

# Painting Solutions

BY FRANK SINICROPE

**M**ost people think that painting the interior of a house is a job that requires just a couple of tools, a high level of boredom, and very little experience. Only after they've come to the end of their messy first job do they begin to wonder about that old guy in painter's whites they once saw working at someone else's house. How could he paint an entire room in a seamlessly choreographed sequence of brush and roller strokes before his second cup of coffee and not spill even a drop of paint? I'm not that old guy yet, but I am a painting contractor. People always ask me how they can improve their painting techniques. If you consider the act of painting on par with a trip to the dentist, the answers ahead will provide some Novocain to ease the pain of your next painting project. □

Frank Sinicrope owns and operates American Capitol Painting in Cromwell, Conn. Photos by Charles Bickford.

#### ONLINE CONNECTION

For more painting tips, go to [www.finehomebuilding.com](http://www.finehomebuilding.com)

Answers to common questions provide advice for professional results on your next interior paint job



## HOW DO I PREP A ROOM FOR PAINT?

I like to move all furniture out or to the center of the room and cover it with plastic. To protect the floor, I roll out 4-mil plastic and tape it to the baseboard. Unless I'm painting the ceiling, it's necessary to cover only the first 3 ft. or 4 ft. of floor from the wall. Blue masking tape is best; it adheres to most surfaces and peels off cleanly for up to 14 days. The green tape can stay on even longer.

Next, I make sure walls and trim surfaces are clean, stain-free, and smooth. Nail holes, bumps, and cracks can be patched; for anything less than ¼ in. deep, I use lightweight joint compound, which dries quickly.

Long-lasting, low-tack tape is best (3M Corp.; 888-364-3577; [www.3m.com](http://www.3m.com)).



**Essential patching tools.** Use a 6-in. tapping knife and a 5-in-1 tool for wall prep.

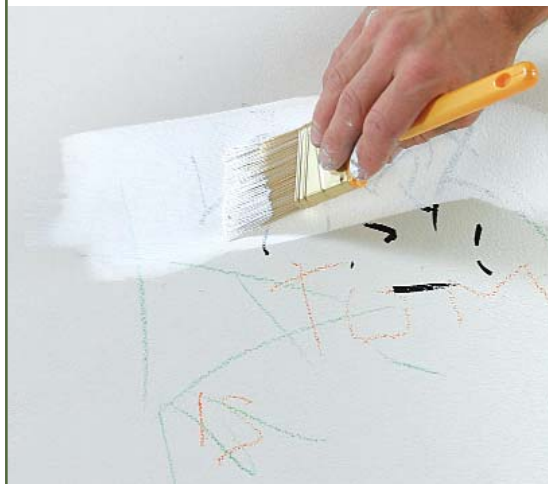


### BRUSH CHOICE DOES MATTER

A \$15, 3-in. tapered nylon-bristle brush is the professional's weapon of choice for the majority of interior latex-painting battles. Beginners might prefer a 2½-in. brush; it's easier to control. Use a China-bristle brush for oil paint. When spot-priming with any of the shellac-based stain-inhibiting paints, I use a 79¢ bristle brush and throw it away when I'm done.

## HOW DO I PREVENT STAINS FROM SHOWING THROUGH THE NEW PAINT?

It's a good idea to start any job with a quality primer. (For more on primers, see "Don't Skip the Primer," *FHB* #161, pp. 60-63). Stains including ink, crayon, water, and smoke soot can be blocked by a stain-killing primer such as BIN (Zinsser Co. Inc.; [www.zinsser.com](http://www.zinsser.com); 732-469-8100) or Benjamin Moore's Fresh Start acrylic primer ([www.benjaminmoore.com](http://www.benjaminmoore.com); 800-344-0400). After applying the primer, be sure to spot-prime the same area with the finish paint before applying the final coat. Otherwise, the spot will appear shiny when the wall is viewed from an angle.



**Cover a multitude of sins.** Begin the job with a stain-killing primer.

## WHICH TYPE OF PAINT IS BEST?

For a topcoat, there are two things to consider: latex vs. oil, and type of finish. Oil paint is made with an alkyd-base resin and cleans up with mineral spirits. I use it in kitchens and bathrooms because it is impervious to water. Latex paint is made from acrylic resins and cleans up with water. Because of their good durability and easy cleanup, I use latex paints everywhere else.



**Flat**  
Typically used for walls and ceilings in all but kitchens and baths; most successful at hiding surface imperfections.



