How To Create a Cosmic Star Ceiling That Will Amaze Your Children Or Partner!

INVISIBLE BY DAY – INCREDIBLE BY NIGHT!
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Introduction

The art of creating a Cosmic Ceiling (also known as a Star Ceiling/Star Mural/Starscape) has been around since the late 1980’s yet it is something that very few people have heard of.

Quite simply, it is a mural applied most commonly to a bedroom ceiling using high performance glow paints. If done correctly the effects will remain practically invisible during the day but at night when the room is in darkness the ceiling will come to life (as in the above example).

In the late 1980’s there was only one type of glow paint available – Green and this was a relatively substandard product compared to what is available today.

Today’s glow paints are available in a range of colours and they glow much brighter and longer than the old type of paint. This allows you to be much more creative with the type of effects that you can produce.

In the following pages I will run through the equipment and materials you will need plus the simple techniques required to complete your own amazing Cosmic Star Ceiling.
About Me

My name is Mark Watts. I first became involved in Cosmic Ceilings in 1995. It was a sporadic relationship with the concept in the early years but over the past 5 or 6 years it has been the main focus of my business.

I now operate a business called Superstars Ceilings which keeps me busy creating Cosmic Ceilings for my customers throughout the UK (www.superstarscelings.info).

I also teach people how to set up their own Cosmic Ceilings businesses. I sell Cosmic Posters on eBay and have sold nearly 3,000 of them over the past couple of years or so.

Finally, I sell my own range of glow paints.

I will be adding a new website (www.cosmicstarceiling.com) to these as well in 2010 which will extend my product range even further.
The concept of creating a star ceiling is still relatively unheard of worldwide. It recently gained a boost here in the UK when a Cosmic Ceilings artist who I trained around June 2007 managed to get himself involved in a very popular DIY makeover show on BBC1. The show was aired on the BBC and included the transformation of a loft bedroom. As part of the improvements a Cosmic Ceiling was created and it prompted the presenter to state; “I think this is absolutely astounding! Of all the things we have ever done on the shows over the years this is the cleverest and most beautiful thing!”

It certainly opened up the world of Cosmic Star Ceilings to a wider audience here in the UK.

**Equipment Required**

Your do not need to spend a fortune on the items required to create your star ceiling and in fact you will probably have quite a number to hand already.

Here is the full list:

1) **Glow In The Dark Paints** – Green, Blue, Aqua and Purple.
These are my own range of glow paints called Superstarz™ which are totally VOC (volatile organic compound) free and child-friendly making them particularly ideal for use in children’s bedrooms.

As you can see, the paints are white/off white in colour in daylight but when charged and viewed in the dark they glow extremely brightly.

Please make sure that you are buying the new generation glow paints made using strontium aluminate not zinc sulphide. The old style zinc sulphide paints are of an inferior quality and do not have the same glow qualities as the strontium based paints.

You will find that nearly all glow paints will be non-toxic, non-radioactive and odourless but please check before purchasing any paints that this is the case.

You can buy both water-based and solvent based glow paints but it is advisable to go with the water-based as they perform just as well now but don’t have the disadvantages of harmful compounds and fumes.

You can buy glow paints in colours other than the 4 I’ve mentioned above but to be honest you will be able to create more than enough effects with the green, blue, aqua and purple. You could, if you wish, just use 2 or 3 colours, in which case I’d go for the Green,
Blue and Aqua. You will also find that other colours such as red, orange, white etc. will only glow for around 10 – 20 minutes.

Green is the brightest glowing of all the glow paints whilst aqua glows the longest (up to 12 hours). Purple is a lovely colour but will only glow for an hour or so.

There may not look to be enough paint in these 20ml pots but you are using very small amounts, particularly for the stars. You can create hundreds of stars plus create some additional effects such as Milky Way and gas clouds with the paints in the kit.

2) **Ultra Violet (Blacklight) Light**

You will need a small UV light source to charge up your glow paints prior to applying them to your ceiling.

When I am creating star ceilings for my customers I use a large 4ft double tube unit which floods the room with UV light but for the purpose of creating your own ceiling you can get by with a smaller version.

You can buy a standard or low energy UV light bulb.

The blacklight below is a 2ft mains operated UV unit which, although slightly dearer than the standard bulbs above, emits more
UV and is better for using to help charge your ceiling up once it’s completed.

You can also consider a UV Headlight like the one below.

You can use any of the units mentioned above but I would buy the 2ft model. If you put a search in google or yahoo for blacklights/UV lights you will find many suppliers worldwide. All you need is a source that will charge up your glow paints sufficiently.

