

BUILDER

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PRODUCTS

Let There Be Light

In the 1800s, sunlight passed through glass block "illuminators" to reach sailors below deck on ships sailing between England and the New World. In the

1920s and 1930s, glass block found form in windows stretching around continuous curves. For more than a century, the product has provided intriguing expression in some of the coun-

try's most significant architecture. Yet at no time has it been as accessible and easy to install as it is today—mostly due to the demands of builders who want quality preassembled units.

Product Evolution
Prefabricated panels that are relatively easy to hang are slowly transforming glass block's reputation for being cumbersome and expensive into one of a practical and affordable product. "Even for tract housing, glass block has become available and at a very effective cost," says Jeff Crowder, sales representative for the Glass Block Shop, a Dallas glass block retailer. Brian Wright, owner of Seattle Glass Block, agrees. "Everyone's wanting glass block in exterior applications, but they want it to perform and install just like a regular glass window," he says. "They want to pick it up and nail it into place."

Low cost and ease of installation haven't escaped the attention of move-up home builders, particularly since it is now common for units like showers to take only two hours to install, as opposed to the eight-hour projects of the past. Because of easy installation, glass block panels can save builders about 10% to 15% over mortared glass blocks, manufacturers say. And builders can use their ▶ See page 184



Builders Accessories: For homeowners who want the look and cleaning ease of preassembled glass block units without the high cost, preformed acrylic blocks are a viable alternative. These lower-cost, preassembled units are about 75% lighter than glass units and come preglazed and framed. The company offers mildew-resistant silicone rubber gasket, which matches the frame. 1-888-921-7086. Circle no. 101.

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existing crews to install the units, so they don't have to contract out for a mason.

Builders Speak Out

Ron Boden with Jarro Building Industries in East Meadow, N.Y., says consistency is the biggest advantage with prefabricated panels, which average 4 feet wide and 6 feet long. "Mortar joints are the same, [as is] the consistency of spacing," he says. "You're not depending on a mason."

Not every builder, however, is a convert. Tom McDonald, a contractor in the San Francisco Bay area, doesn't like to lift the larger units. "They are heavy and hard to maneuver," he says. Jack Brock, owner of Brock Built in Phoenix, doesn't trust the strength of the units. "I don't use preassembled units



Pacific Accent: Preassembled aluminum glass block windows and panels are manufactured with a maintenance-free powder-coated finish on both sides, as well as between the blocks. The combination of real glass, a powder-coated finish, and a sanitary sealant to prevent mildew in wet environments makes for a durable glass block installation, company says. 1-888-522-4527. <http://www.pacificaccent.com>. Circle no. 102.

because they are simply "friction-fit," he says. "They don't have the bonding to hold structural weight."

But Jay Cravagan, another San Francisco-area builder, disagrees with Brock, believing that by nature of their design, glass block windows are not being asked to hold structural weight. "It's only asking to be

assembled," he says. If Cravagan has a complaint, it's the kind manufacturers don't mind hearing. "They did exactly what I wanted them to do without any muss or fuss," he says. "I just wish they could find a paint shop that could do more custom painting of frames to match windows."

Meeting Demand

According to Judy Maracco, owner of Glass Block Designs in San Francisco, builders who have always tried to use glass block as an optional upgrade now plan for at least one glass block window in every house. Prefabricated units help meet this demand, particularly when projects are built close together and homeowners want both light and privacy.

As the demand for prefabricated units increases, so will the choice of shapes and styles, with high-end and multi-unit residential markets being accommodated. For example, Pacific Accent, a company in Bend, Ore., solely targets upscale custom home builders with its prefabricated clad-wood and powder-coated aluminum glass block units. On the other side of the coin, mid-range builders can opt for acrylic blocks, which help provide a custom look at a fraction of the cost.—J.M.



Pittsburgh Corning: Fully preassembled glass block window features a vinyl frame in white or sandstone, and a choice of three glass block styles. Silicone bonding between the blocks provides an "all glass" look. The unit installs like a traditional pane glass window. LightVue. 1-800-992-5769. <http://www.pittsburgh.coming.com>. Circle no. 103.