

18 Pages of Questions and Answers

About painting a new house.

Q. We are moving to a new house that we've decided to paint ourselves, and are wondering if the new plaster on the walls and ceilings should be given a coat of primer or is there any products that you recommend for this. The house is 1,080 sq feet, 3 Bed. Would you have an estimate or a guide to the amount of paint needed for the whole house? E.McGowan

A. Two coats of emulsion over all the walls and ceilings would be standard practice. Your first coat of emulsion with 10% Floetrol emulsion paint conditioner mixed in will take care of the priming / first coat. Irrespective of what colours you choose for the various walls, you could paint them white on the first coat together with the ceilings to make it easy on yourself. You will find that the paint additive mentioned above will also make a huge difference when added to your second coat as well. Easier to do and looks better, no roller marks etc. Mask all edges you don't want paint on for best results; 2" tape works pretty good. Use dropcloths / old sheets etc on all floors to prevent mess.

Here's more food for thought plus a great **tip**: If there is a likelihood of posters etc being stuck with sellotape or the like to some of those painted walls up the road, you'd better make sure that paint is stuck on real tight in the first instance. The best way to do this is to add in 25-30% Emulsa-Bond (also known as E-B) into your first coat of emulsion and this will make sure that paint will stay put, even after being pulled with tapes etc! If you go this route, you can still use the Floetrol in your second coat.

If you are going to stay with the paint choice, you will need about 5 buckets of good quality interior emulsion, 2 for the ceilings and the rest for the walls. The Floetrol emulsion paint conditioner (1 litre per 10 litre bucket) will ensure a lovely smooth, roller mark free job with minimum effort. You may get away with 4 buckets but better get enough. You might like to pick up a bunch of paint sample testers in a paint store and experiment with the colours before you make final choice.

If you are up to it, you could hire an airless sprayer fitted with a, emulsion tip for a day and spray all the ceilings and first coat on the walls. I am reliably informed that you will do it in about a quarter of the normal time it takes to roll. If you do this, just cover glass / wood etc to keep off overspray.

You did not say how you plan to finish the doors etc, but assuming you are going to paint them, you will probably need about 5 litres of gloss, about 7.5 litres of undercoat / primer, box of filler like Pollyfilla, 3 sheets each 80 & 120 grit sandpaper and a litre or so of Owatrol oil for the paint and undercoat.

Mix about 20% Owatrol into the undercoat and about 10% into second coat. This will help grip, hiding and finish. You may also need a litre of varnish for the door saddles and a reasonable selection of brushes, 1, 1.1/2, 2, 3" should do, but invest in good ones while you're at it and don't forget a can of white spirits for cleaning them up. Good luck with your project.

Sea facing walls shedding paint?

Q. I live right on the seafront and am fed up to the teeth with paint peeling off most of the sea facing exterior walls. We've had several different painters do re-paints over the years, and despite each one criticise the work done by their predecessor, and assurances of a successful job this time, it still returned to the same old peeling paintwork.

A. Yes, we've heard it all before.. "you can be sure we will get it right ma'am" etc. Problem is, to make money, the painter must be able to get in and get out of the job as quickly as possible. Sometimes when there is a bad wall needing what used to be a serious amount of time consuming and back breaking preparation... corners will be cut, i.e. get some colour up there on the wall and hit the road. There have been huge strides in paint adhesion technology over the years and nowadays there is no excuse for peeling paint in your kind of situation.

There is a way to paint your walls properly with no more peeling paint. First, all the old remaining paintwork must be properly removed, usually a power washer is best and quickest, but if at all possible, wash at a 30 to 40 degree angle to the surface to avoid too much water penetration while achieving maximum old paint removal. Leave it for a few weeks of good drying weather, and then you are ready for a paint job.

Choose a high quality exterior (water based) paint and mix in about 30% of a very strong gripper like E-B (also known as Emulsa-Bond and available in most good paint outlets) into the first coat only and apply. Apply your second coat **without** E-B. This process will ensure your paint will stick because the E-B will soak deep into the wall providing serious grip and it should not peel off. I've seen what can only be described as desperate situations totally cured using this process.

