

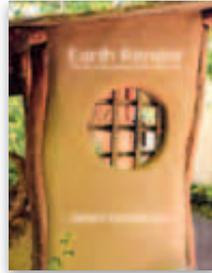


# Reviews...

REVIEW BY ROB HADDEN

## Earth Render The art of clay plaster, render and paints

James Henderson  
RRP \$33. ISBN 9780975778203  
Published by Python Press (2013)  
Paperback, 88 pages



James Henderson has produced a little gem of a book that will, I am sure, be eagerly sought after by anyone who wants to know about clay and its uses in renders and plasters. Drawing on decades of research and experimentation and his mentoring by Bill and Athena Steen, he has condensed this knowledge into an easy to read manual for earthen and straw protection systems.

Clay renders and plasters have a long and distinctive career spanning millennia, ranging across the globe wherever clay is to be found. Especially useful when lime was too costly or hard to come by at the vernacular level, clay afforded the opportunity for the more impoverished to be able to decorate and protect their buildings for minimal outlay. The recipes for milk paint and clay paints are the forerunners for all our modern synthetic and toxic finishes that we splash around at great costs to us financially and adversely for the environment.

James introduces us to the main materials needed for the preparation of these renders, namely clay, straw and sand. With these three items he shows us how, in differing combinations, they form the backbone of all the renders and plasters we will need, whether internal or external.

One of the hardest things to do is to source good clay, sand or straw and James gives us all the information we need and the places to go to if we do not have them at our disposal on site or nearby. As with lime rendering, quality materials will make

for perfect results and getting the right clays (all clays are not equal), sand and straw will determine how your project goes. Get them wrong and you will have failed renders and heartache.

For the preparation, application and mixes, James covers everything you will wish to know for the rendering of conventional plaster walls to light earth, mud brick, straw or rammed earth. Each has its own peculiarities and methodologies. There are typically two main mixes – clay/straw and clay/sand. The straw and sand provide methods of preventing cracking and the clay holds it all together and provides the adhesive qualities need to keep the stuff on the wall and not on the floor. The process of thoroughly wetting down the wall is emphasised, as this provides for a long cure and aids the suction of the render to the wall. While I myself do not use clay slips as the precursor to rendering, James is an advocate for the use of this 'primer' for the walls of earth and straw.

Natural glues that aid some renders are discussed: wheat paste and casein being the main contenders here. Both have a binding effect and will hold the surface dust to a minimum once dried.

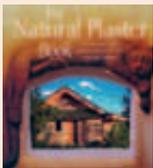
Once the walls are rendered the matter or decorative paints comes up and casein and clay paints top the list of desirable finishes. Casein (or milk paint) is so easy and SO cheap to make and it is bullet proof. Made from skim milk, lime and oxides, it produces a glorious flat to satin finish that can be left natural, buffed or waxed to give a slight sheen to it. Clay paints on the other hand offer an alternative finish and can have finely chopped straw added to make the surface come to life with texture.

The final chapter is a list of all the materials and tools you will need to render your construction. Once you have mastered the techniques outlined in this little tome, you will have a wall finish to be proud of that won't harm you families health and will look a million dollars, but cost much less.

James has wrought well with this book and it is a local production. Support him and the environment by buying this book. You will not be disappointed. ♦

Available to purchase from Python Press ([www.pythonpress.com](http://www.pythonpress.com)) or Holmgren Design (03 5348 3636, [www.holmgren.com.au](http://www.holmgren.com.au))

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