

WRAP FAM

UNLEASHED

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For Wrappers By Wrappers

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Automotive VS Architectural

Why Wrapping Walls Is Nothing Like Wrapping Cars

By Chad Munroe

It's always fascinated me how heavily the wrap industry has been driven by automotive applications. Until recently, nearly every major training or certification program revolved around wrapping vehicles. Even now, in 2026, several manufacturers still focus almost exclusively on automotive certifications despite releasing entire product lines over the last decade specifically engineered for walls, windows, floors and other architecturally specific surfaces.

For years, I've heard respected installers, industry leaders and even pioneers in the wrap space make comments like, "Wrapping walls is easy," or "If you can wrap a car, you can wrap a wall."

After transitioning nearly a decade ago from wrapping vehicles daily with the occasional wall graphic to producing wall graphics daily with the occasional vehicle wrap, we learned the hard way that nothing could be further from the truth.

Yes, vehicles present significant installation challenges: compound curves, recessed areas, transitions between horizontal and vertical planes, and countless obstructions that require a highly refined skill set to achieve long-term success. But while many wall graphics may appear geometrically simple, often flat like a box truck or trailer, the similarities largely end there. Once you move beyond geometry and into the worlds of chemistry, surface science, environmental conditions and adhesion, wall wraps and vehicle wraps become entirely different disciplines.

The Variables That Make Wall Wraps Different

With walls, every surface is different, not just in material, but in chemistry. It's not simply drywall vs brick vs wood. Every wall can contain different paint systems, primers, coatings, VOC levels, surface contaminants and moisture conditions. Two walls in the same room can behave completely differently. Questions that rarely matter in vehicle wrapping suddenly become critical:

- Was the wall properly cleaned before painting?
- What primer was used?
- Was a topcoat applied?
- Has the paint fully cured and outgassed?
- Is the adhesive compatible with that specific paint system?
- What is the humidity level in the environment?
- Was the HVAC system running during curing?
- Is the surface smooth, orange-peeled or heavily textured?
- Were the graphics printed with latex, UV, eco-solvent or solvent inks?
- Was the print properly outgassed before install?

Every one of these variables can directly affect adhesion, removability, dimensional stability and long-term durability. Unlike automotive wrapping, where the substrate is relatively standardized, architectural wrapping often requires installers to become part installer, part surface analyst and part environmental technician.



Why Wall Wrap Failures Happen

At Get Graphic, we spend more time evaluating the science behind a wall wrap than we do physically installing it. That commitment has helped position us as a go-to resource for troubleshooting difficult architectural graphics projects, so much so that we installed a test wall inside our facility to test and re-create paint and graphic combinations to ensure long-term success in the field. We've taken our evaluations so deep that sometimes we even get asked to assist manufacturers in diagnosing and preventing wall graphic failures.

Throughout our journey, we've





manufacturers now explicitly recommend test applications before proceeding with large-scale architectural graphics projects.

Paint Cure Time

One of the biggest misconceptions in architectural graphics is assuming “dry” means “cured.” Paint may feel dry to the touch within hours while still releasing moisture and solvents for days or even weeks. Installing graphics too soon can trap moisture beneath the film, resulting in lifting, bubbling, curling or adhesive failure. Depending on the paint chemistry, cure times can range anywhere from 7 days to over 30 days, and humidity and airflow dramatically affect these timelines.



Humidity Matters More Than Most Installers Realize

Environmental conditions are one of the most overlooked factors in wall wrapping. A room with 85% relative humidity simply does not behave the same as a room at 40%, regardless of what a generic cure-time chart may suggest. Excess humidity can slow paint curing, introduce trapped moisture and negatively affect adhesive performance during installation. Even fully cured walls can experience failures if installation occurs in excessively humid conditions.

discovered that most failures can be traced back to one of a few key areas:

Surface Preparation

Poor surface prep is one of the leading causes of failure. Dust, construction debris, drywall residue, cleaning chemicals and uncured paint can all compromise adhesion. As a best practice, we always recommend adhesion testing prior to graphic production or installation, especially on newly painted or unknown surfaces. Many

Smooth Walls vs. Textured Walls

Another major misconception is assuming a material that works on one wall will automatically work on another. Texture changes everything. A film that performs flawlessly on smooth drywall may completely fail on orange peel, knockdown, stucco or textured painted surfaces, even if the exact same paint was used. Terms many installers ignore during seemingly monotonous training classes,

like “monomeric, polymeric, cast and calendared,” suddenly become extremely important. Cast films generally conform better and maintain dimensional stability longer, while calendared films may struggle on textured or demanding surfaces. Film thickness, adhesive technology and conformability all matter significantly more in architectural applications than many installers initially realize.

Ink Technology Matters

Printing technology also plays a larger role in wall applications than many people expect. We spent years printing with solvent technology, and while I still prefer solvent for many vehicle applications, we have repeatedly encountered edge curl on non-laminated wall graphics, even after proper outgassing. Through years of trial and error, we discovered those issues occurred far less frequently with latex and UV printed graphics.

Can you successfully wrap a wall with solvent prints? Absolutely. But they often require different installation procedures and edge-sealing strategies than latex or UV graphics. For solvent-printed wall graphics, we routinely secure edges using:

- Banner tape
- Edge sealers
- Clear silicone in corners and transitions
- Mechanical termination points where possible

Installers must understand that aggressive edge sealing can complicate removability and potentially damage paint or drywall during graphic removal.

“Removable” Doesn’t Always Mean Damage-Free

Modern architectural and wall films now

include entire product lines marketed as removable or temporary wall graphics, but wall damage during removal can still be caused by:

- Improper surface prep
- Poor paint quality
- Insufficient paint cure time
- Primer incompatibility
- Previously existing adverse wall conditions

This is very similar to wrapping vehicles with non-OEM paint. Just as experienced installers educate customers about potential paint failure on repainted vehicles, wall graphic installers must educate clients about the possibility of paint peeling or drywall damage, even when using products marketed as clean-removable films.

Testing Isn’t Optional

If there is one takeaway from years of architectural and wall graphics installation, it’s this: Always test your surface. Whenever possible, perform adhesion testing using multiple material options before beginning production. Not only does this dramatically improve your odds of success, but professional testing can also become a billable service rather than an unpaid inconvenience. A simple test panel can prevent catastrophic failures, reprints, labor loss and project delays. I’ve personally seen full wall panels begin failing before installers even reached the bottom of the first drop.

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