

Stucco Over Brick: When It Works, When It Fails, and How to Fix It

What a Mason Tells You Before the Trowel Comes Out

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Chapter 1: Can You Stucco Over Brick? The Short Answer

If you're reading this, somebody has probably told you yes and somebody else has probably told you no, and you're trying to figure out which one knows what he's talking about. Here's the straight answer from a man who's been in Texas masonry for fifty years: yes, you can put stucco over brick. It's done every week in this country, and when it's done right it holds for decades. But the "done right" part is doing a lot of heavy lifting in that sentence, because stucco over brick done wrong doesn't just look bad — it fails in ways that cost more to fix than the original brick ever would have.

Brick is actually one of the best surfaces you can stick stucco to. That's the part people don't expect. Brick is porous — it soaks up water the way a sponge does — and that porosity is exactly what cement-based stucco wants. Stucco bonds to brick mechanically: the wet mix keys into the pores and the rough mortar joints, and when it cures it's locked in. A plasterer will tell you straight that both stucco and concrete are Portland cement products, just with different aggregate

— they want to be together. Clean, sound, unpainted brick takes a stucco bond so well that on good walls, no metal lath is even needed. The stucco grabs and doesn't let go.

So why do so many stucco-over-brick jobs fail? Because every word in "clean, sound, unpainted brick" is doing work, and contractors skip the words that cost them time. Dirty brick doesn't bond. Painted brick doesn't bond — the paint seals the pores that the stucco needs to grab, and the stucco sits on paint instead of brick, which means it sits on something that will let go. Deteriorated brick with crumbling mortar doesn't hold anything. And even on perfect brick, if water gets behind the stucco through cracks or bad detailing and can't get back out, the freeze-thaw cycle in a North Texas winter will pop the stucco right off the wall.

The rest of this book is about the bond, the moisture, and the cracking — the three things that decide whether your stucco-over-brick job becomes a fifty-year wall or a three-year problem. I'll give you the real 2026 costs, the two ways to do the work, every way I've seen it fail, how to fix it when it does, and what it really costs to take stucco back off brick when somebody decides they want the brick back. By the end, you'll know whether stucco belongs on your brick house,

and you'll know how to read a bid for the job like a man
who's watched a thousand of them.

Chapter 2: Why People Cover Brick With Stucco

Nobody wakes up loving the idea of hiding brick. People stucco over brick for real reasons, and it helps to sort them honestly before the trowel comes out.

The brick is ugly or damaged. This is the number one reason, and it's a legitimate one. Mismatched brick from a bad addition. Spalled faces from years of bad mortar or hard repointing. A chimney that's been patched by four different men over thirty years. When the brick itself is the problem and replacing it all would cost a fortune, a stucco skin over the top gives you a clean, uniform wall for a fraction of a rebuild. Stucco over brick is the facelift that hides the scars.

They want a different look. Stucco reads Mediterranean, Santa Fe, modern farmhouse — styles that brick doesn't. In Texas you see it on everything from Hill Country builds to suburban remodels where somebody wanted the whole house to read one way instead of another. Taste is taste. My job isn't to argue with your taste; it's to make sure the wall under the taste stays sound.

Fire and durability. Stucco carries a strong fire rating — it can hold a fire at bay at the outside wall for up to an hour — and properly maintained stucco lasts fifty to eighty years. That's longer than most siding materials on the market, and it's the honest argument for paying more upfront: you're buying decades.

They think it fixes a leaking or failing wall. This is the reason that worries me, because it's the one that's wrong. Stucco is a cladding. It is not waterproofing, it is not a structural repair, and it is not a substitute for fixing what's wrong underneath. Putting stucco over a wall with failing mortar, bad flashing, or water getting in behind the brick just hides the problem while the problem keeps working. I've opened up stucco-over-brick jobs where the brick underneath had deteriorated for years in the dark — the stucco looked fine from the street while the wall behind it was coming apart. If your reason for stuccoing is "something's wrong with this wall and I don't want to look at it," stop. Fix the wall first. Stucco the sound wall after.

So the good reasons — ugly brick, a style change, a durable new skin over a sound wall — are solid. The bad reason — covering up a problem — will cost you twice: once for the

stucco, and once for the repair you still have to do underneath it later, now complicated by a layer of cement in the way.

