Top Hung vs Floor Supported Movable Walls

SPECIFICATION GUIDANCE BY MODERNGLIDE

Understanding the critical difference between **top hung and floor supported movable walls**, operable walls, and sliding folding partitions — and how the right choice shapes your project from structure to finish.

What Are Movable Wall Systems?

Movable wall systems go by many names in the industry. Regardless of terminology, they all serve one purpose: creating **flexible, reconfigurable interior spaces** that adapt to changing functional needs. The most important technical distinction in specification is the support method.

Movable Walls

Also called moveable walls — panel-based systems for space division

Operable Walls

Acoustically rated systems that open and close on demand

Sliding Folding Partitions

Lightweight folding systems for quick reconfiguration

Acoustic Walls

Moveable acoustic walls engineered for sound attenuation

The key technical distinction in specification: Top Hung vs Floor Supported systems — and this choice drives structural, acoustic, and aesthetic outcomes.

Why This Choice Matters

The decision between top hung and floor supported systems is **not simply a product selection** — it is a fundamental design decision that cascades across multiple disciplines. Getting it right at the specification stage prevents costly redesign downstream.

Structural Design

The support method determines load path requirements and structural coordination with the building frame.

Floor Finish & Thresholds

Top hung systems allow uninterrupted flooring; floor supported systems require integrated track detailing.

Acoustic Performance

System type influences seal design and perimeter detailing, which directly affects acoustic outcomes.

Ease of Operation

The support method affects the effort required to move panels, with implications for DDA compliance.

What Is a Top Hung Movable Wall?

A **top hung movable wall system** is entirely supported from an overhead structural track. Panels are suspended from the ceiling or head structure, meaning **no floor track is required** and the entire panel weight is carried above. This method is the industry benchmark for high-specification commercial interiors.

Suspended Panels

All weight carried by the head structure above — zero floor load from panels

No Floor Track

Uninterrupted floor finish from wall to wall, beneath and beyond the partition line

Smooth Operation

Effortless panel movement, suitable for all users including those with mobility requirements

Key Characteristics

- Clean, uninterrupted floor finish
- Smooth and effortless operation
- Ideal for high-end commercial spaces
- Full DDA compliance potential
- Premium architectural aesthetic

Benefits of Top Hung Systems

PREFERRED ARCHITECTURAL SOLUTION

Top hung systems consistently represent the **preferred specification choice** for architects and designers where structural conditions allow. The absence of a floor track is a defining advantage — both aesthetically and functionally.

Seamless Flooring

No floor track means continuous floor finishes — critical for premium material selections like stone or hardwood.

DDA Compliant

No threshold obstruction ensures full accessibility compliance and reduced trip hazard risk.

Ideal Applications

Offices, boardrooms, education, hotels, and conference venues where aesthetics and usability are paramount.

Superior Experience

Lighter, quieter panel operation that reflects positively on the quality of the finished environment.

What Is a Floor Supported System?

Key Characteristics

- Load transferred through floor track
- Head track provides guidance only
- Reduced structural demand above
- Suitable for limited overhead support
- Robust for demanding environments

A **floor supported movable wall system** transfers panel weight downward through a floor-mounted track. The overhead track serves as a guide only, not a load-bearing element. This approach is often the **practical solution where ceiling or structural conditions limit top hung installation**.

Floor Track Load Path

Weight distributed at floor level, reducing demands on ceiling and overhead structure

Guidance Head Track

Overhead track aligns panels without bearing load — suitable for lighter ceiling builds

Retrofit Friendly

Often the preferred approach in existing buildings where structural intervention above is impractical

Benefits of Floor Supported Systems

Floor supported movable wall systems offer a **practical and cost-effective path** in projects where the building structure cannot accommodate top hung loading. While they involve visible floor track, their suitability in constrained conditions makes them indispensable in the specifier's toolkit.

When to Specify

- Structural support above is restricted
- Large spans or heavy panels required
- Retrofit conditions limit ceiling load
- Industrial or heavy-duty environments

Key Considerations

- Visible floor track in finished space
- Requires floor finish coordination
- Potential threshold trip hazard
- Heavier panel operation feel

Practical solution where structure dictates design — floor supported systems deliver reliable performance when the building fabric limits the overhead option.

Key Specification Differences

Understanding how these two systems compare across critical performance criteria enables accurate specification from the outset. The choice ultimately rests on **structure, design intent, and end-use requirements**.

Criteria	Top Hung System	Floor Supported System
Load Path	Structural support above — head track bears all panel weight	Floor bearing — weight transferred through floor track
Floor Condition	Clear, uninterrupted — no floor track required	Floor track required along the full partition line
Operation Feel	Smooth, effortless, lighter panel movement	Heavier feel; more effort required to move panels
Aesthetic	Clean, minimal — no visible hardware at floor level	Visible track line at floor — requires design coordination
Accessibility	Fully DDA compliant — no threshold obstruction	Track creates threshold; requires careful detailing
Best Use Case	Premium commercial, education, hospitality	Retrofit, heavy-duty, structurally constrained projects

Acoustic & Performance Considerations

A common misconception is that system type alone defines acoustic performance. In practice, **both top hung and floor supported systems can achieve high acoustic ratings** when specified and installed correctly. The variables that truly determine acoustic success operate independently of the support method.

01

Seal Quality

Automatic drop seals and perimeter gaskets must fully engage at head, jamb, and floor. Seal integrity is the single biggest acoustic variable.

02

Panel Construction

Panel mass, infill material, and face panel specification directly affect Rw performance. Heavier, denser panels attenuate more sound energy.

03

Perimeter Detailing

Flanking paths at ceiling, floor, and abutting walls must be designed out. Acoustic breaks and resilient linings are essential in the surrounding structure.

04

Installation Accuracy

Even the best-specified system underperforms if installation tolerances are not met. On-site quality control is a critical final factor.

Key principle: Overall design coordination — not system type alone — defines acoustic success. Specify the full system, not just the panel.

ModernGlide Recommendation

ModernGlide's specification guidance is grounded in matching the system to the structural and design reality of each project. Both system types are proven performers — the right choice depends on the constraints and aspirations of your specific brief.

Top Hung Systems — Preferred

Recommended wherever the structure allows. Delivers the best outcomes for aesthetics, usability, DDA compliance, and long-term flexibility. Ideal for offices, boardrooms, hotels, education, and premium commercial interiors.

Floor Supported Systems — Structural Solution

Specified where structural constraints, large spans, or retrofit conditions prevent top hung installation. A robust and reliable solution for heavy-duty applications and existing buildings with limited overhead capacity.

2

System Types

Top hung and floor supported — both available from ModernGlide

1st

Choice: Top Hung

Preferred specification where structural conditions allow

Rw49+

Acoustic Rating

Achievable with correct specification on both system types

Ready to specify? Contact ModernGlide for project-specific guidance on Top Hung vs Floor Supported system selection — and download the full specification guide to support your design documentation.