

Best Warehouse

PEI Genesis, South Bend, Ind.

Executives at PEI-Genesis wanted more than simply a plant where the company's employees could assemble and sell electronic wiring connectors. "The owner wanted the building to make a bold statement about PEI-Genesis's place in the global interconnect business," says architect Philip Panzica, principal in Panzica Building Corp. in South Bend, Ind. "We were charged with creating not only an efficient, clean, secure, and affordable environment but to do so with a head-turning design that transcends a big shoebox."

They succeeded, thanks in part to the use of precast concrete insulated wall panels, plus hollow-core deck slabs for the mezzanine. The components provided the optimum marriage of speed of erection, economy, durability, and flexibility, Panzica says.

The building's design stresses movement, Panzica says. "Our vision was for something that looks like it's moving yet standing still, evoking a sense of how PEI's electronic connectors are incorporated into various dynamic platforms." Executives also wanted the building to integrate principles of energy efficiency and sustainable design.

To achieve those goals, the building's plan was expressed as an arrangement of cubes, angles, and stepped-curve or scalloped walls, he says. These variations created openings and slots for glass to add a rhythm to the graceful structure while ensuring that ample daylight poured into areas where miniature components are assembled by hand and also by means of industrial robots. The massing was organized into blocks that were arranged in a logical plan segregating warehouse/shipping, assembly, and office functions while optimizing flow.

The ability to cast and erect precast concrete components in any weather provided a significant boost to the schedule, he notes, as the schedule required construction to continue through a harsh northern Indiana winter. The precast concrete design saved at least four to six weeks plus tens of thousands of dollars that would have been needed for tenting and heating costs.

Judges' comments:

"This design took what is basically a big box and broke it into pieces and reassembled those pieces. It has wings as well as some energy and texture. It obviously is a huge improvement over the standard big box with 30 ft clear spans. It is a building type that can easily become boring because it never gets architectural attention. It's amazing how just a little architectural attention can produce a standout structure."

Architect/contractor: Panzica Building Corp., South Bend, Ind.

Engineer: AJ & Associates PC, Carmel, Ind.

Owner: PEI-Genesis, Philadelphia, Pa.

Precaster (panels): ATMI-Indy LLC, Greenfield, Ind.

Precaster (hollow-core): StresCore Inc., South Bend

Precast concrete components: 105 insulated wall/spandrel panels, hollow-core panels

Project cost: \$7.1 million

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Courtesy of Hilliard Photographs and Panzica Building Corp.

