



The Finishing and Decorating of Gypsum Board Surfaces

For many years contract documents describing how gypsum board walls and ceilings should look prior to final decoration with paints and other wallcoverings have included nonspecific terms such as "industry standards" and "workmanlike finish." And, for as many years, wall and ceiling contractors have tried to fulfill their obligations by providing the finish conditions envisioned but not truly described.

As a means of resolving a common problem, four major trade associations concerned with the manufacture, erection, finish, and decoration of gypsum board wall and ceiling systems have developed an industry-wide *Recommended Levels of Gypsum Board Finish*. This document is intended to assist specification writers, architects, contractors, and building owners to more precisely describe the finish of walls and ceilings prior to the application of paints and other wallcoverings, to encourage competitive bidding of suitably finished surfaces, and to enhance the appearance of the final decorative treatment and thereby enlist a satisfied client.

The finish of gypsum board walls and ceilings for specific final decoration is dependent on a number of factors. A primary architectural consideration is the location of the surface and the degree of decorative treatment desired. Painted and unpainted surfaces in warehouses and other areas where appearance is normally not critical may simply require the taping of wallboard joints and "spotting" of fastener heads. Blemish-free, smooth, monolithic surfaces often intended for painted and decorated walls and ceilings in habitated structures, ranging from single-family dwellings through monumental buildings, require additional finishing prior to the application of the final decoration.

Other factors to be considered in determining the level of finish of the gypsum board surface are (1) the type and angle of surface illumination (both natural and artificial lighting), and (2) the paint and method of application or the type and finish of wallcovering material specified as the final decoration. Critical lighting conditions, gloss paints, and thin wallcoverings require a higher level of gypsum board finish than do heavily textured surfaces which are subsequently painted or surfaces which are to be decorated with heavy grade wallcoverings. Once all of the factors have been evaluated, specifications can be written in specific terms and responsible contractors are better prepared to present their most competitive bid.

The accompanying consensus document is presented by the **Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries-International (AWCI)**, **Ceiling & Interior Systems Construction Association (CISCA)**, **Gypsum Association (GA)**, and **Painting and Decorating Contractors of America (PDCA)** as a guide. The members of these international trade organizations are dedicated to providing the best possible job for the most reasonable cost. By incorporating the appropriate sections of this recommended specification into the project documents the architect, general contractor, and building owner can better anticipate the final appearance of the decorated wall and ceiling system.

RECOMMENDED LEVELS OF GYPSUM BOARD FINISH

- I. **Scope.** This recommended specification describes various levels of finish of gypsum board surfaces prior to the application of specific types of final decoration. The recommended level of finish of gypsum board wall and ceiling surfaces varies with the final decoration to be applied and can also be dependent on their location in a structure and the type of illumination striking the surface. Each recommended level of finish is described with typical applications.
- II. **Terminology.** The following definitions are applicable to this document.

Accessories:

Metal or plastic beads, trim, or moulding used to protect or conceal corners, edges, or abutments of the gypsum board construction.

Critical Lighting:

Strong sidelighting from windows or surface-mounted light fixtures. **syn** severe lighting. See "comments" section of this document.

Joint Photographing:

The shadowing of the finished joint areas through the surface decoration. **syn** telegraphing.

Drywall Primer:

A paint material specifically formulated to fill the pores and equalize the suction difference between gypsum board surface paper and the compound used on finished joints, angles, fastener heads, and accessories and over skim coatings. See "comments" section of this document.

Skim Coat:

A thin coat of joint compound, or a material manufactured especially for this purpose, applied over the entire surface to fill imperfections in the joint work, smooth the paper texture, and provide a uniform surface for decorating. Excess compound is immediately sheared off, leaving a film of skim coating compound completely covering the paper.

Spotting

To cover fastener heads with joint compound.

Texture:

A decorative treatment of gypsum board surfaces.

Texturing:

Regular or irregular patterns typically produced by applying a mixture of joint compound and water, or proprietary texture materials including latex base texture paint, to a gypsum board surface previously coated with drywall primer. See "comments" section of this document.