

Milwaukee's Park Terrace Row Houses

Developers Choose Spancrete® Hollowcore and Architectural Precast for Urban Residential Construction —

Milwaukee's old Beerline neighborhood, north of downtown and fronting the west bank of the Milwaukee River, was once a thriving industrial area. In days past, a dedicated railroad line — the Beerline "B" — rumbled between the factories, bringing goods to and from the city's trademark breweries, but as Milwaukee's beer industry declined, so too did the Beerline "B" and the neighborhood. The soil contaminated and the buildings empty, the area was abandoned for years, until the Milwaukee Department of City Development initiated a public and private revitalization effort to bring life back to this prime tract of land.

The City held a competition inviting architectural design firms to submit ideas and plans for residential and commercial development. Vetter Denk Architects, were awarded the redevelopment project. They started around 2000, and today in 2005, Vetter Denk is now finishing the third phase and completion of the new Park Terrace Row Houses. "We designed the row houses to be different," says Brian Filkens, the project manager for Vetter Denk. "As far as the architectural context of the neighborhood, there was nothing in the area, so we could offer a completely new and unique design."

Spancrete Shortens Construction Time

The unique design and site constraints presented several challenges. Spancrete helped by contributing engineering and design assistance. "Spancrete has a lot of technical expertise, with both designers and engineers available in house," says Filkens.

Designed so the front elevation of the three-story row houses extended from a riverside bluff, the rear elevation was set back into a hill, which meant the soil behind the rear wall had to be retained. Vetter Denk looked at various options but chose precast concrete to save time and money. "A cast-in-place, two-foot-thick



The Park Terrace Row Houses are a complex of twenty-one modern urban loft dwellings, located on Commerce Street in Milwaukee.

concrete retaining wall would have been far too costly," said Dan Nagy, the Spancrete sales representative on the project. "So they developed a pressure relief wall to retain the soil behind the building, and we placed noninsulated Spancrete® hollowcore wall panels, water-proofed across the back, in front of that system."

Step Upstairs to the Garage

With the row house complex built into a hill, the garage is unusually positioned on the third floor. Vetter Denk went with Spancrete hollowcore plank for the garage floor, which meant that they needed a structural bearing wall on the front side of the complex, to support the weight. "It was either set up a structural steel cage and fill it or a masonry block cavity wall," Filkens said. "Using precast just made a lot more sense."

The front bearing walls are formcast insulated architectural precast wall panels consisting of seven inches of structural concrete, three inches of insulation, and three inches of

architectural finish on the outside surface. "We looked at other competitors," said Filkens. "Spancrete is the



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only one who can do hollowcore plank and architectural panels.”

The architectural wall panels included an integral color mix and sand blast exterior finish. “We’ve found that the gray concrete has a good consistent color, panel to panel,” says Dan Nagy.

The row houses were designed as two-family dwellings, with every two units grouped together for building code purposes. “They asked us if we could provide fire walls between every other unit, which could also serve as shear walls to help support the building,” Nagy said. “We worked with them to design fire walls, designed the connections, and helped their engineer understand how we design for shear and how Spancrete wall panels act as shear walls.”

The Spancrete Advantage

Filkens says that he likes the quality and the versatility of Spancrete precast. “Using precast has been great,” Filkens said. “It’s modular and it’s produced in a controlled environment, so you get better quality than on-site construction.”

The Park Terrace Row Houses were completed in August, 2005, and most of the units are now occupied. The Department of City Development (DCD) and Vetter Denk Architecture have already earned the 2004 Excellence on the Waterfront Honor Award for their work redeveloping the industrial riverfront property into an innovative mix of housing, recreation, and public space.

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The Spancrete Wall Panels were left exposed to give the Row Houses a post-modern urban feel.

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