BUILDING Poured-Concrete HOMES

Cast-in-place walls are fast and strong, and make the most of available labor

In 2000, I moved from Kentucky to Florida to manage Solid Wall Systems, a firm undertaking the construction of thousands of new residences for Mercedes Homes. Instead of conventional framing, these homes would be built using a cast-in-place wall system above a slab-on-grade foundation (see Figure 1, next page). I'd been running a successful foundation business back home, so making the transition to above-grade work was fairly simple.

Concrete-block walls began to replace wood framing in Florida's residential construction many years ago. Between fluctuating lumber prices, voracious tropical termites, and Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the shift was only logical. Concrete prices are historically stable, block is entirely termite proof, and concrete's mass provides superior wind resistance, as well as an ideal surface for a low-maintenance stucco finish.

The Case for Poured Walls

Even a skilled block mason is limited to a personal output of between 75 and 150 blocks per day, depending on the number of window and door openings and other details. A single 8x8x16-inch block is equal to about 9/10 square foot of wall area, so it typically takes a team of experienced masons several days to