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Blueboard and Veneer Plaster

A blueboard gypsum panel base covered with a layer of veneer plaster gives the hard surface and glass-smooth look of old-style plaster at close to a drywall price.

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Blueboard's characteristic hue comes from a special plaster-friendly paper applied over its gypsum core.

screws or nails. It also has the same core material as drywall: Gypsum, known to chemists as calcium sulfate.

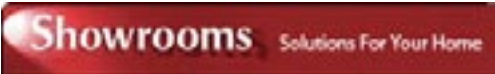
The difference is in the paper covering: blueboard's characteristic blue face comes from the special paper on the board's surface, which is treated to bond well to a skim coat of specially formulated plaster. When finishing blueboard, instead of applying several coats of joint compound to the seams between boards, a quick tape-and-plaster treatment to the joints is applied, and then the entire wall surface is covered with one or two thin (1/8-inch thick) coats of plaster. A skim-coat of plaster can be applied to regular drywall or an existing traditional plaster surface, but first the wall must be painted with a specially formulated orange-colored primer.

Veneer Plaster Advantages

Blueboard and veneer plaster offer two advantages over ordinary drywall—quality and convenience. Veneer plaster is much harder than a regular drywall surface, making it less likely to get unsightly dents and scratches. The top surface of plaster veneer is continuous over the whole wall, so joints almost never show at all—and certainly never leap out at the eye the way drywall joints commonly do. Veneer plaster's continuous surface is also a better base for paint. On a drywall surface, paint can dry differently on the paper surface than on the joint compound base at drywall seams. Even the most skillfully made drywall joints may show up in certain lights. Veneer plaster is much less likely to display any sort of visible shading difference.

Painting veneer plaster is not required. Some people are happy with the plaster's own natural off-white color, and consider the plaster's smooth surface sufficient. It's also possible to colorize the plaster coat itself, either by adding a high-quality paint to the plaster at the mixing stage, or by using proprietary coloring systems.

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Veneer plaster application is typically a one-day operation. Plastering immediately follows the joint treatment, and a second (if needed) plaster coat is applied over the first after a brief period. In remodeling, this convenience becomes apparent. There's no three-day disruption for the occupants of the home; and because there's no sanding, there is no irritating and messy dust.

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A typical drywall job usually takes three days: One day to hang the boards and apply a first coat of joint compound, which then has to dry; then a second day to sand the first coat and apply a second coat (which also has to dry); then a third day to sand again, and, for a quality job, an extra day for a third coat of joint compound.

Cost Considerations

Convenience and quality do increase the cost of a veneer plaster installation. Veneer plaster, including blueboard and plaster, can run anywhere from 20 to 30 percent more than a drywall installation. In addition, choosing a one-coat or two-coat veneer system can affect the final cost. The price difference reflects the greater skill needed to apply veneer plaster. Prices for veneer plaster are becoming competitive with drywall in some areas. The savings of two days on the job schedule and the avoided cleanup costs can make the bottom line difference negligible and offer results that you can brag about.

Text by Ted Cushman
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