

APPLICATOR

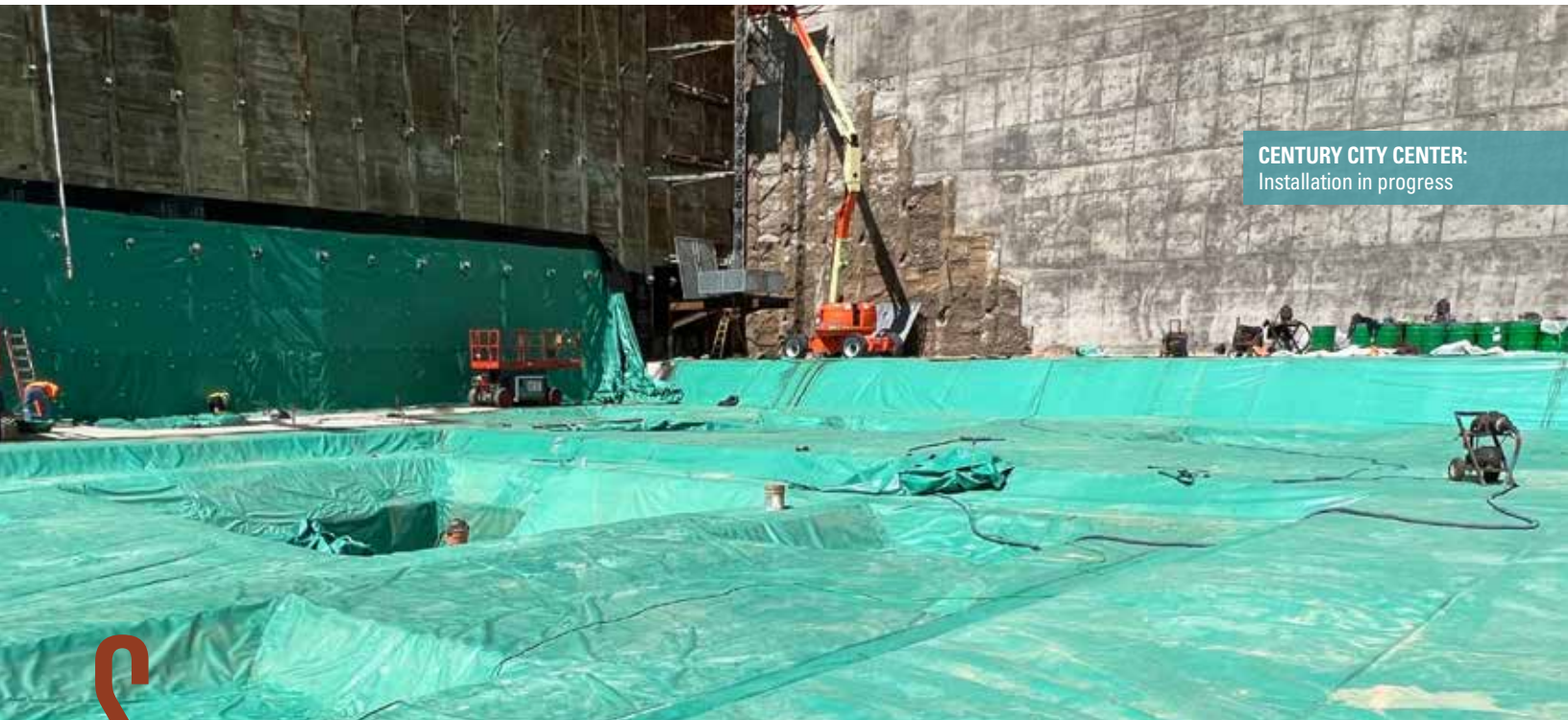
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LOS ANGELES'S CONSTRUCTION COMEBACK: WATERPROOFING THAT PROTECTS TWO HIGH-PROFILE SITES

BY SCOTT SCHENDEL



CENTURY CITY CENTER:
Installation in progress

Six years ago, the pandemic changed everything, and construction was notably affected. With people working from home, gathering in small groups outside once it was safe, and avoiding travel, attracting crowds was the last thing on anyone's mind. While some work from home policies remain as they were with many remote employees, in-office or hybrid work has bounced back. And so has new construction.

