New (and Some Old) Products

By Thomas G. Dolan

One would think that the wall and ceiling industry should have its act together by now. After so many millions of jobs, one would think the products are set, well, if not in stone, at least in plaster, mortar or something cementitious.

Of course, it doesn't work that way. Usage, designs and codes are always changing, necessitating a continual modification in products, sometimes big, sometimes small. It also happens, on occasion, that a manufacturer has a product sitting on a back shelf when a new market demand leads him to dust it off and introduce it in a new wrapping. And a technology often times reaches a plateau of refinement, but then a manufacturer finds a way to offer the same thing at a cheaper price.

So, the new products keep on a-comin'—which is the way it should be, not only to keep life interesting but also to make work profitable. Here’s a rundown of some of the latest, from ceilings down to walls down to floors, with a couple of tools in between.

Ceiling Liner

We'll start at the top—the ceiling that is (well, walls too). Here's one of those basic products that a manufacturer has had around for awhile, but is offering now with a new bow and ribbons because of a market need. It's called Black Wall and Ceiling Liner M, made by Kauf Fiber Glass, Shelbyville, Ind.

The liner is a black flexible fiberglass blanket with a black mat facing adhered to one surface, and is designed for applications where a black surface is desired, one that also reduces airborne sound transmission, provides effective thermal insulation and acts as a low-cost visual barrier for walls and ceilings.

Bob Gardner, manager of mechanical products, explains that one big market need for this product is the growth of multiplex movie theaters. Instead of one big theater, there are now buildings with many smaller rooms showing films. Sound control is needed, as well as...
black walls, upon which drapes can be hung to further absorb sound. An open ceiling design also can use this product, which can be suspended above linear metal and metal pan ceiling systems to serve as both a visual and acoustical treatment. Auditoriums, convention centers and public concourses have a need for this product too, which also has a tough mat surface that resists damage during installation.

This wall and ceiling liner is available in 1.0, 1.5 and 2.0 PCF densities and in thicknesses of 1 inch, one and one-half inch and 2 inches. It meets all appropriate specifications and building codes.

**Suspension Ceiling System**

Another basic ceiling product that is being taken out of the back room and being repromoted due to market need is the Dyna-Glass™ Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic Suspension Ceiling System from Chicago Metallic, Chicago.

Randy Nickell, product manager, acknowledges that this is “somewhat a commodity product.” But this lightweight fiber-
the tile through the grid opening and laying it back down on the grid can be bypassed. The panels slide into the grid without going through the grid opening. This increases the durability of the ceiling by reducing the possibility of damage to the panels caused by hanger wires and other obstructions in the plenum.

To install this product, contractors simply have to engage the double kerf, keeping the two nonsupporting edges pressed up against the grid, raise the trailing edge up into the grid and slide the panel back to engage the kerf on that side. The panels are self-aligning and self-centering, automatically resulting in a neat, straight-line visual.

The market need that makes this ceiling especially appealing is renovation, for it can transform ordinary open plan offices into upscale Class A spaces with minimal disruption. The 2-by-2 lay-in panels are installed in a standard 15/16-inch exposed tee suspension system. “Because there is no need to replace or paint an existing grid system, renovation projects can be completed quickly and cost-effectively with minimal workplace disruption,” McCready says.

Aesthetics is another area to which this ceiling responds well. “The ceiling uses glass reinforced plastic is impact resistant and rust resistant, and it has a textured surface that will resist abuse and not scratch like metal. It’s also highly stain resistant. The rugged fiberglass reinforced grid system is offered in a 1-3/8-inch face that is unaffected by moisture and humidity. It’s also USDA accepted and classified with a Class A flame spread.

The color-matched vinyl moldings with the choice of 11 standard colors install easily and are ideal for use in food processing plants, production areas, kitchens, locker rooms, rest rooms, swimming pools, restaurants, clean rooms, car washes, laboratories and hospitals.

Ceiling System

Something actually new in ceilings, as opposed to simply a new repackaging, is being offered by Armstrong World Industries, Inc., Lancaster, Pa. It’s called the Optical Vector Ceiling.

A key benefit, explains Marketing Manager Dave McCready, is that this ceiling has a new downward access. This means that the traditional process of placing
McCready adds that the ceilings also can be installed quickly and cost effectively, always a plus for renovation.

McCready also reports the ceilings have a fine textured scratch- and soil-resistant surface, as well as properties to reduce humidity and sagging. The ceilings have a high noise reduction coefficient of 0.85 or 0.95, plus a high light reflectance value of 0.89.

Moving down from the ceiling to the walls, the Lewisville, Texas-based Textura is offering Architura Interior Finishes by Simplex Products. The two main benefits of these finishes, explains Sales Manager Herb Smotherman, are “first, the finished coating gets rock hard, so it’s very difficult to damage, and secondly, they don’t contain a single ingredient that’s a food source for mildew.” If it gets dirty, it can be scrubbed, without the coating coming off as can easily happen with paint or vinyl wallcoverings. Moreover, since the color goes all the way through, even if a chip or minor scratch does occur, it’s not likely to be visible.

These features, Smotherman adds, make the product ideal for many commercial, medical, hospitality and residential environments.

Smotherman acknowledges that other manufacturers put out a similar high quality product, but the niche Textura has made is meeting the need for custom designs. “We do a lot of unique applications, presenting different effects from
limestone to faux carved granite to faux whatever-you-can-think-of,” Smotherman says. “Just spray it or trowel it over most any substrate. These blend finishes are designed to breathe with the wall.” Smotherman also says that, while this product provides a more high quality finish than vinyl, it costs no more than vinyl.