The 2ft unit is the exact model that I leave with each of my customers after I’ve completed a star ceiling for them. They don’t have to use it but if they really want to bring out the colours and effects they can leave it switched on for 5/10 minutes. It can also be fixed to the ceiling or wall if preferred. You can get this unit in the UK from www.maplin.co.uk (ref L28BB) and similar units are available in the US from Walmart for around $10.

These UV units emit Longwave UV, the safest form of invisible UV light. They will not damage your eyesight but if you feel that you might require them you can purchase UV Protective Glasses.
3) **Applicators**

You need 2 types of applicators, one for creating the stars and the second for creating the Milky Way/Gas Clouds etc.

You can use ordinary artists brushes to create different sized stars. Some artists use wooden or plastic dowelling rods of different diameters whilst some use a small syringe to squeeze out small blobs of glow paint.

I personally use an item that I found in my wife’s make-up box a few years ago. It is marketed as an eyeliner softener and it basically consists of a pen shaped wooden handle with a rubber tip like the one below.

![UV Protection](image)

The great thing about this applicator is that you can use just the one implement to get every size of star that you will need when creating your cosmic ceiling. By barely touching the ceiling you can get a micro star and then just by varying the pressure on the tip you can increase the size of the star that you are creating.
You can see in these images how easy it is to create stars of varying diameters using the rubber tipped star applicator. It also enables you to create 6 to 8 stars from each insertion of the tip into the glow paint.

You should be able to find them at any chemist/drug store/make-up department but if you would like to buy one from me just send me an email (info@amazingstarceiling.com).

The second applicator is required to create Milky Way and Gas Cloud effects. Believe it or not the bog standard toothbrush is the best item for the job. I actually use smokers toothbrushes because they tend to have extra stiff bristles.

You can however try any type of brush that you are comfortable with as long as it has flat bristles (many toothbrushes nowadays have wavy/undulating bristles). Many people use a nail brush. It is simply a case of finding an applicator that will spray the glow paint onto the ceiling.
4) **Additional items**

There are a few other items needed before you start on your ceiling. You will probably already have some of the following items:

- Stepladder or platform
- Blackout Curtain Material
- Cloth Dust Sheets
- Overalls
- Latex Gloves
- Masking Tape
- Stencils

Any stepladders will do as long as they enable you to reach the ceiling comfortably but it is ideal if you have a ladder that has 7 or 8 steps with a flat surface or tray at the top. This means that you have your paints and applicators at hand at ceiling level.

A platform can be useful as it allows you to complete a larger area before having to move it to another part of the room.

You can purchase blackout curtain material by the square metre. For the process of simply doing one ceiling however you can use an old dark coloured sheet or even black waste bags. All you are looking to do is to block out all the daylight that is coming into the room (if you are creating your ceiling at night then just shutting the curtains/blinds should do the trick). The room needs to be as dark as possible.

You need dust sheets to cover the floor and furniture in the room. Use cloth sheets rather than polythene as they absorb any overspray/droplets much better than polythene and don’t shed the bits as easily when you come to tidy up. It is up to you whether you want to cover the walls as well. If you are careful, particularly when you are spraying paint, and you have a damp cloth at hand then you can probably get away with not masking up the walls. If you want to be 100% certain then just buy some cheap plastic sheets from your DIY store.

You can use overalls or just some old clothes. You will be glowing when you finish so you don’t want to wear decent clothing. Similarly you can wear a hat and latex gloves if you wish.

These are all the items you will need to be able to create your own Cosmic Star Ceiling.

I am sure you are now itching to get started!
**Practice**

Prior to tackling your ceiling you may want to spend some time practicing on paper, card or board.

A good idea is to buy some black artists paper/card and use ordinary white emulsion (latex). This saves you wasting the actual glow paint. Simply water down the paint slightly to a similar consistency to the glow paint and practice flicking it onto the black card and creating stars with the rubber tipped applicator.

Because you are applying the white paint onto a black surface you will easily see the effects that you are creating.

Once you are happy with your technique you can make a start on your actual ceiling.

**Preparation**

If you are intending this as a surprise you will need to give yourself a good 4 hours to allow for the time it takes you to prepare and clear up as well as creating the ceiling.

Prior to commencing each job you should take a few precautions.

Clear the room of any loose items that could be accidentally knocked off tables and wardrobes. Remove as many items as you can that obstruct your movement around the room.

