



Innovative Tile and Stone
Installation Systems

Albert Heijn XL Supermarket Chain

Project Spotlight: July 2008

A photograph of the exterior of an Albert Heijn XL supermarket. The building has a facade of horizontal wooden slats. The name "Albert Heijn" is written in large, blue, 3D block letters across the upper part of the facade. To the right, there is a circular blue sign with "XL" in white. Below the main sign, there are glass windows and doors. In the foreground, there is a parking lot with several cars (a white car, a blue car, and a red car) and a bicycle rack with several bicycles parked. The sky is clear and blue.

Albert Heijn

LOCATION:

Rotterdam, Netherlands

OWNER:

Ahold Corporation Center, Netherlands

TILE CONTRACTOR:

Smits Tegel Natuursteen Projecten B.V., Netherlands

TILE INSTALLATION SYSTEM:

LATICRETE International, Inc., Bethany, CT

Albert Heijn XL Supermarket Chain

By Ron Treister



Throughout Europe, a typical supermarket floor measures roughly 1,500 - 2,000 m². A great percentage of that expanse consists of aisles, entryways and exit lanes, all of which must endure a daily pounding from a high concentration of constant foot-traffic, heavy load-bearing shopping carts and other cumbersome machinery necessary for the upkeep of these modern retail establishments. Savvy store managers know that a high-performance floor covering installation is a necessity. Conversely, they are aware that a failed flooring installation subsequently needing repair will impede the customers' shopping experience, and will need to be constantly monitored (which takes time away from employees' more important activities) and ultimately, will result in a downturn of sales. One of Europe's largest and most progressive grocery chains, Albert Heijn, knows very well the importance of having high-performance flooring installations in its state-of-the-art supermarkets.

The Albert Heijn legacy had its beginnings in 1887 in the Netherlands, just north of Amsterdam in the small village of Oostzaan. It was there that a young man named Albert Heijn, who was working in his father's grocery store, had the vision of developing a mega-store which would offer customers a one-stop shopping experience where customers could purchase all of their weekly necessities, not just their groceries. As his concept soon caught on and over the years, his dream became a reality, and his stores began appearing all over the Netherlands. With a well-honed roll-out plan, heady management and a program geared to always "give the customer what he or she wanted," the company grew and has just kept growing. Albert Heijn went public in 1948, ultimately becoming the country's largest grocery chain. Today, there are 1750+ Albert Heijn supermarkets around the world.

During the early 1990's, when Royal Ahold (the firm's umbrella holding company) was rolling out one Albert Heijn after another, it was imperative that the building materials specified for each new location were not only top-quality, but also easy to install and almost immediately ready to perform at the highest levels. In particular, this pertained to the flooring installations at every Albert Heijn facility. It was around that time that Ahold officials met with Dr. Henry M. Rothberg, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of LATICRETE International, Inc., and Erno de Bruijn, LATICRETE President, International Division to develop a partnership that would remain strong to this day.

"Dr. Rothberg explained that not only would our fast-setting premium latex adhesive fulfill the original promise of contributing to faster ceramic tile renovations," said de Bruijn. "But that the material was so strong, that there would never be any cracked tiles or delamination of the finished tile work. This meant that in the future, the stores would not lose time when making repairs. It is because the LATICRETE materials lived up to those original promises, that Albert Heijn stores have since insisted on LATICRETE."

This partnership became the foundation for the floors of all new supermarkets and the renovation work on the floors of existing ones, each having specifications written which call for the LATICRETE® System. Smits Tegel Natuursteen Projecten B.V. (Smits B.V.), one of the Netherlands' premier ceramic tile installation contractors, is responsible for all the tile installation projects for Albert Heijn stores. Under the direction of Roel Smits, this world-class company has been a firm believer in the LATICRETE System for more than a decade, installing more than 1,250,000 m² of ceramic tile exclusively using LATICRETE materials at Albert Heijn locations worldwide. And Smits' crews don't just install the tile correctly... they install it quickly, as well. The record for Smits B.V. to date for setting the tile material and then grouting it is 1,600 m² in one work day.

In November of 2007, Smits B.V. was contracted to install the ceramic tile floor at the Albert Heijn XL hypermarket in Rotterdam. More than double the size of a typical 1,500 m² store, this 3,500 m² installation consisted of 30cm x 30cm ceramic tiles set in place with LATICRETE® 4237R Rapid Latex Additive mixed with LATICRETE 211 Powder. Smits' crew carefully laid out the floor plan then quickly installed the tiles from one end of the building to the other over a concrete substrate in less than five days. "We have been using LATICRETE materials at all Albert Heijn stores for quite some time now," stated Roel Smits. "Our crews are very comfortable with using these products which allow us to fix the tile and then fill the joints very quickly. We have done over 500 Albert Heijn locations, all with the LATICRETE System."

The vision of young Albert Heijn more than a century ago, of having a one-stop source for all foodstuffs and related materials, has more than come true. Stores are stocked with everyday items which customers need; and stores are built with quality materials needed to keep customers safe. "We're proud to be part of the Albert Heijn building team," declared Erno de Bruijn. "Every good store needs a good floor. And the LATICRETE System will be there to ensure that each floor is installed correctly."

