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Dear Maintenance Men:

By Jerry L'Ecuyer & Frank Alvarez

Dear Maintenance Men:

I own an older four-plex built in the 1950s. I do most of my own repairs in order to save money, so, I am quite handy. But ... lath and plaster walls may be my undoing! I can not get my wall patches to look right. The patch either looks like I used too little material or too much. It always looks like a patch. What can I do to my walls to look good after a repair?

Samuel

Dear Samuel:

Lath and plaster walls are tough to get right. The mistake most people make is to try to keep their patch area too small. Open the area you want to repair by exposing part of the studs on either side of the damaged area. This will give you a base to start your repairs. As you may already know, lath and plaster walls are not the same thickness as drywall, yet drywall will be the material used to do the repairs. Using the exposed studs, place furring strips to build up the drywall to match the thickness of the lath and plaster. Furring strips can be added in one eighth inch thickness. When the drywall patch is almost level with the plaster, apply a layer of drywall compound or mud over the seam or area to be repaired. Drywall tape is the secret to a professional repair job. Apply at least 4 inches or wider of drywall compound or "mud" along the seams. Do not use too much mud and don't worry about filling the gaps. This first use of mud along the seams will be used to bed or 'glue' the drywall tape to the seams. Using a taping knife to install the drywall tape, run the knife along the tape, pressing it hard enough to cause most of the compound to ooze out from under the tape. Remove any excess mud with your taping knife. Apply fresh compound over the tape in a thin layer. Remove any excess mud and apply a second and third layer of mud over the tape. After the mud is dry, sand the repaired area and apply texture to match the existing wall and your repair should disappear.

Dear Maintenance Men:

I would like your advice. My husband and I are installing new interior doors in our vacant unit. My understanding is using pre-hung doors is better and easier and my husband insists that buying a door slab is cheaper and faster. We've never installed doors before and want to do it right the first time.

Maurine

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Dear Maurine:

We have found that there are no two doors hung alike. They are all unique to their doorways. Let's start with our husbands plan. When you buy a slab door, it does not have a hole for the door knob or latch; it also does not have the hinges attached. It might take a master carpenter to fit the door perfectly; the door frame might not be square, which means you will need to trim the door to fit the opening. You will find, getting the hinges to line up with the existing hinges on the jamb is not an easy feat. You also need a special tool to drill the door knob hole and latch. It might take you a few doors to get it right, but that might negate the savings of buying a slab door.

Now, Maurine, your plan is to buy a pre-hung door. As you might guess, we recommend buying a pre-hung door. For those who don't know what a pre-hung door is; let us explain. The pre-hung door comes as a complete door, including jambs, trim, hinges, doorknob & latch holes etc. The pre-hung door comes as a package with the jambs already square to the door. A pre-hung door can be installed by a novice easily the first time and is much faster than trying to wrestle with a slab door. After removing the old door jamb and trim and exposing the rough opening, insert the pre-hung door into the rough opening. Using a level, plumb and level the hinge side of the jamb using shims and gently nail the hinge side of the jamb in place. Level the top of the jamb using shims and nail into place. Using shims on the doorknob side of the jamb; be sure the door opens freely and closes without binding and nail the jamb in place. Most pre-hung doors come with the trim in place. The trim can now be nailed and use caulking around the trim to hide any gaps that might be present. Paint, install the knob and you are done. **Installation tip:** Do not disassemble the pre-hung door package. Install it as it came from the hardware store. The ridged packaging will help in keeping everything square while you install the door.

Dear Maintenance Men:

I am a new maintenance tech and I have just been hired at a large apartment complex. I am not the only maintenance tech, so, I want to stand out to my supervisors. I don't want to be low man on the totem pole for long. What do you suggest I do to be noticed as an outstanding maintenance technician?

Tomas

Dear Tomas:

Ninety percent of a job is showing up! Of course that is not enough, so here are a few suggestions. After showing up on time every day, make sure you are presentable everyday. Low man on the totem pole often gets the worse jobs; don't complain, do them, do them fast and do them right and let your supervisor know when you are done. The phrase "**It's not my job**" does not exist in your vocabulary! While walking around the property and you see trash

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in the bushes: stop and pick it up; every time. If you have special skills, don't keep them a secret. Always be polite to the residents, even if they are not. Keep your jobsite clean. If you have to leave a resident's unit to get parts, clean up before you go. Never leave a unit with the resident wondering if you will ever come back to finish that job. Communicate with both the resident and your supervisor. This will cut down on complaints from both sides. Do not eat, drink, smoke or socialize with a resident, they are not your friends. Your job depends on it. Lastly, take your job seriously, put your heart and soul into the job, it will be noticed and you won't be low man on the totem pole for long.

If you need maintenance work, consultation or management for your building or project, please feel free to contact us. We are available throughout Southern California. For an appointment please call Buffalo Maintenance, Inc. at 714 956-8371 and JLE Property Management, Inc. at 714 778-0480

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