GENERAL: The brown coat is the second or “fill” coat of a three-coat stucco assembly on a hand or machine apply plaster. After the cement brown coat of plaster is applied it is leveled by the plasterer using a rod or darby. The next step is to “float” the brown coat. Historically this was done with a wood shingle, cork or neoprene rubber float. While seemingly an innocuous task, it can have significant impact on the cement plaster basecoats appearance and performance.

CODE: Per ASTM C926 -19 under plaster application and refering the the second (brown) coat, section 7.4.2.2 states The surface shall be floated uniformly to promote densification of the coat and to provide a surface receptive to bonding of the finish coat. The key word is “densification”, this means to compact and make more dense. A properly densified brown coat is more resitant to the passgae of liquid water and more crack resistant.

TIMING: The critical part of floating the brown coat is timing. The plaster membrane must not move under the float during the process of floating. Floating too early will fail to consolidate and likely result in a wavy brown coat. The correct time to begin floating is when sufficient mix water has evaporated and the plaster coat slightly stiffens. One method used to test for timing is to press the float on to the freshly applied brown coat and when the float does not stick, it is ready to be compacted and densified. The floating action is circular and with only light to moderate pressure. This also provides a surface receptive to bonding of the third (finish) coat.

CAVEAT: Sponge floats will not densify the brown coat and are not recommended for this task. Should the brown coat be allowed to become too dry to float, the surface can be scrapped with a trowel and achieve similar results to hard floating. This is called “dry rodding”. ASTM C926 19 allows for trowel scrapping the brown coat under section 7.4.2.1 “... Dry rodding the surface of the brown coat shall be permitted”.

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