

A Polished Performance

Polished plasterwork is gaining popularity from designers wishing for an out of the ordinary and versatile finish. We talk to Richard Flanagan of Franco Finishes to find out more about how it's done.

Formed in 1991, Franco's developed a small range of stucco finishes and obtained projects through architects and designers. "We have always stayed compact, starting out with just two people and reaching about fifteen personnel at our largest – currently there are five of us," said Richard. "We've worked in many sectors, from schools and universities to commercial (banking and offices) plus many projects in the retail sector; also residential, from social housing to the top end of luxury developments."

Franco's workload ranges greatly.

"Our smallest job would be typically a single wall in a kitchen for 'Mrs Jones', comprising around 10m² of polished plaster, and our biggest project was 4000m² of external wall insulation at Wembley Stadium" he said proudly. "Our most challenging project was to design, manufacture and install 180 curved, smooth, limestone panels for a reception area in Gresham Street, opposite the Bank of England."

Some of Franco's projects feature here, showing the range of applications and finishes of this increasingly popular product.

Nano-technology Centre, Southampton University



Images courtesy of Peter Cook

The centrepiece of the entrance atrium is a floating concrete stair, ascending from the ground floor through five levels. The architects Jectico & Whiles wanted to create a monolithic finish to the structure, so Franco Finishes suggested using pitted 'Vitrino,' a durable finish which can be used as a polished plaster. Richard

Flanagan explained the specification. "We applied a high polymer backing (Adesan) to create an even suction and to create a good key. No beads were used; all the external angles were hand run with a twitcher, using another Franco product ('Bloomsbury') which was originally designed for squash courts, thus increasing the knock-resistance of

the corners. Finally the 'Vitrino' was applied on all faces of the balustrade and the soffit to create a seamless finish from top to bottom."



Below: the 'Vitrino' finish shown on a chimney breast



Broad Leys, Swanage



Swan Homes wanted to create a 1930s art deco building for their development of ten flats in the sea-side town of Swanage. The wall and roof structure is a timber framed modular package from Germany. Franco's task was to design and manufacture the three main components to the building comprising GRC curved cornices to the bay fronts, a pre-cast stone string-course to be set at the first floor level, and a heavy rough-cast, sprayed finish,

modified from the 'Bloomsbury' for this purpose.

The techniques used are described by Richard. "To give a good substrate we used a 10mm calcium silicate board attached with stainless steel fixings in a pattern of 300 x 400 centres, going through counter-battens into the studs and noggins. The board was rendered with a high polymer coating at 4-6mm thickness with a polyester glass-fibre mesh-cloth embedded in this coat."

Above: Swan Homes' art deco development in Swanage

Top Right: detail of the 'Bloomsbury' finish

The first floor was plastered with a smooth stucco, including a feature line, and the ground floor was sprayed with a medium to heavy texture to give an authentic rough-cast look. "Finally", he said, "it was painted with a siloxane paint which chemically binds to the matrix of the render stucco, rather than with a traditional masonry paint which relies on adhesion to the surface of the stucco."

The Food Hall, Manchester Airport

The designer's concept was to divide each food outlet with a uniquely designed sculptural form which, from bottom to top, showed the evolution of man. Starting

with cave drawings copied from the originals in Lascaux, France, and drawn onto a rough, stone-like finish, it moves up through an interim period represented by a smooth, matt finish, finally ending up

Left: An appetite for design at Manchester Airport's Food Hall

with a hard, shiny, white finish, standing for our current school of design. From a detailed drawing, Franco's created a pattern in the workshop and then cast the forms in 'Bloomsbury Casting'. Once on site, the castings were fixed to reinforced legs for stability, and the finishes completed using the 'Portofino' range of polished plaster. An in-house artist executed the cave drawings.

See more at www.francofinishes.co.uk



Right: an example of the Portofino finish





Special preparation is required for application in areas of higher humidity

What preparation is required for polished plaster?

Preparation for the application of polished plaster in normal living conditions is preferably newly skimmed plaster or sound, existing plaster. However, use in bathrooms and shower areas requires the following:

Blockwork: 10-12 mm of OCR render in a 1:1:4 mix, cured for 10 days. 0.5mm blinding-out coat of Adesan, a thin-coat, polymer, cement-based plaster.

Stud Partitions: Studs are set at 400mm centres with noggins at every board joint. Use 10mm calcium silicate or magnesium silicate board, fixed with stainless steel screws. The backing plaster applied to the board is a cement, polymer coating, applied at 4mm thickness with a mesh-cloth embedment. The finishing coat is 'Portofino'/'Vitrino', applied at 2mm thickness, then sealed.

Substrate: One important rule – you cannot put cement-based products on top of gypsum plaster. Remember an old plasterers' saying "You can't put a strong man on a weak man's back!"