

innovative uses

French Couple Brings ‘Material Of The Century’ To California Ceilings



Affix a vinyl membrane to a frame, heat it, mold it and – Voilà! – you’ve transformed the drab and ho-hum into elegant and avant-garde.

From the land that gave the world Bordeaux wines, the artistry of Claude Monet and injected the American culinary lexicon with hors-d'oeuvre, au gratin and à la mode, comes interior and remodeling experts Jean and Marie Gachet. Together they are delivering a sleek, artsy texture to California ceilings by using vinyl and a French-born technique.

“Vinyl is the material of the century, and we use it because it helps us create interesting, high-end-looking installations,” Jean Gachet says. “You can achieve a truly beautiful finish that doesn’t alter in time and can dramatically enhance or modify aspects and volume of a room.”

Founders of French Ceiling LLC, the Gachets have quickly impressed the design community – garnering endorsements from designers Gary Hutton and Steven Miller – since setting up shop in the San Francisco Bay Area four years ago after moving from the Luberon region in southern France.

They turned heads at December’s “Dining by Design” charity fundraiser with one of their more unique and sophisticated creations, a retro red awning and wall developed in collaboration with Miller for his festive table.

“French Ceiling is an incredible product. Not only does it provide spectacular visual results, but does so quickly and inexpensively,” Hutton says. “We have had French Ceiling in our offices for more than two years and it still looks as fantastic as the day it was installed. It is something we will spec again and again.”

The vinyl membrane allows for a rapid space transformation, while other smooth surfaces such as lacquer ceiling could take weeks to install, adds Hutton, who is the principal of Gary Hutton Design, a San Francisco-based interior and furniture design firm with showrooms across the country. The designer will soon be using French Ceiling for a residential project in Los Angeles’ posh Bel-Air neighborhood.

It was in the 1970s that flexible vinyl stretched ceilings began making a presence in Europe. Jean and Marie became familiar with the technique 15 years ago. With an architectural background, Marie Gachet’s expertise in volume and shape adaptation made her realize that this technique would be an excellent tool for creating both conventional flat-ceiling spaces and avant-garde applications for the decorative and design industries.

French Ceiling can be installed within hours over most surfaces just about anywhere – including residential, commercial and public spaces, hotels and spas, schools and hospitals. Once the vinyl membrane is roughly clipped to a frame, the room is heated to 120 F to allow the vinyl to soften. The heated vinyl membrane molds easily over any shape, and can be stretched over the frame from wall to wall, or ceiling to floor, without touching the existing ceiling. The technique can enhance any new home or office, but it also effectively conceals unsightly “popcorn” and “T-Bar” or cracked, peeled and water-damaged ceiling.

The French Ceiling concept was created by Prestige Design in Paris, France. The Gachets have used the manufacturer’s Presticlip system, which is patented in the United States and has proved easily adaptable to the American market.

The product is antistatic, lightweight, easy to maintain, and can be cleaned with ammonia-based window cleaning products such as Windex. French Ceiling can also be perforated to allow for lighting, sprinkler or ventilation fixtures, and easily swapped for a new color. It comes in 55 shades and three distinctive finishes (matte, satin and glossy). Glossy and satin finishes reflect the light and the setting in which they are installed in a unique way that adds volume and depth to the decor of any room.



Photos by J.D. Peterson

French Ceiling’s retro-red awning and wall creation was featured at a San Francisco fundraiser.



Jean Cooksey's daughter's bedroom before French Ceiling....



...the same bedroom after French Ceiling.

The vinyl membrane can be installed in up to a 400-square-foot room in one day, without having to move the furniture. That is why French Ceiling can prove extremely useful for schools and other public places, as there is no need for a lengthy renovation closing.

"Our modular 'clip-unclip' frame allows us to change or redo a ceiling overnight," Marie Gachet said.

Also made convenient by the French Ceiling technique is developing a sound absorbing insulation system. Often an important requirement when designing music and recreation rooms, sound absorbing material can be installed easily between the existing ceiling and the vinyl membrane.

French Ceiling, however, is making plenty of noise in private home market.

"The writing is on the ceiling – so to speak," said Jean Cooksey, a homeowner in Fairfield, Calif., who has had French Ceiling installed in her subdivision home kitchen and child's room. "Once you see it up, you start imagining all the possibilities this material offers. Having it installed was a very easy and a very economical decision that gave an entire room a new 'wardrobe' and made it look unique."

The vinyl membrane helped Cooksey cover a dated and unsightly simulated acoustical (popcorn) ceiling. She chose pink for her daughter's room and the material and technique proved especially effective in the kitchen, where the challenge was to conceal a lot of angles with an easily cleanable surface.

"Our kitchen is stunning," Cooksey said. "It has become a wonderfully warm place with the glass-like opaque vinyl, especially at night. And it is a joy to walk into my daughter's room."

You will find more information on this unique application, along with photos and a video, at www.frenchceiling.com.