The wall must also be checked for mould, mildew etc and if present kill same with 50:50 bleach and water mix. (There is also a useful mould preventative paint additive now available called VC 175 Mould Stop which is quite useful in preventing the return of the mould etc)

A very high percentage of the smarter painters now use this method because it is reliable, and from their time point of view, very fast and easy also.

If you would like to help the finish coat you could add 10% of a very useful emulsion paint conditioner like Floetrol. So, next time you are having your wall re-painted let the contractor know what you want done, (whether he likes it or not) and this bit of useful info will make him take great care to do it right this time! If possible ask around among your friends or neighbours for names of some reliable painters rather than just take a chance.

Can I repaint the ceramic wall tiles in my kitchen?

Q. Can I repaint the ceramic wall tiles in my kitchen, as I would like to change the colour to match some new cabinets. S Greene.

A: Yes you can. All you have to do is get yourself a one litre tin of a preparation product ESP which you've probably seen lauded on numerous home TV DIY shows, about 2.1/2 litres of each good quality oil based undercoat and gloss and a decent paint brush or small smooth roller from any DIY or paint store, and you are half way there.

For an extra special, smooth finish, pick up a litre tin of Owatrol oil as used by most of the professional decorators, (in the old days people used white spirits to thin the paint which was very detrimental to the paint quality and ruined hiding power) as this will help the paint flow out beautifully without ugly brushmarks or streaks. It also helps the paint adhesion, hiding power and gloss retention. Add about 20% Owatrol to the undercoat and about 10% to your top coat. About £60 or so should cover all the paint materials, which gives you an extremely cost effective colour change!

Start the job by cleaning the surface properly with warm water & sugar soap. Wipe on the ESP to the tile surfaces thoroughly with a clean lint free cloth. Leave it 10 minutes or so at normal room temperature, and then wipe off gently with another clean lint free cloth taking care to turn the cloth repeatedly as a certain amount of dirt will come off in the cloth. (Follow instructions carefully – there is a new water based version of ESP out now which has slightly different instructions to previous solvent based version which I've noticed here & there)

Usually you can do one wall at a time, wipe on and then the wipe off.

After 90 minutes at normal room temperature, apply your undercoat with the 20% Owatrol oil added. Next day when it has dried, apply your gloss top coat, this time with about 10% Owatrol oil and leave it for about 24 hours at least to dry. Take note, oil based paint can take a week or more to cure properly so don't start poking at it with your fingernails (if you have that strange tendency!) for at least 10 days. Also try to avoid giving that area a hard time for as long as possible. In fact the longer the better.

Smoke Damage on interior walls?

Q. We had a fire in a sitting room which left a lot of smoke damage on one of the walls, I tried painting over it but the stain keeps oozing back out, any solution? Margaret Heffernan.

A. Smoke or fire damage can leave very hard to block out stains on the wall. There is a product I've come across called Seal Lock which works quite well on this type of nagging problem.

All you do is paint on the seal lock, and after about half an hour, apply your next coat. Do bear in mind that this product is very fast drying and if you need to clean brush etc you need a bottle of meths.

Making paint Stick to bedroom walls?

Q. Is there any way I can make sure emulsion stick on the wall of my daughters bedroom as she is always changing and pulling off posters etc and the sellotape pulls the paint off at the same time. Jim Byrne.

A. The only way I know is to apply an emulsion which has a very strong bonding agent like E-B (Emulsa-Bond) mixed in to it.

You need to stir in about 25% E-B into your first coat of emulsion, (it does not matter whether it is matt, vinyl or whatever)

Then apply the paint with a roller or whatever and I would be fairly certain based on my experience that you will not pull that paint off, even with repeated pulls of tape etc.

This is a great idea for anybody that wants to paint a wall that may be used for sticking up posters etc.

Rusty Edwardian Gutters?

Q. I have old Edwardian cast iron gutters and down pipes that are quite rusty but otherwise intact, is there any way I can protect them from further deterioration? May Kirby.

