

THE ART OF PLASTER

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CELEBRATING THE ART OF PLASTER

by Margaret Jetelina

Lloyd Cutting and Jean-François Furieri are two modern-day master plasterers, bringing their unique interior finishing products and services to builders.

The art and practice of plaster have been around since the advent of architecture itself, enduring the test of time, the rise and fall of civilizations and competitive trends, the use of lime plaster as one of the oldest building materials, evidenced as far back as 9,500 years in the area of present-day Jordan. Later, the Romans and Greeks were known to use it mixed with marble dust as a fine application over the coarser lime and sand aggregate, not unlike the technique used today. The use of slack putty existed throughout the middle ages, such as the Montovano finish, resurrected by, and reproduced in Villa Franco, Italy, dating to circa 1100AD.

During the Renaissance, mid 15th century, the Marmorino finish was introduced in Venice and by the 17th century many types of interior plasters flourished, the most notable, the highly polished Veneziano, Venetian plaster found in the palaces of Republic of Venice; through the 18th and 19th centuries the composition of both slacked lime and lime plasters were modified with polymers. The modified plasters tend to be very durable—and if well maintained are virtually indestructible.

decorative plasters. Names may refer to the composition, style, or maybe merely 6 branding, or some combination of the three. In fact the word "Plaster" originates from Old French *plastre*, "to cover, coat, repair" and the Greek *emplassein*, "to plaster on." Plaster has been called the synthesis of all surfaces by virtue of colour, transparency, depth and the vibrations induced by hand trowel bold finishes.

There is no standardized naming system applied to the manufacturing of

When drywall was introduced in the mid-20th century, the art of plastering crumbled a little. Drywall was faster, cheaper and required very little training, in contrast to the average five years

8 *The Trowel*



Photo courtesy of Insight International and The Muddlinger

as the principal ingredient. Natural or acrylic colourants are added to the mix onto base-coated solid surface, such as concrete block or a supportive wire mesh called lath or plaster board (blue-board).

Durability influences today's consumer choice in traditional plaster materials, not just for mouldings and accessories,

his father's company, Valley Plasterers in Port Alberni, BC. When the drywall industry began to take hold, Lloyd realized the opportunity to incorporate his plaster finishing techniques, earning a Level 5 distinction and a reputation for flawless drywall installations.

Lloyd could never put aside his love for plaster entirely, and would travel great distances to accommodate the ornamental or specialty plaster finish client. In 1999, Lloyd was offered an opportunity in the Turks & Caicos Islands for a large resort project, The Ocean Club, one of Lloyd's acclaimed achievements. Assembled and trained a plastering crew from locals who dubbed Lloyd the Mud-Master employed his cutting edge approach, acquired speed in application, artistic vision and use of color and texture in finishes spawned the technique now known as "The Living Wall".

but for all their walls and ceilings applied by trowel using a variety of techniques, practiced by few remaining craftsmen. Throughout the building trades, skilled and experienced traditional plasterers; and those seeking an apprenticeship or skill improvement training, even rarer are those who could be considered "Master" plasterers, a term giving to true artisans.

Lloyd Cutting, trade name The Mud Slinger, a second-generation master plasterer and artisan, learned the art and discipline from his father, a ticketed master, after 12 years working with

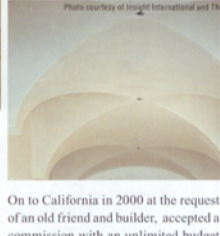


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On to California in 2000 at the request of an old friend and builder, accepted a commission with an unlimited budget in the Gold Coast area known as Pelican Hill, where Lloyd created another masterpiece encompassing over 90,000' of board. The Falcon represented an architectural challenge throughout the living quarters to cathedral, theatre to guest quarters to caretaker's residence. Lloyd then returned to BC with determination. Specializing in traditional

necessary to master a trowel. Drywall carried a short lifecycle in comparison, yet streamlined interior finishing trends of the latter 20th century, ornamental interiors took a definite step aside, as did the need for master plasterers, reserved for wealthy clients who could afford a high-end finishes.

