



## 36 / PLASTERWORK

NOW WE PREPARED TO MAKE CENTERS, THOUSANDS OF THEM, IN THE PLASTERWORK OF THE LIVING ROOM.

My first idea for the plasterwork panel design had been a pattern of tiny leaves. It had a comfortable organic quality. Randy made a beautiful mockup by casting plaster over a form made of relief built up from thin paper, and we then installed two or three panels in the room to look at them. Physically, they were lovely. Everyone liked the leaf design.

However, there was an uneasiness in me, a feeling that the leaf designs were pretty, but not substantial enough, too formless. Truthfully, because the space between the leaves wasn't very good, there were not many living centers in the design. I felt afraid that they did not have enough lasting power to make the room really good.

I asked Randy to make another, very geometric, pattern which was something like a basket pattern, tiny strips crisscrossing in low relief.

It was colder, and more formal. It had more strong centers. But it was also less pleasant.

When I first showed the two to our clients, they chose the pretty one, the one with the leaves. But this did not make my uneasiness go away.

I asked them to spend an hour, first sitting for half an hour with the leaf design, then sitting for half an hour with the geometric design, in both cases paying attention to the life and wholesomeness they felt in themselves while sitting in the room.

Faced with that question, and the staying power of the pattern, all of us came to the same conclusion. The leaf design was the more trivial. It did not sustain a feeling of wholesomeness in any of us as strongly as the geometric basket design. We chose the basket design.

Then we had to decide the arrangement of the panels in the room. We kept going back and forth between real full-size castings, fixing them and making paper mockups, in the room, until the whole room became still and comfortable.



*Randy checking widths and details of the edge band on the plaster panels. On these panels, it turned out that a difference among one-eighth, one-quarter, and three-eighths of an inch was of tremendous significance.*

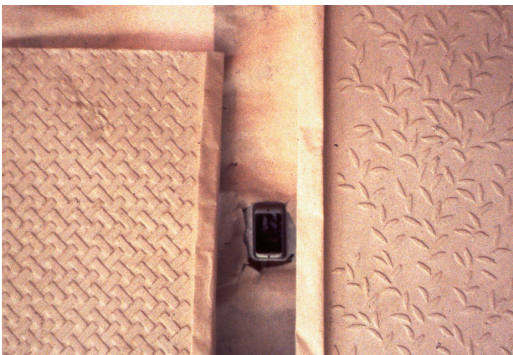


*Mockup in paper to test the overall pattern of the plaster panels on the ceiling. This part concentrates on the edge, where the width of the panels had to be chosen very carefully, to get a proper harmony.*

During this process I found out, to my surprise, that the *overall* pattern of cast panel strips in the room was the most crucial thing of all. We therefore made several cardboard models of the room interior at 1 inch to 1 foot, trying different overall arrangements of one-inch wide white paper strips (not patterned), just to find the overall

arrangement of the strips in the room that made the room most beautiful.

We ended up with wood panelling below waist height on the walls, a regular array of vertical patterned plaster strips above waist height, about 4 or 5 feet apart, with areas of smooth plaster between them, and a basketweave of



*Plaster panels with the basket pattern and the leaf pattern placed in the living room, so we could compare the feeling each one created in that room*



*Trying the size and weight of one of the versions of the rosettes to go in the middle of the ceiling panels*



*Another view, looking at the middle of the ceiling*

raised patterned strips in the ceiling, with flower medallions at the intersections of the strips. All the patterned strips had the same geometric miniature basketweave design in low relief, cast from a mold that we ourselves made in balsa wood.

All this had to be done now, before the house was closed in or windows installed, to allow us the lead-time necessary to make the plaster panels in advance.

We made them in our own workshops.



### 37 / WINDOW OPENINGS AND WINDOWS

ABOUT THIS TIME, IT CAME TIME TO DECIDE THE DETAILED WINDOW DESIGNS.

At the time of framing, window openings had been made specifically for each room. Now we had to look at the actual window design itself: the arrangement of lights, mullions, and glazing bars for each window and door.

In my experience, this is always torture. It seems easy, but is actually hellishly hard. We usually do it with surveyor's tape, pinned or stapled to the window frames, so we can look at the

effect of different patterns on the building, from inside and out. It takes days, sometimes even weeks.

The Upham house was no exception. We worked at it for several days, always looking at each room from the inside (that is usually the easier part), and then looking at the building as a whole from the outside. That is the hard part. Each room has its own demands, and tells you what the windows should be like, from the inside. In a complex building, it is very hard to get