A. Yes, remove all debris and clean them as best you can. A power washer would be ideal to shift the old ground in dirt. If you don't own a power washer, you can rent one in your local hire shop for a few quid a day.

After the gutters have dried fully, get your hands on some that old ever-useful Owatrol oil and a can of exterior quality oil based gloss paint, whichever colour you choose.

Mix them up half owatrol and half paint, and apply directly to the rusted gutters with an appropriate paintbrush. For your information this mixture will do two things at the same time, i.e. it will penetrate deeply into the rusty steel, getting into all the small nooks and crannies, pushing out any remaining moisture and air while giving it colour at the same time. This idea also makes a solid colour oil based stain that works great on wood, concrete etc.

Leaking attic tank caused bad water stains.

Q. I have a very badly stained ceiling, the result of a water leak from the attic tank. I would appreciate if you could advise me how to treat the problem as the stain is still coming through. Dymrna.

A. This is a fairly easy problem to fix. All you need is to apply an appropriate stain blocker with a brush and finish off with a coat or two of paint. These stain blockers come in various types, generally water based, oil based or alcohol based. The best type for water stains is the alcohol type, and next best would be the oil based. Note that a water based stain blocker is no good on water borne stains but would work well on oily stains. Its almost like opposites work best.

There are a few types of stain blockers on the market and one of the better ones I've come across is a product called Seal Lock. (**Tip:** Seal Lock dries extremely fast and you might not be able to wash out the brush afterwards unless you have a supply of metholated spirits)

How to avoid streaks in paintwork

Q. The articles are great. A few weeks ago you wrote about how to avoid streaks in paint and you recommended two brands of mixture. As I've mislaid the article could you please let me know the names and where they can be purchased? George O'Halloran.

A Thanks for your kind comments. We've had many requests like this so here's a tip regarding same. If you find these articles useful, or any other similar articles for that matter, just cut them out as soon as possible and pop them into a folder marked DIY or Home Improvement Tips etc. Keep the folder in a safe place, like your garden shed hanging up on a nail and it will always be there when you need it.

Great also for essential home maintenance phone numbers, web sites etc.

The products I mentioned a few weeks ago were called Owatrol Oil and Floetrol. Here's just a brief reminder again of what they do.

Any time you are using oil based paint such as household gloss, undercoat, satinwood, varnish, eggshell etc, when the paint gets a bit tight and the brush starts to drag a lot add a few teaspoonfuls of the Owatrol oil. Just enough to make it flow easily. It will give you an enviable finish every time.

You will also find that you can even paint in very low temperatures using this method, and still get a great finish, that is assuming you don't mind the cold!

Any time you are using emulsions, either indoor or outdoor and the paint starts to dry too quickly etc, add about 10% of Floetrol and stir in. This will result in a much easier application and a streak-free finish. It is especially useful in deep colours and low hide colours like yellows and reds etc. Great also for rag rolling, colour washing, colour washing, sponging etc.

Can I change the colour of my PVC windows?

Q. I was hoping to change the colour of my PVC windows and doors, but don't know how to go about it. M Crehan.

A. You can paint those PVC windows and doors any colour you like thanks to a clever product called ESP (short for easy surface prep) now readily available in practically any hardware, or paint store. I would suggest you choose an oil-based satin or gloss paint to do the job for maximum durability.

Wash the areas to be painted with warm water and sugar soap and allow to dry.

Now, to do the job all you have to do is get some clean lint free cloths, soak with ESP and wipe it all over the surfaces you wish to paint. Do one window at a time. Read the instructions carefully.

Leave that to cure for at least 90 minutes at normal room temperature and after that you are ready to apply your gloss or whatever.

In case you are unsure if the paint will stick, you will know as soon as you start to apply the paint, i.e. if the paint starts to crawl or run away from the brush you have not applied the ESP properly. If this happens, just wipe / wash off the paint in that area and re treat that area with ESP. On the other hand, if the paint goes on in the normal way, everything should be ok.

When you are finished applying the ESP, dispose of the cloth properly as per instructions on the tin.

