



Modern Plaster

For those who are open to plaster as more versatile than just Tuscan and Mediterranean looks, there are endless ways to use Venetian plaster in support of modern architecture.

Throughout history, there have been times of challenging old ideas in architecture and design. In each case, there is an inevitable trend back to the norm afterwards, as people tire of one look and desire to return to other options. In the last generation of our experience with residential and commercial design, the dominant style was Mediterranean-inspired. Sometimes called Tuscan or Old-world people built in styles evoking their European heritage, with baroque balustrades, Moorish chimneys, wrought iron accents, columns, and fountains. These buildings made people feel comfortable, like they had arrived and built their own European villa. Colors were rich, saturated earth tones that helped

If the word “plaster” makes you think of only Old-world and traditional finishes, then read on. **By Nick Brown**

Photos taken by Melissa Higgins

the structures blend in with surroundings and evoked warmth and timelessness.

Companies such as ours benefited from this trend, and supplied Old-world looks based on stucco, lime plaster, or faux paint. These aesthetics called for finishes to look old right away, like the building had been in place for decades, left out in the weather to age gracefully. Vero became associated with Old-world almost exclusively, in a Tuscan tyranny of rich, mottled earth tones.

As so often is the case, we the manufacturer learned from our customers how to add new dimensions to our products. The artisans in this article taught us imaginative techniques to appeal to a broader customer base. They

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Simple Functional Forms –
D&D Plastering of Sherman Oaks, Calif.



Glass, Steel and Concrete –
Dale Cotton of Luce del Mondo, in Lone Pine, Calif.



Geometric Patterns –
Lora Miller of Deux Broses of Irvine, Calif.

from a select customer for a more modern and updated look. And they saw the ability to achieve that look using plaster, in some cases the same plaster used to make old-world aesthetics, just applied in a different way, with different colors, or over a different architectural style. They challenged the dominant interior aesthetic—monotone paint colors—with glossy, geometric, simple designs. On the exterior, they coated the smooth, clean, boxy designs called out by the architects with cool tones, sometimes glossy, and always opulent. But the opulence of these contemporary homes was in a different spirit than the ornate Mediterranean villas that often surrounded them in the high-end custom home developments.

SIMPLE FUNCTIONAL FORMS

Perhaps the dominant aesthetic of modern designs is clean lines without ornamentation. In the exterior (shown top left), the gray Antiqua lime plaster evokes simple concrete rather than an antiqued, saturated warm tone. It seems as if the building would be cool to touch even on a 100 degree Fahrenheit day. Done in a classic three-coat smooth-troweled style, this house elevates the art of stucco to another level. There are no unnecessary niches, statues, or window details, and the color appears simple, as if it required no additional pigments to be added.

GLASS, STEEL AND CONCRETE

The shimmering geometric pattern used in the Dodger Stadium VIP Bar (opening image) achieves a futuristic metal look that makes you wonder when baseball's records may be broken by athletes yet to be born. Done in a 4-coat process, the different layers create a complex interplay of color, texture, and geometry.

“When marketing Venetian plaster to architects and designers for a modern and contemporary installation, I always seem to be up against manufactured, plastic, and synthetic alternatives,” says the artist Ted Xentaras, of Luxe Plaster. “You get a vibe and a movement [with Venetian plaster] that you can only achieve with a hand-troweled finish.”

In the desert exterior (shown top center), glass is a prominent element that allows the desert landscape into

the home for first-hand observation of road runners, jack-rabbits, and other wildlife. The plaster complements this aesthetic by mirroring the rocky hillside behind the house, so that all one sees in this scene is glass, steel, and rock.

GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

In contrast to the right-angle design of the Dodger Stadium project, this Irvine bedroom (shown top right) uses round shapes to create this unique aesthetic that is at once futuristic and feminine. Done with stencils and plaster, the design is in relief, giving it depth and challenging the flatness of common painted or papered walls.

