Q

What is the allowable difference or tolerance for variation of a veneer plaster surface?

A

There is more to this question than first meets the eye. I have learned that anytime there’s hand finishing done, it’s going to be a challenge finding a tolerance that is going to hold the finisher to too tight a spec. And there are also several variables that have different trades pointing their fingers at each other and the material suppliers when things don’t meet muster.

Veneer plaster is typically applied over a special type of gypsum board, technically referred to as “gypsum base” but in the field often referred to as “blue board,” (the blue turns gray with over-exposure to the elements, alerting the finisher to first apply a primer). There might be a marginal variation in the thickness of the board to be considered, but I’d expect modern manufacturing methods and quality control to keep such variations to a minimum. (ASTM C588 sets the limit at 1/64 inch.) The blue board is attached to framing, (wood or steel) or occasionally over masonry of some kind. The veneer also can be applied directly over a properly prepared masonry or concrete surface. All of these bases may contribute to certain amount of wiggle in the surface, and this needs to be taken into consideration when deciding how much variation to expect.


Tribute

I want to take this opportunity to mention my sadness at the passing of Charlie Thomas of Hamilton Materials (see page 12). I knew Charlie from my participation in the Drywall Finishing Council, where he was president, ASTM subcommittee C11.03, and his participation and contributions to AWCI’s technical committee on gypsum board.

I found myself on the opposite side of several discussions with Charlie, but though he was always passionate in his pursuit of what he believed was best for his company and his customers—particularly discussing the levels of finish, he was always warm, friendly and helpful to me.

Charlie really made my day not so long ago when he told me that Wachuwannano was the first thing he read when he got his AWCI’s Construction Dimensions. Several times he called me personally to comment and contribute to the column.

I for one am grateful for having had Charlie Thomas put in my path.

Base to Receive Gypsum Veneer Plaster,” section 8.1.1 refers the reader to Appendix X2 for wood framing requirements, and C754 or C1007 for steel framing requirements. The appendix provides in section X2.1.1 that all wood framing members “shall be straight and true,” with no further criteria. However, wood framing is known to warp and twist with changes in moisture content, so even if installed perfectly, there may be some movement. Steel framing is reputed to avoid such problems, but I found no specifications concerning straightness of walls constructed of steel.

In ASTM C843, “Standard Specification for Application of Gypsum Veneer Plaster,” section 3.2.8 instructs “... plaster shall be applied with one or more components not exceeding 1/4 inch in total thickness.” Section 10.2 allows each of the layers in that total thickness to be no less than 1/16 inch for the base coat(s) and no less than 1/32 inch for the finish coat. So, theoretically one could have 1/16 inch of base coat and 1/32 inch of finish for 3/32 inches minimum thickness, allowing a tolerance of 5/32 in the plaster itself. However, my trowel-savvy friends have suggested that discerning such thickness in 16ths—much less 32nds—is testing the skill of the most experienced finishers.

About the Author

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