

Super NATURAL

Estes, Sanders & Williams, LLC.
Vestavia Hills, AL



When the attorneys at Estes, Sanders & Williams in Vestavia Hills were looking to build a new office, they had a list of priorities and needs to be filled. They turned to architect Brian Roberson with bDot Architecture for a solution, and for one of the major items on their wish list, he turned to pervious concrete. "It was very important to the client that this project be as environmentally friendly as possible," he said. "It is not LEED certified, but we wanted to get as close as we could to that designation. They also wanted the office to look like it truly fit in with the natural surroundings. It is a very wooded area, and we left lots of trees."

The 12,000-square-foot office space was completed in October 2010, and with its steep roof pitches and multiple angles, it makes quite a statement. But to find the concrete on this project, you'll have to take your eyes off the stunning structure and look back to where you left your car. The 28-space parking lot is made of pervious concrete and stone gravel, and according to Roberson, pervious

concrete turned out to be the natural choice, even if it was not the first choice. "We began with plans for an asphalt parking lot with curb and gutters and a storm drain," he said. "Storm water was a big issue because the building and lot were going on such a difficult site. We had to undercut six feet under the whole property and bring in engineered fill for the entire site. It is an odd-shaped lot, and there was no room to do a retention pond. The water level wouldn't let us do the retention underground."

There is a creek running nearby, and both Roberson the client were concerned about the possibility of storm runoff from the parking lot flowing into the water — as was the city of Vestavia Hills. "The creek is only 10 yards from one side of building, so it was a very crucial issue, and we were very sensitive to that. We wanted to be as careful as possible, and the city has strict regulations in place that we had to follow as well," Roberson said.

As Roberson and his team went through the pricing for the asphalt



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lot and the measures they’d need to put in place to adequately deal with the storm water runoff, it quickly became clear that asphalt was not the way to go for this project, particularly from a cost-effectiveness standpoint. To ensure that they could work pervious concrete into the budget, Roberson and the client came up with an innovative way to incorporate the material. “So we went with a combo of pervious concrete in the drive lanes, and the parking spaces are actually stone gravel, which I’ve not seen done before,” Roberson said. “The cost was equal to the asphalt scenario, and it was great to find that out. Many probably think that pervious concrete would be more expensive, but since you don’t have to do curb and gutters it equals out.”

And then there are the many added benefits that pervious concrete brings to the equation. They may be harder to put a price tag on, but for many, including Roberson’s clients, they are worth a lot. “The pervious concrete and stone gravel mix gives the parking lot a beautiful, natural look, which is in keeping with the office building and is just what the client wanted,” he said. “So from an aesthetic perspective, the pervious was a really great fit. It worked much better than asphalt would have.” Pervious concrete is also a “green product.” “It naturally filters the water,” Roberson said. “And it is inherently a more natural

product than asphalt, which is petroleum based.”

According to Roberson, though the parking lot won’t have to be re-paved like an asphalt lot would at some point, there is some basic maintenance that must be done to ensure the pervious concrete’s effectiveness. “They will have to be careful since they have the gravel parking spaces,” he said. “You don’t want gravel pieces to migrate over and cover the openings of the pervious concrete. They will have to watch that and keep it clean, and they know that. And once a year, a company will come and vacuum it.”

The attorneys will also have to make sure that large, heavy trucks aren’t routinely driving on the pervious portions of the parking lot. “It’s not really a drawback, especially for the type of traffic this lot will have, but they do have to be aware of it,” Roberson said.

Roberson’s clients are very satisfied with the outcome of the project on all three levels: cost, function and looks. “The owners are extremely pleased,” he said. “The pervious concrete works exactly as it should and matches the surroundings perfectly.” ■ Jennifer Kornegay