I have opened a lot of walls that looked fine at first glance and found galleries of chewed wood, paper, and frass just behind the paint. Termites are quiet workers. By the time you see a ripple in paint or a line of mud on the baseboard, they may have run miles of tunnels in studs and plates. Wall repair is where the cosmetic and the structural meet, and the way forward depends on what your wall is made of and how far the damage traveled.

This guide walks through what to look for, how repairs differ in plaster and lath versus drywall, and where structural elements like sill plates and joists fit in. It also helps you sequence work with your pest pro so you do not finish a room only to reopen it a month later.

Why plaster, lath, and drywall fail differently

Plaster and lath walls can be a century old and still tough if kept dry. Plaster brings weight and rigidity, so when termites hollow out the wood lath, the plaster shell loses its anchorage. You will see sagging, wide vertical cracks that almost look mapped, or hollow spots when tapped. When keys that lock old plaster to the back side of the lath break, the surface goes soft or drums under your knuckles. If termites run the lath like a ladder, the plaster can stay intact for a while, then fail in sheets around doors, windows, and baseboards.

Drywall is lighter and paper-faced. Subterranean termites love the paper as a food source, then keep going into the studs. You might notice bubbles under the paint, soft corners, or screw pops clustered in one area. With drywall, the wall surface itself is part of the snack, so damaged sections often cut out cleanly and patch well, provided the framing behind them is sound after treatment and repair.

Both wall types can hide bigger problems at the plates and sills. If a sill plate is honeycombed, every stud above it settles a fraction. Doors stick, crown molding pulls apart at corners, and floors develop a new squeak that was not there last winter. Those are the moments to pause and look beyond skim coats, because cosmetic fixes without structural termite repair do not last.

The sequence matters: treat first, then repair

I never start opening walls before the termite repair services team has treated the colony that caused the damage. The usual sequence is inspection and confirmation of species, treatment to stop active feeding, then repair. For subterranean termites, that may be soil treatment, bait stations, or localized foam in wall voids. For drywood termites, you might see whole-structure fumigation or localized injection. Your repair plan should

dovetail with their approach. If they plan to inject foam into a specific void, you can save yourself rework by waiting or coordinating openings in the exact bays they will treat.

Early signs you can trust

- Paint that ripples, bubbles, or looks blistered without obvious water damage.
- Pencil-thin mud tubes climbing foundation, inside garage walls, or behind insulation near sills.
- Baseboards or window trim that caves in when pressed with a fingernail, even if the paint is intact.
- Hollow sounds when tapping between studs, especially near the floor line.
- Fine, sand-like pellets accumulating along baseboards or on windowsills, a drywood termite tell.

Catching these early can preserve more original plaster or reduce the size of drywall patches. If you are not sure, a moisture meter and a bright flashlight will tell you a lot. Termite activity often rides with elevated moisture from a tiny foundation leak, a sweating pipe, or poor grading.

Scoping the damage without tearing the whole room apart

Start low. Termite wall repair often begins around the bottom 12 to 24 inches of a wall because subterranean termites enter at grade or through the slab. Probe gently with an awl at the baseboard and along stud lines. Use a borescope through a small hole behind baseboard or within a closet to inspect the stud bay. Look for mud tubes on the inside face of sheathing, frass, and wood that flakes in long, straw-like fibers.

If the house predates the 1980s and has plaster, test paint for lead before any sanding. If the plaster has a sandy brown scratch coat, a white lime finish, and wood lath, assume you are going to create dust and plan containment. An inexpensive lead swab takes seconds and sets your safety plan, and it matters if you have children or pets in the home.

Opening walls, the smart way

I like to open walls with a purpose and close them as soon as possible. In drywall, score and remove clean squares from center of stud to center of the next stud. Cutting from the middle of a stud to the middle of the next creates a solid backing for your replacement piece. Keep the opening tight, 16 or 24 inches wide in line with stud spacing, and cut up to the height needed to reach sound material. If you find damaged blocking, keep going until you meet wood that takes a screw cleanly without crumbling.

