



ARCHITECTS PERSPECTIVE: ELEVATING ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION WITH PREFABRICATION

CLIENT:
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
SAN FRANCISCO**

ARCHITECT:
KIERAN TIMBERLAKE

LEAD ARCHITECT:
ELI ALLEN, AIA

LOCATION:
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

When UCSF made prefabrication a requirement for its Tidelands Student Housing project, it turned the traditional design process on its head. Instead of being selected late as a delivery strategy, offsite construction became a design driver from day one. For the architects at KieranTimberlake, this meant rethinking how architecture could unfold within a manufacturing-first mindset.

While the UCSF design team had initial reservations about the need for early coordination in a fast-track project, as well as the potential for expression with a GFRP barrier wall system, close collaboration with Clark Pacific's experienced team allowed for a positive design outcome well-integrated into the building structure and design context.

But what initially seemed like a constraint quickly became a catalyst for deeper collaboration, between Clark Pacific, KieranTimberlake, Tipping, Skanska and UCSF. By aligning early and often, the team discovered new ways to preserve design intent while leveraging the efficiencies of prefabrication.

What began as a challenge soon evolved into a creative breakthrough, not only for the project, but also for the team's perspective on the design of GFRC barrier wall systems.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

UCSF Tidelands delivered 595 graduate student housing units in record time—meeting a tight budget, aggressive schedule, and high-performance goals. With Clark Pacific's Infinite Facade, the team reduced the design schedule by six months while achieving sustainability, seismic resilience, and design flexibility at scale.

For KieranTimberlake, the project marked an evolution in understanding the potential of GFRC barrier wall prefabricated systems. By exploring the opportunities within the prefabricated system through a collaborative early-design process, the design team was able to unlock the inherent possibilities and beauty of GFRC facades.

The project became a touch point for prefabricated GFRC facade design, offering a paradigm for future projects. It reinforced the value of early, cross-disciplinary integration and demonstrated that tight parameters can unlock unexpected opportunities.

For more details on the prefabricated construction of The Tidelands, check out our UCSF Tidelands Case Study.

ABOUT THE ARCHITECT

Eli Allen, AIA, a Principal at KieranTimberlake, approaches architecture through a multidisciplinary lens, blending facade performance, environmental research, and refined design. Since joining KieranTimberlake in 2011, he



has led complex, high-impact projects including working on and leading the Pennsylvania Masterplan and the U.S. Consulate in Curaçao.

UCSF Tidelands marked a first for Allen: his introduction to prefabrication at scale. The project required a mindset shift, especially around coordination and early decision-making.

That early collaboration proved pivotal. As the project progressed, what initially seemed like a limitation became a source of creative momentum. Instead of restricting design, prefabrication became a framework for clarity, innovation, and control.

TECHNICAL INTEGRATION: BUILT-IN PERFORMANCE

One of the most significant shifts for the team was how prefabrication combined multiple trades into a single, factory-built system. Each panel arrived complete—with punched windows, louvers, insulation, and air seals already integrated.

KieranTimberlake's Eli Allen reflected that installing the full window assembly and sealing it to the GFRC assembly in the factory reduced complexity in the field. It provided a level of precision and control that are much harder to achieve in the field.



Mockups played a critical role—from material samples to full-scale facade sections—enabling the team to make confident, early decisions. This upfront investment paid dividends, ensuring that color, reveals, and joint treatments were resolved before production.

ARCHITECT PERSPECTIVE – KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Factory-built components delivered a level of finish rarely achievable in the field
- Installation was fast, coordinated, and remarkably clean
- Prefab's "constraints" became an unexpected source of creative opportunity

Architect Eli Allen's advice for architects new to prefabrication:

"The beauty of prefabrication is found within its constraints. Learn those boundaries, and you'll find meaningful, durable solutions that are deeply responsive to context."

Early coordination was essential, particularly around embeds, interfaces, and movement joints. Structural performance, especially seismic behavior, was engineered into the facade from the start.

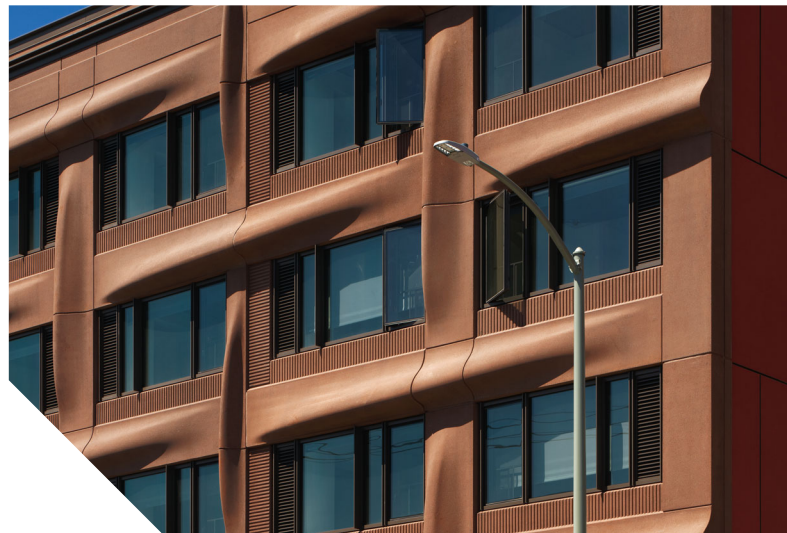
A manufactured facade ensures constructability while incorporating built-in safety features.

EXECUTION AT SCALE: FAST, PREDICTABLE, BEAUTIFUL

The KieranTimberlake team was struck by speed and quality of installation.

"Instead of months of stick-building and layering trades, the facade was up in weeks. The quality from the plant was built-in—and it showed." Eli Allen noted. That same precision also enabled seismic strategies to be engineered directly into the facade, ensuring performance as well as aesthetics.

Clark Pacific manufactured panels in parallel with structure erection. Each truckload delivered thousands of square feet of finished facade, reducing site congestion and accelerating the schedule.





LESSONS LEARNED

- Begin collaboration early—before design is locked
- Use mockups not just for aesthetics, but to validate performance
- Let constraints guide the process, not restrict it

The experience on UCSF reinforced KieranTimberlake's legacy of the integration of early collaboration and support for off-site fabrication. At its best, facade design is not a downstream package but an integral, early-phase collaboration between architect, fabricator, client, and builder. Early engagement can reduce compromise, enhance clarity, and deliver greater design control from concept to completion.

“For architects exploring prefabrication, the earlier you engage, the more power you retain. Prefab done right doesn’t diminish creativity—it amplifies it.”



Eli Allen
PRINCIPAL
KIERAN TIMBERLAKE