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Concrete Condos Promise Quiet



Marko Georgiev for The New York Times

Factory-built brick-covered precast concrete slabs arrive at the site of the Velocity, a condo complex in Hoboken, ready to be installed

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SHHHHHHH. Do you hear anything? Nothing at all? Well, that could be the sound of a large man tap dancing, in clogs, in the apartment above.

That is the plan, anyway, at the Velocity condominium complex under construction in [Hoboken](#). The plan is based — literally — on seven-inch concrete slabs that encase each of 128 dwelling units at the complex.



The 128 units range in size from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet and are priced at \$350,000 to \$800,000.

"We decided to go with the best sound-reduction system possible," said Erik A. Kaiser, the principal of the REMI Corporation, the developer, "because we asked people, and they told us the No. 1 thing they wanted was not to hear their neighbors."

That led to the use of a different way of constructing the building's superstructure using precast concrete pieces. It is a system usually employed only for monumental government structures or for housing heavy industry. And it is more expensive than ordinary steel framing.

The Velocity developers say that extra expenditures reduced their profits on the project by \$1.5 million. They look at this as an investment in building a reputation for giving home buyers what they want.

Mr. Kaiser, who founded his company 10 years ago at age 24, tried to make his previous smaller projects stand out within the flock of developments in Hoboken through use of innovative design and amenities. Today, an array of top-flight amenities has become pretty much the norm at Hoboken condominiums, but concrete construction is a first, he said.

The company had to lay out \$2 million to \$3 million extra for materials and design at the start of construction for Velocity's twin four-story buildings compared with what it would have paid for standard construction, although this was partly recouped, Mr. Kaiser said.

Concrete is poured into specially designed molds to create structural parts for the building — plain concrete slabs for ceilings, floors and walls; brick-covered slabs for the building facades; and ornamental pieces for the roofline, window frames and entrances.

The parts are produced in factories in Pennsylvania, and then trucked to the Velocity site on Jackson Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets, near the Hoboken light rail station at the north end of town.

Almost any day, a huge tractor-trailer or two are parked at the site, waiting for a huge crane stationed there to pick up the latest delivery and hoist it into place. A floor slab measures up to 40-by-8 feet and individual slabs weigh six to eight tons.

While precast construction is more expensive than traditional steel-frame building, it is also faster, which earns back some savings, according to the project manager, Robert Armando.

It took a mere five weeks to erect the superstructure for the first 400-foot-long building, he said, and only slightly longer to nearly complete erection of the second, during a period of bad weather. Using conventional construction would take five or six months, Mr. Armando estimated.

"It's like using an erector set," Mr. Kaiser said, as he watched a crane maneuver a piece of the roof into place one recent afternoon. "Assemble the parts and snap them together." Preassembled windows are simply screwed into place and fit more precisely, Mr. Armando said.

In addition, precast construction requires no expensive scaffolding and creates less debris, among other cost-saving factors, Mr. Armando said. There is also the side benefit of being able to install precast stairways at the beginning of a project so workers can move easily and safely between floors.

Besides sound reduction, the final benefits for tenants will include reduced danger of fire and more efficient heating and cooling, since air does not leak through the concrete walls, the project manager said.

Sales at Velocity have proceeded at high speed too, Mr. Kaiser noted. When the first 44 units were offered last spring, they sold out within hours. Only about a quarter of the complex's 28 one-bedroom, 92 two-bedroom and 8 three-bedroom units remain available, he said. The first units are to be ready for occupancy this summer.

The units range in size from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet and are priced at \$350,000 to \$800,000 — in the upper range for Hoboken, where 935 condominium units were sold in 2005, at an average sales price of \$481,830.

The standard features in the Velocity units include hardwood floors, granite counters, marble baths and stainless steel appliances.

The complex will feature a heated parking garage on the first floor, a mailroom lounge with a private entrance and elevator, a state-of-the-art gym, and a large landscaped courtyard with furniture and wireless service.