Chapter 3: The Two Ways to Do It — Direct Bond or Metal Lath

Every stucco-over-brick job goes on one of two ways, and the choice between them is the first big decision on the job. Understand the two methods and you'll understand half of every bid you read.

Direct application — the bond method. The stucco goes straight onto the brick. No lath, no wire, just preparation and plaster. This works because of what I said in Chapter 1: clean, porous brick bonds to cement stucco mechanically, about as well as any substrate in construction. But "direct" does not mean "just trowel it on." The brick has to be pressure-washed clean — every speck of dirt, dust, and loose material off the wall. Loose brick and failed mortar get repaired first. Then, depending on the wall, the plasterer applies either a dash-bond coat — a thick slurry of Portland cement and fine sand dashed onto the wall by hand or machine to give the scratch coat something to key into — or a manufactured bonding agent brushed or rolled on per the manufacturer's directions. Then the standard three-coat stucco system goes on: scratch

coat, brown coat, finish coat, at the full thickness the system calls for.

The technical bulletins from the stucco manufacturers back this up: before the scratch coat goes on, bond adequacy has to be checked, and if there's a bond problem, you don't proceed — you fix it first with a dash-bond coat, a bonding agent, or the second method. The bond is the whole job in this method. Get it right and the stucco becomes part of the wall. Get it wrong and you're growing a very expensive scab.

The lathed method — metal lath over the brick. Self-furring metal lath — the diamond-patterned metal mesh with little dimples that hold it a quarter inch off the wall — gets fastened to the brick with masonry fasteners, and the stucco is scratched into the lath so it keys through the mesh and locks on. This method doesn't depend on bonding to the brick at all; the stucco hangs on the lath, and the lath hangs on the fasteners. It's the belt-and-suspenders approach, and it's the right call on brick that's been painted (where no bond is possible), on brick that's too smooth or too deteriorated to trust a bond, or where the designer wants a uniform unbonded condition — some specs call for paper-backed lath specifically so the stucco adheres in some spots and not

others in a controlled way.

Each method has its trade-offs, and the honest trade literature says so plainly. Direct application means cracks in the brick will telegraph through the stucco — the stucco moves with the wall, for better and worse. But as long as the bond holds, the stucco doesn't develop its own independent movement cracks. The lathed method isolates the stucco from the brick's movement, which sounds better until you read the rest: lath can develop its own cracking independent of the wall, the metal can rust — and rust takes up more volume than steel, which spalls the stucco from behind — and if there's no water-resistive barrier behind the lath, water that gets through can sit against the brick with nowhere to go.

Neither method is "the right one" in the abstract. The right one depends on the brick: its condition, its surface, whether it's painted, and what the wall is doing. A contractor who specifies one method for every wall without looking at yours is selling a system, not solving your house.

Chapter 4: The Bond — Why Preparation Is the Whole Job

I want to spend a full chapter on the bond, because in fifty years of watching stucco-over-brick jobs, the bond is where they live or die, and it's the part of the job you never see. By the time the finish coat is on and it looks beautiful, the question of whether it stays on was answered weeks ago, in the prep.

Clean. The wall gets pressure-washed. Not rinsed — washed. Stucco bonds to pores, and pores full of dirt, chalk, efflorescence, or old paint residue aren't pores anymore. Everything loose comes off. Every contractor who's good at this work is obsessive about the wash, because he knows the prettiest finish coat in Texas won't save a dirty bond.

Sound. Loose brick gets reset or replaced. Failed mortar gets cut out and repointed. If the brick wall underneath is moving — stair-step cracks through the joints, a leaning section — that gets addressed before stucco, not covered by it. Stucco over a moving wall is a cracked stucco job with a waiting period. The crack in the brick will come through the stucco;

that's not a maybe, that's physics. Control joints get planned at the junctures where different materials meet — brick against frame, old work against new — because those junctions move differently and the stucco needs a designed place to relieve the stress instead of cracking wherever it feels like it.

The bond coat. On direct-application jobs, this is the step that separates the men who know from the men who hope. A dash-bond coat — Portland cement and fine sand, dashed on wet — gives the scratch coat a rough, high-strength surface to key into. Bonding agents do the same job chemically. The manufacturer directions matter here; bonding agents aren't interchangeable, and applying the wrong one wrong is worse than none at all. This is also the step most often skipped on cheap bids, because it's invisible in the finished job and takes real time. When you read a bid and one contractor has a line for surface preparation and bonding and the other doesn't, you're not looking at two prices for the same job. You're looking at two different jobs.

