

# 50plus Handyman



## Chips, cracks and worries

**50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick discusses making good tired walls and woodwork**

So you are sitting down, relaxing, looking around you and thinking "this room could do with a spruce up". Prowling round you start to notice a few chips and scratches in the woodwork (must have been the football practise during the world cup) and the odd crack in the wall. So just how does one go about fixing these things?

Cracking is something that can easily drive one to distraction. Most traditional UK homes are built with plaster walls and these typically have cracks of one kind or another. Houses, particularly older ones built when foundations were minimal, move as soil conditions change. So a dry summer for example can cause movement and cracks to appear. Cracking where a plasterboard wall (stud) meets a solid wall is similarly common.

If these are "hairline" cracks, less than a couple of mm wide, they are most likely due to these normal stresses. However, if a crack becomes noticeably wider or goes through to the brick, stone and or mortar of the wall, call in a builder or surveyor for advice but don't panic, the odds are it's still nothing serious.

Before we come on to how to deal with regular cracks a word on 'live' plaster. If a wall has become damp or there has been movement over time plaster can become detached from the brick or block behind it. It is often apparent when this is the case as the plaster makes a 'hollow' sound when it is tapped. If there is any hint of dampness then the underlying cause should be investigated and dealt with before going further. 'Live' plaster needs to be removed and the hopefully small area re-plastered before decorating. Whilst plastering is a real art new lightweight 'fill and skim' products are now available which make patching far easier for the lesser skilled if only a relatively small area needs re-plastering.

A wide variety of materials are available to deal with cracks. The traditional method was to fill the crack with a dry mix or ready mixed filler, smooth down and paint over. This method still holds good but improved fillers are now available which substantially reduce the risk of the crack reappearing in the short to medium term. Both lightweight fillers (enabling filling of larger cracks or damaged areas quickly) and flexible fillers are available from all good DIY stores - the latter are particularly good for joints between walls and timbers such as skirting and door frames as it allows the timber to move without cracking. Many fillers offer a fast drying time. If you are a professional then this is important as drying time can hold one up. For the non-professional who hopefully has a little more time available then it is worthwhile taking the job slowly and filling then sanding to get the perfect finish. Note also that paint technology offers a range of flexible paints, particularly suitable for ceilings that are prone to hairline cracks.

For real hairline filling can be difficult. The best way to handle them is to open it up into a 'v' groove, dampen the crack and then fill it, removing the excess just before it dries. Then sand down - but not for 24 hours or so.

Finally remember that when decorating the bulk of the time should be in the preparation. Putting the topcoat of paint on will be when the good preparation work shines through!

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