According to Colliers, Kastle Systems data showed rising office attendance through 2024–2025, with overall occupancy at 54% of pre-pandemic levels and 78% in Class A-plus buildings.¹ Further, a Colliers report from last year stated that 83% of global CEOs anticipate a return to full-time office

attendance by 2026, signaling a potential end to hybrid work models. This is up from 64% in 2023.² Outdated, pre-pandemic office space will require upgrades and retrofits in many cases, while new construction may be necessary to accommodate new technologies, approaches to work, and company needs. With more people going back to work, they will also need transportation or parking.

Starting in 2024, two new massive, high-profile projects in Los Angeles reflect this shift. Century City Center is a brand-new building located at 1950 Avenue of the Stars, and its construction is a testament to the area's resilience and continued development during and after the pandemic. Echelon Studios is a film production complex in the heart of Hollywood – the first purpose-built studio campus in 20 years – that redevelops the site of a former Sears building. Both post-pandemic projects demonstrate dedication to innovation, and the need for in-person

places to work. Both also required significant amounts of waterproofing. Here's how each separate project team devised and installed solutions for each site.

CASE STUDY 1: Century City Center

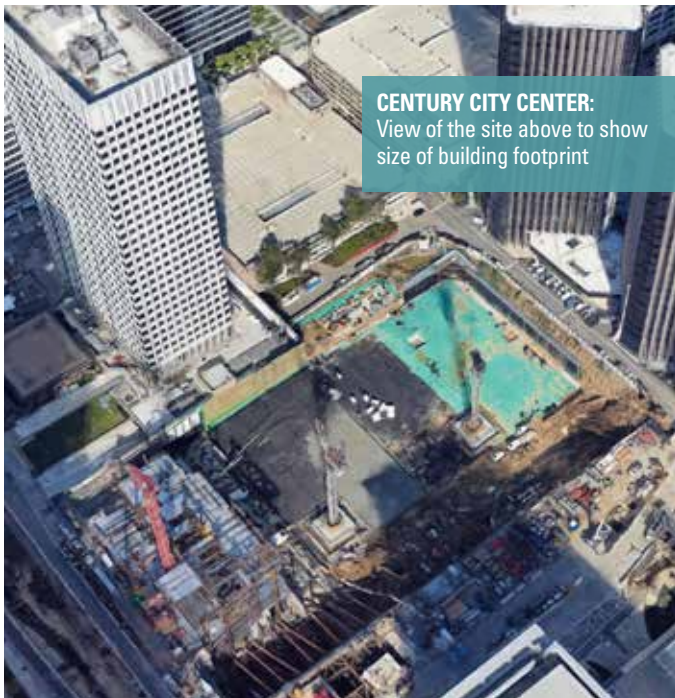
Century City is an exclusive neighborhood in Los Angeles, bordering some of the most expensive local real estate and well-known around the world for its affluence. It's in proximity to Beverly Hills, Holmby Hill, and near the famous Nakatomi Plaza. It is important to note that despite a decline in the office market since the pandemic hit, the project secured major tenants – anchored by the CAA casting agency. So far, CAA has leased 400,000 square feet, investment firm Clearlake Capital leased the top eight floors spanning approximately 150,000 square feet, and Sidley Austin, a law firm, leased 75,000 square feet, according to the *LA Times*.³ This further demonstrates that

“Outdated, pre-pandemic office space will require upgrades and retrofits in many cases.”

demand for top-tier space is strong, and signals a strong financial confidence in the area.

The architect had urban integration in mind, replacing a long-vacant site

with a tower that aims for LEED platinum certification, focusing on energy efficiency and, most importantly, worker well-being. And for those who choose to commute, the tower is connected to the metro plaza to enhance pedestrian activity. In fact, the opening of Metro D line extension coincides with the projected completion of the project.