In plaster and lath, the goal is to save as much intact plaster as practical. Use an oscillating multi-tool to cut a control joint just inside the nearest stud lines, then pry gently to release damaged sections. If the plaster is drumming but the lath is intact and the studs are firm, plaster washers can sometimes save large areas. Where lath is chewed, it is usually better to remove plaster and lath together down to the studs and rebuild that panel with new lath or an appropriate plaster base board.

Openings in both systems should make room for a proper assessment of studs, plates, and any wiring or plumbing that share the cavity. Photograph everything for your files and for insurance. A set of clear, dated photos showing termite tubes, chewed studs, and the repair process can help if you later sell the home or file a claim.

What to expect with plaster and lath repair

When termites eat lath, the plaster above it loses its grip. Saving that plaster depends on how many keys remain and how brittle the old lime coat has become. If 50 percent of the keys are gone, I do not try to reattach the field, because it will often crack again within a year. If loss is patchy, I stabilize the field with plaster washers and install wood or metal lath patches at the base where the worst damage was.

For reattachment, a dedicated plaster adhesive works better than general construction glue. Wash or vacuum loose dust from the back side if accessible, butter the plaster, set screws with washers, then skim in two to three coats of plaster. In old houses with lime finish, I use a basecoat plaster for the build and a lime or gauged finish coat to match sheen and hardness. If the original walls were sand-finished, add fine silica or clean masonry sand to your brown coat to match texture, or use a finish plaster with integrated sand and feather it carefully.

Color matching the finish is part technique, part patience. Old lime plaster has a depth that new gypsum cannot mimic in one pass. A tinted primer close to the final color helps blend. I often paint the whole wall corner to corner rather than spot paint a three-foot patch because sheen ***Helpful resources*** and micro-texture give away small repairs.

Drywall repair after termite treatment

Drywall makes surgical openings easy and finish work fast, but it still pays to build a solid backing. After treatment, cut away any drywall with softened paper faces. Set backer strips if your cut leaves a seam without a stud. Add blocking at horizontal joints so your seams do not float over air. Use moisture-resistant board in bathrooms and basements if code or common sense calls for it.

For seams, a fiberglass mesh tape stands up well if there is any residual movement from lumber drying out after treatment, but I still prefer paper tape for vertical joints placed on solid studs because it resists cracking in the long run when properly embedded in setting compound. Use a setting-type joint compound for the first coat so you can get back on the wall the same day. If the wall had an orange peel texture, a small hopper gun or aerosol texture can blend the repair, but practice on scrap first. For a hand-skimmed or level five look, plan on three to four thin coats with broad knives and good light.

If your termite work reached exterior walls in a cold climate, replace any vapor retarder that you removed. A sheet poly retarder or kraft-faced insulation belongs on the warm-in-winter side. Staple insulation tabs to studs, slit the kraft paper at outlets so it lies flat, and tape poly seams if used.

Structural termite repair, from studs down to the sill

Cosmetics look good on a sound frame. When termites have eaten into studs, plates, beams, or joists, you need termite structural repair techniques that close the loop from the foundation to the roof. The decision tree is simple: if a member has lost enough section that it no longer meets load requirements, you reinforce or replace it. How much is enough varies by location, load path, and code, but if a two by four has half its depth gone in a vertical track and you can push a screwdriver into the web, assume it needs help.

Sill plates are frequent casualties. They sit on top of concrete or block, they catch moisture, and they give termites a landing pad. Termite sill plate repair can often be done from the inside, especially in basements or crawl spaces. After treatment, support the wall above with temporary shoring, cut out the bad plate in sections, and slide in a new pressure-treated plate with a sill sealer. Anchor it per code with expansion anchors or epoxy-set bolts. Where only part of the plate is gone, you can sometimes sister new treated stock alongside and stitch fasten it to sound wood, but a fully replaced plate gives better long-term performance and a cleaner inspection story.

Stud repair depends on how high the damage climbs. For a stud eaten out along the bottom two feet, cut back to solid wood and sister a new stud full height from plate to top plate. Fasten with structural screws or nails staggered along the length. If several adjacent studs are compromised, add a new header or a flat strap across the faces to distribute load until you can rebuild correctly. In load-bearing walls, never remove a stud without shoring the load.