Thickness. Standard three-coat stucco on a wall runs about seven-eighths of an inch total. Over brick, the coats need to be thick enough that the brick and mortar joints don't ghost

through — there's a known phenomenon where a too-thin application lets the mortar joints show through every time it rains and the wall saturates. The plasterers who do this daily will tell you: get the thickness right or the wall tells on you in the first storm. If you're painting the stucco afterward, ghosting matters less — paint evens out the read — but the thickness still matters for durability.

Curing. Stucco is chemistry. It needs water to cure, and Texas heat wants to steal that water. In a Texas summer, fresh stucco can dry too fast — the surface sets before the body cures through, and you get shrinkage stress built into the wall from day one. The building science on this is clear: stucco mixed with too much water, or cured too fast, develops shrinkage stresses that show up as cracking months later, after the homeowner has moved in and the contractor is gone. Good plasterers mist the work, work mornings, and protect fresh stucco from baking. Ask your contractor how he cures in August. The answer tells you everything.

Chapter 5: The 2026 Costs — What Stucco Over Brick Really Runs

Let's talk money with real 2026 numbers. I'm giving you the ranges the national cost data reports, and then where Texas sits in them.

Per square foot. Putting stucco over brick runs roughly **\$5 to \$9 per square foot** installed, according to the national cost guides reporting 2026 numbers. That's for the full job — prep, bonding or lath, three coats, finish. For comparison, fresh stucco on new construction runs about \$7 to \$12 a square foot, and the \$5-to-\$9 over-brick number reflects that the wall is already there: no framing, no sheathing, just the skin. Some estimators break out direct-bond application over masonry in good condition as low as \$3 to \$6 a square foot for the application itself, but by the time prep, repair of the brick, and finishing are in, the \$5-to-\$9 range is the honest planning number.

Per house. The cost guides put a 1,500-square-foot wall area at roughly \$10,000 to \$14,000 for stucco over brick. Scale it: a 2,000-square-foot wall area runs \$14,000 to \$18,000, and a

3,000-square-foot wall area \$21,000-plus at the \$7-a-foot middle. These are planning numbers, not bids — your house's number depends on the next paragraph.

What moves it. Height and access — second-story work needs scaffolding, and scaffolding rental alone runs \$300 to \$700 on a typical job. Condition of the brick — every loose brick reset and every foot of repointing before the stucco goes on is labor. Painted brick — if the wall's painted and you're going the lath route, that's the lath, the fasteners, and the labor to hang it all. Texture and finish — a smooth Santa Fe finish costs more in labor than a standard textured finish because it's fussier. And repairs to the brick underneath, which we'll come back to: if the wall needs real masonry work first, that's a separate number on top.

Permits. Most Texas cities want a permit for exterior cladding work. Budget \$100 to \$500 depending on the jurisdiction. It's not the money that matters — it's that the permitted job gets the details right, because somebody's checking.

Where Texas lands. DFW labor runs in the national middle for this work. What moves Texas jobs inside the range is heat scheduling — good plasterers work mornings in summer and

sometimes charge for the trouble — and the condition of the brick, because our clay soil moves walls and moved walls need more prep. A straightforward one-story ranch with sound brick lands at the low end. A two-story with painted brick, bad mortar, and scaffolding everywhere lands at the high end. Same wall area, very different job.

The honest summary: budget \$5 to \$9 a square foot for the stucco-over-brick work itself, more when the brick needs repair first, and get the brick repair priced as its own line so you can see what you're actually buying.

Chapter 6: When It Works — The Jobs That Hold for Decades

Not every stucco-over-brick story is a warning. Plenty of them are quiet successes — walls that went up twenty, thirty, forty years ago and still look right. The successes share a pattern, and it's worth knowing the pattern so you can recognize whether your house fits it.

The brick was sound. Not perfect — sound. Mortar intact, no active movement, no crumbling faces. The wall had decades of life left in it and just needed a new face. Stucco over a sound wall is a cosmetic upgrade on a structural non-issue, and that's the best possible starting point.

The prep was real. Washed, repaired, bonded or lathed properly, control joints where materials meet. The jobs that last are the ones where the plasterer spent the unglamorous days on the wall before the beautiful days with the trowel.