CENTURY CITY CENTER:
View of the site above to show size of building footprint

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While not directly situated in the water table, preemptive protection was needed to ensure that if the structure was subject to hydrostatic conditions in the future, it would be protected. The structure is also located within the LA City Methane Hazard Zone or Buffer Zone where underground methane-bearing sediments release combustible soil gas. Subsurface methane gas is highly flammable and poses a severe combustion risk when trapped, making mitigation essential to protect occupant health. Subsequently, the below grade system needed to serve as both waterproofing, methane barrier and be amenable to installation over a large foundation footprint. Projects of this complexity highlight a growing reality in below-grade construction: When a single assembly must simultaneously address hydrostatic risk, and impacted soils, the expertise of geotechnical engineers, waterproofing consultants, and manufacturers must unite to ensure the right product is specified.

“While not directly situated in the water table, preemptive protection was needed to ensure that if the structure was subject to hydrostatic conditions in the future, it would be protected.”

Johnson Fain, the building’s architect, and consultant ABBAE specified EPRO’s E.Protect+ for 175,000 square feet underslab and 80,000 square feet at the walls to protect the building envelope. The system was installed by J.P. Gergen, Co.

“This site had many challenges that were constantly evolving and subsequently required attention to detail and swift responses,” says Nate Shamosh, J.P. Gergen Co.



E.Protect+ is a composite system that unites waterproofing and contaminant vapor intrusion protection compatible with cast-in-place and shotcrete foundation walls. It combines three effective waterproofing systems into one to create a very high level of composite below-grade building protection. It can also be installed quickly over large areas, such as this site.

This 37-story tower will ultimately have 730,000 square feet of offices above parking, and retail space when complete.

CASE STUDY 2: Echelon Studios

Echelon Studios is a major development for Hollywood. Designed as a vertical movie studio lot, the structure repurposes a former Sears site along Santa Monica Boulevard. In its entirety, the complex will span five acres with four 19,000 square-foot soundstages, one 15,000 square foot flex stage, and a 90,000 square foot “creative village” of office space, according to the project’s design architect, RIOS.⁴ Among myriad other features, Echelon Studios also features ground level retail and restaurants, offering a better and integrated workplace. Significantly, the project is entertainment focused and provides a space to meet the growing demand from streaming services and creators in Hollywood.

The space also aims to bring the outside in and incorporate many natural elements. RIOS explains that throughout the towers and bungalow village, lush shared and private garden terraces and paseos support a modern work style with an indoor-outdoor connection.

The Echelon project also required a robust, comprehensive waterproofing system due to the site’s location in the water table. The building foundation required waterproofing to run continuously around the walls and under the mat slab to create a fully protected building envelope. Waterproofing



was applied directly to the shoring walls and under slab. The selected waterproofing also had to be installed quickly and easily over large areas and account for utilities and other unavoidable penetrations.

“We were lucky that the design and construction team were all in unison to minimize penetrations with the PreTak membrane,” says Carizza Dayao, Specified Building Products.

PreTak is a pre-applied high-density polyethylene (HDPE) sheet waterproofing membrane combined with a pressure sensitive adhesive that fully adheres to cast in place concrete and shotcrete to prevent lateral water migration in both

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ECHELON STUDIOS:
View of waterproofing installed continuously

blindsiding shoring and under slab applications. Installation is productive and reliable with up to eight-foot-wide rolls to minimize seams.

Echelon Studios has 36,000 square feet of HDPE waterproofing membrane on the walls, and a further 216,000 square feet installed under slab.

“The Echelon project also required a robust, comprehensive waterproofing system due to the site’s location in the water table”

environmentally complex locations – a trend moving across the country. This means that the specification of below-grade systems will require increasingly close coordination between geotechnical engineers, waterproofing consultants, and installers. These two Los Angeles projects demonstrate that specifying the right

Groundbreaking took place in spring 2024, and it is anticipated that the project will be completed in 2026.

Conclusion

Urban infill development continues to intensify. Concurrently, more projects are occurring in geologically and

products to meet unique site conditions is key to below grade success.

About the Author

As Director of Product Development for EPRO, Scott Schendel manages an innovative portfolio of products that help protect structures in any site conditions, at any location. Scott has over 15 years of relevant building envelope experience with specific expertise in below-grade waterproofing for new construction and restoration applications. From large scale civil infrastructure to elevator pits and planters, Scott has a wide range of project experience. Scott is a member of IIBEC and SWR Institute. He regularly collaborates on waterproofing projects across North America.

FOOTNOTES

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4. <https://www.rios.com/projects/echelon-studios/>