Another tip to ensure you get a lovely smooth, brush-free finish is to add some Owatrol oil to the paint if it feels draggy or heavy. This will also help with paint adhesion.

Painting a dark house in bright colours?

Q. We just bought a house that is painted a very dark grey and want to paint it white. The surface is flaking in many areas what is the best way to get this job done? Ann McBride.

A. Sweep off all the flaking bits with a stiff brush or you could power wash it off. I prefer sweeping because you don't wet or soak the wall.

Generally speaking, if you try to paint white on top of a dark, you would require three good coats to get the proper hiding power, but there is a quicker and less labour intensive method used by many contractors.

After you've done the most important part, the preparation, apart from tools etc you will need a good quality exterior water based paint, E-B, and some Floetrol, and here's a real neat trick on **how you should be able to do it in just two coats instead of the usual three.**

Mix in 25% E-B into your first coat of paint and apply. The E-B will deal with the flaky condition as well as help with hiding power.

When your first coat is nice and dry, apply the second coat, and this time mix in the Floetrol emulsion paint additive (do not put E-B in your second coat) at a rate of 10% +/- and apply.

You should have the equivalent of a good three-coat job done at this point.

Tip:

For readers who have exterior walls that look a bit tired but you don't want the expense of a two coat paint job, you can get a tremendous one coat job done with a combination of E-B and a high quality exterior masonry paint as mentioned above.

Paint spill on roof tiles?

Q. Emulsion paint got spilt on to the roof tiles of my front porch, I've done everything and I cannot remove the paint from the tiles, as it seems to have soaked in. Do I have to replace the roof tiles? B McNally.

A. If you wanted the paint to stick it probably wouldn't, but there you go. My suggestion is to re-paint the porch roof tiles. Simple as that.

Choose a superior quality exterior masonry paint that matches all the rest of the roof and mix in a product called E-B (Emulsa-Bond) 50:50 into the paint. E-B acts like a stir-in glue that makes paint stick to otherwise questionable surfaces.

Pick a reasonably good day and apply one good coat directly to all the tiles. When that dries, if the 'bad tiles' are adequately covered you are finished. (Usually one good coat does the job)

If you can still see some of the offending paint looking through, apply another coat of the exterior emulsion, but this time without the E-B. (only use E-B in your first coat). You should end up with a fresh looking new porch roof. Lots of people actually repaint their faded and tired looking old roof tiles using this method. (Please bear in mind, working on roofs can be very dangerous, so don't even think about it if you are not very capable and have all the proper access equipment, ladders etc)

Q. I have loads of decorating to do, but I hate the smell of paint, any ideas? R Moran

A. Actually there is a clever little product I've come across from Australia of all places, called Paint Odour Eliminator. It is an additive that you add in to your paint. Just a few drops. The bottle has graduations to indicate the mix ratio for different kinds of paints, solvents etc. I'm reliably informed that it works very well in gloss, varnish, cellulose, even two-pack floor paint which gives off quite a strong whiff. It is stocked by most of the better specialist paint outlets and sells for about €10-00. Well worth a try I'd say.

Varnish peeling off my teak windows

Q. My teak windows and doors were varnished but they have peeled and faded and look awful, what can I do? M McCarthy.

A. All is not lost, but a bit of elbow grease will be required to get them back to looking good again. Try the following which should deliver a satisfactory result.

First you must strip all the remaining varnish off and you can do that relatively simply using a paint stripper like Nitromors. Follow makers instructions carefully.

When all the old varnish is removed, wash off all traces of the stripper thoroughly, a power washer at medium pressure would be ideal if you have one, or maybe you could just rent one down the road for a few quid.

When all traces of old varnish and stripper have been removed, you can restore the original colour of the wood with Net-Trol. Wet the wood first, then apply the Net-Trol with a brush. Agitate the surface slightly with a stiff brush shortly after application. Leave it for about twenty to thirty minutes and then rinse off. A power washer would do the best job. You will be amazed at how new the wood will look after you've done this.

