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Recommendations For Smooth Troweled Stucco Finishes

Cementitious stucco products, commonly known as Santa Barbara Mission Finish, Santa Barbara Finish, and Smooth Coat, can achieve a range of smooth and semi-smooth finishes. These products were designed to create an old-world finish reminiscent of the early California missions and other early types of plasters. The look of these products is striking, with its natural variation of color and subtle texture profile. These products are especially popular today in European-inspired architectural styles, but can also achieve more contemporary looks through the use of different application techniques.

Smooth stucco products can achieve a natural hand-applied appearance over a properly prepared brown coat substrate. The result will have a natural variation of color and texture, and small cracks from the curing process and normal building movement. Common smooth troweled finish cracking patterns include thin checking in a jagged spider-web pattern and stress cracks emanating from corners of doors and windows. Natural color variations occur, because the act of troweling stucco to a smooth finish causes “burn” marks, where the color is accentuated and darkened. Note that “burn marks” are by their nature inconsistent, and should not be expected to be consistent in color or frequency across an entire building. Small pigment streaks can also occur depending on color and load of pigment. Typically, smooth troweled finishes are troweled on in two thin coats.

By following a few industry best practices, the occurrence of cracking in smooth troweled finishes can be reduced. The use of control joints, adherence to manufacturers’ recommendations for curing, and scheduling final plastering after sources of building stress are reduced can all minimize excessive cracking. For instance, roofs should be fully loaded, interior drywall should be installed, and the brown coat should be given at least seven days to cure (14 days is recommended) to find its equilibrium prior to the application of the finish coat of plaster.

Stucco finishes should not be expected to produce perfection, particularly with a smooth plaster finish. Refer to member associations, manufacturers, or plastering contractors for recommendations for alternative materials and methods to minimize cracking and enhance the overall performance of the plaster finish.

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