



Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program

Technical Preservation Services
National Park Service

Exposing Interior Masonry Walls and Ceilings

The National Park Service consistently has advised against the removal of plaster or other finishes from interior masonry walls and ceilings in order to create a new appearance. Where such finishes are deteriorated, they should be repaired, replaced in-kind, or replaced with compatible new materials, depending on the specific project. The application states that “owners are strongly discouraged ... from exposing masonry surfaces unless the condition is supported by historical evidence.” In addition, the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings state that “removing paint, plaster or other finishes from historically finished surfaces to create a new appearance (e.g. removing plaster to expose masonry surfaces such as brick walls)” is not a recommended treatment. The only exceptions to this review approach have been rare cases where very small areas of historic finishes have been removed in secondary spaces, a treatment that is less likely to alter the historic character of a building’s interior.

Over the past decade, this approach has resulted in a significant reduction in the removal of plaster and other finishes from walls and ceilings in historic preservation certification projects. However, the number of projects in which applicants propose to expose masonry walls and ceilings is again rising, generally in projects from the recent past (20th century). Historic buildings from the recent past are treated the same way as other historic buildings – the removal of plaster or other finishes from walls and ceilings to expose masonry (e.g., concrete or brick walls and ceilings) and to create a new appearance will cause denial of certification.

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