Now you are in a position to re-coat the wood to preserve that look. If you want to keep the natural look I would recommend two coats of Textrol which is applied wet on wet. This stuff penetrates

deeply and gives a nice matte, anti-U.V. finish. Allow at least four good drying days before applying Textrol. (Tintable and now available in two ready to use tints Golden Oak & Rustic Oak)

Another alternative if you want something really upmarket is Deks Olje (*O-lea*) D1, normally used on wooden boats, yachts etc this is another deep penetrating oil which leaves a matte finish, or if you would prefer a lovely high gloss finish, you could apply several coats of Deks Olja D2, preferable on top of a coat of D1.

How to transform those boring, dreary kitchen presses, cabinets, wardrobes or tiles on a shoestring budget.

If you have a kitchen full of dull presses or cabinets, boring tiles in the bathroom, or weary wardrobes in the bedroom, take heart... you don't have to take out a big loan to refit the whole place, just freshen it up with a few tins of paint and a little bit of TLC. (tender loving care)

"Oh, but surely its impossible to paint kitchen presses, tiles and other shiny surfaces, because the paint will just peel off" you say!

Well, believe it or not, you can! with the help of an amazing new product called E.S.P. (short for Easy Surface Prep)

I first came across it on T V shows such as, Beyond the Hall Door etc where it has been rightly hailed as one of the best new painting or decorating products ever seen and I fully agree.

E.S.P. will make it possible for you to change the look of all those tricky, and normally very difficult surfaces without sanding, dust or hard work.

Transform the look of your presses, tiles, wardrobes to any colour under the sun with any oil or water based paint for the price of a few cans of paint, and probably for well below £100.

Paint the fridge to match the presses, or the wardrobes to match the new curtains or whatever. The possibilities are endless and limited only by your own imagination.

In fact, you can even use E.S.P. to change the colour of all those other doors, architraves and so on. Gloss over gloss, varnish over varnish, all are now possible, and at minimal cost to you which is always welcome news.

It is a good idea to use an oil based paint in the bathroom because of the moisture etc. If you use a water based paint elsewhere, bear in mind whether its needs to be washable etc. (Note: give the paint time to cure properly before you give it a hard time)

More helpful ideas.

Here's two more interesting items that will be a huge help in any or all of the above scenarios. If you are using a water based paint (emulsion) add about 10% of another amazing new product called Floetrol. This will ensure a streak-free lovely even finish, especially on deep colours or vinyls, and it is also a dream in yellows, reds etc. Saves a coat or two also which is no harm work-wise!

If you are applying an oil based paint, add some Owatrol oil and this will ensure a really smooth, brushmark-free, rich finish making your work look like it was done by a pro.

Faded wooden garden furniture

Q. My wooden garden chairs and table have faded terribly and look very dry, should I varnish them or is there another option. I never put anything on them since I bought them?
James Moran.

A. Some people like to simply leave garden chairs etc out there in the wind and rain and forget about them. Others treat them with the wrong finish resulting in the finish peeling off. Here's a few simple ideas to get your furniture looking lovely again.

Firstly, you need to get the wood cleaned up and its colour restored, you should be able to pick up a new product out there called Net-Trol that is capable of doing this job really well. I use it to bring back the original look to faded wood and even fibreglass. Its great also on faded teak windows or doors after first stripping with Nitromors.

First you must wet the surface thoroughly and then apply the Net-Trol which can be diluted up to 4:1 ratio depending on how dirty or faded the deck is. Leave it for about 20 minutes and then give it a quick light scrub with a stiff brush. (Follow instructions) Rinse off thoroughly with a hose or better still a power washer at low to medium pressure. When fully dry, your wood will be back to how it looked on day one, amazing but true! If you spot any rust present near screws etc, spot prime before going any further with a drop of Owatrol oil and let dry.

Next, to keep them looking at their best with a nice natural look, you could apply something like Textrol, a clear, anti-UV penetrating oil that is easy to apply. Let the wood dry out fully over three or four average drying days. Just two coats wet on wet one after the other and you end up with a lovely natural looking matt finish that will not peel or flake. Wipe off any excess and do not allow it to pond.

