

The Art Of EIFS

Rachel Curry is not your typical artist. Her favored medium is layers of acrylic stuccos and a range of paints applied to a canvas of expanded polystyrene board (EPS).

Curry, who is also a Senergy architectural rep for the Edmonton branch of Brock White Canada, is raising eyebrows in the EIFS community for her artistic finishes which are proving to architects and building owners that there are options to the everyday “flat stucco finish” normally associated with the exterior finishing system.



Her most notable achievement is the recently completed feature wall inside the Bold Centre, a new civic centre in Lac La Biche, Alta. At conceptual design, Curry saw the wall as an important gathering place for local residents. Her finished product features EPS and acrylic finished tree-like columns representing the pillars of the community while gesturing to a variety of tree species in the region.

Curry worked with project architect ATB Architecture, Marcon Masonry Ltd. and Clark Builders on the job. All of the Acrylic and EPS trees were done in her Studio, about one hour's drive north of Edmonton.

The project won her the Alberta Wall & Ceiling Association's new Pushing the Envelope Award for Innovation. Gaining that recognition is a “huge step” for Curry, who says the stucco and EIFS industry has come a long way but the craft of plastering (in a sense that is what she does) has been mostly forgotten.

Curry had no experience with EIFS and stucco when Brock White assigned her to represent Senergy about six years ago. “One of the first things I did to learn was take home a five-gallon pail of acrylic stucco to stucco my bathroom.”

Learning the craft was one challenge; securing clients another. To drum up sales, Curry started experimenting with Senergy's specialty metallic acrylic stuccos at her home studio to develop her style. Typically, prior to applying an acrylic finish, the EPS board (a minimum of two inches thick) is roughed and a standard base coat and mesh are applied – just as with conventional EIFS type applications. From there, Curry's creative juices take over. “Every application and style is a different technique. Layering, force drying and cooling, mixing and sculpting the materials are part of the procedure.”

Her work is often applied in panels which are simply inserted into a standard EIF system. They work well even with rain screen systems in place.

Curry is surprised at how well her work has been received. The Alberta Association of Architects has been one of her big supporters, retaining her to teach a course called Acrylic Stucco as an Art Form: Interior and Exterior Design. “The course shows architects that we can make acrylic stucco look like anything under the rainbow.” The course is AAA accredited.

Her work can be more than a pretty picture on a wall, however. A case in point is a practical and cost-effective application of EPS architectural profiles replicating wood battens done on homes at an Edmonton subdivision recently. Curry trained the builder’s crew to apply the faux battens, which eliminate the need for caulking and the ongoing maintenance that real wood battens need.

Curry is often called on by contractors, designers and architects to consult on replicating a specific style or type of plaster work. In most cases she will train the contractor or provide advice on the almost limitless options. “We can take old and make it look new again, we can take new and make it look old, we can make walls look like steel without any steel at all and EIFS's look like masonry and masonry look like wood or water. If you can dream the design, together with trained installers we can make it real.”

The cost of her work can range for a typical four-by-four panel (anything from an EIFS wall to a cedar mounted hanging art piece) from \$2,000 to \$10,000. Architects might consider services like hers where public art is required by municipalities as part of developments with public space. The City of Edmonton, for example, requires projects with public space to allot one percent of the total project cost to art. “It can really give architects grief because there is often a conflict between what the artist wants and their vision for their building.” By contrast Curry’s work can be blended into the architectural theme of the project.

She sees a bright future ahead for her type of work. “This is something that can make a building really shine and we (the industry) have the skill level to do it.” Curry can be contacted through Brock White’s Edmonton office or through Facebook at Studio In The Woods Art by Rae.

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