“I have always loved contemporary design,” says Lora Miller, who was a thermophysicist in a prior career. “The updated contemporary look seems to be clean lines and a new added warmth, using ancient materials, with some glitz and glam added. It is not only functional but elegant, too.”

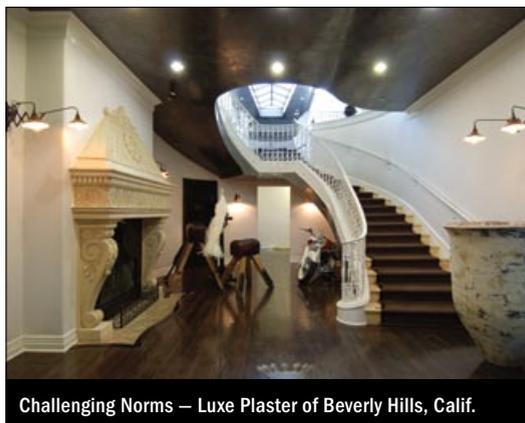
CHALLENGING NORMS

This living room (shown left) is a juxtaposition of unexpected elements. The plastered ceiling has a wrinkle in it and looks

like cold-rolled steel. The motorcycle, feathered element, leather sawhorses, and ornate fireplace challenge the visitor to pigeon-hole this room into a particular aesthetic. Is it technology, with the lights on telescoping robotic arms, metal ceiling, and motorcycle? Or is it Greek, with the stone fireplace and weathered urn?

Xentaras chose Venetian plaster for this room because, “Architects and designers also like the fact that you can match any color spot-on for them and through that one color that they pick, you can get three to four different hues of that color ... which only enhances the finished product.”

The exterior of this home (shown on page 26, top left) built in the center of U.S. modernism, Palm Springs, challenges the norm of European villas and instead is a square box with rectangular boulders in front. The dark Velasil tinted sealer over stucco surprises the visitor against the neutral body of the home, while protecting against moisture penetration.



Challenging Norms – Luxe Plaster of Beverly Hills, Calif.



Challenging Norms –
Tysor Plastering: Palm Desert, Calif.



Cool Color Tones –
Gon Pachi Restaurant by The Roger Miller Company in
Los Angeles.



Opulence –
Paul Ostergaard of Faux Paul in
Scottsdale, Ariz.

COOL COLOR TONES

At Japanese restaurant Gon Pachi (top center), the bar is done in cool metallic shades of gray. Asian sensibilities seem to favor more understated looks as fashions evolve, even when the design is not exactly modern, such as in this restaurant.

“When someone sees true Venetian plasters for the first time there is an emotional response that is noticeable ... I believe it is the warmth and vitality that Venetian plasters bring to a project,” says Roger Miller of The Roger Miller Co. Robert York Crockett Architects wanted finishes representative of 17th century Japan and insisted on only natural lime plasters. “The colors, patterns, and textures create interest and a comfortable feeling not found with other products.”

OPULENCE

The ceiling plastered with Solution siloxane plaster is a cool blue, but not sky blue (shown top right). It is glossy and distractingly beautiful to stare at during meetings at this conference table. The square lines of the ceiling frame it into a contemporary appearance, per the preference of the owner of this business.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The architects, designers, and plaster artisans we work with have taught us how versatile these ancient materials are. Known for its Old-world looks, Venetian plaster can enhance the clean unadorned lines of glass, steel, and concrete in modern designs. These products can be used to challenge norms of the period, signify an affinity with geometry and modern technology, and create a contemporary flavored opulence. The warmth and depth of the aesthetics created by using Venetian plaster products creates an emotional response in people, whether they are used in support of old-world or modern designs. It is the design versatility of Venetian plaster that will ensure that these products grow in importance over time and open up new ways for talented architects and artisans to express their creative visions. **W&C**

Nick Brown is president of Vero Fine Italian Finishes and Merlex Stucco. Born in Sydney, Australia, Nick immigrated to the U.S. in 1979, and lives in Southern California, where stucco and plaster are predominant. For more information, visit www.vero-rialto.com and www.merlex.com.

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