If you are really fussy, you could apply several coats of Deks Olja D1 that penetrates the wood deeply and leaves a nice, matte finish. This stuff is used a lot on wooden boats. If you want a highly durable, yet flexible glossy finish, apply a few coats of Deks Olje D2 afterwards.

For a completely modern or different look, you could also use a "stain" of any colour oil based paint, gloss or matte mixed up to 40% with my old favourite all-rounder Owatrol oil as mentioned in this column last week. In that case a 4:1 wash with Net-Trol will suffice just to clean the surface before staining. This durable finish would be expected to last up to 6 years or even longer without any peeling or flaking. This type of finish would be very easy to wash if needed.

Q. I have badly rusted gates and railings which I've painted with all sorts of stuff but with very poor results, help please! G Meehan.

A. There is now available to the general public a super method for treating rust on gates, railings, fire escapes, and so on.

This stuff, I am reliably informed, is used mostly by professional painters, decorators and also semi-state bodies like Dublin Corporation on many of the parks railings etc. Owatrol oil (*O-WA-TROL*) as it known, has many very useful applications, one of which has been found to be the treatment of rust. (It also works great making oil based paint stick to sills, wall cappings, fascia boards etc.)

To sort out the rust all you have to do is, apply the Owatrol oil with a brush or whatever all over the metal surface (even seemingly good areas) with particular emphasis on the big lumps of rust. Saturate those areas and leave for at least a few hours to soak in.

Owatrol works in a most unusual, but yet common sense way, i.e. it soaks right in through the rust into the base metal and forces out any hidden moisture and air, otherwise known as the food for rust.

Next, use a scraper to remove the heavy flakes of rust, brush away any loose particles, and you are ready to paint. No need for tedious wire brushing or sanding. It does not matter if you don't paint right away or even for several weeks after, as the Owatrol will have sealed up all the rust pores.

All you need to do now is apply a coat (or two) of **any** good quality **or colour** oil based primer with about 25% Owatrol added to it, (this helps the primer level and flow out properly) Then finish by applying an oil based topcoat of any colour with about 10 to 15% Owatrol added for better flow and finish. This relatively simple exercise will result in a job that should outlast anything you've ever seen before. I used it on a rusty aerial bracket 4 years ago and it still looks as good today only for a little less shiny, but it held the rust back.

Painting effects

Q. I would like to do some painting special effects like sponging etc around the house, what is the best way to go about it? Martina Caldwell.

A. This is an area where you can really let your creativity run wild. Anything is possible such as breathing new life into an otherwise dead room, or even doing up old furniture to match this or that. With a little bit of practice and a few very simple tools you too can design your own masterpiece, be the envy of your friends while adding value and beauty to your home. With faux finishing techniques you can do all this and more.

This decorating technique has been around for a long time. Faux finishes, as they are described can be applied using different techniques such as “sponging” for giving a deep textured rich look to walls, ceilings, or furniture; “ragging” where a crumpled rag is used for soft and delicate effects as a backdrop for furniture or artwork; “combing” for subtle contrasting lines; “marbling” for a distinctive appeal with a luxurious feeling; or “woodgraining” to create the rich patterns and colours of fine wood without the high price- tag.

Sponging is perhaps the quickest and easiest way to go faux. It lets you create colourful walls from a dappled, mottled look to one of marble. Subtle or bold design variations are limited only by the number of colours, the contrast between different shades and the variety of application techniques used. Here is a quick run-down to get you started.

Apply a base coat using any good quality interior satin or semi-gloss oil-based or acrylic, water based paint in the colour of your choice. Most people go for the water acrylic-based version nowadays.

Once the base coat is dry you are ready to sponge. Mix 3 parts of oil

Based paint with one part Owatrol oil **or** 3 parts of acrylic with 1 part Floetrol. Dampen a large sea-sponge (synthetic sponges leave hard-edged identical impressions that don't flow together very well) in water and squeeze out the excess. Lightly dip the sponge into the paint and blot off any excess on a paper towel.

