

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

“Ghosting” on Stucco Surfaces

Different shading of stucco finishes at wall framing can become visible overtime, showing a “ghost” image of the framing behind the stucco.

Stucco surfaces between studs are better insulated and are more shielded from interior heat during the heating season than stucco over studs. Therefore, the surfaces between the studs stay cooler and very small dust and soot particles in the air tend to stick more on the cooler surfaces and accumulate over time, showing a darker shade.

Because the particles are very small, they tend to be difficult to wash off completely.

This “ghosting” effect can be more pronounced on stucco over open (unsheathed) framing, or over well insulated stud cavities, or with steel framing because it conducts heat more than wood. Ghosting of framing is not limited

to stucco; it also appears on other siding materials. The shading difference is harmless to the stucco.

Concrete masonry units (CMU) and mortar cure at different rates and have different densities. Mortar absorbs water faster and dries out quicker than block. This leads to color differences that “print through” the stucco. Insufficient stucco thickness (less than the required ½ inch over CMU) makes ghosting far more likely.

Occasionally ghosting indicates excessive moisture inside walls. Excessive moisture requires attention from a qualified investigator and should be remedied promptly.

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