



Images: Stephen Goodenough Photographer

PRECAST DELIVERS STYLE, FUNCTIONALITY AND AFFORDABILITY TO NEWBUILD TOWNHOUSES

AN ARCHITECTURAL AWARD-WINNING PROJECT IN PETONE (WELLINGTON) HAS EMPHASISED THE VERSATILITY AND SUITABILITY OF PRECAST CONCRETE FOR MULTI-UNIT, MEDIUM-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL NEWBUILDS.

Located on a 7,851 m² site at the eastern end of Jackson Street, the 56-dwelling Paetutu townhouse project was constructed for client Taranaki Whanui and developer The Wellington Company by Homestead Construction via plans drafted by CoLab Architecture.

Homestead Construction project manager Zane Bull says precast concrete was the “perfect fit” for the development, which features units ranging from 72 m²/two-bedroom to 78 m²/three-bedroom dwellings.

“It allowed for speed of construction – the precast structural components were manufactured offsite, and could be installed onsite in just a few days,” he says.

“The concrete has also helped with passive fire protection, as well as being an effective sound barrier for intertenancy walls.”

Furthermore, Zane says the precast proved capable of serving as an attractive design element both internally and externally on a number of the units.



"It was used as a feature wall inside some of the homes, while others showcased a plain off-the-form finish or an imprinted timber grain finish on the exterior.

"Ensuring the units that presented concrete externally had a consistent look across the 12 different blocks meant pouring them all within a few weeks of each other."

Zane says this development aligned seamlessly with Homestead Construction's experience and expertise, and further enhanced the working relationship established with the developer and its team over previous projects.

"Homestead prides itself on rapid construction, which when applied to multi-unit developments really benefits the client."

Having "cut its teeth" on townhouse developments in Christchurch, CoLab Architecture was introduced to the project after a representative of the client, The Wellington Company, sighted some of the firm's previous work.

"The Wellington Company reached out to us for the Erskine Development in Island Bay, where we

worked with Homestead Construction for the first time, which then led to the Paetutu opportunity," recalls Tobin Smith co-director of CoLab.

The Paetutu project is one his firm is "very proud of," says Tobin.

"Architecturally it's clearly a success, while from a 'social' perspective it puts people into home ownership, and 'morally' it reunites whānau of the Taranaki Whanui with their historic land.

"The biggest challenge with any project is the fine balance between the desired yield, architectural and build quality, and of course the budget.

"Fortunately, in this instance, we were able to work with Homestead Construction very early in the piece to ensure variation and movement in the building forms and use of precast concrete, while at the same time guaranteeing that the outcome was truly affordable to iwi and ultimately the wider market."

Tobin says developments such as Paetutu are "absolutely critical" to tackling New Zealand's housing shortage and affordability issues.





"Land is our most valuable natural asset, and as construction will most likely continue to get more expensive, building a new house will become more-and-more unaffordable for the majority of people.

"A project like this creates efficiency in land use as well as construction, which makes the outcome affordable without compromising quality.

"The model of Paetutu is particularly good in my eyes, as it still gives each occupant a house with land connection, meaning that every house has a private courtyard garden – as opposed to a vertically-stacked apartment model."

Zane adds that multi-unit, residential developments are becoming increasingly commonplace in

Homestead Construction's work programme.

"We have a number of exciting projects in the pipeline, all of which showcase the benefits of precast concrete construction."

The Paetutu project earned CoLab one of only two Wellington Architecture Awards bestowed in the Housing – Multi Unit category by the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) in 2020.

"The feedback we've received from the client, occupants and the wider community has been incredibly positive," continues Tobin.

"In fact, so has the feedback we've received from the architectural community, so we're very happy."

ARCHITECTURAL RECOGNITION

CoLab Architecture's work on the Paetutu development was acknowledged in 2020 by the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA).

The official awards site provides the following statement on the project:

A long history led to the recent opportunity for an iwi/development company community housing development on the historic site of Paetutu Kainga. Successful site planning balances the public realm with the private facilities for each townhouse. Textured and robust materials – timber and concrete – are used with highly-controlled detailing. Cultural placemaking is a well-integrated design feature; the path through the community of two- and three-storey dwellings to the river's edge is lined with artworks that tell the story of Rona and te Mārama (the moon).