

Building Technology Heritage Library

Ceilume Ceiling donation to the BTHL

The [Building Technology Heritage Library](#) (BTHL) received a donation of ceiling-product catalogs from the post-1964 era from the [Ceilume](#) division of Empire West Inc. In this case, we were contacted by a company representative after he saw stories about the BTHL in the *ARCHITECT* magazine e-news feature. This new contributor, along with the recent addition of materials from the United States Gypsum Company, illustrates another path for the long-term growth and utility of the BTHL.

Empire West Inc. – Ceilume Division

Empire West, through its Ceilume division, acquired ownership of the copyrighted documents of Cepco, United Lighting and Ceiling Company, The Old Jefferson Tile Company, and Snellings Thermo-Vac. Documents from these companies through the year 2002 were shared with APT for the BTHL. Because Ceilume acquired the copyright to these documents, and gave permission to APT to post them, they have been added to the BTHL with a Creative Commons licensing attribution. These documents can be shared with the public, but the company still retains the rights for any commercial use.

The Ceilume Companies roots go back to the 1940s and a company called Cepco Manufacturing, located in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. Herb Wong, Cepco's co-founder, was one of the first to hold a patent on "modular ceilings", commonly known as dropped or suspended ceilings. While others were using gypsum board and mineral fiber for their ceiling panels and tiles, Wong saw the tremendous potential offered by thermoformed plastic. Cepco offered a wide variety of ceiling panels in modern and traditional styles, including translucent panels for use in luminous ceilings. Ceilume subsequently acquired other panel manufacturers and now offers a wide variety of panel and tile styles for suspended and adhesive-applied ceilings. They even acquired several manufacturers of "tin ceiling" panels in traditional designs; Ceilume now manufactures them in lightweight thermoplastics suitable for installation in suspended grids.

The widespread use of dropped or suspended ceilings in the modern era means that there are many variations of these systems. The BTHL is now poised to be a repository for this story as part of the modern-heritage movement. A history of Ceilume can be found on the company [web site](#).

Images (top to bottom)

These two similar catalogs illustrate a variety of ceiling panels for two-foot-square grid installations.

- Diffuser Panel Patterns, c. 1965. United Lighting and Ceiling Co., Oakland, Calif.
- Diffuser Panel Patterns, 1975. United Plastics Corporation, Oakland, Calif.

These companies, acquired by Ceilume, manufactured panels that were based on traditional tin-ceiling patterns but designed for installation in suspended ceiling grids.

- The Old Jefferson Tile Company, catalog, c. 1975. The Old Jefferson Tile Company, Jefferson, Texas.
- Ceilings Magnifique & Interiors, 2002. Snelling's Thermo-Vac, Blanchard, La.

This 1980s catalog features decorative ceiling panels with designs that range from 1980s modern to traditional patterns similar to tin ceilings.

- Cepco Inc., catalog. 1980. Cepco Inc., South San Francisco, Calif.

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