

# TILT-UP

## Construction on the Rise



The Sav-A-Lot lobby had many art niches and soffits.

Can You Acquire the Right Equipment?  
Can You Stick to a Tight Schedule? Then  
Tilt-Up Concrete May Be a New Service  
to Add to Your List of Offerings

Article and Photos By Peter Downs

**T**he builder had an idea, the architect created a design, and the wall guys made it work.

The idea was to take the tilt-up construction techniques commonly used for warehouse and industrial buildings and build a first class corporate office building. In tilt-up, concrete walls are poured on site in a flat form, and then “tilted” into place against the steel frame with cranes.

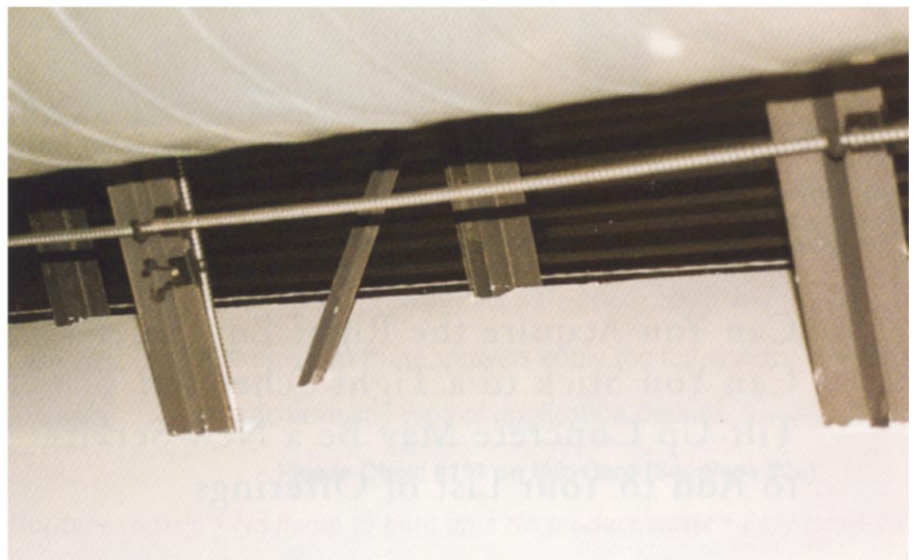
The architect, ACI/Boland, developed a new corporate design style for tilt-up material that Project Manager Nancy Rodney called “nouveau industrial.” It combined exposed decks with recessed wall spaces for displaying artwork,



The “nouveau industrial” design combined exposed decks with recessed wall spaces for displaying artwork, curved soffits and finished drywall to the deck.

curved soffits and finished drywall to the deck. The project was a new corporate headquarters for Sav-A-Lot, Ltd., a company with 700 limited assortment supermarkets in 31 states.

Most people think the painter is the one who makes it look nice, but the taper is the one who has to make the walls smooth and clean looking,” said Terry Wies, president of AWCI member contractor Wies Drywall and Construction Company, St. Louis, MO., the wall contractor on the project.



Finish work around duct work at Sav-A-Lot

For this “nouveau industrial” design, which Wies called a combination of rustic elements with a high end Class A office finish, the tapers carry a special burden.

Art niches, for example, take more time to tape “because they are a focal point,” Wies said. “You can’t have any mistakes.” Since they are meant for dis-

Many ceilings in the Sav-A-Lot building were 15 feet from the floor—30 feet in some areas.

playing artwork, they are well lit and meant to draw attention, which makes it difficult to hide even slight imperfections.

## Reach for the Top

Higher walls also made for more intensive work. “Normally we put in a ceiling at 8 or 9 feet, so we finish the wall up to 8 or 9 feet,” Wies said. In the Sav-A-Lot building, however, many walls reached 15 feet from the floor to the deck. In one area they rose 30 feet to the deck.

“It doesn’t sound like much, but the time and difficulty increases geometrically the higher you go,” he said.

