



Eastern front

Completion of a 10-year development at the iconic Australian War Memorial in Canberra, was celebrated in style when the project won the Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Public Architecture in the 2011 National Architecture Awards.

The major development involved the refurbishment and new additions to the War Memorial's eastern precinct, comprising construction of a signature staircase linking the courtyard with the renovated cafe, a 200-place underground car park, amenities block, bus parking bays and extensive landscaping works including a distinctive retaining wall.

Precast concrete features in the project – with elements supplied by S.A. Precast - include the retaining wall, staircase and the architectural elements of the landscaping works. Each called for an entirely different surface treatment.

First was the 40-panel, black reconstructed granite retaining wall. "The challenge here was to make sure the finish on the new wall exactly matched that of the existing walls," explains Troy Pincin from S.A. Precast who oversaw much of the project, including the transportation of some 15 truckloads of precast from South Australia. "We also supplied the wall panels for the two previous stages but even so, this was a very specialised finish and there was a real art to getting it right. We used a very coarse diamond rub to expose the aggregate, which gives a polished finish that's very distinctive."



Project Owner

Australian War Memorial

Architect

Johnson Pilton Walker


Builders

PBS Building

Precast Manufacturer

SA Precast

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The staircase called for an entirely different approach and presented different challenges. The architect required a special non-slip treatment for the grey off-form steps: grey stainless steel strips running the length of the stairs. Each step was cast, then saw-cut with four grooves. Stainless steel strips that were raised about 3mm above the finished concrete were then epoxied into the steps to provide the non-slip finish. This required pinpoint accuracy because the 1.7 metre-wide steps were laid 15 abreast and the non-slip grooves had to line up perfectly. The end result combines both form and function, forming a striking feature of the finished project.

The precast landscaping elements in the development were also custom-made to the architect's specifications, because the mass produced alternative would not give the desired finish. This included bollards, planter boxes and a number of grey, off-form class one precast steps.

Throughout the job, the War Memorial remained open to the public, with contractors required to work in with the opening hours of the museum and to ensure minimal disruption on the site. "All in all, the job went exceptionally smoothly and I think it's been a credit to all involved," says Troy. "When the project received the award it was like the icing on the cake – it's always great to be involved with a project that earns that kind of recognition."

Precast winner in National Architecture Awards

Topping the list of award winners in the prestigious 2011 National Architecture Awards was the Australian War Memorial Eastern Precinct in the ACT. Also, a Recipient of The Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Public Architecture.