Floating Butts

A sheet of drywall has two sets of parallel edges. The long edges, bound with paper, are called recessed edges; the two shorter edges of the sheet are not bound with paper and are commonly called “butts.” When drywall panels are hung and meet at their recessed edges, the finisher can tape this joint with ease: The tape and mud nestle in the recess and a perfectly flat finish is possible. This is the ideal scene that tapers and painters hope for. However, when drywall panels are hung and meet at their butt edges, the situation gets tricky: Since the butt edges don’t have that recess, the mud, then tape, then more mud, creates a small hump that mars our perfectly flat finish.

The drywall industry has various accepted techniques to make these butt-joints less of a problem. Finishers feather their mud out from the edges of the butt-joint and make the hump less noticeable. Rockers try to keep the butt-joints to a minimum and make them occur in areas that are less visible. Nevertheless, as long as the butt-joint occurs on backing that is on the same surface as the surrounding backing, a crown is going to happen, and it’s often detectable under certain lighting conditions.

This butt issue was addressed by Donald E. Smith, CCS — Mr. Wachuwannano — in the February 2004 issue of AWCI’s Construction Dimensions. His recommendations are industry standards and bring about the flattest butt-joints possible while obeying the rules.

Here’s another solution to the crowning problem: Floating and indenting the
of the drywall. When the next sheet is hung and the joint fastened, the whole joint will be sucked inward.

This trick was particularly handy when hanging the outside of a curved wall—the convex side. It’s very hard to provide a finisher with a nice joint on a curved wall when you break your joints on the studs provided. We used float-sticks, and it came out very nice. The radius we did this on was about 15 inches—if you try this, be careful, because as the radius tightens, the float-sticks have to get shorter.

Now here’s a possible problem with floating butts: The finished joint isn’t as resistant to forces applied perpendicularly to the face of the sheet as a normal joint would be. But in areas like ceilings and the higher rows of drywall on walls, this isn’t an issue. The drywall contractor who showed me this method of recessing joints has never had a callback with the technique.

My GA-216-96, Application and Finishing of Gypsum Panels, says in paragraph 5.2, “All ends and edges of gypsum board, except treated joints oriented at right angles to framing members, shall be located over framing members or other solid backing.” The use of float-sticks runs counter to the “solid backing” requested here.

On the other hand, floating butt-joints isn’t a very different concept than the accepted practice of floating interior angles. Paragraph 4.9 of that same publication says: “The floating angle meth-
od of application shall be used to minimize the effects of truss uplift and the possibility of fastener popping in areas adjacent to wall and ceiling intersections . . . ” I So floating interior angles is acceptable—why not butt-joints?

Check with your local authorities before floating your butt-joints—and I’d be delighted to hear your thoughts on this!

About the Author
Pat Carrasco is a drywall hanger, trainer and writer who lives in Montana.