Wies couldn’t imagine completing



**Finish around the joists of the Sav-A-Lot structure**

those wall cost effectively or on schedule without affordable mobile scissor lifts. “Can you imagine trying to do

that with scaffolding?” he asked. In addition to the problem of hoisting drywall sheets, “every time you want to

move you have to climb down, unlock your wheels, push the scaffolding over and then lock the wheels again. Lifts are key,” he said.

The Sav-A-Lot structure houses many uses: warehouse, printing plant, corporate offices, a training center with a model store, and executive suites. The design was great for usability, Wies said, but it meant he had to insulate and finish walls all the way to the deck to

Cutting and taping board to fit around joists was the most labor-intensive part of the job. It increased total labor to 20 percent more than typical.

block the transmission of sound from one area to another. Even in those areas that got acoustic ceilings, “we still hung the walls to the deck” instead of stopping at the joists, he said.

Cutting and taping board to fit around joists was the most labor-intensive part of the job, especially the taping. “It increased our total labor to about 20 percent above a typical office project,” he said.

## **Fast-Track Labor**

When there is no rush, extra labor isn't a problem, but on today's fast-track

projects, it can be difficult. Clayco Construction Company the general contractor, prides itself on sticking to schedule. “When we get behind, we find creative ways to make it up,” said Clayco project manager Ken Lovelace. That was important to Sav-A-Lot, which had sold its old building and had a firm date by which it had to vacate it.

Wies actually found his schedule compressed because wet weather had

with the building. Since finishing Sav-A-Lot earlier this year, Clayco has begun two more tilt-up Class A office buildings in St. Louis, another in San Antonio, Texas, and two more on the East Coast.

“We plan on aggressively marketing the technology and material to corporate clients,” said Kirk Gordon, Clayco’s director of design development. Tilt-up is a very simple and straightforward

“Tilt-up is a relatively new technique and material that office architects and owners aren’t familiar with. No one has ever taken the first step to think of tilt-up as a viable alternative to masonry.”

delayed the early phases of construction. He had three months to finish all the walls in the 128,000-square-foot building, “and there were a lot of partitions,” he said. With nearly 40 people at a time working in the building, he managed to get it done.

To keep getting business, “you not only have to have the best price, you have to have the commitment to schedule,” he said.

“They got a great building,” he said, “but it was labor intensive” for the wall guys. As the wall contractor, that meant his portion of the total contract price was “a little more than the typical 10 percent.”

Sue Shocklee, facilities manager for Sav-A-Lot, said the company is thrilled

method of construction that solves the problems associated with putting a masonry skin on a building, he said, and has such structural versatility that architects can design features that they can’t do with brick.

Since a tilt-up panel is the building structure, the facade and weatherproofing all in one, “it is really quick and cost effective,” Rodney said.

## Crossing State Lines

St. Louis-based Clayco does about 70 percent of its business on a national level, mainly in the midsection and on the East Coast, Gordon said.

In most areas of the country, tilt-up has been limited to warehouse and indus-

trial construction. It has been used for Class A office buildings in California, the Seattle and Vancouver areas, and pockets of Ohio, but elsewhere “it is a new technique and material that office architects and owners aren’t familiar

can do,” Gordon said. “I think you are going to see a lot more of it.”

Wies is working on the two St. Louis buildings for Clayco, but he doesn’t plan on following Clayco out of state.

The job couldn’t have been done cost effectively or on schedule without affordable mobile scissor lifts. The lifts also made it easier to hoist sheets of drywall.

with,” he said. “No one has ever taken the first step to think of tilt-up as a viable alternative to masonry.”

We are working with eight different architectural firms, and they are all very interested in it and the new things they

“I have a hard time thinking we can go into another guy’s market with a competitive price and do well,” he said.

Historically, Wies did do a lot of work out of state, “but by and large our expe-

rience was not good,” he said. “It is a real management problem, and a very difficult feat to make it pay”

Since Terry took over the company from his father, “we try not to do it, and with so much work in town, we don’t need to.”

That means other wall contractors will get a chance to work nouveau industrial corporate buildings with Clayco. Wies’ advice to would-be bidders: Keep in mind it will be labor intensive and you will have a tight schedule. 🏠

#### **About the Author**

Peter Downs is a free-lance journalist covering the construction industry