

## trade secrets plaster restorations

# Balance the ledger

The plasterer who granted a film star's wish for straight lines, writes **Matt Eaton**.

**J & J  
TRADITIONAL  
RENDERING &  
PLASTERING**

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Joe Stephens has had several big-name clients on his books, but hearing him mention Heath Ledger strikes a particularly timely note.

Stephens's business, J & J Traditional Rendering & Plastering, spent almost four months working on Ledger's house at Bronte, which the actor has just sold for a reputed \$7 million.

Working in teams of two and three, the plasterers carried out a range of fine-detail work – such as recessing a flat-panel TV so it was flush to the wall.

"Everything there had to be spot-on," says Stephens. "And nothing was spot-on in the original house. We had to work within millimetre tolerances."

Stephens also has plasterers rebuilding all the walls in Rona, a neo-gothic mansion in Bellevue Hill. The owner wants them perfectly level, which means using traditional plumb-bob methods that are too costly for most domestic purposes these days.

J & J specialises in heritage work and restoration. Stephens says its restoration work has three times the life of normal plastering because it uses the HeliBar process to reinforce underlying walls.

"Once a crack happens in plaster, it will always crack there again unless it's addressed in the brickwork. The HeliBars stabilise the brickwork where it's already cracked."

Stainless-steel HeliBars are dug into the mortar

bed, about half the depth of the brick, and sunk into epoxy resin. An expanded metal lath goes on top of the bricks, then render, and plaster over that.

Stephens says not many plasterers know about HeliBars. But using them means J & J can offer a seven-year guarantee on its work.

"At worst, some hairline cracks may reappear. But that would only be on walls where it was so bad you could put your hand inside the cracks."

Stephens admits the expertise means it is not the cheapest plasterer around. He charges \$88 to give a quote, to deter anyone simply after the lowest price. The fee is refunded if the work goes ahead.

J & J also restores old lath-and-plaster ceilings. Stephens says most plasterers simply suggest ripping them out.

"A lot of times they sag. We will temporarily baton the ceiling to pull it back up to the ceiling joists. Then we apply resin to the top side of the ceiling, which bonds the lath and plaster back together.

"Then the batons are removed and the ceiling touched up to bring it back to its original state."

Everyone working for the company is on staff. They even do in-house training on practice walls.

"We always focus on what the customer wants. We clean up after ourselves each day and at the end of each job we get customers to fill in a feedback form."



Spot on ...

Joe Stephens, right, on a job in Balmain

Photo: Jon Reid