I live in Texas, and my 75-year-old house really got some cracks in the drywall this summer. We’ve added an addition to the back of the house, so I’m wondering if that has had an effect. Some of the usual vertical cracks around windows and doors have been joined by horizontal cracks. What does it mean when you get a horizontal crack in your drywall?

—Debra (e-mail)

Assuming the cracks are occurring in walls that the addition shares, there’s a good chance the cracks are due to settling. Cracks of this type usually occur in the first year due to movement of the building materials as they stabilize. It’s best to let everything settle for a year, then cut out the cracks to a “V” shape, fill with a set-type joint treatment, tape, and then paint or wallpaper.

I am looking for information on the correct treatment of pine tongue-and-groove paneling for the walls and ceilings of a new addition. I was told to use a linseed oil product, which I cannot locate. I was also told to use polyurethane. Any advice?

—Linda (e-mail)

There are many different ways to finish pine paneling, and much of that depends upon what you want in the final look and how durable you want the finish to be. The technologies available range from products obtainable at the corner hardware store, to exotic finishes that cannot be taken across state lines without an EPA escort.

There are several recipes for an old-timey linseed oil finish. These usually combine turpentine, boiled linseed oil and varnish. The proportions of each depend on the finish you’re trying to achieve and usually require much experimentation on a sample of the wood you’re finishing. If you want the odor of a depression-era paint job lingering in your new addition for several months, with a finish that scratches easily, may never dry properly, turns yellow then eventually orange, and will become a world-class mildew farm in the presence of moisture, this is probably just what you are looking for. Otherwise, I recommend something a little more current.

A polyurethane system is probably the simplest, most durable finish you’re likely to use without getting into something fairly exotic. It is important to be sure that the finish is compatible with whatever is used to stain and/or seal the wood. Many products are self-priming, meaning they can be diluted for the first coat and applied full strength for the finish coat(s). Most of these products are now available in both solvent (paint thinner) and water-borne versions. The waterborne versions usually cost a bit more, but they generally dry fairly quickly and don’t give off solvent fumes. Some require that you stir in an activator to reach proper hardness and drying. Always read the directions on all containers before attempting such a project.

About the Author
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