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## LUXURY HOMES

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THE ULTIMATE  
SAGAPONACK  
RETREAT



# EMBELLISHED SURFACES

By: Pamela Hughes

It is amazing how intertwined art is with design. The two words are almost synonymous. In previous columns, I've written about buying art and how to frame it, and we have had numerous columns about various facets of design. In this column, I'd like to write about having art actually created on the surface of our interiors: truly blending art with design.

We have long been an admirer and proponent of painted surfaces and have often used artists and craftsmen to embellish limited surfaces of a home. Like most things, if overdone, they lose their impact. So when we have used them to make a statement, we surround them with more subtle surfaces; when we use them more prolifically, we make them more background, using less bold tone-on-tone glazes and finishes.

The menu of painted surfaces and techniques is vast, varying from simple glazing; to stippling and sponging; applying metallic leafing; and painting murals or designs on the wall or ceiling. Other techniques include venetian plaster which is a special plaster material incorporating finely ground marble to give a surface that is almost as smooth as glass, yet has the look of some dimension and the mark of the craftsman's trowel throughout. Here are a few examples of what we have done to demonstrate these techniques.

We recently had a client that adored embellished surfaces. So almost every surface of the home has some sort of applied special paint finish, even all the baseboards, floor casings and crown mouldings. In order to do that amount of work we had to make sure the painting was subtle and added nuance and elegance, and that the surfaces did not compete with one another. So, we had artisans do a gentle striae technique which

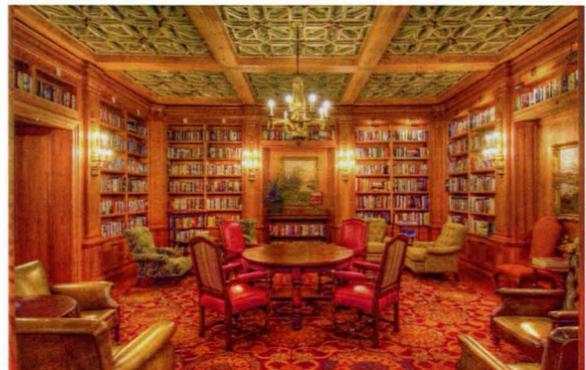


Photo above and to the right:  
The Cloister at Sea Island. Designed by Hughes Design Associates.





involves painting a glaze onto the already painted base, door casing and trim, and then dragging a dry brush through the glaze to give it direction and a vague texture. We even had them mask the various boards of the door casing and wainscoting so that the vertical boards have a vertical striae and the horizontal boards have a horizontal striae. It is subtle, of course, but it almost unconsciously informs the eye of the nature of the trim and wainscot, giving a richer environment. It doesn't shout at all, and from across the room is not noticeable, yet as you walk down the hall and your hand and eye touch the casing or chairrail, you have a little "aha" that says someone took some special care and attention here. It is very lovely.

For yet another project, we are having a venetian plaster applied to a vaulted ceiling in a large vestibule between the great room and the foyer. It has a detailed moulding at the perimeter of the curving ceiling surface where it meets the walls, but the ceiling itself will have a lovely sheen almost like a rich damask. The color is tone-on-tone so it too adds detail without clamour.

At The Cloister at Sea Island, we designed cast plaster shapes on the ceiling of the library. Then we painted, glazed and stenciled the shapes to give the look of Renaissance plaster. The embellished surface then gained the luster and glow that comes with age. Something totally glamorous that we have done is applying an ethereal mural to a single wall in a small room whether it be a bath, powder room or dressing area. On one project, the artist painted a wall with a gradual shading, starting with a soft yellow at the ceiling and descending to a more pronounced gold at the base. On this was painted a graceful branching of forsythia with delicate leaves and clusters of voluptuous blossoms cascading. This room may have

been small, but it was bursting with character and charm.

For a bar area at one of the larger homes we have designed, we had artisans stencil rugged dark beams with a low contrast design. The pattern was a series of scrolls and leaves of a dark fern green and muted ochre that blended well with the grain of the wood, but did not jump to the eye.

Another way we used venetian plaster was on the walls of the entrance foyer at The Concession, an extremely elegant golf club in Bradenton, Florida. When entering The Concession, one passes through heavy mahogany double doors into a foyer with a double vaulted ceiling. The feeling of spaciousness and grace is as if one has entered a lovely Tuscan villa. The subtle beige of the venetian plaster walls adds to this image of rich elegance.

As you can see, the variety and palette is essentially infinite. It's part of what makes our work so much fun and interesting- we like using the broad spectrum of fabrics, materials and the talent of artisans to customize the homes of our clients. The embellished surfaces truly blend art with design, and we are all richer for it. ✈



Pamela Hughes is president and owner of Hughes Design Associates, one of the premier interior design firms in the US, with offices throughout Florida and in Washington, DC/VA. Pamela and her firm work throughout North America and the Caribbean creating luxury residences of incomparable style and beauty.