

Drywall Installation Guides

by Dave Holbrook

If you find yourself hanging and taping drywall more than once, and you're not a drywall contractor, you might first want to ask yourself, "why?" Maybe like many remodelers, you find you have to "do it yourself" on smaller jobs and quick repairs. Whatever the reason, if you feel the need for a little "drywall" reading, here's some of what's available.



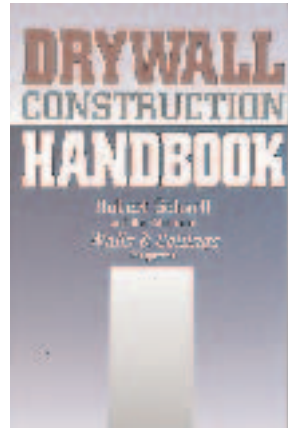
Specifiers, and anyone else looking for comprehensive technical information on drywall products and applications, may need to look no further than the *Gypsum Construction Handbook — 90th Anniversary Edition* (\$15 from U.S. Gypsum Company, P.O. Box 806278, Chicago, IL 60680; 888/874-2450), the oldest reference of its kind, and a long-time international standard for the industry. A quick glance at the old-fashioned-

looking graphics might lead you to conclude that the book is out of date. That's far from true, though, as even a cursory flip through it brings up references to the advances in materials, equipment, and application methods in just the past decade. The book introduces the broad spectrum of USG's wallboard and associated products, and covers a lot of territory going well beyond residential construction. While some attention is paid to planning, estimating, and installation, this book is not a training manual for the entry-level installer, although it will probably introduce you to products and applications you aren't aware of. But as a specification and application guide, including fire-code and sound-control details, it's a must-have, especially when you consider the price.

The Drywall Construction Handbook (\$49.95 from McGraw-Hill, New York, N.Y.; 800/722-4726) by Robert Scharff and the editors of *Walls and Ceilings Magazine*, narrows the focus to gypsum panel installation and finishing, but left me with a nagging sense of déjà vu. In more than a few chapters, the text was clearly borrowed from the USG handbook, with even some of the same photos being used. It's basically an

excerpted and condensed version of the handbook without the in-depth site installation tips. Although the *Drywall Construction Handbook* is a decent general reference for architects, engineers, and contractors, for the money, I'd buy the USG guide first.

To compare the two books, I looked up "curved wall application," to see what each guide offered. Both books use the same photos, and both supply handy charts giving minimum bending radius, panel thickness, and stud spacing, along with a note that the gyp-board may have to be wetted on one side (USG) or both sides (Scharff) to be flexed into position.



For a more hands-on reference, I jumped over to Myron R. Ferguson's *Drywall — Professional Techniques for Walls and Ceilings* (\$19.95 from Taunton Press, P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470; 800/888-8286; www.taunton.com). The author is a 16-year veteran of the drywall trade who admits in the introduction that, like most of us, he learned by trial and

error with a bit of research thrown in along the way. Ferguson introduces the basic and familiar working materials within the first nine pages (about 1/10 of the space required by USG's exhaustive coverage), and takes you on a linear walk through the estimating, hanging, taping, and finishing, with plenty of pictures. He relates an early disaster story about trying to bend drywall onto a curved wall, learning from that experience to wet the board on one side, use thinner board in layers, and tighten up the stud spacing. There are useful descriptions and practical rules of thumb from cover to cover. For my money, I'd buy this book and the USG handbook, and have all I needed to know about drywall.

Karen Goad's book *Drywall Installation and Finishing* (\$34.95 from Delmar Publishers, P.O. Box 15015, Albany, NY 12212; 800/998-7498; www.delmar.com) tackles the job head-on,



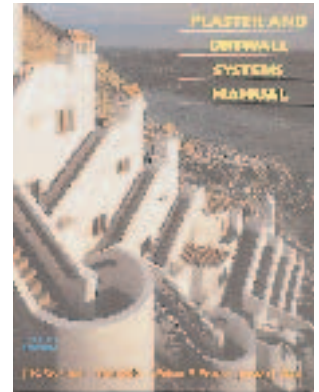
with the rather unique (and ridiculous) perspective that hanging and taping should be learned without the aid of power tools, since job sites frequently have no electricity at the drywall stage. The book relies entirely on simple hand-drawn illustrations that are adequate for the task, but don't give the book the "real-world" feel that a couple of photographs would.

Following through on my curved wall research, I discovered that the author prefers to handle curved walls by letting the drywall panels sag between two sawhorses overnight and take a set, warning that wetting drywall for curved installations risks separating the paper facing and creating blisters in the finish. She treats what I'd consider the worst part of the job — sanding — with respect, supplying a chart that matches the appropriate sandpaper grit to the proposed finish. The author also includes some unique surface finishing textures and techniques, which just might make a hero out of someone with the right customer.

While the book sufficiently demonstrates Goad's command of the subject, I'd beg her to leave out the multiple-choice quizzes at chapter's end, with answers at the back of the book. If there must be a Q&A section, I'd rather see one that brings

it all together. This book is full of good information, but given the price, I'd probably choose the Ferguson book for a hands-on reference.

Finally, I looked at the large hardcover *Plaster and Drywall Systems Manual* (\$59.95 from McGraw-Hill, New York, N.Y.; 800/722-4726), authored by J.R. Gorman, Sam Jaffe, Walter F. Pruter, and James J. Rose. The back cover claims this is "the authoritative source in the field," but I believe its rightful place is back at the office. Plainly put, this is strictly a spec-



ifiers guide, geared toward supporting an architect, engineer, or commercial contractor in writing thorough job specs. However, flipping through, it was déjà vu all over again, as photos from the USG handbook reappeared. (I hope the photographer's getting royalties on this stuff.) As for how to handle that curved wall, I couldn't find it to save my life. It's not that sort of book. It combines an academic, technical format of a high-end technical manual with some full-color photography featuring various plaster textures, and the not-so-riveting text of your typical AIA specification or building code. There is a wealth of copy and graphics here, but it would be made more useful with the addition of a CD for pasting text and images into construction documents. I would check this one out before you buy.