

# BUILDING PRODUCTS

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## A Perfect Fit

**F**or many years, glass block has provided intriguing designs and abundant light for some of the nation's most posh custom homes. Yet at no time in its history has glass block been as affordable and as easy to install as it is today.

Glass block's reputation for being cumbersome and expensive is slowly being transformed because of the proliferation of preassembled units that are relatively easy to hang, industry officials say. Because of the shift, glass block is turning up in moderately priced housing—even in production homes—in showers, as windows and much more.

Prefabricated panels, which average 4 feet wide and 6 feet long, are so simple to install that they can cut an eight-hour shower installation down to two hours, manufacturers claim. And a

### Preassembled glass block panels are easy to install, but may be hard to lift.

mason isn't needed to install these units.

Because of easy installation, glass block panels can save contractors about 10 percent to 15 percent over mortared glass blocks, manufacturers say. "Even for track housing, glass block is available at a very effective cost," says Jeff Crowder, sales representative for the Glass Block Shop, a Dallas glass block retailer.

Builder Ron Boden of Jarro Building Industries in East Meadow, N.Y., says that the biggest advantage prefab glass blocks offer is their consistency. "Mortar joints are the same and the [spac-

ing is consistent]," says Boden. "You're not depending on a mason."

Adds San Francisco-area builder Jay Cravagan: "They do exactly what I want them to do without any muss or fuss."

Judy Maracco, owner of Glass Block Designs in San Francisco, says many builders in her region install at least one glass block window in every house, particularly where dwellings are built close together and homeowners require both light and privacy.

As the demand for pre-fabricated units is increasing, so is the choice of shapes and styles for high-end and multi-unit residential markets, manufacturers say. For example, Pacific Accent of Bend, Ore., targets upscale custom home builders with wood-clad and powder-coated aluminum pre-fabricated units.

But not everyone's a fan of preassembled glass block panels. "They are heavy and hard to maneuver," says Tom McDonald, a contractor doing work in the San Francisco area. And Jack Brock, owner of Brock Built, a remodeling firm based in Phoenix, doesn't trust their strength. "I don't use preassembled units because they are simply 'friction-fit,' so to speak," he says. "They don't have the bonding to hold structural weight."

But, counters builder Cravagan, "The window is not being asked to do anything structural." His only complaint is that he hasn't found a paint shop that custom coats frames to match the windows. **BP**

**Builders Accessories.** For homeowners who want the look and cleaning ease of preassembled glass block units without the cost, pre-formed acrylic blocks are a viable alternative. These lower-cost, preassembled units are about 75 percent lighter than glass units and come pre-glazed and framed. The company offers mildew-resistant siliconized rubber grout, matched to the frame. 888-921-7086. Circle 191.

Builders Accessories.  
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