



Contractors Minimize Risk and Save Money With Single-Spray Level 5 Finish

A Level 5 finish—the highest quality finish for drywall walls and ceilings—can be tedious and time-consuming. USG Corporation is making that job easier with its SHEETROCK® brand TUFF-HIDE™ primer-surfacer that simultaneously skim-coats and primes new drywall in a single spray application to create a Level 5 finish in minutes. Customers like Gary Ahern, president of Ahern Drywall in Chicago, say, “TUFF-HIDE saves time and money with its easy application and smooth finish. I have zero problems, zero callbacks and zero negative effects with TUFF-HIDE.”

ASTM International describes Level 5 as the highest quality finish because it provides the most uniform surface and minimizes the possibility of joints or fasteners showing through. Level 5 is recommended wherever severe lighting is present, such as cathedral ceilings, south-facing windows, or when semigloss or non-textured paints are used.

Typically a Level 5 finish is achieved by applying a series of five coats, or levels, of joint compound, including a skim coat over the entire wall and a coat of primer, to achieve a smooth finish. USG Corporation’s TUFF-HIDE, a dual-purpose primer and surfacer in one, eliminates the need to apply a joint compound skim coat and additional coat of primer. Instead, TUFF-HIDE sprays on quickly and evenly in a single application with professional airless spray equipment and produces a durable, whiter and smoother finish that generally does not require sanding. The USG primer-surfacer is designed for interior application on new drywall and resists abrasion and minimizes joint banding and photographing.

Contractor Gary Ahern has worked with several churches that have high-sloping ceilings and skylights in their sanctuaries and use TUFF-HIDE to achieve a Level 5 finish both time-effectively and cost-effectively. “There is no flashing or seams showing through with TUFF-HIDE, and I reduce my callbacks,” said Ahern. “Callbacks cost you money and put your reputation at risk because general contractors will look at your work more closely. With TUFF-HIDE, I save money and increase my reputation with quality finish work.”

TUFF-HIDE can be applied over any USG substrate where painting is recommended, but it is critical that a Level 4 finish, including proper fastener coverage, is completed first. The primer-surfacer is not intended to achieve a Level 5 finish from a surface prepared to a Level 3 or below. USG also recommends a job-site mock-up in advance of complete installation to confirm visual standards with the building’s owners, architects and general contractors.

Ahern even used the product in his own home, in a room where sunlight reflects in from the Fox River. “I don’t want anyone noticing drywall issues in my own home,” he said. Ahern applied TUFF-HIDE in a single step, achieving the same results as the traditional two-part Level 5 process of skim-coating surfaces with joint compound followed by a coat of primer.

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Useful for Various Construction Markets and Applications

Nelson Wall Systems, which works mostly in the Midwest, uses TUFF-HIDE for a Level 5 finish in both high-end residential homes and commercial projects, including office buildings with long hallways, which project manager Terri Brandenberger said are notorious for joint flashing.

“Critical lighting is a drywall contractor’s nemesis,” she said. “TUFF-HIDE is like an insurance policy. It removes much of that risk. I know that wall will be perfect and there will be no problems when it’s done. TUFF-HIDE leaves a drywall finish unequalled to anything else I’ve seen.”

TUFF-HIDE is also beneficial for remodeling projects as the Level 5 finish can evenly coat new drywall and existing plaster surfaces to create a continuous look. Nelson Wall Systems recently used TUFF-HIDE to do just that on a 50-year-old plaster home with a kitchen remodel. “A Level 4 finish won’t look like plaster, so we used TUFF-HIDE as a cost-effective alternative to achieve a Level 5 that looked closer to a plaster-looking finish,” explained Brandenberger. “The architect was so pleased with the outcome, he hired us for his own home remodel. TUFF-HIDE produces a Level 5 finish that is so uniform and even, it’s nearly impossible for even the highest-end finishes to rival it.”

Additionally, TUFF-HIDE can be used for ceiling applications. Where a flat white finish is desired, TUFF-HIDE can be left unpainted, resulting in an ideal final finish and saving time and money for the both the contractor and the customer. “After we apply TUFF-HIDE to the walls and ceilings, if our clients like the color, they just have to paint the walls and not the ceilings. This saves them time and money too,” Brandenberger said.

Affordable, High-Quality Finish in a Fraction of the Time

Besides providing a high-quality finish, TUFF-HIDE’s single-spray application creates substantial saving in cost and time compared to the two-step skim- and prime-coat process. Residential contractor Mike Polhamus of Great Plains Drywall said he uses the USG primer-surfacer product for every smooth-wall job and saves critical labor costs doing so. In fact, Polhamus estimates that he saved six hours of labor by using TUFF-HIDE in a 2,400-square-foot, two-story home.

Bennett’s Drywall in Charlotte, N.C., used TUFF-HIDE in the largest Level 5 application in the city at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. TUFF-HIDE finished 140,000 square feet of wall space at the newly opened facility that features high ceilings, expansive, uninterrupted walls and vast amounts of critical lighting. “TUFF-HIDE lays down better and is easier on the spray equipment,” said Nicky Helms, owner. “It is easier to use and we don’t have to replace the pump packings as often, which saves us a lot of time and money for equipment.”

Brandenberger said she expects TUFF-HIDE to protect more than just her bottom line. She hopes it is a life saver as she recently used TUFF-HIDE in her surgeon’s remodeled home. “I wanted that house to be perfect because if I’m in the ER again, I don’t want him mad about his drywall,” she laughed. “TUFF-HIDE protects my firm’s performance and reputation. We won’t warranty smooth ceilings unless we’ve used TUFF-HIDE. Reputation is my company and TUFF-HIDE is so good for our business.”

For more information on SHEETROCK TUFF-HIDE primer-surfacer, including literature and videos and other innovative USG products, visit usg.com/level5. Additional information on Level 5 finishing can be found on the Gypsum Association’s website at gypsum.org.