

TODD JERSEY ARCHITECTURE

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Reviving a Great Old Finish For Walls

by Tara Aronson

When architect Todd Jersey began considering the finishing touches for his beefed-up Berkeley bungalow in February--he had nearly doubled its size--he had two main goals: to restore the 1920's-era Arts and Crafts style of the house and to stay as environmentally friendly as possible on the interior walls of his home.

He also wanted to stay within a conservative budget.

His solution? Veneer plastering, a versatile, "green" and clean paint alternative inspired buy an old technique.

"It's a new-old product based on the finish old Victorian and European homes had," Jersey explains. "I remember seeing old walls with hairline cracks and a patina from many years of people passing by and touching them. No paint gets better with age, yet plaster actually does."

Add to its design appeal the product's health benefits: The plaster absorbs and holds many odors, while the lime in the plaster destroys bacteria. It also helps maintain optimal humidity because it absorbs and releases moisture.

Unlike paint, which requires frequent touch-ups to hide inevitable nicks, scratches and scrapes, the nicks and chips on the 1/8-inch plaster can be easily cleaned or sanded away. A light penetrating sealer was applied as a final step to make surface cleanups easier and prevent staining from liquids.

Best of all, the veneer plaster is nontoxic and free of volatile organic compounds than can cause health problems, Jersey says.

Sam Kingore, an ecological designer at Jersey's Berkeley based Todd Jersey Architecture and Living Laboratories Inc., says most paint available today produces an unhealthy indoor environment because of the "volatile gases that they emit." Paint formulated not to release gases can cost as much as \$40 per can, he says.

Kingore helped Jersey mix the rich reds, deep red-purples and brilliant brown hues on the walls of Jersey's home which were originally painted lath and plaster. Color pigments were obtained through chemical suppliers Dowd and Guild of San Ramon.

And the cost of this textured treasure trove of humidity-controlling colors? It was \$4,725--competitive with the cost of a traditional high-end paint job, Jersey says.

"Most of all I like the sheer beauty of it" Jersey says. "Light cast against it appears with all of its colors and shadows."

And what a colorful collage it is. In Jersey's bedroom, rich and mottled reds steal the show. To achieve this effect, the walls were plastered first with light red-based pigment with a red purple mixture added in patches.

"In my living room, dining room and kitchen I chose a straw-gold color for the walls and a rich brown for the cabinetry," he says. For the walls and ceilings, he chose combinations of yellows, browns and reds. All were expertly applied by Hectors Drywall.

Jersey recommends veneer plaster for all remodeling projects in which the whole house is being redone. "Also, it is a great finish for accent walls and walls you want to appear more like stone or at least a definite material."