A popular decorative portland cement plaster finish, one used for many years in the Southwest Region, is the “Smooth Steel Troweled Finish”. Some common terms used to describe this finish are “Slicked Finish” or “Santa Barbara Smooth”. There are varying degrees of texture produced within the smooth troweled finishes. These textures can range from “concrete” smooth, to a smooth finish with slight undulations and trowel marks, to surfaces left with voids (cat faces). Smooth finishes with added coloring, may also be applied to create a color-varied finish commonly referred to as “Tuscan” style. Because of the smooth nature of the finish, aesthetic conditions known to present some challenges may be present. They are cracking and the varying degrees of smoothness.

When smooth finishes are chosen, the stucco surface dimensions should not exceed those recommended for stucco application. No wall section larger than 144 square feet, and no ceiling or soffit area larger than 100 square feet.

**CRACKING:**
Smooth finishes require multiple troweling passes which compact the cement layer creating a thin and rich-in-cement surface, making it more susceptible to cracking. The lack of a texture also allows for a higher visibility of cracks in the stucco finish. The cracks typically associated with smooth finishes can be the result of movement in the cement stucco (lineal cracks), or from shrinkage during hydration (micro surface cracks). Because the finish layer is smooth and more brittle, cracking in the base coat or cracking from movement may continue through the finish coat as well. Shrinkage during hydration, associated with all cement plaster layers, and the water spritzed onto the surface to make it workable can contribute to “micro” cracking during hydration. Micro cracking and lineal hairline cracking do not necessarily indicate that there is a stucco failure or improper application. The severity and quantity of any cracking should first be carefully assessed before any decision is made to repair them.

Careful consideration should be taken when determining if a crack should be patched or left alone. Because of the smooth nature of the finish, any patching or repair work will be noticed, even if slightly visible. In most cases the necessity to patch a given area will require re-spreading of the entire surface area.

**SMOOTHNESS:**
Texture, like color, can be interpreted differently by each individual. For this reason a sample wall area or separate mock-up wall should be created for each project. A “concrete” smooth finish may in fact contain small holes or voids where as a “Santa Barbara” finish may be without holes but appear wavy with varying humps or bumps. The method of multiple passes of the steel trowel over the finish to create the desired smoothness naturally creates undulations in the surface plane. In many instances these undulations are a desired architectural effect. Some smooth finishes have slight trowel marks or “chatters” visible in the finished product. These marks too are sometimes an architectural desired effect. These varying degrees of smoothness are especially visible when light from the sun, or aesthetic up-lighting, washes across the surface of the finished stucco. The light will enhance the variations in the stucco surface and may create an undesirable aesthetic view. As with cracking, these variations, holes and slight markings do not necessarily mean an improper application was done.

Because there are varying degrees of smoothness, and because smooth finishes show more imperfections, an expectation of the final appearance and performance capabilities should be agreed upon before any finish is applied to the project.