

# The Power of Paint

For instant good looks and enviable return on investment, a painting project can't be beat.

WRITTEN BY JASON MILLER



Few indoor remodeling projects can deliver such immediate results and gratification as a paint job. Even a large project can be completed in a weekend, giving a room of any size a completely new personality. Ensure success by doing your homework before you wet your brush.

Different projects require different tools and types of paints, so decide what, precisely, is going to get painted. Are you covering a large wall? Does trimwork need to be repainted or just touched up? Are there tight corners, a ceiling, or molding that will require special tools? Figuring

out the basics up front will minimize trips to hardware and paint stores.

## PICK A PAINT

When shopping for paint, you should address three primary elements: color, sheen, and volatile organic compound content.

**COLOR:** When choosing a color, "your starting point should be your home, not the paint store, because you'll just get swayed by your favorite color," says Pam Sather, a color consultant with I Pick Paint Color in Jacksonville, Florida.

Sather advises do-it-yourselfers to make informed color choices by looking at the space, the light, and the existing elements, such as flooring and furnishings. "Walk around your home and find what you like—the tones and colors that you've repeated, possibly unawares," she says. Keep in mind that "once a color goes onto a wall, it becomes a little more intense. Pick your favorite shade and mute it—bring it down a little bit," Sather says, adding that muted doesn't mean lighter. For example, choose a shade of gold rather than a bright yellow.

Next, bring a color deck or cards home from the store and lay out favorites side by side in the space you want to paint. This will help you determine which shades work and which don't. With your list narrowed to two or three, invest in small samples (usually less than \$5 each) and paint each color on the wall of the room. Study the samples in different lights and at various times of day for several days. One will jump out at you as the right one for your space.

"Don't try too hard," Sather says. "You don't want visitors to notice your paint first. Good design is not noticeable—that applies to paint, too."

**SHEEN:** A paint's sheen is the amount of light reflected by the finish surface. There are four kinds: flat, satin, semigloss, and gloss.

Flat paints are nonreflective, which helps hide surface imperfections. They're typically used on ceilings and walls in areas that don't get a lot of wear and tear.

A satin or eggshell finish is softer, with a sheen similar to that of an eggshell. More durable and stain-resistant than a flat finish, a satin finish is a good choice for walls in kids' rooms, hallways, stairways, and other rooms that see a little more traffic.

Semigloss paints are even more durable. They're easier to clean and more stain-resistant than satin-finish paints. Because of this, you'll find them in areas that are frequently cleaned, such as kitchens and bathrooms.

Gloss paints are the toughest of all. They're easiest to clean, making them ideal for heavy-wear areas like kitchens, bathrooms, handrails, and trim around high-traffic doors and halls. One downside: Gloss finishes can make surface imperfections more noticeable.

**Walk around and notice** the tones and colors that you've repeated, possibly unawares.

Remember that once a color goes onto a wall, it becomes a little more intense. Pick your favorite shade and mute it—don't choose a lighter color, just one that's a little less intense.

**VOCs:** Volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, have gotten more attention during the past couple of decades. The harmful gasses are emitted during paint application and even after it has dried.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, elevated concentrations of VOCs can persist inside a home long after the painting is completed. They can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation; headaches; loss of coordination; nausea; and, in extreme cases, liver, kidney, and central nervous system damage.

For these reasons, many homeowners are choosing low- and no-VOC paints. Read labels carefully and confer with a qualified paint salesperson to find a brand that's right for you.

### CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS

Keep your tool choices basic, says Marty McMett, owner of Marty's Paints in Burlington, Washington. Most jobs can be handled with brushes, rollers, and corner edgers.

"Preparation is the key, and that's basically a whole lot of elbow grease," McMett says. "Clean the surface of atmospheric residue—that's a polite word for grease." Then use a quality primer and paint, and you should be pleased with the results.

When applying paint, don't do all of the edges first and then paint the larger surface. Instead, keep a wet edge by painting the edges as you move across a wall.

Finally, "remember that your roller is an applicator, not a reservoir," McMett says. "Put plenty of paint on it as you work—not because I want to sell you more paint, but because you'll get more even coverage and you might be able to finish the job with one coat."