3. Now press the sponge lightly against the wall, repeating this in an overall pattern and texture, making sure the base coat is showing through.

Rotate and twist the sponge (except when touching the wall) so you are not creating repetitive patterns or marks.

4. Work the edges of the wall first. Balance the finish on the wall to match the edges. Stand back once in a while to judge the uniformity of the pattern or finish. (If your acrylic is drying too fast and you are losing the “wet edge”, add a little more Floetrol) You can make corrections by using the base coat colour and a new sponge. Whilst the pattern will be quite irregular, try to keep the amount of paint applied consistent for a uniform appearance. Finish one wall before starting the next.

Important note: *Always experiment on sample boards to find the best colour combinations using tester bottles, and practice your sponging technique before starting on the actual wall. Sponge one square meter at a time.*

Always use the darkest colour (or the lightest if sponging over a dark base) first. Use the least amount of this colour. Dab a bit more with the second colour, filling in blank areas with some overlap onto the first colour. The third colour should overlap everything, leaving no glaringly blank areas. A third colour close to the base coat colour will blend in the first two colours and even-out the overall visual texture. Always let the paint dry thoroughly between applications. When sponging only one colour over the base coat, go for close in value for a rich subtle look. For a starker effect use contrasting colours such as blue or green over yellow.

It is a good idea to thin acrylic (but not with water) when sponging to achieve more translucent, softer colours and avoid premature drying. The Floetrol will extend your “working time” in acrylics or the Owatrol will do the same in oil based paints.

Painting MDF with emulsion

Q. I've made a big dolls house out of MDF, and as I would like a realistic flat finish, I'd like to know if I could paint it with emulsion in different colours? John O'Mahony.

A. You can paint it straight with any emulsion but I would not be too sure about it adhering! However, there is a commonly available stir-in primer called E-B, a great favourite of mine that will make sure your emulsion sticks to the MDF. I used it once on MDF when I painted it with a navy blue emulsion, and after only one coat with a medium roller, I had a perfect finish which hung on for dear life. Well worth a try I'd suggest. By the way if you or any reader would like to use MDF outdoors, you can by using E-B, but this time mixed in to an exterior quality masonry paint.

Give that tired garden furniture a whole new lease of life.

If your PVC or wooden garden table, benches or chairs look like they've been dragged up from the bottom of the sea don't despair, a simple, and highly cost effective solution is at hand that the average DIY'er can easily take on.

Let's take the wooden type first.

Firstly, If you've just bought new wooden garden furniture, I recommend two coats of Textrol to keep them right in the first place. Every other year or so, just apply one top-up coat and that's it. It's a dead easy to apply.

All too often, tables, chairs and benches etc are either treated with the wrong finish resulting in peeling, etc. or not treated at all leaving them to the mercy of the elements.

Here are a few simple steps that will breathe a new lease of life back into them. Test for porosity first by placing a few drops of water on the surface and see if they go in, if they do, Net-Trol will work very well. I got this great but simple tip from a woodcare friend of mine a while back and it works a treat. If the water does not penetrate there may be an old stain or oil still lurking about beneath the faded wood surface and that should be removed first for best results. You may need something stronger than Net-Trol to take out old oils/ stains etc.

If coated with an old varnish, remove it with a stripper following maker's instructions. Next wet surface completely and apply a coat of a great new product called Net-Trol. Leave the Net-Trol for about 10 minutes and then agitate with a stiff brush. (Read instructions) After about 20 – 30 minutes, rinse off with a hose or a power washer (at low to medium pressure) and when dry your wood should be back to how it looked on day one more or less.

Note: If any rust present near screws etc, spot prime with Owatrol oil and let dry. (After wood dries out)

Next, to keep them looking good, apply 2 coats of clear, penetrating Textrol one after the other for a lovely natural matt finish. (wipe off any excess and do not allow to pond". If you are really fussy, apply several coats of Deks Olja D1 as used on wooden boats which also gives a matt finish, and if you want a high durable, yet flexible gloss finish, apply a few coats of Deks Olje D2 afterwards.

