THE FAÇADE BRIEF
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THE FAÇADE LEAD-TIME CHAIN

A reference for design managers — what 8 to 14 weeks actually buys, phase by phase.

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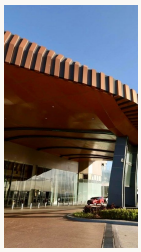

EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT WORKSHOP

Practical buildability questions to put on the design coordination table at Stage 2–3.

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LEAD EDITORIAL / INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

When to bring the façade into the room.

A practical brief on Early Contractor Involvement, written for developers, architects, and design managers planning their next high-rise envelope.

LEAD EDITORIAL

When to bring the façade into the room.

A practical brief on Early Contractor Involvement, written for developers, architects, and design managers planning their next high-rise envelope — and a quiet argument for why the convention of engaging the façade specialist after structural sign-off costs projects more than they realise.

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Most façade packages on Southeast Asian high-rise projects are tendered the same way. Structural design closes. The architect's envelope drawings are issued for tender. A façade specialist is appointed against price and scope. Construction begins. By convention, the contractor enters the conversation at RIBA Stage 4 — Technical Design — or later, after slab edge geometry and floor-to-floor heights are already locked.

This convention has a cost. It is rarely on a budget line and does not appear in any single change order. But on high-rise envelopes across the region — from Manila and Cebu to Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore — the sequence quietly produces the same outcomes: bracket geometry that fights cast-in anchor positions, deflection criteria that surface too late, fabrication windows that miss topping-out by weeks, and a six-week argument about tolerances that nobody planned for.

The argument for Early Contractor Involvement on the façade package is not commercial. It is buildability. Bringing the envelope contractor into design coordination at RIBA Stage 2 — Concept Design — and certainly before Stage 3 closes, gives the architect and structural engineer access to two pieces of data that are otherwise unavailable: the contractor's lead-time calendar, and the constraint geometry of the manufactured panel.

A unitized façade is a manufactured product, not a site-built finish. Panels are fabricated in a controlled factory environment, shipped, craned, and locked into a structure that must accept them within tight tolerances.

FIG. 01 · A UNITIZED FAÇADE READS AS A FINISH BUT PERFORMS AS A STRUCTURAL SYSTEM.

LEAD TIME REALITY

8–14 weeks before the first panel arrives.

Fabrication in a controlled facility, shipping, and on-site staging — all before installation begins.

LEAD EDITORIAL / CONTINUED

ECI is not a procurement decision. It is a buildability review.

FIG. 02 · ECO TOWER, BONIFACIO GLOBAL CITY — A UNITIZED CURTAIN WALL OFFICE ENVELOPE, PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE STREET AS THE SYSTEM READS AGAINST THE SKY.

> *The difference between good and bad architecture is the time you spend [planning] on it.*
>
> — DAVID CHIPPERFIELD

By the time most contractors are asked to mobilise, the structural slab edge has been poured and the bracket geometry is being negotiated against concrete that cannot be moved. This is the moment a tower wins or loses two months on its critical path.

The discomfort with ECI tends to come from procurement teams concerned about collapsing the firewall between design intent and construction tender. The framing is reasonable, but the solution is procedural: ECI is a coordination workshop, not a contract. The commercial conversation can — and should — come later, on properly tendered packages with a level playing field. What the workshop delivers is honest constraint data, surfaced before drawings harden.

A practical version of ECI on a high-rise façade package looks like this: a single two-hour session, held during Stage 2 design coordination, with the structural engineer, the architect, and one or two pre-qualified envelope specialists in the room. The session walks the slab edge, the bracket logic, the lead-time calendar, and the fabrication window. It identifies the four or five constraint points where the structural and architectural design assumptions need to be tested against manufacturing reality. The output is a one-page memo back to the design team. That is all.

The towers that do this rarely talk about it, because there is nothing to talk about — they hand over on programme. The towers that do not, work through the consequences in RFIs and variation orders later.

For developers and consultants planning projects with 2027 break-ground, the practical question is straightforward: **when in your design programme will the façade specialist be in the room?**

REFERENCE / LEAD-TIME CHAIN

The façade lead-time chain, in weeks.

A typical engineered envelope package, working forward from design coordination to the first panel landing on site. The 8–14 week window is a floor, not an estimate.

PHASE	CALENDAR WEEKS
Design coordination & shop drawings	2 – 4
Structural calculations & approvals	2 – 3
Material procurement (glass, aluminum)	4 – 6
Factory fabrication	4 – 6
Shipping & on-site staging	1 – 2
TOTAL BEFORE FIRST INSTALLATION	**8 – 14**

Assumes no late design changes, no remediation cycles, no permit delays. Lead-time figures reflect engineered unitized façade systems on Southeast Asian high-rise projects.

