



The Last Paint Job

Breaking yourself of the DIY habit

By Bart Walters

So, I'm out looking for an apartment to rent and my favorite candidate has everything I want in a living space. Light, air, wood floors and plenty of room to run around in. Opposite the long list of positive features there exists only one entry in the "negative" column; "needs paint". The fact I needed to move in quickly combined with the painful expression on my future landlord's face when I mentioned it had me in a bit of a pickle. I wanted the place and I wanted it painted, but the probability of that happening quickly and with any modicum of style was pretty slim.

From somewhere in the depths of my machismo, a voice that sounded strangely like my own blurted out "I can paint it". I said it as a statement of fact, not making the connection between having the ability and actually painting an entire 125 square meter apartment by myself.

Indeed I have painted many a house, both interior and exterior, but not for at least 15 years. I had forgotten how much patience, time and energy such an endeavor can eat up. After the first room I made a solemn promise to myself that this would be my last paint job.

For any other do-it-yourselfers out there, I offer the following tips and recommendations to make your experience, if nothing else, survivable.

It's all in the prep

Painting a room is kind of like cooking Thai food; it's mostly about preparation. The amount of time actually spent painting is much less than the time spent cleaning, filling holes, sanding and a taping. Choose the room you want to paint and take everything out of it. Ideally, you should be in an empty room. If this isn't possible, crowd whatever is left into the middle.

It is important to understand the paint you will apply needs to stick to a clean, non-glossy surface. Give your walls a damp sponge bath top to bottom, especially in kitchens and bathrooms. If you need to fill in holes or cracks, make sure to sand the filler down to an even surface.

If the surface of your wall has damaged and flaking paint, it is advisable to scrape as much as possible off and sand the surface down so a primer can be applied.

Many people are tempted to skip putting any primer on the walls. Without a doubt, applying a coat of primer will ensure your paint properly adheres to the wall and brings out the paint's true color. Primer is also useful for hiding stains, covering dark colors and will make your new paint job last longer.

I painted the first room of my apartment without primer and the old concrete walls sucked it up like a sponge. I used more than twice the paint it should have taken in that room.

Remove all wall plates for light switches and electrical sockets and tape off the device for a cleaner look. Use plastic sandwich baggies over door knobs as they are notorious for catching paint splatter.

If you use tape (and I highly recommend it), try to find painter's tape. It is usually blue or green and identified as painter's tape. If that's not available, a good quality masking tape will do. Apply it in overlapping strips and press down firmly along the edge to ensure a crisp line.

Get the right stuff

Once you've prepped the room, you need to assemble all the tools and materials it takes to begin painting or applying primer. Painting walls is best accomplished with a roller. Make sure to get one with the attachment for a pole to keep you off of a ladder. Don't get cheap on the roller covers as the lower quality versions leave fuzzy lint balls in your paint and produce a ragged edge.

Trim is more easily painted with brushes. A 2.5" angle brush is a good multi-purpose tool.

Other materials you'll need include a drop cloth, sandpaper, a lint-free damp cloth, a stir stick, an edging tool (if you're like me and can't paint a straight line).

Choose a paint finish that is appropriate for the room and application. Semi-gloss is good for trim, eggshell for kitchens and bathrooms, and flat for all other rooms. Glossy finishes are the most durable, but flat finishes help to hide imperfections. Most paint finishes now, even flat, will hold up to a little cleaning.

I've always used water-based latex paint as it dries quickly, emits less fumes and easy to clean up. You can paint latex over oil-based paint, but you'll need to use a primer first.

Choosing colors is mostly about personal preference, but I think it a good rule to follow is: Don't pick a color and then ask for half-strength or lighter version. Many people swear by this technique, but I recommend just choosing a lighter color instead. That way you'll know exactly what you're getting. Most people prefer a slightly muted (tinted with gray or brown) colors as opposed to a pure primary color.

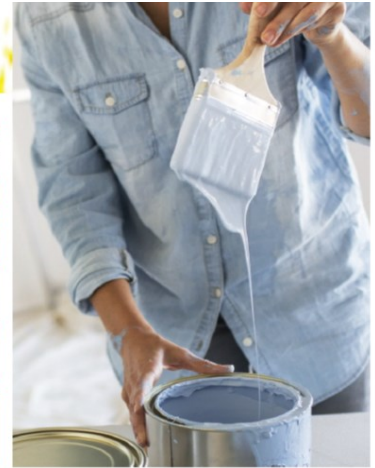
White ceilings are not mandatory. If your wall color isn't too dark, use it on the ceiling as well.

Getting on with it

Now that your walls are prepared and your materials assembled you can finally get on with it. Select a dry day to paint as moisture in the air keeps water-based paint from drying. It is important to remember, a wall needs to be dry before you apply a second coat.

- Stir your paint before beginning and don't paint straight from a can. Obviously you would pour paint into a roller tray if using a roller, but consider using a small bowl when painting with a brush. It is easier to hold, and decanting paint will keep the can free of impurities like dust, wood particles, etc. your brush may pick up as you work.
- Whether using a roller or a brush, always keep a wet edge; that is to say painting from dry to wet. This minimizes brush and roller marks.
- Don't try to stretch your paint. Scrimping will produce a patchy and/or blotchy paint job.
- Paint the areas to be "cut in" first like along the trim, ceiling and corners with a brush. After that has dried use a roller for the walls.
- Paint in long continuous strokes. Not doing so is one of the most common mistakes of amateur painters. When using a





roller, aim for covering a three foot wide section at a time. Professional painters usually go from ceiling to midway point, load more paint, and then go from the midway point down to the floor. Then move left or right to the next section, always keeping a wet edge and working from dry to wet.

- When using a brush, only dip about a half or quarter of an inch into the paint, then wipe off one side on the edge of the container. This helps to avoid paint runs from using too much and keeps your brush in good condition as well.
- Don't dab the paint or move your brush in a short back and forth motion. You can paint with the brush left and right (or up and down) to apply the paint, but then take one long finishing stroke from the dry side and tapering off into the wet edge.
- After all that preparation and all that concentration of painting, that first coat may look fantastic; but trust me ... it'll look even better with a second coat. With dark or vivid colors you may need 3 or 4. Let the paint dry fully between coats. Usually the container will have instructions telling you how long to wait.
- Do not pull off painter's tape until the wall is finished. Use a razor blade to crease any stubborn paint that wants to come off with the tape.

Probably the best advice ever given to me about painting was "don't look back". Once you've painted an area and it starts to dry, leave it alone. Going back over it can leave marks and color variations you did not intend.

Painting is hard work

After hastily finishing one room I remembered all the things I had forgotten about painting interiors. I violated every painting rule I'd ever learned. The room looked better than when I started, but terribly amateur compared to the next room I finished. As things came back to me, my work got better. Now I remember why painting is so hard; because it takes patience and has rules. Probably the only reason I finished the job is because I'm stubborn. And I kept promising myself, "Bart, if you get this done I promise, this will be your last paint job".

