

Could housing be reinvented?

With a skills shortage in our midst and in an effort to improve efficiencies, smart residential housing developers are looking for alternatives to traditional construction methods. They are starting to realise what all the fuss is about when it comes to the push to use more off-site manufactured products... and they are starting to use precast concrete.

Whilst brick and mortar houses have been well entrenched in this country, precast is starting to get a look in, offering a much faster, thermally efficient and long lasting alternative.

One National Precast member who is experiencing a rise in demand for precast housing is Melbourne-based Hollow Core Concrete. According to owner Peter Healy, precast is comparable from a cost perspective to a solid brick house with concrete flooring, but it's the speed of construction which is its huge selling point. The company has worked on a number of precast houses ranging from simple single storeyed to complex multi-level houses and medium density housing.

As an example, a precast house that Hollow Core is building at the moment in Melbourne will take about 6 months. It's a 300 square metre, two-storeyed house. Lock-up occurred after just 9 weeks on site. Using conventional construction methods it would have taken at least 12 months to build this style of home.

Another National Precast member who recognises the potential for housing is MJB Industries. The company has already manufactured precast for seven precast homes it has developed and sold, and there are more on the horizon. Buyers are impressed with the finish of precast, the speed at which the homes can be built and the lack of rubbish and waste during the construction process.

Affordable social housing is another huge growth area and MJB is also working with a not-for-profit organisation looking at the possibility of affordable social housing built with precast.

In Tasmania, National Precast member Duggans Precast has for many years supplied precast for houses, particularly insulated sandwich panels. They are now helping to make a difference to communities, supplying the precast for social housing in North Hobart. In a \$14 million dollar project, a former adult learning centre is being transformed into an inner-city housing project for young people at risk of homelessness and those with a disability.

Whether it's individual homes or multi-storey apartments, the future growth for precast housing is promising. Although precast housing requires specialised engineering design, when you compare it with a traditional solid double brick home, there are so many benefits.

Sarah Bachmann, CEO National Precast, August 2015