Place your dust sheets on the floor and over any items of furniture. Cover everything in the room (unless you want glow in the dark bedding and furniture as well?).

You then use whatever blackout material you have decided on to block out the light from the window/s. I do this by sticking the material to the window frame using duck tape or masking tape. Be careful that you don’t stick any of the tape to the paint or wallpaper around the window frame as this can result in a patch being peeled off when you remove the tape.

You may be able to simply drape your material over the curtain pole/track. As long as you have blocked out as much of the daylight filtering into the room as possible then you will be ok and you will have the perfect conditions for creating your star ceiling. You can
then set up your ladder and UV light. If you have bought one of the 2ft UV light units it is a good idea to fix it to the top of your ladder. Most of these units also have a flick power switch along the length of the cable. Tape this to the frame of the ladder within easy reach so that you can simply flick the UV light on and off as and when required. Then tape the rest of the cable to the frame of the ladder so that you do not run the risk of tripping over it.

Here you can see the light unit fixed to the ladder with the flick switch just below it on the left hand side and the flex taped to the ladder.

**Background**

It is one of the most popular questions that I am asked – “Do you have to paint the ceiling black?”

It is a fair question and has an easy answer. No, you don’t have to paint your ceiling black. In fact by far the best colour on which to create a Cosmic Ceiling is white, for 3 main reasons.
At night when the curtains are drawn and the room is in darkness the ceiling appears completely black and the paints glow against that apparently black surface.

Secondly, as the paints dry to a near white finish we want them to be applied to a white/light coloured surface so that the effect is invisible during the day (one of the magical and mysterious aspects of the creation).

This second point explains why you have to blackout the room and use a UV light unit. If you tried to create your masterpiece in daylight conditions you would have great difficulty in seeing what you are doing because you are applying paints that are white in daylight onto a white surface.

By blocking out all light entering the room then using our UV light unit to charge the paints up so that they are glowing brightly you can then see them as you are applying them to the ceiling.

Thirdly, a black background actually diminishes the glow because it absorbs it. Glow paints work by storing light and reflecting it back. This reflective process works best against a white background.

Another point to consider before creating your ceiling is the type of surface and its existing coating. Most glow paints dry with a very slight sheen. If you are working on a ceiling that has been painted with a matt (flat) emulsion (latex) there is more likelihood of the effects being slightly visible in places. This is particularly the case if you have a smooth finish to the ceiling rather than a textured finish.

A textured ceiling is great for creating a star ceiling as it helps to hide the glow paint better and it also adds to the 3-D qualities as well as you can put stars on the high spots and hide some amongst the low points.

So, you may want to consider giving your ceiling a new coat of paint with a silk finish before starting on your cosmic ceiling.

If you don’t want to do this, no problem. Just be careful when working on a smooth matt finished ceiling. If you don’t go mad by building up thick layers of paint in certain areas and you stick to spraying/flicking the paints on lightly and creating small/medium stars you will still be able to create a daytime invisible star ceiling. You could even test a small area if you wanted just to see the result.
Getting started

I don’t use any set template for designing a Cosmic Ceiling. I simply go with whatever I feel like creating on the day.

I will show you the basic techniques and you can then use your own imagination when creating your own ceiling.

I will deal with a Milky Way type effect first. The Milky Way should generally snake its way diagonally across the ceiling and should be an irregular wavy shape i.e. it should vary in width and shape.

This is the type of effect that you should be looking to replicate for your Milky Way.

You can either make this a main feature through the middle of the ceiling or make it more discreet in one corner of the room.

Don’t worry too much about exact size and shape of your effects at the outset. You will soon get a sense of what looks good. Once you understand and have mastered the techniques and methods of applying the paints you can use them in any way you like. You don’t have to put a Milky Way effect right through the centre of the room. Place a few Milky Way/Gas Cloud effects on various parts of the
ceiling instead. All I am trying to say is that you have complete control over what you do with your new knowledge.

You may think that it would take forever to complete a ceiling using the small toothbrush but it is surprising how quickly you can cover a large area once you are used to using it effectively.

Position your ladder under your starting point with your UV light unit on.

I like to use the blue glow paint for the base colour of my Milky Way effect but you can use any of the colours.

You will probably need to pour some of the glow paint into a small plastic tray or even onto a plate enabling you to dip the bristles of the toothbrush onto the surface of the paint without getting the head of the toothbrush completely coated in paint. You just want to coat the tips of the bristles with the glow paint.

Now hold the brush close to your UV light for a few seconds to charge it up. Switch the UV light off and you will see the paint glowing brightly.

