

# Finishing Touches

Create an impression with unusual surface options

By Erika Schnitzer, Managing Editor

With so much competition today to attract renters, first impressions are key. From landscaping to the leasing office, prospective residents are looking at every ounce of effort that apartment communities put in to get their business—and the initial visit is crucial. If a prospect doesn't sign a lease on the first visit, for example, it is important for a community to be memorable enough for him to schedule a second visit.

Of course, in today's recessionary environment, it is difficult for many communities to invest significant resources in outward appearances of their existing buildings when they are simply trying to maintain their bottom lines. But sitting pretty doesn't have to break the bank.

"In that kind of situation, a developer is looking to say, 'how can I make this place look as nice as possible, with as [little] money as possible?'" notes Geoff Schaefer, creative director and vice president of Chemetal/Treefrog.

Panels or surfacing materials, for example, can be used in relatively small areas but can make a truly lasting impression on anyone who walks in the front door. An interesting element—whether it's an unusual material or an eye-catching color—could be placed behind the concierge desk, for example, where prospective residents will see it before they even get to the leasing office.

Other products are unique for their tactile nature and can literally draw a prospect in, such as TAC Acoustical Panels. "From far away, it has a somewhat subtle metallic and reflective quality. Most people are fascinated with its structure when they get close up to it," notes Robin Reigi, principal at Robin Reigi Inc. "For young renters, it would likely feel hip and less expected than other, more recognizable, materials like cork."

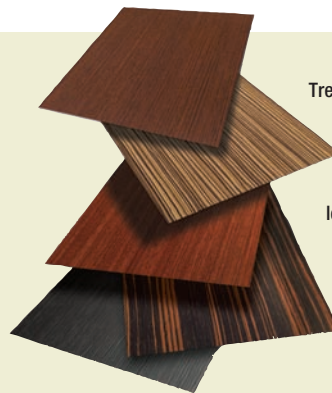
For \$2.45 per square foot, a developer could consider implementing a brushed aluminum panel, such as Chemetal, that differentiates the leasing area or lobby from the competition down the street. And if a prospect cannot decide whether or not to sign on this first visit, creating that lasting first impression will keep the property in the renter's mind when he weighs his various options.

"People still care about how something looks. It has to be great-looking" for it to be memorable, notes Schaefer, who observes that people are generally willing to pay a premium to live in an environment they find visually appealing.

One issue that property owners and managers need to keep in mind when considering installing decorative panels is the wear and tear often associated with materials in common spaces. Lobbies and hallways, in particular, need to be outfitted with materials that can handle high traffic, especially when residents are moving in and out.

"In really high-wear areas, you need to use materials designed for high wear," Schaefer asserts. "One needs to think about how much it's going to get kicked." So, in areas where residents are moving furniture or that have higher-than-average traffic, panels should be located in out-of-reach areas, while still at eye level, for maximum impact. MHN

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Treefrog recently introduced its FSC Collection, five new real wood veneer laminates featuring FSC-certified wood. The new offerings are based on veneers in Treefrog's existing collection. Available in 4-ft. by 8-ft. sheets, Treefrog FSC Collection is pre-finished, which makes the fabrication process more cost-efficient. The collection can contribute to LEED Materials and Resources Credit 7—Certified Wood.

Chemetal has introduced 11 new colors to its Tints Collection. Most of the tints are roll-coat applied to minimize VOCs. Available as 4-ft. by 8-ft., 4-ft. by 10-ft., and custom sizes, the sheets are .025-in. thick. Chemetal Tints contribute to LEED MR Credits 4 Recycled Materials with 85 percent pre-consumer and recycled content, and LEED MR Credits 5.1 Regional Materials for install locations within 500 miles of Easthampton, Mass.



Architectural Systems Inc.'s Sculptured Collection now offers E1-and CARB (California Air Resources Board)-compliant panels with no added urea-formaldehyde. The panels can contribute to LEED EQ Prereq 1: Minimum Indoor Air Quality Performance, EQ Credit 4.4: Low-Emitting Materials: Composite Wood and Agrifiber Products and ID Credit 1: Innovation in Design. (Picture: Sculptured Collection, designed by Hugh Hardy, FAIA, principal, Hardy, Holzman, Pfeiffer Associates.)



TAC acoustical panels are made with porous polypropylene bead foam suitable for ceilings and walls. Class A fire-rated, waterproof and paintable, TAC is available in white or charcoal gray. TAC is mildew- and moisture-resistant and does not contain chlorofluorocarbons, hydrocarbons or VOCs.



Sublime's Alchemy is a collection of hand-painted acrylic and glass panels available in various thicknesses and custom colors with maximum sheet size of 4-ft. x 8-ft. In this collection, the interaction of metallic and opaque pigments result in a kaleidoscope of color and multi-dimensional patterns.