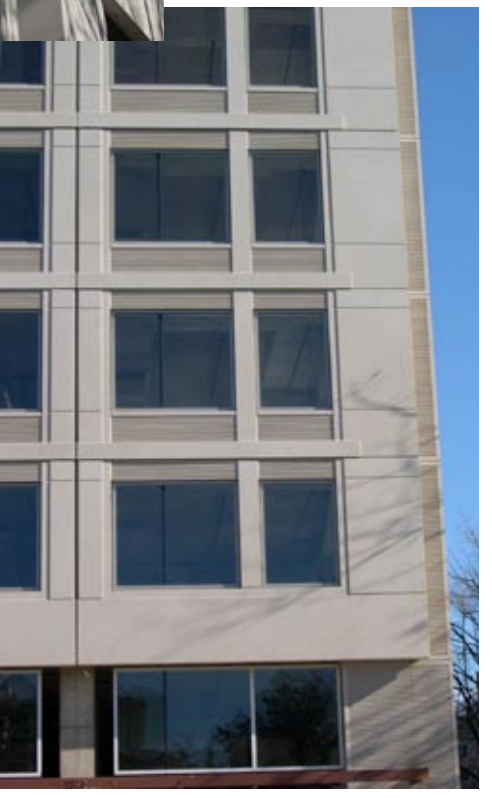

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PCI-Certified Precaster: Gate Precast Co.
Description: Patriot Square is a speculative office building that used texture and three-dimensional architectural precast panels to create a distinctive look. The project uses two colors of precast, replicating a limestone finish and a white, contrasting shade, to help create layers on the building and make the plaza areas (in white) stand out. The result makes the building seem even more crisp in color and design. The textured approach was emphasized by the use of thin strips of precast beneath the ribbon window, adding additional shadow lines.

Beyond the typical performance require-ments of design wind and seismic loads, the precast panels and connections had to resist directly applied blast loads plus the blast loads collected by the adjacent window systems and superimposed on the panels.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT
The Atrium
Location: Los Angeles
Project Type: Office building
Area: 30,000 square feet
Designer: Gensler
Owner: Continental Development Co.
Contractor: Hathaway/Dinwidde
PCI-Certified Precaster: Clark Pacific, Fontana, Calif.
Description: Located at the core of the major south-bay business hub minutes from the beach, The Atrium consists of two five-story, L-shaped buildings connected by a bridge, plus an adjacent parking structure. A half-acre central courtyard offers a spectacular setting with stately palm trees, lush gardens and imaginative water effect. Architectural precast concrete panels were used to clad the building, using a classic white mix with light sandblast texturing and highlights featuring a medium-sandblast finish.

Terraced balconies were created on each level, stepping up to the bridge, which connects the two buildings at the fourth and fifth levels, with a three-story glass wind wall below that acts as an entryway to the central courtyard. The project's skewed setbacks at alternating levels at the entries created a challenge for the precast erection.

Architectural precast concrete panels clad both five-story, L-shaped buildings that make up The Atrium, a 287,000-square-foot Class A office building, plus the adjacent parking structure.