HIGH-TECH INTERIOR

PUTS DRYWALL DESIGN & MATERIALS TO THE TEST

Reception area in Progressys lab features custom gypsum board application.
These words described the look desired by Progenesys for its new biotech laboratory in Palo Alto, Calif. The technical requirements for such an interior design presented special challenges for both its architect and builder. Creating a variety of architectural ornamentation while meeting stringent code restrictions throughout the 36,000 square foot interior space required both expert material selection and skillful construction.

“We’re very experienced in building challenging interiors—this one ranks up there,” said Mike Tirri, project manager/estimator for J&J Acoustics, Inc., a Campbell, Calif.-based contractor. “In order to build each surface properly, we used just about every interior finish product known to us.”

The Progen project called for the retrofit of a two-story, 70,000-square-foot building. The first floor was transformed into a parking garage. A 300-square-foot entrance with circular staircase leads from the parking level to the second-floor laboratory/offices. The second floor contains 24,000 square feet of laboratories and support rooms, 10,000 square feet of office, and 3,200 square feet of warehouse. Almost 200,000 square feet of gypsum board, 700 boxes and bags of various joint compounds and 150,000 lineal feet of metal studs were used to
construct the second floor interior space.

**Gypsum Board Helps Create “Distinctive Identity”**

Bright colors, curved surfaces and geometric pediments, constructed of gypsum board, give this research and lab facility a distinctive contemporary identity. "We selected gypsum board to construct the details because of its flexibility," said Nancy Escano, project architect for Erlich-Rominger.

"The triangular pediments and wall designs lend a high-tech, European look to the interior. We wanted to promote geometric shapes throughout the building."

In this unique work environment, hallways are activity centers, as scientists share equipment like refrigerators, freezers and centrifuges. "We designed the hallway to encourage interaction and activity in mutually shared spaces," Escano said.

The brightly painted pediments span the width of the main corridor, distracting the view of exposed utility lines along the ceiling. In addition to the triangle-shaped pediments, other design features posed construction challenges. Wall clocks were set into giant triangles and window frames were built into geometric enclosures. Octagonal skylights were cut into the entrance ceilings.

"Of all the detailing, the pediments required intricate craftsmanship," said Chris Chambers, taper/foreman for J&J Interiors. To build them, J&J prefabricated the frames with heavy-gauge metal corner beads and L-brackets, fitted with self-drilling steel screws. Next, they covered them with triple-layered Sheetrock brand Gypsum Board, from United States Gypsum Company, and screw-attached them to the frames.

"Due to the fact that we were dealing with a variety of angled and curved gypsum board joints on the pediments, we used several different types of joint compound," Chambers explained.

**Wall Surface Requirements**

The scientific nature of Progen’s work created special wall surface requirements. All walls had to be finished to a Level 5 finish, according to
In the renovated Progenesys bio tech lab building, Palo Alto, Calif, hallways feature a wealth of geometric detailing.

GA-214. Within the laboratory area, 6,000 square feet were at a BL-3 level (biological hazard level of safety). This was designed to protect against the spread of hazardous materials.

To meet the construction and finished wall quality requirement, J&J Acoustics skim coated all laboratory wall surfaces with PLUS 3 joint compound. In other areas of the building, J&J opted for the next best thing to skim coating—they applied a layer of Sheetrock First Coat, a gypsum board primer from U.S. Gypsum Company.

“We went with that product because it fills in small imperfections and hides blemishes better than typical primers,” Chambers said.

Sheetrock First Coat effectively minimizes the texture and porosity differences between joint compound and drywall face paper, eliminating decorating problems such as joint banding and photographing.

After the basecoat dried, J&J shined bright lights on the joint and seam surfaces. This allowed crews to see imperfections that escaped them in the application phase. “This let us locate minor problems and quickly go in and fix them,” Cambers said.

“In terms of time and construction difficulty, this project put us to the test,” Tirri said. “We had a very aggressive construction schedule. The difficulty in constructing the pediments was a little surprising.” Construction began in November 1993, with tenant move-in in February 1994.