The water was managed. This is the quiet one. Successful jobs have good roof overhangs, gutters that work, flashing that sheds water away from the wall instead of into it, and grade that falls away from the house. Stucco is a rain screen,

not a submarine hull — it sheds water that hits it and dries out between storms. The jobs that last are on houses where water never gets a chance to sit against the wall.

The climate cooperated. Stucco loves dry heat. Texas is mostly kind to stucco — our long dry stretches let walls dry out between rains, which is exactly what cement plaster wants. The jobs that struggle are the ones where water sits: north walls that never see sun, walls under leaking gutters, walls where sprinklers spray daily. Same stucco, different water, different life.

Nobody painted the brick first. I'll say more about paint in its own chapter, but the long-lived jobs are almost always on unpainted brick where the stucco bonded to the masonry itself.

When all five line up, stucco over brick does what the brochures say: fifty-plus years, a fresh face, minimal drama. I've walked up to houses in Texas where the stucco went over brick in the eighties and the wall still reads clean. The method works. It just doesn't forgive shortcuts.

Chapter 7: When It Fails — Stucco Over Brick Problems, Up Close

Now the other side. Every stucco over brick problem I've ever opened up comes down to one of a short list of causes. Learn the list and you can diagnose a failing wall from the sidewalk.

Delamination — the bond lets go. This is the big one. The stucco separates from the brick in sheets or patches, sometimes with a hollow sound when you tap it, sometimes falling off in chunks. The causes, in order of how often I see them: painted brick underneath (the stucco bonded to paint, the paint let go of the brick), dirty or dusty brick (the stucco bonded to dust), too-thin application over smooth brick, and water getting behind the stucco and breaking the bond from the inside. Delaminated stucco can't be glued back. The failed areas come off and get redone, with the prep done right the second time.

Cracking. Here's what the stucco industry will tell you straight, and you should hear it before you buy: all portland cement plaster is expected to crack. It's inherent in the material — a thin, rigid coating on a structure that moves.

Cracks aren't a defect in the stucco; they're stress relief. The question is never "will it crack" but "where, how much, and does water get in." Hairline cracks are cosmetic and normal. Larger cracks — especially ones that follow the brick joints underneath, or that open at material transitions where no control joint was installed — are pathways for water, and water is what turns a crack into a failure. The building science research on failed stucco keeps coming back to the same findings: too much water in the mix, too-fast curing, and inconsistent coat thickness concentrate stress into large cracks instead of harmless hairlines. A well-mixed, well-cured, well-detailed job cracks in hairlines. A rushed job cracks in canyons.

Moisture trapped behind the stucco. Brick breathes — it takes on water in a storm and gives it back up as it dries. Stucco over brick changes that drying path. If water gets behind the stucco — through cracks, through bad flashing above, through a leaking gutter dumping onto the wall — and the assembly can't dry, you get the slow disaster: the brick stays wet, mortar softens, and in a North Texas freeze, trapped water expands and pops the stucco off from behind. This is the failure that looks fine the longest and costs the most when it lands, because by the time the stucco falls off,

the brick underneath has been deteriorating in the dark for years.

Lath rust. On lathed jobs, the metal lath can rust — especially the cheap stuff, especially where water reaches it. Rust takes up more volume than the steel it came from, so rusting lath literally pushes the stucco off the wall from the inside. Galvanized lath in a dry wall lasts; lath in a wet wall doesn't. This is why the water management in Chapter 6 matters twice on a lathed job.

Efflorescence and staining. White mineral staining bleeding through the stucco means water is moving through the wall carrying salts. It's the wall's early warning system. A little is cosmetic. A lot, or staining that keeps coming back, means water is traveling where it shouldn't, and the stucco is just the messenger.

The freeze-thaw pop. North Texas gets real freezes. Water trapped between stucco and brick, or inside saturated stucco, expands when it freezes — and expanding water doesn't negotiate. It pops the stucco off in patches, usually after a wet fall followed by a hard freeze. This is the failure mode that makes water management non-negotiable in our climate: it's not the cold that kills the wall, it's the water that was already

there when the cold arrived.

Chapter 8: Painted Brick — The Bond Killer

I gave paint its own chapter because it deserves one. Painted brick is the single most common reason stucco-over-brick jobs fail, and it's the one homeowners understand least.

