

Interior **Trends**

# A New Day for Clay



Photo courtesy of Addison Doty



Photo courtesy of Andy Mattern, artimbo.com



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GOING 'GREEN' comes in many colors, especially when talking about the walls in your home. When one wants to add color and design to their walls, they generally turn to paint, wallpaper or glazes. However, there is one environmentally friendly, aesthetic alternative, which must not be overlooked: CLAY! As the oldest interior finish in the world (hail the days of caveman living rooms!), we have learned to respond well to clay earth and even celebrate its health inducing effects. With the recent focus on 'green-buildings,' clay offers a smart eco-friendly solution.

American Clay Enterprises out of New Mexico has created a line of clay earth plasters based with 40 different organic Mayan pigments. Lu Goodwin Mark, owner of the Austin School of Faux Finishes, has worked extensively to create healthy, aesthetic interiors, and is familiar with the benefits of American Clay. As a truly organic substance, it breathes and interacts with its surroundings, cleansing the air as it circulates. One of its most distinguishing characteristics is that it absorbs moisture and then releases negative ions, a chemical reaction scientifically touted for its stress-reducing effects. Walls that create a sense of well-being? If you are skeptical, simply ask any homeowner who's experienced clay walls and you will likely hear words such as "healing", "peaceful" and "calming".

There are other benefits to clay walls besides the vibrant, lush colors and textures. Unlike many of its competitors, it is non-toxic, meaning that volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are not released during or after use. It is resistant to fire, repels dust, animal hair and mold and is easy to clean. Clay walls lower temperatures measurably during the hot Austin summers, thereby reducing fuel expenditure and cutting down on A/C costs. During winters, the clay walls surrounding the fireplace retain the warmth all evening.

In the 2009 HBA "Parade of Homes," American Clay was featured in one of the award winning homes. Mark aptly notes how surprisingly well the organic product adapts to a contemporary setting, and how versatile the finishes are in general. For homeowners who are not ready to outfit their home entirely with clay walls, Lu suggests a more cost-effective approach, "simply create ONE wall in the front entrance, bedroom or wherever you'd like to add warmth and elegance to your home." Whether one is looking for a rustic, textured look or a polished sophistication, the options are seemingly endless! ❖

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