

Precast benefits prestigious apartment development

With demand for new developments in the nation's capital at an all-time high, precast was specified as the material of choice for Renaissance Manuka, a premium apartment complex in Canberra's inner south suburb of Griffith.

Located on the site of the old Stuart Flats, the predominantly precast Renaissance Manuka development covers three parcels of land located on Captain Cook Crescent, Stuart Street and Light Street, Griffith. It offers 414 one, two and three-bedroom apartments in five buildings of three to six stories across the three blocks, as well as a childcare centre, health facility and basement parking.

The buildings' façades are a mixture of traditional brick – achieved by brick tiles cast into precast panels – mixed with white painted precast concrete walls and charcoal window framing, upper-level cladding and roofing.

Construction of the complex coincided with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a number of unforeseen challenges.

Speed of construction and reducing site labour were the key drivers for the decision to use precast concrete while still achieving a brick finish, but without the time, site labour and other disadvantages

of constructing a conventionally framed structure clad with brickwork.

The decision came at just the right time, when COVID-19 was severely impacting labour supply in the ACT and resulted in many months of time savings.

In all, 364 loadbearing and non-loadbearing precast elements were manufactured for Block 23 of the development, comprising wall panels, spandrels, columns, retaining panels and planter walls. Of the wall panels, 150 were manufactured using brick tiles that were cast into the faces, tops and edges of the panels, with the selected brick tiles matching the suburb's traditional surrounding buildings.

Precast elements were manufactured by National Precast Concrete Association Australia Master Precaster Advanced Precast at its Wetherill Park factory.

Manufacturing the brick panels for the project entailed meticulous planning.

Materials shortages created challenges, and significant engagement between Advanced



Renaissance Manuka development.

Precast, Guida Moseley Brown Architects (GMB) and Northrop Consulting Engineers during the documentation phase was required to ensure a smooth build. Careful layout of bricks to accommodate differing panel sizes and differing tolerances of the various materials was essential during manufacture.

Rob McLachlan, Architect at GMB says: "The floor-to-floor height of the units has been worked out to exactly work with a brick dimension; where a normal floor-to-floor height is 3.1 metres, in our case it's 3.188 metres and that's a dimension that works perfectly with the brick rod."

"It's almost like the whole building has this brick rod overlay to it and we have sort of nudged it and organised it so that we're not cutting bricks in half at the bottom in their horizontal axis – it's really exciting when you get everything fitting just so."

"It's interesting because even though these bricks are brick tiles on precast, you still have the same set of problems; you still need to design the dimensions of the building to work to the bricks because they're the visible thing that you see on the outside – that's something we're really proud of because when it's done well there's a peacefulness about the development."

Renaissance Manuka has been marketed as "a quality build that has been meticulously

crafted to take full advantage of its prominent address and deliver a lifestyle that is second to none".

Not surprisingly, demand for the apartments is high. Stage 1 was fully sold by the end of 2022. Stage 2, a smaller, four-storey boutique development of 30 units over four levels on Stuart Street, was completed in 2022. Stage 3, the largest of the stages – offering 276 units across five buildings fronting Captain Cook Crescent – is due for completion in 2023. ■■

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- Project**
Renaissance Manuka
- Location**
Griffith, ACT
- Developer/builder**
Morris Property Group
- Architect**
Guida Moseley Brown Architects
- Engineer**
Northrop Consulting Engineers
- Master Precaster**
Advanced Precast (Aust)



A brick finish was achieved by National Precast Concrete Association Australia Master Precaster Advanced Precast using precast panels, saving time and site labour costs.

Sleek, modern look connecting to existing landscape

The design has been cleverly designed to maximise space, light and views towards Parliament House and across leafy parks and heritage homes. All of the apartments' living areas connect to the existing landscape in some way.

"The church on the corner is a really key element in the landscape, so the building had to address the existing environment," says McLachlan.

"There's definitely a sleek modern theme but adding brick to it as an earthy element really gives that nice contrast."

"The brick is a brilliant relationship to the church and some of the houses on the southern side as well."