Plaster is enjoying a resurgence in popularity. Architects, interior designers, builders and consumers want that quality old-world, custom look again. Now that the living environment takes on more meaning and importance, the age old benefits of interior plaster are in demand. Of course, there are many products today that can mimic the heritage look with modern materials. Consumers can get mouldings, cornices, columns and more, in intricate, custom designs, but made out of modern materials like polyurethane. Genuine plaster basically entails using crushed marble, limestone or gypsum plaster

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finishes such as marmorino, Venetian plaster, grassello fresco, veneer inlays and tuscan. His technique and craftsmanship can be seen in some new residential construction for several notable builders Whistler, BC.

So how exactly are plaster walls put



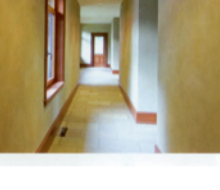
up? While plaster can be applied to a lath or solid surface, Cutting chooses blue-board or plaster sheets as his base. Blueboard sheets are similar to drywall sheets, but have a plaster-friendly paper applied over its gypsum core. He then tapes and preps it like a drywall job, before he spreads on a base coat. Then he applies the finishing plaster material, from clay plaster to Venetian plaster, with his trusty trowel, mixing in colour as desired.

While plaster walls are typically smooth finishes, Lloyd's The Living

Wall® technique offers many choices, like a textured look. A technique he uses called burnishing, for example, darkens areas to create a mottled look. "It leaves a patterning behind, but the wall still ends up smooth, almost like marble," he explains.

He may also use a skip trowel finish for a bit of texture. "It's flat to touch and glassy smooth, but there can be the odd spot that's hollowed out."

There are so many variations of styles, colours and techniques that can be used for plaster walls, and Cutting can truly



Photos courtesy of Insight International and The Muddlinger

customize according to the homeowner's tastes. "There's lots of variability with what you can do," says Cutting. "I get it all taped out and trim the house over the complete wall with their finish of choice. You can go as many layers as you want. You might have to go over the wall 20 to 30 times to get the desired finish." Plaster is also being recycled and provides health benefits over drywall for interiors.

This type of custom work doesn't exactly come cheap. "A lot of people are spending big money," says Cutting, who works mostly in new construction. He also does some renovation work, but building plaster walls can become tricky if the house was originally built with standard drywall. "When doing plaster over regular drywall, the board must be finished to a blemish-free, superior Level 5 before plaster can be applied, otherwise the client faces extensive and costly repairs or replacement within 5-6 years."

Although expensive (about three times more than drywall), plaster walls can save money in the long term because they are lower maintenance, fire retardant and don't grow black mould. "There are lots of benefits," Cutting says. "To reap these \$10 million homes after a few years can cost a fortune. If plaster is done right, it can last for hundreds of years, and you can create anything you can dream up from frescoes to inlays to paintings. The sky's the limit." Also The Mud Slinger – Mud Master Tool Line will be offered soon delivering faster and more accurate drywall and plaster installs.

Third-generation master plasterer Jean-François Furieri, owner of Iconoplast in Toronto, has been dreaming up unique plaster designs and products for years for clients in Canada and the United States. "We are a custom fabricator. We customize our work to any specifications," he says.



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He has spent a lot of time doing commercial work, for retail outlets like Silk & Satin stores across Canada to the Manhattan Opera House and Royal Ontario Museum, in addition to historical restorations and high-end residential work, where "everything is original."

Furieri says he received his "master" designation (a term he says comes from a long tradition of European apprenticeship) after his work on the Egyptian Theatre in Montreal and the Pantages Theatre in Toronto — his personal "masterpieces."

This master plasterer agrees with Cutting that there are endless things you can do with plaster. "There are many different types of plaster for different uses. Variety is a large part of the product's popularity right now," he says. "For custom ceilings, we use only traditional materials, gypsum and sisal reinforcement. But we use higher density gypsum cement for table bases and accessories."

While his skills are generations old, going back to his grandfather Dominique in Italy, and his father Jean-Dominique in France, Furieri's work combines them with new technologies, such as using rubber silicone for mould making. He's also establishing a line of plaster garden products, with an acrylic base mix with resin and fibreglass.

"We're able to bring a modern approach to a traditional art. Creations are only limited by the imagination."