

A new era for precast design

Once a rarity, textured and patterned precast façades are now a defining feature of modern construction.

Previously limited to smooth surfaces or finishes requiring specialist machinery, precast concrete in Australia has entered a new design era. Formliners – flexible mould inserts that create textures and patterns on concrete surfaces – are now being used to bring visual depth and creative variety to façades across the country.

Whether it's replicating brickwork, stone, timber grain or creating abstract or organic forms, today's formliners offer designers and builders an expanded creative toolkit. This shift is not just aesthetic; it's practical. Durable, easy to use and suitable for a range of projects, formliners are making it easier than ever to add visual appeal to structural elements.

In many cases, formliners are replacing traditional hand-laid brick or natural stone, offering not only aesthetic consistency but also savings in construction time and labour. This is particularly important in the current market, where skills shortages and increasing labour costs are impacting project timelines and budgets.

Formliners in action

Formliners are now a common feature in architectural and civil precast. They're used in sound walls, building façades, bridges and even public art installations. The integration of stains (such as Ecotone) onto textured or patterned precast elements, along with the ability to embed thin brick tiles directly into the formliner mould, provides designers more freedom.

Another growing trend is the use of brick-patterned formliners. These allow precasters to pour standard grey concrete into a mould that features a brick design. Once released and stained in multiple tones, the result is an authentic brick-look wall – without laying a single brick. It's quicker, more cost-effective and suitable for upper-level façades where it's virtually impossible to tell it's not traditional brickwork.

"The combination of a patterned surface with a tinted or multi-toned stain is incredibly powerful. It means any precaster can now offer something that was once



An Indigenous artwork panel at Mercy Hospital demonstrates the creative potential of custom formliners. (Image: Ausliners)

limited to specialists with polishing or honing equipment," says Sarah Bachmann, executive advisor at National Precast Concrete Association Australia.

Some local councils and developers are now including formliner finishes as part of their urban design guidelines, recognising their durability and contribution to local identity.

A local solution with global appeal

One company driving this evolution is National Precast Supplier member Ausliners, based in Bayswater North, Victoria. According to director Mario Tsirbas, the company's inception was the result of a complementary experience with a friend.

"Nick came from a background in precast panel production, and I had worked extensively in computer-controlled building material manufacturing," says Tsirbas.

"Over dinner in early 2023, we realised we could create a better solution for the Australian precast industry."

Nearly 18 months of research and development followed before the company launched. Today, Ausliners designs and manufactures all its formliners in-house using Australian-sourced polyurethane, and has developed a proprietary formula that reduces the risk of tearing or stretching during use.

Further, the company's mats are engineered to last more than 100 uses when properly fixed and maintained.

Innovation meets art

Ausliners recently completed a 5.7-metre-square Indigenous artwork panel for Mercy Hospital – a striking example of custom formliner capability.

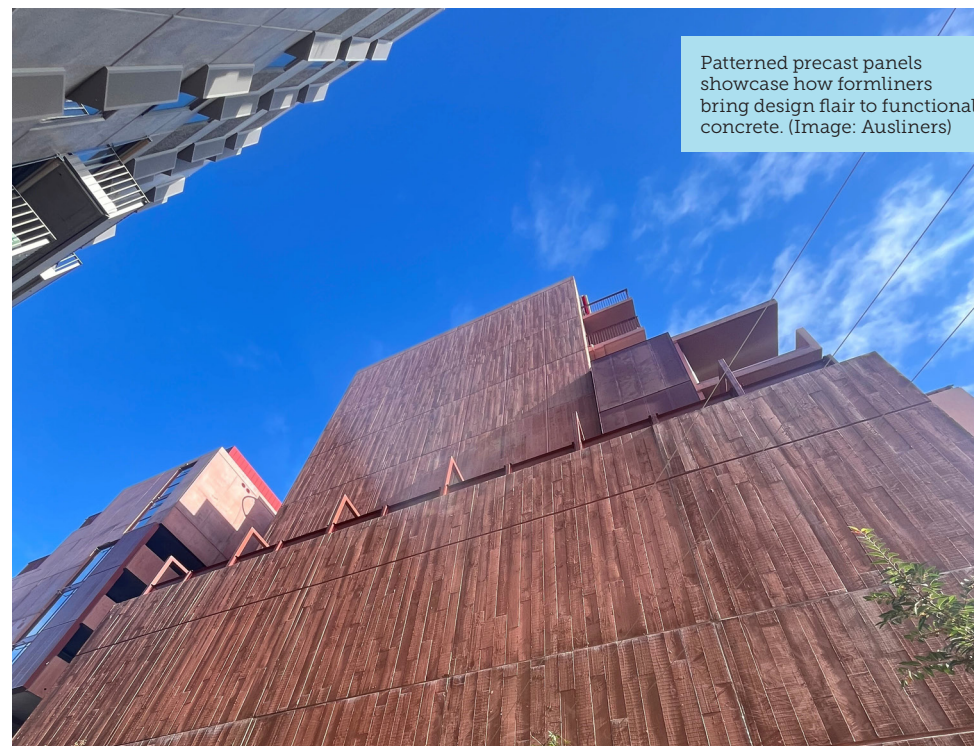
"We worked hand-in-hand with our precaster client and the design consultants for over eight months," says Tsirbas. "The result is a one-of-a-kind formliner that not only meets technical demands but delivers on cultural and visual impact."

The design was not only technically challenging due to its scale and detail but also required sensitivity to the cultural significance of the artwork – a testament to the flexibility and precision achievable with custom formliner manufacturing.

Designing the future

Formliners are making it easier and more affordable for architects and clients to bring ambitious design visions to life in concrete.

"In the face of ongoing skills shortages and increasing pressure to improve construction efficiency, formliners offer a smart, scalable solution," says Bachmann. "They enable architects to achieve highly customised outcomes while allowing precasters to deliver consistent, high-quality finishes without the need for specialised labour or equipment."



Patterned precast panels showcase how formliners bring design flair to functional concrete. (Image: Ausliners)



By Sarah Bachmann, executive advisor at National Precast. (Image: National Precast)



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