**Eggshell**  
Slightly more shine than flat; also used for walls.

## WHAT DO I PAINT FIRST?

Pro painters have different preferences, but I like to paint the walls first, then the trim. I can roll out the walls quickly and not worry about any spray landing on the trim. Once the walls are finished, I wipe down the trim with a damp rag and start on it. I don't mask off the trim when I cut in the walls, but masking is certainly a good option if you'd rather not worry about getting wall paint on the trim. Any one of the low-tack tapes works well.



**Don't sweat it. Use tape.**  
Pros rely on a steady stroke to avoid using masking tape in many situations. But tape ensures clean, straight lines while you're still improving your skill.



**Easy does it.**  
Too much pressure on the roller will leave lines called ropes.

## WHEN ROLLING OUT A WALL, HOW CAN

Lap marks on walls are the visible transition between the textures made by a brush and by a roller. I cut in with a brush first, then try to roll as close to the trim as possible. I switch between cutting and rolling to ensure that the cutting stays wet, which also helps to eliminate marks. You'll also find that the greater the paint's sheen, the greater the likelihood of lap marks, which is a big reason to use flat paint on walls.

Ropes, another type of lap mark, are caused by squeeze-out from the roller's edge and can be remedied by a lighter touch when rolling out a wall. After loading the roller with paint, I use short, easy strokes that overlap each other by at least half.

### ADDITIVES KEEP THE PAINT FLOWING

I use a product called Floetrol (800-321-3444; [www.floodco.com](http://www.floodco.com)) to make trim paint flow better; it extends drying time and helps to reduce brush marks.





**Satin**  
Shinier than eggshell; can be used for trim, but is less durable than higher gloss paints.



**Semigloss**  
The most common finish used for trim, it's washable and durable.



**Gloss**  
Difficult to work with; dries quickly, but additives can improve its ability to flow. For the highest sheen, go with an oil-base gloss.



**I AVOID LAP MARKS AND ROPES?**

## WHAT'S THE TRICK TO PAINTING A WINDOW?

I paint the muntins of the window first, then move to the face of the window. With a 2½-in. sash brush, I angle the brush's tip into the muntin's edge and draw the paint along the muntin with one smooth stroke. (If you're unsure of your technique or don't want to bother, you can mask the glass with blue tape or scrape the glass once the paint has dried.) Don't apply too much paint to the window frame; also, open and close the window during the drying period so that it doesn't dry shut. If the window is painted shut, carefully run a razor blade between the window frame and casing to break the seal.



**Start inside and work outward.**  
To avoid lap marks, paint the muntins first, then the window frame, and finish with the casing.

## HOW DO I PAINT A PANELED DOOR AND NOT GET LAP MARKS?

Paneled doors should be primed with a high-quality primer to eliminate bleed-through stains. Multiple finish coats (usually two) may be necessary to get good coverage. Ask your paint supplier to tint the color of the primer as close as possible to the color of the final-coat paint. Again, the secret to stopping lap marks is to use a smooth last stroke with little paint and light pressure.

1. Start by painting at the top of the door, panels first, then rails, then stiles. Here, less paint is better to prevent drips; two coats lightly applied are better than than one heavy coat that drips or sags.

2. Be sure to keep the paint's leading edge wet to prevent brush marks. A final light stroke across the panel faces and along the intersections of the rails and stiles will eliminate sags and brush marks.

3. When you reach the door knob, use even less paint to get a seamless stroke pattern. The trick is to brush around the knob with continuous strokes and avoid stops. Masking or removing the hardware is also an option.

4. Be sure to check your work for drips, particularly in recessed areas and along door edges. As long as the paint is still fairly wet, drips can be erased with a light brush stroke.



*A final brush stroke defines joinery.*

## WHAT ABOUT CLEANING UP LATEX PAINT?

First, I flood the bristles with water, working out the majority of the paint. I use a wire brush gently to scrape out all remnants of dried paint. If not cleaned thoroughly, the brush will lose its flexibility. I use a little dish soap to remove the traces of oils that are in latex paint, rinse again, then shake or spin the brush dry. For info on cleaning oil paint from brushes, go to [www.finehomebuilding.com](http://www.finehomebuilding.com).

Rollers are certainly worth cleaning. If washed thoroughly, they can be used repeatedly. Scrape excess paint out of them with a 5-in-1 tool, then wash them using the same principle as the brushes, without the wire brush, of course.



*A thorough washing saves both brushes and rollers.*