Here's the mechanics: stucco bonds to brick by keying into the brick's pores. Paint seals those pores. When you trowel stucco onto painted brick, the stucco isn't bonding to the brick at all — it's bonding to the paint film. And the paint film is bonded to the brick only as well as paint bonds to masonry, which is to say: temporarily. Paint on exterior brick chalks, peels, and lets go — that's what exterior paint does over time, especially in Texas sun. When the paint lets go, the stucco goes with it, because the stucco was never attached to anything but the paint.

The cruel part is the timeline. A stucco-over-painted-brick job can look perfect for two, three, even five years. The paint is still holding, so the stucco holds. Then a wet season works moisture behind the paint film, the bond breaks down, and whole sections delaminate at once. The homeowner's complaint is always the same: "it was fine, and then it

wasn't." It was never fine. It was just waiting.

So what do you do with painted brick? Three options, honest assessment of each:

Remove the paint. If the paint comes off cleanly — chemical strippers, careful media blasting — and the brick underneath is sound, you're back to unpainted brick and the direct-bond method works. But paint removal from brick is its own expensive, fussy job, and aggressive blasting damages brick faces. Get a price for the removal before you assume this route.

Go the lath route. This is the standard answer: since no bond to the brick is possible, hang self-furring metal lath on the wall with masonry fasteners and let the stucco key into the lath instead. It works. It costs more — the lath, the fasteners, the labor — and it adds the rust consideration from Chapter 7, but it's the correct engineering answer for painted brick.

Don't stucco. Sometimes the right answer. If the brick is painted, the paint is failing, and the budget doesn't stretch to proper prep or lath, the honest advice is to maintain the paint or strip it — not to bury the problem under stucco and hope.

One more note, because I see this mistake constantly: sealing or waterproofing painted brick before stuccoing does not fix the bond. A sealer is just another film between the stucco and the brick. The stucco needs the brick's pores or it needs lath. There is no third option, no matter what a salesman tells you.

Chapter 9: The Texas Factors — Heat, Storms, and Clay

Stucco over brick in Texas lives in Texas conditions, and those conditions have opinions.

Heat. Our summers are the cure-management problem from Chapter 4, every year, on every job. Fresh stucco in 100-plus degrees needs misting, morning work, and shade — or it cures too fast and carries shrinkage stress for life. But heat is also stucco's friend long-term: our long dry stretches let walls dry out thoroughly between rains, which is exactly the wet-dry cycling cement plaster handles best. Texas is a good stucco state as long as the installation respects the summer.

Storms. North Texas gets the violent stuff — hail, wind-driven rain, the spring storm season that throws water sideways at your walls. Wind-driven rain is the test of every stucco wall: water hitting the wall under pressure finds every crack, every bad flashing detail, every unsealed penetration. After a big storm season, walk your stucco walls and look for new cracks, staining below windows and at the base of walls, and any hollow sound when you tap. The storm didn't cause

the weakness; it found it.

Clay soil. Our black clay moves — swells wet, shrinks dry — and moving soil moves walls, and moving walls crack rigid coatings. This is why the "sound wall" requirement in Chapter 6 matters so much in Texas: a wall that's still settling or cycling with the seasons will telegraph every move through the stucco. If your brick house has a history of stair-step cracking or foundation work, that history needs to be resolved and stable before stucco goes on. Stucco over an actively moving Texas wall is a maintenance plan, not a finish.

Sun exposure. South and west walls take the beating — thermal cycling, UV on the finish, driving rain from our prevailing storm direction. These walls crack first and need watching. It's normal; it's just the price of the exposure. Budget your maintenance attention accordingly.

Sprinklers. I say this in every book because it's the cheapest fix in masonry: if a sprinkler sprays your stucco wall every morning, redirect it. Constant wetting defeats the drying cycle that keeps stucco healthy, feeds efflorescence, and in winter sets up the freeze-thaw pop. Free to fix, expensive to ignore.

Chapter 10: Fixing It — Patch, Recoat, or Start Over

Stucco fails in patches more often than all at once, and the repair strategy follows the failure.

Hairline cracks. Caulk or a brush-grade elastomeric patch, then paint if the wall's painted. This is maintenance, not repair — you're keeping water out of a normal stress crack. Do it promptly; a hairline crack ignored for three rainy seasons becomes a delamination.

