



Plastered Again

Put yourself in a cherubic mood making this plaster candle sconce.

Materials:

Gorgeous tin ceiling panels make great moulds and are available from:

[Brian Greer Tin Ceilings](#)

1572 Mannheim Road, RR2

Petersburg, ON, Canada, N0B 2H0

(519) 743-9710

(519) 570-1447

Specifically you'll need:

- Tin background or 'filler' ceiling panel for the mould - Filler #101A
- Tin cherub face with wings - Specialty Item #308
- Tin trim pieces for the edges -
- Moulding or Cornice #202
- Cement or grout colourant
- Grout sealant
- Liquid soap

Tools

- Tin snips
- Duct tape
- Drill and drill bits
- Rubber mallet
- Rubber pail

Steps:



Use a drill bit to start a hole in the centre

Decorative tin panels really make fantastic moulds. Master tinsmith Brian Greer provides a staggering assortment of patterns that will give you brilliant design options.

I used Brian's cherub for the centre of my mould, surrounded by stippled filler. I also used 2½" trim for the edges, and duct-taped it into a 20" x 11" rectangular mould.



Then use tinsnips to cut out the centre section



Right and left handed tin snips for cutting curved lines



Best tin snips for cutting straight lines

Draw a rectangle on the stippled background material, leaving the border a bit deeper at the bottom because that is where we'll put a candle. (Also, Leonardo da Vinci discovered that the human eye sees the centre of an object just above the actual centre, so it's more pleasing to the eye to leave about half an inch more at the bottom compared to the top.)



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The cherub should fit nicely inside the stippled background



Cut the outside corners to fit snugly



Tape the pieces together on the outside surface of the box



Tape the sides to the bottom



Tape the outside corners firmly together

Once you've taped your box together with duct tape, add a wire votive-holder by punching a hole in the mould two or three inches below the cherub's face. Pass an 18" piece of 12 gauge copper wire through the hole. Make a four inch loop of wire inside the box so that it will be firmly embedded in plaster.



Use liquid soap as a release agent

Next, coat the inside of the mould (but not the copper wire!) with liquid soap, which allows the plaster to release easily after it's hardened. For a "sanded" finish on your cherub, sprinkle a layer of sand over the soap. A bit of warning; It's difficult to keep the sand in place when pouring the plaster. It tends to wash away from the pour location. If you solve this little irritation, please let us know how you did it!





Put the mould in a sand box and support the sides

The tin is quite flexible so it's a good idea to have a cardboard box filled with sand standing by. Sand in the bottom of the support box will hold the uneven surface of the face of the cherub. Use wooden blocks along the sides to prevent the walls of your mould from blowing out with the twenty to thirty pounds of plaster they'll be holding.



Don't use lumpy plaster - it should be silky, like flour

Plaster can be ruined by humidity and time, so select your plaster with care. Usually, there is a manufacturer's date stamped on the bag and it shouldn't be more than six months old. If it has hard lumps in it, don't waste your time trying to use it because it will just turn into big uncooperative clumps. Good plaster should have the texture of finely milled flour.

Mix Mastery

The plaster-to-water ratio is about two pounds of plaster to one pint of water.

To find the amount of plaster you need, multiply the dimensions of your form - width x length x depth. This will give you the total number of cubic inches inside your form. Divide this number by 30. That's how many pounds of plaster you need. (But have a bit extra just in case.) For this project, you'll need roughly 16 pounds of plaster.



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Make some colour samples



Mix the colourant into the water first

Measure 8 pints of water into a tub and pre-weigh the plaster. If you're using a colourant, mix it into the water before adding plaster. Dry cement colourant seems to work best.



Always add the plaster to the water sifting it through your hands



Mix the plaster from below with your hands

Now, take one handful of the plaster and sift it through your gloved hands into the tub of water. Keep sifting plaster into the water by the handful (it takes a while) until it naturally builds up like a little island in the centre. Let it 'slake' (just sit and absorb water) for about three minutes. Then mix the powder into the water with your fingers, coming from underneath like you're tickling the belly of the island. Go slowly or you'll whip bubbles into the mixture and your cherub will look like a smallpox victim.



It is ready to pour when a wake is left after drawing your finger across the top



Pour the plaster down a stick to reduce bubbles

The plaster is ready to pour when you can run your finger along the surface and the mixture forms a soft trough.

Pour the plaster into the mould slowly and gently. Letting it flow down a vertical stick helps to prevent bubbles, but you'll still have some, so once all the plaster has been poured, release bubbles by tapping on the bottom of the mould with a hammer or rubber mallet.





While the plaster is wet, insert a copper wire hanger

Insert a copper hanging wire into the plaster from the back so that it can be hung on the wall later.



Peel the form away from the plaster



Clean up any lines left by the mould while plaster is still soft

As the plaster cures, it will become quite warm. After two or three hours it will cool somewhat and is then ready to be removed from the mould. Cut away the tape at the corners and around the wire at the front and the mould should just fall away from the plaster. At this stage the plaster is called "green" - it's soft and workable. So if there are any unwanted ridges or marks left by the mould, now is the time to remove them with a Popsicle stick or screwdriver tip. You can also fill any unwanted bubble holes with some freshly mixed plaster.



Seal with several coats of grout sealer after thoroughly cured

The plaster will continue to set for two or more weeks, depending on humidity. It can be cured more quickly by placing it in a warm, 250-degree Fahrenheit oven for a few hours.

Once the plaster is fully cured it should be sealed with grout sealer.





Finished plaster with candle

If you really get into plaster, one of the best books on mould making is called, "**Mold Making, Casting & Patina**" by *Bruner Felton Barrie* and is published by *Adams, Barrie Felton and Scott Publishing, Box 247, Princeton, NJ 08540*

Have fun with plaster and don't get frustrated if it doesn't come out just right the first time. Even Leonardo da Vinci got frustrated, which is probably why he was once heard exclaiming: "Why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than the imagination when awake?"



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