

DROP CEILINGS GET DOWN

OUT OF THE REC ROOM, INTO THE DINING ROOM, ACOUSTIC TILE TURNS FANCY

IF IT'S NOT the easiest task for the do-it-yourselfer, it has to rate among the top three. How many of us have spent a weekend brightening the family room or basement recreation room by hanging a suspension ceiling?

If you're thinking about doing it again, those acoustic panels and grids that make suspension ceilings — or drop ceilings — a snap aren't what they used to be.

For the longest time, suspension ceilings were used in two ways. You either installed them in basements to conceal pipes and ducts (while still allowing easy access to them) or you used them in a room that had a problem ceiling. This was a quick, easy solution to hiding stains, cracks or peeling paint.

Today, these ceilings are making their way into dining rooms and living rooms. Always functional, suspended ceilings are earning high marks for color and decor.

HOME WORK



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"When many homeowners think of a suspended or tile ceiling, they visualize a plain, institutional-looking ceiling," said Scott Qualls, marketing manager for residential ceilings at Armstrong, an industry leader in the manufacturing of suspension and tile ceilings. "However, that's not the case these days. There are a variety of textures, designs and patterns to choose from."

Two major reasons suspension ceilings are being used for classier applications are color and style. A few years ago panels seemingly were available in white only, with textured patterns of pinholes and ridges. Gridwork, the lightweight, steel frame that supports the panels, was a bit more exotic, coming in black and white.

Now companies such as Celotex of Tampa, Fla., and USG Interiors Inc. of Chicago offer panel textures that simulate limestone and parchment in colors of sandstone, beige, blue and platinum. In many cases, there are matching grid colors, too.

"As homeowners learn more about the distinctive designs of the panels, suspension ceilings are finding their way to other rooms around the house," Qualls said.

Another reason for more stylish applications are patterns that help hide the gridwork. Armstrong, for example, produces Raised Panel, a design that copies the look of Old World woodwork. Raised Panel features a repeating pattern with a stepped edge that helps hide the metal framing. In other words, the gridwork appears as part of the panel's pattern.

A manufacturer of metal walls and ceilings since 1896, Shanker Industries makes suspension ceilings of brass, copper, chrome and prepainted steel with matching gridwork.



For those who still might think drop ceilings are best left to the basement, you might want to consider the suspension ceilings by Shanker Industries Inc. of Oceanside. A manufacturer of decorative metal walls and ceilings since 1896, Shanker produces suspension ceilings of brass, copper, chrome and prepainted steel with matching gridwork.

"We've been doing the suspension ceilings in metal for about 15 years," said John Shanker, "but it's really caught on only in the last five years or so."

The metal plate ceilings offer intricate designs and durability on 2-foot by 2-foot panels. As for style, they resemble the tin ceilings that were first introduced in the late 1800s as a way to achieve the look of expensive, hand-shaped plaster ceilings.

"This is not to take anything from the companies

that make the acoustic panels," Shanker said, "but in the long run we're very attractive, easy to maintain and cheaper."

Shanker said that the metal tiles resist stain, water and mildew. "When you put us up against acoustic panels and tiles, we last longer. It's a case of penny wise and pound foolish."

The metal-plate suspension ceilings are a step up in price, too. While acoustic-panel suspension systems can run from less than \$3 a square foot, Shanker's tiles begin at about \$3.50 and run as high as \$9 a square foot. ■

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