Termite floor joist repair uses similar thinking. If the joist is notched out by termites near the end bearing, a new sister joist bonded with construction adhesive and fastened every 6 to 8 inches with structural screws can restore capacity, provided there is enough bearing length. For deep damage beyond the first third of the span or multiple adjacent joists affected, bring in a structural termite repair specialist to evaluate a beam addition or a flitch plate. Termite beam repair sometimes requires steel reinforcement or partial replacement under temporary jacks. Expect careful staging and lots of cribbing.

Subfloors near exterior walls and under bathrooms are common targets. Termite subfloor repair is straightforward if you can access from above. Remove flooring, cut back to center of joists, and install new tongue and groove subflooring glued and screwed to joists. Block perimeters so flooring edges have continuous support. Match thickness to avoid height differences that telegraph through finish floors. If you have plank subfloor in an old house, patch with similar species and thickness or overlay with plywood after tying down loose boards.

In attics, look at the ends of rafters and the birdsmouth where the rafter sits on the top plate. Termite attic wood repair often means sistering rafter tails, adding a new look-out for soffit support, and repairing the top plate at the eave with treated stock. If roof sheathing at the eave is chewed, replace it before installing new fascia and soffit so you do not trap moisture.

Moisture, ventilation, and the conditions termites love

Termites track moisture like a bloodhound, so solving water is part of repair. Granular fixes like new downspout extensions that carry water six to ten feet away, a regraded bed that slopes a quarter inch per foot away from the foundation, or a dehumidifier in a damp basement change the equation. Inside the house, a waxed ring leak at a toilet can supply enough water for both decay and termites for years. If you find termite damage in a bathroom wall, spend an extra hour checking under the tub access, around the toilet flange, and inside the vanity.

Ventilate crawl spaces to the standard that fits your climate. In mixed-humid regions, I lean toward sealing the crawl, adding a continuous vapor barrier on the ground sealed to piers and walls, and running a dedicated dehumidifier. This stabilizes wood moisture content so new sill plates and joists do not cycle wildly.

The finish you touch every day

Once the bones are healthy, the room has to live like it always did. In plaster rooms, I store old trim pieces carefully when I pull them. A back-primed new baseboard looks fine, but nothing beats a patinated original that fits the wall’s quirks. If termites ran behind the baseboard but left it mostly intact, consolidate soft sections with an epoxy wood hardener, replace missing chunks with a two-part wood epoxy, and prime with a stain-blocking primer before paint. The same method saves window stool noses and door casings you would rather not replace.

On drywall, sharp light is your friend. Rake light with a handheld LED across the repaired area and you will see humps and dips before paint makes them permanent. Feather joints wide. A 12 inch knife for the final pass on vertical seams helps keep edges invisible. Use the same primer and topcoat system for the entire wall to match sheen, especially with eggshell and satin finishes that show difference in roller stipple.

How to sequence a typical repair project

- Confirm active termites and hire a licensed pro to treat, then coordinate timing and target areas.
- Open the smallest practical sections to expose all damage, document, and set containment.
- Shore and repair structural elements first, including termite sill plate repair and sistering studs or joists.
- Rebuild wall assemblies, re-insulate if needed, then close with plaster or drywall to match existing.
- Finish, prime, and paint, then schedule a follow-up inspection with your termite company.

This rhythm keeps you from painting too early or hiding a structural issue that will open your seams later.

Choosing help you can trust

Search terms like termite repair near me or termite damage contractor near me will throw a lot of names at you. Narrow the field to companies that can show permits, insurance, and photos of termite wood repair jobs similar to yours. If you need bigger work like beam reinforcement, look for structural termite repair near me and ask who handles their engineering review. When I bid termite framing repair, I include a written scope with line items for sill, studs, insulation, and finish, plus allowances in case hidden rot turns up. Good contractors do the same. Make calls to references who live in older homes with plaster if that is your house type. Drywall experts can learn plaster, but proof on a similar wall wins.