The technique that I then use to create the Milky Way/Gas Cloud effects with the toothbrush is as follows.

As I am right-handed I take the toothbrush in my left hand. I then place the tips of the fingers of my right hand against the handle at the bristle end of the brush with the pad of my thumb resting along the full length of the bristles. I want to use the full length of the toothbrush head as this allows me to get the maximum amount of paint onto the ceiling and also relatively quickly.

The following picture should help to give a better idea of this explanation.
Holding the brush 3/4 inches below the ceiling I then draw my thumb down against the bristles to flick paint up onto the ceiling. I do this quickly whilst turning my hand/wrist to get a random splatter effect.

You will find that the first couple of flicks against the bristles will lay down a thick layer with large specks and then as the paint disperses off the brush you get a very faint/subdued effect.

You can also vary the density and size of your splatter effect by diluting the glow paint down slightly with water. Don’t water it down too much (perhaps up to 15%) as this can reduce the glow and also the adhesive properties of the paints.

Make sure that you do not travel in straight lines and that you vary the thickness and the direction in which you spray the paint onto the ceiling. You don’t want to see a uniform pattern.

You need to make sure that as you are spraying the paint onto the ceiling that you turn your hand/wrist to create the random pattern. If you don’t you will find that you have created a series of straight lines which looks very unnatural.

When I am happy with the size and shape of my blue base layer I will then highlight patches of the Milky Way with the aqua glow paint (as in the image above). This helps to add depth and create the 3-D effect.
Just be careful not to spray the paints on in too thick a layer as this increases the chance of it becoming visible in the daytime.

Once you have completed your Milky Way you can add a few smaller Gas Clouds using exactly the same technique. Use one colour on its own or layer two or three colours on top of each other. Experiment with the paints.

If at any stage you are unhappy with the effect you have created you can, if you are quick enough, simply wipe it off with a damp cloth. The paints can dry quite quickly, particularly in warm conditions.

At this stage you can also go round the ceiling using the aqua paint to spray light clusters of stars and mini galaxies in random patches. I create these by holding the brush farther away from the ceiling (6/8 inches).

This is where the use of polythene sheets on the walls can prove effective. As you spray outwards towards the walls you run the risk of overspray. If you haven’t gone to the trouble of masking up the walls you could just work up to a foot or so from them and ensure that you spray the paint with the toothbrush pointing towards the centre of the room rather than outwards.

**Shooting Stars**

A few shooting stars can really enhance the cosmic effect of the mural.
They are really easy to create. Don’t make them too large as they will dominate the sky.

A Shooting Star is simply a bright star with a tapering tail coming from it and there are a number of ways that you can create them.

You can use two pieces of masking tape. Place the strips of masking tape onto the ceiling so that you have a narrow tapering strip about 3” – 4” long. Paint over the gap with green paint using an artists paint brush and remove the tape immediately.

Now place a dot of Green paint at the wider end of the tail using either the rubber tipped applicator or an artists brush.

Instead of using the masking tape procedure you can alternatively make up your own shooting star stencil or purchase one of my ready made stencils.

If the ceiling has a heavily textured finish you may need to paint-in the tail freehand as you will be unable to use masking tape or a stencil. Simply create the star and then with a dry artists brush drag the paint away from the star to create the tail.

Depending on the size of the ceiling I generally paint in about 6-8 shooting stars of various sizes and moving in different directions.

**Star & Zodiac Constellations**

You are now at a stage where you can start to add the stars and any constellation/s. You can add in a few of the main constellations or more likely just the constellation relating to the star sign of your child/partner. The best place for this is on the ceiling above their pillow so that they can sleep under their own lucky star sign. I
would make this around 8-10 inches across and I would use an alternative colour for the stars that make up the constellation. So, for example, if I’d used Aqua to create the stars on the ceiling I would use Green for the stars that make up the constellation so that it stands out.

You will find a Constellation Chart at the end of this guide.

Using your choice of colour dip the tip of the applicator into the paint. Create a round star about 8mm in diameter by pressing the tip against the ceiling. When creating the large stars for the birth sign constellation you will need to load the applicator for each star. Follow the pattern shown on the constellation chart creating an 8mm circular star for each dot (star) on the chart.

**Star Fields**

Now that you have created the Milky Way, Nebula Gas-Clouds, Constellation and Shooting Stars it is time to create the real 3-D effect. You are going to ‘in-fill’ the ceiling with Star Fields.

**WORD OF CAUTION**

If you look at a real night sky you will see black areas that contain no stars at all. You want the same effect on your ceiling. Do not cover all the surface with stars.

