Acoustical Ceilings

...Provide Design Opportunity While Performing A Functional Necessity

By Robert W. Hadfield

Acoustical ceilings can provide more than just a functional necessity, they can also provide a design opportunity. The Beaded Cirrus from Armstrong shown here, incorporates a soft, subtle surface pattern with a detailed molding edge.

Today’s acoustical ceiling is more than just a functional necessity. It is also a design opportunity, incorporating both form and function. As the largest uninterrupted surface, it can, and should, complement and enhance the interior.

The challenge for the specifier is to explore the possibilities and provide the ultimate selection in suspended ceiling design, quality and performance.

Today, that challenge is easier to face than ever before because of the variety of new images from which to choose, including new edge details, new textures, new geometries, new patterns, and new colors.

Custom Ceilings

Probably nowhere is this more evident than with the advent of “custom” ceiling systems that offer thousands of design possibilities.

This concept features a family of design-related acoustical panels that can be combined in different ways to create highly individualized installation. The panels feature finely articulated patterns with edge details that relate to furniture and architectural details.

This development, made possible through computer technology and state-of-the-art manufacturing equipment, has had a wide-ranging impact on commercial interior design. Designers now can circumvent light fixtures, echo corners and curves, highlight functional areas and create focal points.

The newest twist to the “custom” ceiling concept is the introduction of accents that provide a decorative focus at the grid intersection. Available with either a step detail or a beveled edge detail, grid accents actually provide the specifier with a unique means of highlighting the grid rather than trying to disguise it.
Textured Ceilings

Texture provides another means of adding interest to an acoustical ceiling—namely through nuances of light and shadow.

In areas where textured ceilings are desired, there is a wide variety of distinctive patterns from which to choose. They range from soft, subtle textures that provide pleasing and unobtrusive visuals and a sense of expansiveness to a room to boldly textured surface designs that add an extra dimension to any room’s overall appeal.

And they are available in a variety of highly visible edge details that are ideal for added ornamentation and embellishment. Among the most interesting is a chamfered edge because it brings a new approach to the grid element.

Ceilings are often designed to “hide the grid” by blending it into the overall design of the panel. The broad hammered or beveled edge causes the grid to recede by visually overpowering it. At the same time, the large bevel reflects current design trends.

Scored Ceilings

Another method to achieve dimension and drama is through the use of deeply scored acoustical ceilings. These geometrically patterned ceilings offer exceptional design impact and work together with an extra-thin grid system to create an overall monolithic appearance. In addition, the scoring incorporated into each panel camouflages the exposed grid and thereby helps create a sleek, uninterrupted ceiling.

Scored ceilings have shown consistently outstanding growth over the past few years. From the time these ceilings were introduced, their strong geometric appeal has helped them remain among the most imaginative ceiling products in the industry.

A more contemporary interpretation of a scored ceiling is the “corrugated” look. The ribbed surface pattern of this type ceiling creates a subtle interplay of light and shadow for an interesting overall texture on the ceiling while the deep scoring provides the required acoustical control.

Specialty Finishes

Today’s specifiers can also choose from a wide range of specialty finishes that lend identity to a ceiling while providing visual and tactile appeal.

All of the finishes are installed over
Acoustical ceilings produced on a fiberglass substrate provide highly efficient sound absorption, designed for commercial and open plan installations. Shown are Painted Nubby Fiberglass ceiling panels from Armstrong.

A mineral-fiber substrate to obtain the required acoustical performance. Among the various “looks” that can be attained by using specialty finishes are fabric, wood, multitoneal, mirrored, and metal.

As a result of a patented manufacturing process, specifiers also have access to a generation of designs that achieve a look in ceilings that is crisper, more tailored and in finer detail than ever before. And they can achieve this look without holes or fissures in the ceiling panel since acoustical performance is obtained by way of a smooth, unperforated skin molded around a sound-absorbing core.

**Fiberglass Ceiling**

All the ceiling choices mentioned thus far feature a mineral fiber substrate. However, another growing segment of the ceiling industry features panels that use a fiberglass substrate.

Fiberglass acoustical ceilings are divided into four categories:

- **Standard**--These ceilings are designed to provide optimum performance at minimum cost in commercial and industrial buildings with large expanses of ceilings.

- **Upscale**--This type of fiberglass ceiling combines color and good acoustical performance with a maintenance-free film facing to help maintain quiet, good-looking interiors.

- **High performance**--These ceilings provide highly efficient sound absorption. They are specially designed for...
“Custom” ceiling systems can create highly individualized installations. commercial ceiling and open office installations that demand speech privacy.

Energy-saving--These ceilings combine excellent sound absorption with exceptional thermal resistance.

Designed for use in low-rise buildings, these ceiling panels offer an easy, low-cost way to save on energy costs.

As you can see, from standard fiberglass panels to “custom” designed systems, today’s myriad of acoustical ceiling choices can provide not only flexibility but also opportunity for both the specifier and the building owner.

About the author
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