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Move Out of Your Comfort Zone—Raise the Bar

Have you ever thought about how comfortable we become with routine? It is so easy to do the same things the same way, day-in and day-out. For example, I essentially follow the same schedule or plan every day: I get up at about the same time, brush my teeth, shave, get dressed, etc., in the same order, in the same way. I even sit in the same seat on my train ride to and from work. Talk about getting into a routine!


Most people do not like or seek out change. This is also true in building design and construction. We like doing what we have always done. When I designed buildings and houses (which was some time ago now), I noticed that it was easy to fall back on the tried-and-true approach and details. They were known, fast, safe, and comfortable, which helped reduce our risk.

But by staying with routines, we can miss out on opportunities to innovate, advance, and grow, personally and professionally. That applies to our businesses, too. Products and techniques are not the same today as they were 10 years—heck, five years—ago. What can we do to raise the bar a little higher, grow a little, and take advantage of innovations?

When discussing the use of precast concrete, we often hear, “It works great for parking structures and bridges, but we’re building a school, or office, or dormitory...” Sometimes people say, “I’ve never tried that before” or “This is how we always do it” or even “This is what the client expects.” These justifications keep us in our comfort zone, stuck in a routine. It is time to break out of that routine and try something new, for the benefit of clients and ourselves.

Precast concrete inherently offers many capabilities that can let us advance the way we design and construct structures, but we must be willing to take advantage of them. High-performance design provides a great opportunity to do things in new ways, and precast concrete is an exceptionally beneficial high-performance material to help us achieve goals in a more cost-effective way. Here are just a few points to consider:

- High-performance precast concrete has become the enclosure system of choice for many structures due to its aesthetic versatility. The Perot Museum in Dallas, Tex., used precast concrete to create an earth-like, stratification façade rising up out of the ground. However, the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, Calif., used Glass Fiber Reinforced Concrete (GFRC) to create a light, airy lattice façade. Precast concrete can reach from one end of the aesthetic spectrum to the other.
- Precast concrete is also an inherently resilient material providing passive fire protection, storm resistance, and more. For example, there have been many advances in seismic design that make precast concrete structural systems ideal for all seismic zones (that’s critical today, as about 42 of the 50 states have a reasonable chance of experiencing damaging ground shaking from an earthquake in the next 50 years, according to the United States Geological Survey). Apple is using a precast concrete structural system for their new headquarters in Cupertino, Calif. It is one of the largest private office buildings in the United States.
- Another great example is energy efficiency. Codes, sustainability, and high-performance design, are all driving designers to create more energy-efficient buildings, but how are you designing your enclosures? Did you know that high-performance precast concrete can provide a continuous thermal barrier (using continuous insulation), a continuous air barrier, and a moisture retarder all in one efficient system?

These attributes and many others make precast concrete a high-performance material. But we have to be willing to try something new to take full advantage of it. This issue of *Ascent* presents some of those benefits on a variety of building types. They can help you Discover High-Performance Precast and how it can help you “raise the bar” on your next project. 

ASCENT

On the cover: Data Center in Georgia (see page 34). Photo: Metromont Corporation.

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