

A Clean Look for Luxury Living

A new luxury apartment community in Montgomery, Alabama, has a lot of little extras – crown moulding, 9-foot ceilings and garden tubs. The property goes that extra mile, too, offering amenities like a WiFi hot spot around the beautiful resort-style pool and splash pad, and a media room with billiards table. These are the amenities that catch a tenant's eye, but there is more luxury at Carrington Park literally right under their feet – concrete.

While some might not consider concrete exactly luxurious, in reality the selection of this durable material adds value by ensuring the longevity of the development, while also adding beauty in an unexpected place – the parking lot. Concrete's clean look creates a good first impression and a lasting sense of quality for customers, tenants and employees.

The Carrington Park project used 501,000 square feet of concrete for the parking lot, sidewalks and slabs, as well as an additional 12,200 square feet for curbs and gutters. The pool also is made of concrete; an additional 10,000 square feet, stamped into a tile pattern and then dyed.

The choice of concrete for the extensive parking area surrounding the complex is unusual, but becoming less so,

according to industry experts. Traditionally, parking lots have been constructed of asphalt, but more and more often today owners and developers are requesting concrete parking lots for their durability, ease of maintenance, long service life, beauty and initial cost competitiveness.

Concrete's price has been getting more competitive as compared to asphalt partly because asphalt is a petroleum-based product and reflects the impact of higher oil prices. Even when fuel prices drop, asphalt can still be expensive because the availability of liquid asphalt has decreased because oil refineries are producing less of it. Concrete, on the other hand, is readily available in ample supply, with a dependable price point. It's something developers can count on for long-range planning.

Concrete is certainly comparable in cost, but contractors will often choose it in spite of any price difference because of its advantages, says Pep Pilgreen, president of Pilgreen Engineering, which handled the Carrington Park project. Very often the decision to use concrete is based on the contractor's preference and its ease of installation based on an individual project's requirements, he says.

Concrete was an ideal selection for Carrington Park, Pilgreen says, because the area includes a number of buildings in close proximity to one another. In that type of situation, concrete lends a precision that other materials simply cannot, he says.

“This is a very dense apartment complex, as far as the number of units and acres, so the buildings are fairly close together,” he explains. “This is complicated by the fact that there are varieties in the apartment buildings that makes grading for drainage away from the buildings very complicated. Concrete is much more precise when you’re trying to get fine grading points as opposed to asphalt. You can pour concrete as flat as you want it, exactly like you want it,” he says.

In close quarters, as in the Carrington complex, concrete also is easier to manage physically, as far as installation. “With concrete, you can use smaller equipment to get in there where the buildings are tight and the driveways are close together,” Pilgreen says.

Constructed by Morrow Construction Company, project contractors for the Carrington Park apartments first placed the curb and gutter to establish a grade, then prepped and poured the concrete, cast in place, tailgated from a ready-mix truck. They installed the concrete in phases, and were able to place and finish between 15,000 to 20,000 square feet per day.



“It’s much, much easier to phase with concrete than it is with asphalt,” Pilgreen said. “So, in a lot of ways concrete really was much better suited for this job,” Pilgreen said. “We’ve done similar projects with asphalt, and I can promise you this one was easier.”

Placing concrete does take a bit more time and care than using asphalt, as it must be done in sections during the drying phase to prevent cracking. However, once the concrete has properly cured and dried, it has a naturally strong tensile strength that holds up extremely well under daily use. Contractors should use proper uniform subgrade support when pouring the concrete, and should use expansion or isolation joints where necessary to separate slabs from fixed objects like walls or columns that may cause

stress. Steel mesh or the addition of synthetic fibers also might be options for increasing the impact, shatter and abrasion resistance of the finished surface.

Concrete is a cost-saver in the long run. Normal maintenance costs of asphalt pavements, which include sealing, re-striping, resurfacing and loss of business during maintenance operations, greatly exceed those needed for concrete, which is a more durable paving material that will require much less maintenance over the course of its lifetime.

“Concrete typically holds up longer than asphalt,” Pilgreen says. “Almost all of the complexes we put in have some concrete in them,

simply because of the load-bearing requirements of different areas, even if asphalt is used in other sections. It depends on what kind of traffic loads will be on it. For example a place with a dumpster or with heavy equipment or heavier traffic, concrete is better.”

Pilgreen says a possible drawback of concrete is that it can more difficult to replace, but that is countered by the ability to replace or repair small portions, in sections, without disturbing traffic flow and activity in other areas. And, once a section of concrete is replaced, it won’t have the appearance of being patched unless the original section is particularly old.

Another possible hitch when using concrete is protecting the repair until it has properly set. Pilgreen points out that when doing a patch on asphalt, it is less likely that the material will be affected if disturbed in the interim, even if it’s run over before completely set. Alternatively, “Kids do like to write their name in concrete before it sets up,” Pilgreen said. “Nobody does that in asphalt!” he says with a laugh.

Concrete parking areas and pavements are also environmentally friendly in many ways. Concrete’s light-colored surface is brighter, requiring less lighting, reducing energy use and cost. Also, concrete’s lighter finish attracts and retains less heat, and as a result, its cooler surface leads to cooler stormwater runoff, which benefits groundwater, streams and lakes.

While not used in this particular project, another even more environmentally friendly option available for concrete parking areas is pervious concrete. Pervious concrete pavement is a unique mixture that actually allows water to seep through it, back into the ground. This material is very ecologically friendly, and helps save project costs by reducing the need for retention ponds and other stormwater management devices. Pervious concrete may actually be required in some geographical areas, such as shoreline developments, where drainage is a particular concern.

■ Wendi Lewis