Delaminated patches. The failed stucco comes off — all of it, back to sound material with a clean edge. The exposed brick gets prepped the way Chapter 4 describes: cleaned, repaired, bonded. Then the patch goes on in the full three-coat system, matched for texture. Here's the part nobody likes: the patch will never match perfectly. Stucco weathers — sun, rain, and time change the color and texture — so a fresh patch on a ten-year-old wall reads as a patch. On a painted wall, paint evens it out. On unpainted stucco, expect the patch to be visible. A good plasterer minimizes it; nobody eliminates it.

Widespread failure. When delamination is everywhere —

the tap test sounds hollow across whole elevations — patching is throwing money at a wall that needs redoing. The failed stucco comes off the whole elevation (or the whole house), the brick gets properly prepped, and the system goes back on right. Yes, it costs real money. No, there's no cheaper version that works. I've watched homeowners pay for three rounds of patches that each failed within two years, spending more in total than the redo would have cost the first time.

The 2026 repair numbers. Stucco repair work — removal of failed areas, prep, and reapplication — runs roughly **\$8 to \$11 per square foot** of wall addressed, per the 2026 contractor cost data. That's higher per foot than new application because repair is fussier: careful removal, edge work, matching, working around the sound areas. Small jobs cost more per foot than large ones — mobilization doesn't scale down.

Elastomeric coatings. You'll hear about these as a fix for cracked stucco, and they're worth understanding honestly. A quality elastomeric coating bridges hairline cracks, stretches with the wall, and sheds water while letting vapor through — it's a legitimate maintenance tool for a sound-but-cracked stucco wall. What it is not: a fix for delamination, a substitute

for proper prep, or a way to waterproof a wall with water trapped behind it. Coating over failed stucco is painting a scab. And straight acrylic paint, for the record, doesn't bridge cracks — they come right back through it. If a contractor proposes coating as the fix, ask him what he's doing about the bond underneath. If the answer is vague, keep looking.

Chapter 11: Removing Stucco From Brick — The Real Cost of Going Back

Sooner or later somebody wants the brick back. Maybe the stucco failed. Maybe the new owner hates it. Maybe a historic house is being restored. Whatever the reason, taking stucco off brick is one of the most unforgiving jobs in masonry, and you need the truth about it before you start.

The removal itself. Stucco on metal lath comes off at roughly **\$1.05 to \$1.20 per square foot** for the tear-off, with a typical whole-house removal landing between \$900 and \$2,100 — but that's the tear-off only, and it assumes straightforward access. Direct-bonded stucco is harder: it's chemically locked to the brick, and getting it off means mechanical removal — chipping, grinding — right against the brick faces. It's slow, dusty, miserable work, and it costs more per foot than lath removal because every square foot is a fight.

The brick underneath is never what you hope. This is the part that breaks hearts. The brick under old stucco has lived in the dark for decades — sometimes moist, sometimes with mortar that's softened, sometimes spalled from freeze-thaw it

endured while hidden. And the removal process itself damages brick: the bond that made direct-applied stucco so durable is the same bond that tears brick faces off when you pull the stucco away. Aggressive removal methods — sandblasting, which runs \$1 to \$5 a square foot — strip the hard outer face off the brick along with the stucco, and a brick with its face stripped is a brick that will deteriorate fast. The preservation rule is brutal and simple: the better the stucco was installed, the harder it is to remove without wrecking the brick.

Then the restoration. Exposed brick after stucco removal almost always needs repointing — the joints took abuse during removal — and often needs brick replacement where faces tore off, cleaning, and sometimes a breathable sealer once everything's sound. The removal number is just the first number. The full "brick back" job is removal plus masonry restoration, and the restoration is usually the bigger number.

The honest math. Removing stucco from brick and restoring the brick properly typically costs more than putting the stucco on did. I tell homeowners this upfront because the fantasy is "we'll just take it off if we don't like it," and the reality is that stucco over brick is close to a one-way door. Not

entirely — it can be done, and on lath it's straightforward — but direct-bonded stucco comes off only with patience, money, and some brick damage as the price of admission.

When removal makes sense anyway. Historic restoration where the brick has documented value. Failed stucco where the wall needs rebuilding regardless — you're paying for tear-off either way. And lath-applied stucco, which was always the reversible choice: the lath unhooks, the brick underneath is usually in the shape it was in when covered. If you're stuccoing today and think you might want the brick back someday, that's an argument for the lath method — reversibility is worth something.

Chapter 12: Reading the Bid — What an Honest Stucco-Over-Brick Bid Says

You've got the technical knowledge. Here's how to spend it — reading bids like a man who's paying for the work, because you are.

