EIFS and the Concept of Partnering

The 114 owner-residents of the Pierce 100 Condominiums in Clearwater, FL, knew they had to do something. The deteriorating exterior of the building was quickly driving down the value of their units.

The 13-story, 240,000 sq ft building was first constructed in the early 1970s. “It was very run down, and, from a design standpoint, the building had become outdated, dirty and had a boxy shape with very few design features,” said project architect Steve Klar, AIA, of Walker & Associates Architects, Safety Harbour, FL.

Taking into consideration the project’s limited budget of $3.2 million and the owners’ desire to continue living in their units while construction was underway, all agreed that an EIFS retrofit would be the best solution for their building’s exterior wall problems.

Several other features of the system, such as durability and design flexibility, were also key factors in the final selection of the EIFS product. “We had seen the superb performance of Dryvit during Hurricane Hugo and the San Francisco earthquake,” said Clint Sly, president of the Condo Association’s Board of Directors and chairman of the Building Committee. “We were confident the EIFS would stand up to the constant wind, salt spray and direct sunlight associated with this area and still offer our building a new, modern look.”

Due to the complexities of opening an existing building on a limited budget, the architect stipulated that the construction contract be a negotiated bid with a preselected general contractor. Biltmore Construction of Clearwater, FL, met with the preselected subcontractors, the architect and the owner’s representative once a week for eight weeks prior to the start of the project. “When construction began, everyone was completely clear as to their own responsibilities,” said Mar. “As a result, we finished ahead of schedule and under budget.”

Mike Cannon, the project manager for the EIFS applicator, Keenan, Hopkins, Schmidt & Stowell, Tampa, FL, added, “This project was a perfect example of partnering. We went through every detail before the project started and worked out all the potential problems collectively. It was extremely rewarding and ended up being the smoothest run job with which I’ve ever been associated.”

As the design-build team anticipated, the existing wood stud curtain wall panels were no longer structurally sound due to termite infestation. In addition, the steel clip angles that held the epoxy/rock textured decorative panels to the concrete superstructure had rusted away due to water infiltration between the panels.
The 360 lb, 4 ft x 8 ft panels were removed, and temporary partitions were installed 6 ft from the outside edge of the slab, allowing condo residents to continue to live in their units. Each unit was boarded up for approximately six weeks with no more than four floors being reworked at a time.

The new wall system was framed with light gage metal studs running and bearing from slab to slab (eliminating the true curtainwall system). Densglass® exterior gypsum sheathing was fastened to the frame and the Outsulation® System by Dryvit Systems, Inc. was then applied to the 57,000 sq ft of wall area. Starting at the top of the building, it took a week to apply the system to each floor. Drywall was reapplied to the new interior wall of each unit.

The EPS insulation boards were used to incorporate a number of different architectural shapes and details. “We wanted to give the building a more contemporary look, and at the same time add a couple of design features to give the building and downtown Clearwater a much-needed focal point,” said Klar. “The original building was too busy and vertical, so we added a variety of horizontal elements and details to make it more proportional.”

The horizontal banding was achieved by incorporation six in. sloped reveals out of the EIFS at every floor and adding large diameter top rails to the new balcony guard rails. The natural and artificial light produced shadows from the bands which enhanced the building’s horizontal lines. The elevations now look comfortably busy, and there is no vertical or horizontal dominance.

EPS insulation board was also used to form a step cornice at the roof line, a canopy at the entrance of the building and bold shapes around the two “lighthouses” on the roof top. One lighthouse relates to the intercoastal waterway where boats will use it as a visual navigation aid, and the other directs itself toward downtown Clearwater.

Extra-tough high impact mesh was incorporated around the building’s ground floor with a standard mesh used throughout the rest of the exterior.

The owners selected white for the building finish. “We decided on a white color as it is an ageless color, reflects heat and does not fade,” said Klar. “Along with the dark solar grey glass sliding doors which were installed, it is a strong contrast which adds more depth to the balconies.” Klar added that by the end of the project, which also included a new roof and the replacement of all the exterior windows, the building’s image became so distinct that additional building graphics or signage were not recommended.

“All the owners are extremely satisfied with the job,” said Sly. “According to the recent appraised values of our condominiums, we’ve already received an equal return on our investment even in the face of today’s recessionary trend. Just as important, we have people interested in buying our units for the first time in years.”