**High-Impact Wallboard**

Sometimes manufacturers create new products. Sometimes they repackaged old ones. But National Gypsum Company, Charlotte, N.C., has come up with a new variation. It’s taken two different products and combined them into one, providing double the quality.

Product manager, Michael Brown, explains that in the mid-1990s, National Gypsum utilized Lexan, a product made by General Electric Company, to make a high impact resistant wallboard. The Lexan was laminated to the back of the gypsum product. Then, in 1997, National Gypsum formulated its own Hi-Impact Brand Wallboard to protect against surface abrasion.

“Our customers started telling us that both of these products were great, but why not put them together into a single product?” relates Brown. So that’s what the company did. It put the Lexan on the back and the high-abuse front together to create its new and improved Hi-Impact Brand Fire-Shield Type X Wallboard to provide the maximum combination of impact and penetration resistance plus abrasion resistance.

Again, this product relates directly to a market need, for those really tough jobs, such as schools, correctional facilities, dormitories, hospitals, mass transit facilities, public housing, common areas and retail separation walls.

Each 5/8-inch panel consists of a fire resistant type X gypsum core encased in heavy smooth, white abrasion-resistant paper on the face side and strong liner...
paper on the back side, on top of which the Lexan substrated is bonded. The long edges of the panels are tapered to allow joints to be reinforced and concealed.

Brown says this wallboard is less expensive and labor intensive than concrete block and fiber-reinforced gypsum panels. “It’s also as easy to use and install as regular gypsum wallboard,” Brown says. “It can be cut and installed quickly, so painting, other decoration and the installation of most metal and wood trim can begin almost immediately.” Brown adds that where the look and feel of veneer plaster is preferred, this option is also available.

Firestop System

Moving from the walls to the floor, the Tulsa, Okla.-headquartered Hilti Firestop Systems, Inc. has introduced its CP 680 Cast-In Device-Hilti’s One-Step Firestop Solution, Product Manager John Kaule explains that traditional firestopping methods are both labor and time intensive, typically beginning after the assembly of the floor. Usually after you’ve attached the steel sleeve to the fluted deck or wood form from which you pour the concrete, you then have to come back and pass the pipe through. But this Hilti device for firestopping through penetra-
tions in fire rated concrete floors eliminates that step.

Simply set the CP 680 device like a sleeve, then pour the concrete. There is no concrete coring or firestop installation required after the fact because the penetration pipe has already been integrated into the device. With this pre-fitted, patented firestopping unit, you can simply pass through the cast-in device, which comes with an innovative adapter that makes it suitable for metal docking applications.

This integrated firestopping unit allows for pipe movement and vibration both during and after installation. Subsequent pipe removal is also possible. Key features include an intumescent ring that is designed to expand and close the hole in the event of contact with fire; an active ring that retains the intumescent ring and smoke seal unit within the body of the device and secures the cast-in device in concrete; a smoke seal unit that helps ensure the device is both water- and smoke-resistant; and a plastic sleeve that enables use of the product in concrete thickness from two and a half inches while reinforcing the water tightness of the unit and cover caps, placed at the top and bottom of the device to prevent concrete entering the device during pouring (and to protect the device during transportation).

Brown says the product makes the jobs of specifier, installer and inspector all that much easier. He adds that the CP 680’s features, which also include sound reduction with the water- and smoke-resistant seal, meets the most stringent regulatory requirements in residential, commercial and industrial buildings.

Wood Boring Bits

Two IRWIN brand tools especially helpful for the thriving renovation market are the SpeedborSL (Short length) Wood Boring Bits and Lock-n-Load Chucking System.

Product Manager John Sara explains that the SpeedborSL bit provides contractors with a practical solution for drilling between tightly spaced studs and other confined areas. “With its 4-inch length, you can get between joists and holes without drilling in at an angle, which can lead to jagged holes,” he says. “Also, by being able to drill straighter, you reduce drag and friction that can strip insulation off electrical wires and deteriorate tubing, conduit and other materials.” The bits are available in half-inch, three-quarter-inch and 1-inch widths.

The tool, Sara also explains, features positive cutting edges that cut wood instead of scraping it way. This results in reduced heat buildup and longer life. The bits also feature angled spurs that cut
the outside of the hole first, creating a smoother hole finish. Speedbor bits feature a hang hole for convenient storage and are heat-treated to guard against bending in heavy-duty applications.

Speedbor bits can be used with the Lock-N-Load™ chucking system, which features a slim body design ideal for use in contained workspaces. The wood boring bits lock firmly into place into the chuck holder without the use of a hex key. Bits are released by simply pulling down on the sleeve holder. “During our market research,” Sara says, “we discovered that contractors were very frustrated with the old set-screw extensions. One electrician described to us how he was changing bits in an attic and dropped the hex key in the insulation. A needle in a haystack would be easier to find.”

The tool-free Lock-n-Load extension eliminates this problem.

**Interior Laser**

For the past few years, AWCI’s Construction Dimensions’ product review often featured a number of lasers, each with some kind of new technical innovation.

However, a threshold appears to have been reached in this category, Dennis House, advertising manager for Topcon Laser Systems, Inc., Pleasanton, Calif., acknowledges that other manufacturers offer basically the same features as the new Topcon RL-VH3C interior laser. So what’s new about this laser?

“Absolutely the biggest thing is the price,” House replies, “This one sells at half the price as the others on the market.”

This laser is electronic self-leveling in both horizontal and vertical operation. It has a patented beam scanning feature, and has the ability to electronically match a slope of up to 9 percent while maintaining self-leveling in the cross axis. The visible laser diode is precisely focused to a perfectly round spot only three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. Power is supplied by four D-cell alkaline batteries that should operate the unit for more than 40 hours. The unit comes packaged with a height adjustable wall mount, two magnetic scanning targets, batteries and a hard shell case.