

Lime wash

General

Traditionally lime wash was the principal finish applied externally and internally to historic buildings, quite often applied directly to the masonry or brickwork and more commonly to pre-applied lime coatings (i.e., harling, plaster, render etc.,). Although often thought of as a decorative coating, the lime wash was first of all a protective layer to the lime coatings and masonry substrate. On new lime renders and plasters it unifies and protects the surface particularly while strength is developing within the new plaster.

As with all lime coatings, lime wash is a breathable coating allowing evaporation of moisture and water vapour. Lime wash is also a repairing material, being used to fill small shrinkage cracks on the lime coverings.

Lime wash can also be used in conjunction with various aggregates to make shelter coats for friable masonry and will act as a sacrificial protective coat.

Disclaimer

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Plain Lime wash

Plain un-coloured lime wash will take on the colour of the lime used; this can range from pure white through to grey or buff coloured.

Coloured Lime wash

Generally earth pigments were used to colour the lime washes, most commonly ochre's, but also sienna's and umbers, which produced a range of yellows, reds and oranges. Broadly speaking these produced pastel shades, although deeper colours are not uncommon. Coal dust, ash, blood and ground stone dust have all been found as additives in historic lime washes to achieve the desired colour

Application of Lime wash

Preparation

Surfaces to be lime washed must be clean, free from grease and they must be porous. Previously lime washed surfaces must be well brushed down and any loose lime wash scrapped off. Any mould should be treated with fungicide and thoroughly washed off with clean water. Do not use fungicides, which contain silicon.

Where lime wash is to be applied to a smooth or dense background, the addition of a small amount of fine aggregate in the first coat will aid adhesion to the background.

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Damping Down

Lime wash should never be applied to a dry surface, as this will cause rapid drying out of the lime wash and result in dusting. Spray about 3 sq/m of the surface to be lime washed with water until the surface is damp but not running with water. Do not try to damp down the whole wall or ceiling at one time, as most of the area will be dry before it can be lime washed. Dry joints must be avoided as these will result in the lime wash gaining a patchwork appearance.

Application

Lime wash is best applied by using a flat brush or masonry paintbrush. Stir the lime wash well before and during application, apply working the wash well into the surface. The lime wash should be applied in several thin coats. Avoid runs or drips running down the face of the work.

The lime wash will appear transparent when first applied so care must be taken not to build up the lime wash too quickly as this will craze on drying. Each coat should be allowed to dry before the next coat is applied. We recommend 24 hours between coats. It is very important to rewet the previous coat before applying the next coat. At least 4 coats will be needed to cover new work.

Each wall or ceiling should be worked on until each coat is completed, as day joints will be visible.

Each coat will need to be burnished into the surface with a dry brush as it starts to 'gel'. This will give a surface free from brush strokes and leave a unified finish.

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As earth pigments are a natural product slight variations in colour do occur. We highly recommend when ordering coloured lime wash order the whole amount required plus 15%, this should then be mixed together in a large container and will avoid variation in colour over the job.

Common Mistakes and Solutions;

Lime wash dry but powdery:	Dried too fast, spray with water and recoat with lime wash.
Lime wash not absorbed:	Unsuitable non-porous surface remove and use alternative product.
Lime wash patchy	Insufficiently mixed, mix following coat thoroughly.
Lime wash dries too quickly:	Remove flaky lime wash and damp down the background.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT THERE IS NO DANGER OF FROST FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER THE LIMEWASH HAS BEEN APPLIED.

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