Biogen Idec “Nobel Facility”
5200 Research Place San Diego, CA

Project Spotlight: May 2005

LOCATION: 5200 Research Place San Diego, CA
OWNER: Biogen Idec Cambridge MA
ARCHITECT: HOK Culver City CA
SPECIFICATION CONSULTANT: CDC Consulting Long Beach CA
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Turner Construction San Diego CA
PLASTERING SUBCONTRACTOR: Raymond Interior Systems San Diego CA
STONE SUBCONTRACTOR: Klaser Tile Chula Vista CA
STONE SUPPLIER: Ansum and Ash Minneapolis MN
STONE INSTALLATION SYSTEM: LATICRETE International, Inc. Bethany CT
LATICRETE DISTRIBUTOR: Arizona Tile San Diego CA
First-Class San Diego Project Chooses LATICRETE

By XXXX XXXXX

Biogen Idec Inc. operates on the cutting edge of scientific and technological advancement. It spends nearly $500 million dollars per year on research and employs over 1,000 R&D employees, including approximately 400 in discovery research. As part of their growth plan, Biogen Idec has recently finished a new campus consisting of 6 buildings in San Diego, CA dedicated primarily to discovery research.

“In designing workspaces, Biogen Idec focuses on cultivating the passion and discipline that drive our employees to transform scientific discoveries into advances in human healthcare” according to Jose Juves, Associate Director of Public Affairs for Biogen Idec. “We strive to promote connectivity and collaboration,” says Juves.

Any successful construction project also requires connectivity and collaboration between the players involved, and this truth was proved out by the team that constructed and finished this remarkable project.

One of the most striking features of the architectural design is the bold use of over 110,000 square feet of clefted Indian sandstone as an exterior veneer. Each building is clad in one of three colors which compliment and blend naturally with the surrounding environment.

A project of this magnitude, in an area with a potential for major seismic activity, calls for thoughtful design and even more careful execution. HOK Architects engaged CDC Consulting to write the installation specifications for the exterior veneer. Having had success previously using the LATICRETE® System on similar projects CDC contacted local LATICRETE Technical Representative Rick Coury to discuss the project.

“The main concern was how to assure the long-term performance of the veneer — that it remain well-bonded without any cracking or delamination,” said Coury. “John Wair of CDC and I worked together with LATICRETE Technical Services to create a code-compliant installation specification that would qualify for the LATICRETE Warranty and provide optimal ease of use for the installers of the scratch and brown coat, and the stone.”

The final specification called for site-mixed sand and cement fortified with LATICRETE® 8510 Bonding Admix to be applied as a scratch and brown coat by the plastering subcontractor. LATICRETE 4237 Latex Thin-Set Mortar Additive plus LATICRETE 211 Crete Filler Powder was specified as the stone adhesive. For aesthetic reasons, the design architect chose to leave the joints between the stone empty so as to enhance the texture of the finish with dramatic shadows of the stones’ edges.

San Diego County is the adhered veneer capital of the USA. Starting in the mid-1980’s, commercial projects of all kinds have been finished with thin brick, ceramic and porcelain tiles, and thin stone. Typical substrates are cement backerboard, or a cement plaster “scratch and brown coat” and occasionally concrete or concrete block. As a result of the high demand for this type of finish, major tile subcontractors in the San Diego area have developed highly efficient techniques for installation and quality control.

Because of the scale and scope of the stone installation, when the Biogen Idec project was put out for bid, only a few local tile subcontractors were capable of executing the entire project and providing sufficient insurance bonding. One that was in the final cut was Klaser Tile of Chula Vista CA. “It was clear to me from the start that everyone involved wanted this job done right with first-class products and correct installation methods” said Kent Klaser, VP of Operations. “That’s the only way we want to approach doing an adhered veneer.”

Klaser Tile has specialized in adhered veneers for much of the past two decades, and their involvement in the technically complex Petco Park project in San Diego was a deciding factor in their being awarded the Biogen Idec project, according to
Klaser. “The Petco project was very high-profile in our city, and there was a lot of concern about using adhered veneer due to liability concerns. Liability need not be an issue with our adhered veneers as our quality control systems and our use of quality installation products assures safety and long-term performance,” says Klaser. “The key players at HOK and Turner Construction took a tour of the ongoing work at Petco and came away convinced we were the right choice for Biogen Idec.”

Quality control is of course critical to the success of any tile and stone installation firm. The stakes are raised significantly when the installation is made on a vertical surface. Klaser’s process to assure quality includes giving each installer training in the precise method and sequence for preparing the substrate and each piece of stone, “burning in” the mortar and notching it on the substrate, “backbuttering” the stone, placing, sliding and beating in the stone, and then removing the stone to assure 100% coverage. “That’s how we do it on every piece of stone” Kent Klaser asserts. “Every single stone is set and then pulled and double checked.”

Greg Griswold was foreman for Klaser Tile at Biogen Idec “and quality control day-to-day was one of his most important responsibilities” says Klaser. “Greg did a terrific job working with the GC, and with the other trades to assure the project stayed on track in terms of time and budget.”

Many pre-installation meetings were held before and after bidding with the Architect, GC and involved sub-contractors. Early communication helped flush out potential issues so that they could be resolved before they became problems.

The stone was to be applied to a scratch and brown coat base. “There were several meetings before the plastering work began” said Rick Coury of LATICRETE. “Raymond Interiors is a first-class company and though they knew of LATICRETE, they had not used our additives in their process before.

We worked with them, even doing full-scale mock-ups, to make sure that everything would work as we said it would. In the end, their productivity was improved significantly as a result of talking things through beforehand. That communication means a lot when a subcontractor is counting on pumping hundreds of square yards of plaster each day.”

Klaser Tile invested time even before being awarded the job to meet with HOK Architects regarding correct placement of expansion joints within the plaster work as well as within the stone. “Often on veneer projects the architects don’t include any information on the drawings about expansions joints. This can be a real problem when it comes time to do the work, especially as multiple trades are usually involved,” says Kent Klaser. “HOK recognized this as an important issue, and invited our founder Bill Klaser and me up to their office to go over the details. At the end of that process, we had drawings to bid from that were virtually 100% accurate in terms of the placement of the expansion joints. That made things fair and equal for everyone who was bidding on the work, and assured a much better final result.”

“In the end, we came in ahead of schedule and well under budget. Working with this team was a pleasure. Turner Construction made sure all the trades were well coordinated, Raymond Interiors did a great job giving us a solid and true surface to bond to, and Rick Coury of LATICRETE was always accessible when we needed him. We use LATICRETE frequently and have always been pleased with the result,” Klaser concluded.

Next time you are in San Diego, take a good look around. From any freeway you’ll see some great work done in tile and stone enhancing commercial architecture of all types. Our industry would do well to actively promote adhered veneers in every city as an alternative to less attractive and higher maintenance finish systems. Klaser Tile, and many other quality tile installation firms in Southern California have already made a specialty of doing just that.