The honest bid names the method. Direct bond or lath — stated explicitly, with the preparation described. "Prep wall, apply stucco" is not a method. "Pressure wash, repair loose brick and repoint failed joints, apply dash-bond coat, three-coat stucco system" is a method. "Install self-furring metal lath with masonry fasteners at 12 inches on center, three-coat system over lath" is a method. If the bid doesn't say which, the contractor hasn't decided, and you don't want to be there when he decides mid-job.

The honest bid prices the brick work separately. Any loose brick, any repointing, any repair to the wall before stucco goes on — its own line, its own number. This protects you two ways: you can see what the masonry repair costs versus the stucco, and the contractor can't quietly skip the brick work and pocket the difference.

The honest bid describes the system. Three coats — scratch, brown, finish — with the finish texture named. Total thickness. The mix or product line. Cure plan for hot weather. Control joint locations. If you're in Texas and the bid was written in July with no mention of heat management, the contractor isn't thinking about your wall in August.

The honest bid has the unglamorous lines. Protection of windows, roofing, landscaping, and adjacent surfaces. Cleanup — stucco work makes a mess, and mortar splatter on your windows is your problem if the bid doesn't say otherwise. Permit handling. Schedule with start and completion windows.

The too-cheap bid is missing the prep. Every time. The low bid on stucco over brick is almost always the bid that plans to trowel over whatever's there — no wash worth the name, no bond coat, no brick repair, lath skipped on painted brick. It looks identical on day one. It looks very different in year three. When one bid is 30 percent under the others, you're not getting a deal; you're getting the prep deleted.

The questions to ask. What method, and why for my wall? How are you preparing the brick — specifically? What are you doing about the painted section? Where are the control

joints? How do you cure in summer heat? What's your warranty, in writing, and what does it exclude? Can I see a stucco-over-brick job you did five years ago — not last month, five years? The five-year-old job is the only portfolio that matters, because stucco failures take years to show. A contractor with no five-year-old work to show you either hasn't been doing it long or doesn't want you to see it.

The warranty reality. A workmanship warranty on stucco runs two to five years from an honest contractor. It covers installation defects — the bond, the application. It does not cover the wall moving, water getting in from a failed roof or gutter above the work, or normal hairline cracking — because all stucco cracks, and warranting against the nature of the material would be a lie. "Lifetime warranty on stucco" is a sales pitch, not a warranty. Get the real one in writing.

Chapter 13: Stucco or Just Fix the Brick? The Decision

Here's the question underneath the whole book: is stucco the right answer for your wall, or is the right answer to repair the brick you already have?

Repair the brick when: the brick is fundamentally sound and the problems are mortar-deep. Failed joints get repointed — \$5 to \$25 a square foot depending on the work, and a repointed wall lasts decades.

Spalled individual bricks get replaced. Ugly-but-sound brick gets cleaned — and you'd be surprised what a proper masonry cleaning does for a wall that looks tired. A full [masonry repair and restoration] (<https://championbrickrepair.com>) on a sound brick house almost always costs less than stuccoing over it, keeps the wall breathable the way brick wants to be, and preserves the option to do anything later.

Brick is a hundred-year material. Treat it like one.

Stucco when: the brick's appearance is the problem and the brick's structure is fine — mismatched additions, widespread cosmetic damage, a style change you've committed to. Or when the brick is deteriorated across large areas but the wall is structurally sound, and the cost of replacing that much brick exceeds the cost of a stucco skin. These are real

situations, and stucco is the right tool for them.

Neither — rebuild or rethink — when: the wall is moving, the brick is deteriorated through its full depth, or water is getting in from above and nobody's fixing the source. No cladding fixes a sick wall. The order of operations is always: stop the water, stabilize the structure, repair the masonry, then choose the finish. Stucco is a finish. Finishes go last.

The cost comparison that matters. Don't compare "stucco" versus "repointing" as abstractions. Price your actual wall three ways: repoint and repair the brick; prep and stucco over the brick; and the maintenance tail on each — repointed brick needs joint attention in twenty-plus years, stucco needs crack maintenance and eventual recoating. Then decide with real numbers instead of vibes. Any contractor who won't price it both ways is telling you which answer he's selling.

Chapter 14: Keeping It Alive — Stucco

Maintenance That Actually Matters

A good stucco-over-brick job isn't maintenance-free. It's low-maintenance, which is different. Here's the actual maintenance, in order of importance.

