DRYWALL in the ATRIUM

It's Tough Enough Installing Drywall in a Six and One-Half Story Atrium, But Expertise Was Really Needed in a Glass Pyramid

One of the most glamorous luxury hotel projects in the Twin Cities in recent years — the Amfac Hotel in downtown Minneapolis — features some extraordinary uses of drywall, including the attractive finishing of the central atrium and its glass pyramid roof.

The hotel, part of Minneapolis’ new City Center, was designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. AWCI member Frogher Drywall Inc., St. Paul, did the work on the retail space and the first 10 floors of the hotel. The drywall contractor for the remaining floors was Custom Drywall, St. Paul, also an AWCI member.

Included in the 52-story office tower is the 32-story Amfac Hotel with 606 rooms, a three-level retail complex with 90 stores and restaurants, and a parking ramp for over 700 vehicles.

The elegant atrium is an open area that rises six stories, from the ground level retail shops through floors four, five and six, which contain the lobby, restaurants, ballroom and meeting areas of the hotel.

The drywall contractor elected to build scaffolding six and a half stories high to do the job. As much of a feat as that was, the real creativity was required in the area of the glass pyramid at the very top of the atrium.

The architects originally intended to enclose the steel beams in the pyramid with attractive aluminum, but when that proved difficult, it was decided to use drywall instead. The drywallers first installed drywall furring channels, broken at various angles, to create a template.

Next they had to frame the beams with steel studs, and then apply the drywall. At intersections where the drywall butted itself, it had to be
Each floor opening of the Amfac Hotel's six-story atrium is finished with three overlapping tiers of drywall soffits, which conceal a cold air return system. Steel beams (upper right) supporting glass pyramids are hidden behind drywall.

back cut at a 45-degree angle. The finished taper touched perfectly at the outside, creating the outside angles.

**Use Flex Bead . . .**

The drywallers then used a flex bead — a paper bead with metal reinforcement — which they could

The ceiling of Gustino's was given special attention by the design architect. Drywall was used to create a rolling-step effect from the exterior window systems. The result is an interesting shaded effect over the entire ceiling.
pull straight after it was mudded into place across the 60 to 70 feet of beam.

The pyramid area of the atrium was finished off with three overlapping tiers of soffits.

Similar innovations were required in Gustino's, one of three restaurants in the hotel complex. The plan for the wine cellar called for multi layers of drywall stepped back and then trimmed with an L-bead on the bottom. In some cases, eight layers of drywall were installed, stepped back, and then angle cut and trimmed on the bottom with the L-bead.

The Amfac's large ballroom also challenged the ingenuity of the drywall contractor, since the all-drywall ceiling has six individual drops. The job called for a massive scaffold assembly — 70 feet by 60 feet, and 14 feet high, with a step-up in the center to facilitate the stepping up of the soffit and ceiling system.

One problem encountered in the ballroom was that the architect was not pleased with the finished appearance of a light and heating diffuser system, and asked the drywall contractor if a three-inch strip of drywall could be installed between the two systems. As part of the suspension system, a three-inch reveal was installed, separating the fixtures. In some cases, a strip of more than 100 feet of the three-inch reveal was installed alongside a soffit system that steps up three different sections.