

The prefab stone age

- Toronto's condominiums go back to the future with precast concrete
- The material stands up longer to exposure to the elements and also has environmental benefits



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In days of old, Toronto condominiums were almost entirely constructed with precast concrete exteriors.

These buildings had a stately look to them, almost like the sandstone structures of a bygone era.

More recently, most condos have either a glass wall construction or are surrounded by glass balconies.

We're beginning to see a return to the precast trend, and in addition to aesthetic qualities, there are other benefits as well.

Precast stands up longer to exposure to the elements, as it is less porous than brick or stone and requires less exterior maintenance.

There's also an environmental advantage. It acts as a layer of insulation and for building owners, that can add up to savings on heating and cooling.

Most Torontonians are well aware of the recent spate of incidents involving glass panels falling from condominium towers.

Precast offers a welcome safety factor. The fact that the windows are set into the exterior walls means that glass panels are unlikely to drop out.

Governor General Award winning architect, Stephen Teeple, designer of OpArt lofts in Oakville, talks to Metro about the

use of precast concrete.

What was your rationale to go with precast exteriors with OpArt?

We're looking to do something kind of fun and a little bit more artistic and so we had imagined a kind of randomly perforated solid as an artistic representation of the building and the precast was a really good way to achieve that.

We want to do some special finishing on the precast to make sure that it's very crisp and bright and not the same old look, so we're actually going to stain it bright white.

What advantages can be realized with the use of precast?

We can get a greater level of insulation, better proportion of window to wall and windows that don't fall out of the buildings.

I live in a condo and have an all glass facing bedroom and it seems fairly bizarre sometimes.

So precast is good for insulation?

We can get a good amount of insulation behind all of the precast, which is always better than glass. Even though glass has improved in its performance over the years, it'll still never be as good as a solid surface. But it's the artistic expression that was the true genesis.

Are there other condo devel-



► The Bloor Street Neighbourhood condos by Cresford Developments near Yonge and Bloor makes intricate use of precast concrete exteriors.

opments using precast?

In downtown Toronto there's some very nice ones that use a mix of window wall and precast, there's a number of them around.

It's a fairly efficient material as well, in terms of construction timing and so on, so it has a lot of advantages.

You do see it on other buildings, there's a sort of more standard of language of it I would say, and this is using the same technology

to achieve a different look and feel.

Advantages

Precast concrete is very versatile, as it can be moulded and cast into various shapes.

► It gives the designer flexibility in terms of ornate structures and can be surfaced in different ways.



► The material can offer a clean and classic look.



► Precast concrete is less porous than brick or stone and requires less exterior maintenance.