If you prefer to self-perform cosmetic work and hire out the structure, say so. A reputable wood repair contractor termite damage near me should be comfortable coordinating with your painter or plasterer. Keep a single point of contact to avoid crossed signals.

Costs, permits, and insurance

Repair costs swing with access, finishes, and how far the damage climbed. A typical termite drywall repair after termite treatment in a non-load-bearing wall might run a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars for opening, sistering a stud or two, re-insulating, closing, and painting. Plaster and lath repairs are slower and often land higher, particularly if matching specialty textures or restoring crown molding.

Structural items move into four figures quickly. Termite sill plate repair across a straight eight-foot section with interior access might run in the low thousands, more if exterior siding has to come off or if you need to shore a two-story load. Termite floor joist repair with full-length sisters and new hangers fluctuates by count and access. Termite beam repair, especially with steel, jacking, and engineer oversight, can touch five figures if the beam supports a significant span.

Permits are not just paperwork. Any time you alter a structural member, most jurisdictions want a permit. It protects you and the next owner. If you file an insurance claim, your adjuster will want clear separation of termite damage repair versus general maintenance and moisture issues. Policies often exclude the cost of termite treatment and repairing damage from insects, but cover ensuing damage if a covered peril like a sudden leak was involved. Read your policy and ask questions early.

Safety and cleanup

Plaster dust gets everywhere. Plan for containment even on small jobs. Zip up a plastic door, run a HEPA vacuum as you work, and change filters more often than you think. If your home tests positive for lead paint, follow lead-safe practices: plastic on floors, minimize sanding, use HEPA vacuums, and clean with a detergent that binds lead

dust. In basements and crawl spaces, protect yourself from mold spores that sometimes attend termite damage. A P100 respirator, gloves, and protective eyewear are not overkill when you are scraping sill plates.

Dispose of chewed wood promptly and keep it out of contact with soil. Although treated termites cannot resurrect like a movie monster, you do not want to attract new colonies with a buffet of damp, starch-filled debris near the foundation.

A quick story about doing it right once

We opened a 1920s dining room with classic plaster and tall baseboards after a client noticed her chair rail was a bit wavy. A small cut at the base revealed a network of mud tubes and a sill plate that looked like lace. We stopped and brought in the termite team, who treated from outside and foamed the interior bays. Once clear, we shored the wall, replaced the full length of sill, then sistered four studs where the damage ran up to knee height. The lath was mostly eaten across two bays, so we removed the plaster and rebuilt with wood lath to maintain the wall depth and sound.

Instead of trying to save a sagging three-by-six foot panel of plaster above, we used plaster washers to reattach two upper sections where most keys survived. We set new wood lath at the bottom, built a gypsum brown coat, and applied a lime finish that matched the room’s soft sheen. The baseboard was chewed at the bottom edge, but the visible face was good. We hardened the soft fibers, rebuilt the bottom with an epoxy wood filler, and painted. The client kept her original character and gained a solid structure. Two years and three monsoon seasons later, that wall is still straight.

Prevention that sticks

Once you have invested in termite damage restoration, keep it that way. Maintain a clean six-inch visual gap between soil and siding so you can see mud tubes. Store firewood off the ground and away from the house. Seal gaps around plumbing and wiring that enter at the foundation. Keep shrubs trimmed back for airflow. If your region is active for termites, schedule an annual inspection and keep bait stations serviced. None of this is fancy, but I have seen it make the difference between a quick local termite damage repair and a costly subfloor and beam overhaul.

Where all the pieces connect

Termite wall repair asks you to look at the surface and the structure as a single system. Plaster and lath reward patience and skill, and drywall rewards clean planning and sequence. The studs, plates, joists, and beams behind the finish carry the story of the house, for better or worse. When you coordinate with a good pest professional, choose a contractor who respects old and new materials, and fix what you find from the sill up, your repairs last. If you are starting the search with phrases like termite damage repair near me or local termite damage repair, talk to two or three providers, ask detailed questions about sill plates, joists, and matching finishes, and pick the team that can explain both the why and the how.

If you take one idea from all this, let it be this: treat first, repair structure second, close and finish last. Do it once, and the next time you tap your wall, you will hear the right sound.