The ‘in-fill’ stars should be a mixture of sizes varying from the tiniest of dots up to about 7mm. Use the rubber tipped Star Applicator and the sky blue/aqua paint (there is no hard and fast rule here and if you prefer you can use green paint for the stars as it is the brightest glowing of the paints). You create the various sizes simply by loading the rubber tip and altering the amount of pressure that you use as you apply the paint to the ceiling.

The size of the dots is important. If you do them too big the finished effect doesn’t look as realistic. So, if you do a star slightly smaller than intended, don’t waste time trying to enlarge it. Just leave it until you can check the ceiling from about bed level. If it doesn’t look suitable, then you can add a touch of paint. Most of the time you will find that it looks fine in the overall scheme of things.

What you should try and do however is to create the stars with a dome shape or small point (gravity pulling the paint downwards will help here) as this helps with the 3-D effect.
I generally do a number of small stars that are very tiny indeed. Sometimes they are just tiny pinpoints. They seem to show up as the tiniest of twinkles, very much like the real night time sky. You can look outside on a nice clear night and sometimes the smaller stars look as though they fade and disappear, then a few seconds later you can see them again. To create these use the applicator with a tiny amount of paint on the end.

Do not paint the stars in a regular grid pattern. This is how the night sky looks, with no obvious patterns. Create some stars in clusters and some on their own. Study pictures from the internet and build up an idea of how the night time sky looks. Try and create similar patterns.

Split the ceiling into quarters and put a couple of dozen or so stars in each quarter. Once you have completed these, come down, sit on the floor near the head of the bed and look up at the stars you have just created to make sure that they look okay. Paint fewer stars rather than more and you can always add more if you think they are needed.

This is where you begin to create the magical three dimensional ‘depth’ effect. By varying the size of stars you give the impression of some being close and others far away. You can also add to this effect by adding the odd star in a different colour as the intensity of glow and duration of glow will vary. Don’t feel hurried or under pressure to complete this stage as fast as possible.
But, I hear you ask, what about the thousands of stars that you talked about? Relax, you may have only painted 250 to 300 stars on the ceiling but, because of the method you have used, the enchanting 3-D effect is complete.

The impression that is conveyed is that there are literally hundreds and hundreds, maybe even thousands of stars up there.

**Additional Effects**

You can add more interest by creating simple additional effects.

Create a ‘bright star’ by loading a toothbrush with paint of any colour and build up a central concentration of paint. Then spray a fine mist in a circular pattern around it.

Create a ‘black hole’ by spraying paint in a circle about 4-5 inches in diameter with nothing in the middle. If you don’t want to do this free-hand get some lids of varying sizes off jars/pots. Stick some blu tack in the middle of them and press them onto the ceiling and spray the paint/s round them.

Try using different brushes. I know that some of my customers have used a potato scrubbing brush and a suede shoe brush to good effect in place of the toothbrush.

Apply a different colour of paint in the middle of a star that you have already created.

Slightly overlap one star with another star of a different colour.
Try applying watered down paint using an artist's brush to create a wispy effect. You can water the paints down by up to 15%. Then splatter paint over the top.

Apply paint using the toothbrush creating small clusters of stars and then rub them gently with a dry cloth to form a delicate haze.

Try applying the paints with a sponge or damp cloth to get a completely different effect.

In the photograph of the ceiling above you will also see that there are 5 very bright stars in amongst the Milky Way. First of all I mixed 2 or 3 of the paints to achieve a different colour. I then used the star applicator to create a large star and then sprayed the same paint over the top using a toothbrush so that it looked as though light was radiating from it.

Use a space stencil to create planets or special stars.
Clearing up and unveiling.

When you are done it is simply a case of cleaning up and returning the room to its original state.
You can simply clean the star applicator and toothbrush in soapy water (don’t use white spirit or turps).

When removing the dust sheets it is best to gently fold them inwards so that any loose glow paint particles are trapped within each sheet. You can then shake them outside.

If you want to show off your ceiling in the daytime then leave the window blacked out. If you are going to unveil it at night then you can remove the blackout material.

The ceiling will charge itself up from the available daylight but you can use your UV light to help bring out the colours/effects. When viewing the ceiling the darker the room the better and you will start to see more and more as your eyes become adjusted to the dark.

If you have any questions or you need assistance with any aspect of creating your ceiling please feel free to email me at info@amazingstarceiling.com

Good luck

Mark
Superstars Ceilings
Constellation Chart