Keep water off it. Gutters clean and flowing, downspouts discharging away from the wall, grade falling away from the house, sprinklers not spraying the wall. The cost guides put professional stucco maintenance — cleaning and sealing small cracks — at roughly \$200 to \$500 a year, and most of that is just staying ahead of water. Every maintenance dollar you spend on drainage saves ten on masonry.

Walk it every spring. Fifteen minutes, eyes open. New cracks — especially any crack you can fit a fingernail into. Staining below windows, at the base of walls, or under the roofline. Hollow sounds when you tap — delamination announces itself to a knuckle before it announces itself to the eye. Caulk the hairlines, note the big ones, and call a plasterer for anything that's growing.

Seal the cracks early. A hairline crack sealed this spring is

maintenance. The same crack ignored for three years is a delamination repair. Elastomeric sealants made for stucco bridge hairlines and move with the wall. This is a Saturday job, not a contractor job, for the small stuff.

Don't pressure-wash it aggressively. Stucco cleans up fine with a garden hose and a soft brush. A pressure washer held close drives water into the wall through every hairline crack and can erode the finish coat. If it needs real cleaning, hire somebody who cleans stucco for a living and knows the difference between cleaning it and blasting it.

Repaint on schedule if it's painted. Painted stucco needs repainting every five to ten years depending on exposure — and use paint made for masonry, breathable, not whatever was on sale. Paint is the sacrificial layer; let it sacrifice itself on schedule instead of failing all at once.

Watch the ground line. Stucco should terminate above grade — typically six inches or so — with a weep screed that lets any moisture behind the stucco escape at the bottom. If landscaping, mulch, or regrading has buried the bottom of your stucco, pull it back. Stucco sitting in wet soil wicks moisture up the wall, and that's a slow failure you can't see until the bottom two feet delaminate.

Chapter 15: The Five-Year Test — How to Tell If Yours Was Done Right

If your stucco-over-brick job is already a few years old — yours, or one you're evaluating on a house you're buying — here's how to read it.

Year one to two: hairline cracks appear, especially at material transitions and long unbroken runs. Normal. Seal them. No staining, no hollow spots, finish looks uniform. If you're seeing delamination or wide cracking in year one, the prep or the mix was wrong — that's not aging, that's installation, and it's a warranty conversation.

Year three to five: the wall should look settled — hairlines sealed, color even, no new surprises. Tap-test the wall every spring: solid everywhere is right; hollow patches are delamination starting. Check below windows and at the base of walls for staining that keeps coming back — that's water traveling, and it needs a source found, not just a stain cleaned. On a house you're buying, a five-year-old stucco-over-brick job with no hollow spots, sealed hairlines, and clean drainage is a wall that was done right. One with

patches, stains, and hollow sounds is a negotiation — price the repair from Chapter 10's numbers and negotiate accordingly.

The questions for the seller or the contractor: what method — bond or lath? Was the brick painted? What prep was done? Who did the work, and is there a warranty in writing? "I don't know" to all four is information too — it means you're buying the wall as-is, on its looks, and you price your risk accordingly.

When to call a mason instead of a stucco man. If the tap test finds hollow areas and the brick underneath is the suspect — bad mortar, spalled brick, movement — you need the masonry evaluated before the stucco gets patched. Patching stucco over a failing brick wall is the cover-up from Chapter 2, and it fails the same way the second time. The right sequence never changes: wall first, skin second.

A Final Word Before the Trowel Comes Out

Stucco over brick works. I've seen it hold for decades on Texas houses, and the physics is on its side — cement wants to bond to porous brick, and a well-built stucco wall shrugs off weather that destroys lesser claddings. But it works on

conditions: sound brick, real prep, managed water, honest detailing. Skip any one of those and you're not buying a fifty-year wall — you're renting a good-looking problem.

If you take one thing from this book, take the order of operations. Fix the wall first. Prep like the bond is everything — because it is. Manage the water like your wall depends on it — because it does. And hire the plasterer who talks about prep, curing, and control joints before he talks about texture and color, because the pretty part is the easy part.

Your brick has been standing a long time. Whatever you put over it should be worthy of what's underneath.

If you want to keep learning what your walls are trying to tell you, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) cover the rest of it — the mortar, the cracks, the water, all of it, in the same straight talk.

About the Author

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(469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).