

CHOOSING

Selecting the right tradesperson is crucial to your project's success, says Sophie Hoyland

a plasterer

If like many other self builders, you're planning to build using subcontractors you'll need to learn what each trade does, what they're responsible for and how to manage and assess the quality of their work. In the first part of our new series on the key trades we take a look at the role of a plasterer so you can ensure they're doing their job efficiently.

"Personal recommendation is key to finding a good plasterer," says Alison Winfield-Chislett at the Good Life Centre. Ask friends and neighbours, check out online forums and trades websites, such as www.mybuilder.com and www.ratedpeople.com, but most importantly always ask to inspect their recent work and speak to their previous employers before you hire them.

Tools and materials

Typically, plasterers will supply their own tools, mixing utensils and bagged goods. "Understandably, plasterers are very loyal to their favourite brands and tend to stick with what they know works well," says Alison. However, if

you're having plasterboard fitted, you'll need to provide this yourself, along with any beading required.

Wet plaster and drylining

The most traditional plastering technique uses a 'wet' mix of either gypsum or cement and water. It's spread directly onto brickwork using a trowel (in one or two layers) and finished with a thin skin coat of gypsum. When set, the plaster forms an integral part of the wall and is ready to be covered in whatever decoration you choose, such as paint or wallpaper.

Drylining uses manufactured boards of paper-covered plaster for both ceilings and walls. The large flat sheets are bonded, nailed or screwed in place. If attaching to masonry walls, dabs of plaster can be used to fix the boards in place ready for decoration. Alternatively a thin layer of plaster can be applied.

Wet plaster is generally favoured because it provides a smooth and durable finish, possesses good soundproofing qualities and seals around openings. Nevertheless, plasterboard does offer a number of advantages. This method is a lot quicker to put up, doesn't come with long drying periods and removes the risk of any cracking.

How long does the job take?

It's difficult to give an exact timeframe as it depends on factors such as the quality of work, the weather and how big the house is. "I'd suggest one day per room.

ALISON WINFIELD-CHISLETT

is owner of the Good Life Centre, an independent learning space in London that offers DIY workshops. For more information visit: www.thegoodlifecentre.co.uk



If it's in the middle of winter it can take longer to dry, whereas in the summer plaster should set relatively quickly," explains Alison.

Costs

Plasterers can work on a supply and fix, part-supply or labour only basis and will often give a lump sum quote. However as a guide, Tristan Rees (a recommended plasterer on www.ratedpeople.com) suggests, a plasterer should charge on average £150 per day and anything from £50-£100 per labourer. "I normally estimate how many days a job will take and work out a price based on that," says Tristan. In inner cities, Alison advises that you may end up paying more – up to £200 per day.

Assessing the work

You're inspecting how smooth and level the work is. Look directly at the surface from the middle of the wall outwards, in the lighting conditions that the room will be most used in. If you notice any bumps or angles, be sure to discuss these with the plasterer as soon as possible to avoid conflict at a later date.

Plastering can be a messy job. If splatters are left on the floor or any other surface and not cleaned straight away, they can be difficult to remove. So when looking for a plasterer, make sure you inspect not only the quality of their work but how tidy they are, too.

