

# ASCENT<sup>®</sup>

DESIGNING WITH PRECAST

## HOW PRECAST BUILDS

PRECAST CONCRETE:  
AMBITIOUS AND  
BEAUTIFUL





AWARD

# 2019 SIDNEY FREEDMAN CRAFTSMANSHIP AWARD: NORDSTROM, NEW YORK, N.Y.

THE NORDSTROM PROJECT HAD MANY CHALLENGES, INCLUDING EXTENSIVE  
CORNICE AND BULLNOSE PIECES OF TWO DIFFERENT STYLES FOR VARYING LEVELS

**BY TOM BAGSARIAN**

---

Walk down any street in Manhattan and one can't help but be struck by the architectural gems reaching upward to the sky. Some are modern and sleek and couldn't have been imagined by architects who toiled in decades past. Other more squat and brawny structures have existed for decades, showing off the hardy strength one would expect in a tough city like New York.

Such a plethora of architecture makes the structure honored for the 2019 Sidney Freedman Craftsmanship Award even more impressive. It's hard for a building to get attention among so many other awe-inspiring structures in such an architecturally rich city. But the century-old Nordstrom building at 58th Street and Broadway did just that.







*Gate Precast Company's plant in Ashland City, Tenn., was honored with the 2019 Sidney Freedman Craftsmanship Award for its work on the Nordstrom store façade in New York City. Photo: Erin Derby Photography.*





PCI recently awarded the 2019 Sidney Freedman Craftsmanship Award to Gate Precast Company's plant in Ashland City, Tenn. The annual honor recognizes PCI-certified plants for excellence in manufacturing and craftsmanship of architectural precast concrete and glass-fiber-reinforced concrete structures and individual components.

## 1950s Era

The project required retrofitting of the building's first two floors to replace a 1950s-era aluminum and glass storefront. The new façade had to match the original white marble of the upper floors and blend aesthetically with the rest of the building. The original stone façade was removed for a more modern marble, glass, and aluminum version. Architectural precast concrete and high levels of craftsmanship allowed Gate Precast Company to successfully execute this ambitious, high-profile project. The building is listed by the New York Architectural Preservation Commission.

The project included many challenges on many fronts, including extensive cornice and bullnose pieces of two different styles for varying levels, buildups on every piece, and supplemental steel that was added to the existing riveted steel superstructure to accommodate the precast concrete loads and connections.



A crane lifts a piece of precast concrete at Gate Precast's plant in Ashland City, Tenn. Photo: Gate Precast Company.

Due to the façade's complexity, most of the molds took two days to set up, while the actual building of the molds took several weeks to complete. The molds consisted of multiple height steps and radii all in one mold. The form buildup was built to the highest level of detail the carpenters could achieve, stacking several layers of wood of various shapes and sizes within about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. Crews used different mold-finishing techniques to achieve the desired detail and crispness of the finished product.



The Nordstrom project presented several challenges. See the digital issue of *Ascent* to learn how these challenges were overcome.

*An extensive color-testing process matched the color, texture, and pattern of the existing stone façade with new precast concrete material.*  
*Photo: Gate Precast Company.*

The projects' many different flat and radiused forms drew the attention of judges. "Each one of these forms required high-end detailing to match the existing building's marble façade," notes Matt Graf, executive vice president of sales at International Concrete Products, who served on the judging panel. "Great attention to detail was needed with the forming, precast handling, shipping, and replicating the marble veining in the concrete mix. The craftsmanship replicated that of the original 100-year-old building."

The rigorous aesthetic requirements demanded extensive hand-sanding for delicate details, custom-fabricated lettering, veining to match the existing marble, and special mixture proportions.

### **Getting the Design Right**

"We went through an extensive color testing process to match the color, texture, and pattern of the existing stone façade with new precast material," says Trevor Willis, senior project manager with J.T. Magen & Company Inc. in New York, the project's general contractor. "The original façade had variations in color and texture, so we had to find a compromise that would satisfy the design intent and Landmarks Preservation Commission review. There were many mock-ups throughout this process, but thankfully we were able to satisfy all the requirements and get into fabrication."

Although this was not a huge project by any means, there were many complexities. "Although this was a relatively small project, it required more time in coordination, R&D, mold building, and planning than most large projects," says Chris Cruze, executive vice president of sales at Gate Precast Company's plant in Ashland City. "Every aspect of the job was a challenge. Our invaluable team of modelers, engineers, and craftsmen eagerly embraced all of these challenges with passion and zeal. The result of their efforts was extraordinary." ●

*Each year, the Sidney Freedman Craftsmanship Award recognizes PCI-certified plants for excellence in manufacturing and craftsmanship of architectural precast and glass-fiber-reinforced concrete structures and individual components. The award is named after retired PCI Director of Architectural Systems Sidney Freedman, who was a leading voice in precast concrete architectural design for more than 43 years with the organization. Visit [pci.org](http://pci.org) in the spring for information on submitting for the 2020 award.*