FIG. 03 · PRE-FABRICATED FAÇADE UNITS STAGED FOR SHIPMENT FROM A CONTROLLED PRODUCTION FACILITY.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

If your project is targeting topping-out in Q2 2027, the contractor for the façade package needs to be in the room with the structural engineer and the architect by Q3 2026 at the latest. Earlier is cheaper.

PRACTICAL / COORDINATION WORKSHOP

Eight questions for your next workshop.

A starting list for design managers and project leads convening Stage 2–3 coordination on a high-rise façade package. Take it into the room and work through it.

01 What slab edge profile is being assumed for the cast-in anchors?

02 What deflection criteria is the bracket system being designed to — L/175, L/240?

03 Are floor-to-floor heights still subject to revision after structural sign-off?

04 What is the assumed envelope module, and is it reflected in the column grid?

05 When does the structural programme expect topping-out, and how does that align to fabrication start?

06 Are there movement joints or seismic gaps the panel system needs to accommodate?

07 What is the project's wind load criteria — and which PAG-ASA wind zone applies?

08 Will the envelope sit on the critical path, and at what stage?

> *Bringing a contractor into design coordination is not collapsing the procurement firewall. It is a buildability review. The commercial conversation comes later.*
>
> FROM THE LEAD EDITORIAL · PAGE 02

REGIONAL BRIEF / CODES & CLIMATE

Regional context — why codes and climate reshape envelope design.

Engineered façade systems across Southeast Asia operate under a tighter set of constraints than the global benchmark — typhoon corridors, equatorial humidity, seismic exposure, and a layered code environment. The Philippine code stack is illustrative of the broader regional reality.

NSCP 2015 — STRUCTURAL CODE

The National Structural Code of the Philippines governs structural loads, including wind, and directly determines bracket sizing and panel anchorage. Towers in PAG-ASA Zone I — the typhoon corridor through Metro Manila and Northern Luzon — design to wind speeds that significantly exceed regional benchmarks.

NBC — NATIONAL BUILDING CODE

Governs occupancy classification and fire-rating implications for façade systems, with knock-on effects on glazing, framing, and spandrel construction. Façade fire-rating decisions are often best made before architectural sign-off, not after.

DPWH — REVIEW PROTOCOLS

Permit and clearance timelines should be assumed in the programme, not hoped for. Envelope review can intersect with structural permitting in ways that are not always linear.

BERDE & LEED — PERFORMANCE

Increasingly material to envelope decisions. Thermal performance, daylighting strategy, and embodied carbon now influence frame selection, glazing specification, and unitized vs. stick-built methodology — all decisions that benefit from early contractor input rather than late substitution.

PAG-ASA WIND ZONES

Zone I (Luzon, including Metro Manila), Zone II (Visayas), and Zone III (parts of Mindanao) carry different design wind speeds. The applicable zone is one of the first inputs an envelope specialist needs in order to size brackets, glazing, and serviceability deflection limits.

THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

None of these are exotic constraints. They are the operating environment for high-rise envelope work across Southeast Asia. A façade specialist in the room at Stage 2 will surface them as design data, not surprises.

FIG. 04 · ASCOTT HOTEL, BONIFACIO GLOBAL CITY — A UNITIZED CURTAIN WALL ENVELOPE ON A HIGH-RISE HOSPITALITY TOWER IN PAG-ASA ZONE I.

A SHORT GLOSSARY / FOR THE COORDINATION TABLE

A vocabulary for the next coordination workshop.

Six terms worth defining before they become friction. Not exhaustive — just the ones that consistently get assumed differently across the design table.

ECI Early Contractor Involvement. The practice of bringing a specialist trade contractor into design coordination at RIBA Stage 2–3, ahead of formal tender, for buildability input only.

UNITIZED VS. STICK-BUILT Unitized panels are pre-assembled in a factory and craned into the structure as complete bays. Stick-built systems are assembled on-site from individual mullions, transoms, and infill. Unitized is faster on site but demands tighter tolerances and earlier coordination.

SLAB EDGE TOLERANCE The allowable variance in poured concrete slab edge geometry that the bracket system must accommodate. Typically ±10mm; tighter requires post-pour adjustment.

CAST-IN ANCHOR An embedded steel plate or channel set into the slab edge during the concrete pour, to which the façade bracket later bolts.

SERVICEABILITY DEFLECTION (L/175, L/240) The allowable wind-load movement of a panel or transom, expressed as a fraction of span. Tighter ratios mean stiffer — and therefore heavier and more expensive — framing.

LEAD TIME Calendar weeks from order placement to first factory-completed unit ready to ship. For engineered façades on Southeast Asian high-rise projects, typically 8–14 weeks.

IN SUMMARY · THE ARGUMENT OF THIS ISSUE

Engage the façade specialist at Stage 2, not Stage 4.

The slowest manufactured element on a high-rise envelope is also the one most often added last to the design conversation. Reverse the sequence and you reverse the consequences.

FOR THE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

Thank you.

For reading. For sharing. And for the projects you are scoping today that we hope will be a little easier to deliver in 2028.

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