For a totally different look, you could also use a "stain" of any colour oil based paint, mixed with up to 40% with Owatrol oil.

Plastic garden furniture.

You can clean them up really well with the Net-Trol used in the same way. When completely dry, apply a light coat of Owatrol oil with a clean cloth and buff to a shine. If you can get your hands on a product called Polytrol it will buff a bit easier than the Owatrol. If you want to change the colour, use E.S.P. followed by any oil based paint that takes your fancy. The same applies to plastic downpipes, gutters etc. Now you've got no excuse, just get to it, and then sit back and enjoy.

Gas heaters and old bikes.

Q: Its my daughters birthday in 2 weeks, and we have bought an old bike for her, as new was out of our budget this year. Some of the chromework is a bit rusty, but other than that it's not too bad. Hubby reckons you can't paint over chrome, but I think that there must be something we can use to fix it

up. Any hints? Thanks in advance, for some quick responses, as we really only have this weekend to fix it up. Angela Flanagan.

A:

It's time for our old friend "ESP" again! Gawd, I wish I had shares in that stuff! Seriously, this is the thing to use before painting chrome, I actually asked this question of my local hardware store genius as I intend to renovate an old chrome dining suite by painting it matt black like the modern ones & he definitely said.. use ESP first..

I painted my old Superser gas space heater with gloss black engine enamel (its heat resistant) and prepared the surface with ESP. It has stayed on for 5 years and no sign of peeling etc. I took the panels off and used the spray can enamel to get a good finish. Hope this helps

Can I paint the tiles in my bathroom?

Q: Can I paint the old wall tiles in my bathroom and kitchen?
Maureen Hickey.

A: The answer is yes, and it is very easy to do if you are handy type. All you have to do is get yourself a one litre tin of that remarkable preparation product ESP which you've probably seen lauded on numerous home TV DIY shows, about 2.1/2 litres of each good quality oil based undercoat and gloss and a decent paint brush from any DIY or paint store, and you are half way there. For an extra special finish, pick up a litre tin of Owatrol oil as used by professional decorators, (in the old days people used white spirits to thin the paint which was very detrimental to the paint quality and ruined hiding power) as this will help the paint flow out beautifully without ugly brushmarks or streaks. It also helps the paint adhesion and hiding power and gloss retention. Add about 25% Owatrol to the undercoat and about 15% to your topcoat. About £60 or so should cover all the paint materials, which gives you an extremely cost effective bathroom change! You can do similar small budget miracles in the average kitchen with old presses or cabinets and old boring tiles.

Clean thoroughly first with warm water & sugar soap. Wipe on the ESP to the tile surfaces thoroughly with a clean lint free cloth. Leave it 10 minutes or so at normal room temperature, and then wipe off gently with another clean lint free cloth taking care to turn the cloth repeatedly as a certain amount of dirt will come off in the cloth.

Usually you can do one wall at a time, as usual follow the instructions on the can.

After 90 minutes at normal room temperature, apply your undercoat with the 20% Owatrol oil added. Next day when it has dried, apply your gloss top coat, this time with about 10% Owatrol oil and leave it for about 24 hours at least to dry. Take note, oil based paint can take a week or more to cure properly so don't start poking at it with your fingernails (if you have that strange tendency!) for at least 10 days. Also try and avoid using that area for showers for as long as possible. In fact the longer the better. Have fun.

Mould on tile grout.

Q. The grout on my kitchen and bathroom tiles looks awful no matter what I do to clean them, any suggestions? Deirdre Mannion, Stillorgan.

A. Wash the area first as best you can and rinse thoroughly. I've only recently come across a couple of amazing new products made by an American company called Homax. One is called Tile Grout Coating It comes in a small bottle that has a sponge applicator on its lid.

All you do is, move the sponge along the grout line, and it leaves a coat of "paint" which impregnates the grout. Any "paint" that gets on to the tile surface can be simply wiped off with a cloth. Truly amazing stuff!

There is a sealer, called Silicone Grout Sealer, made by the same people, which locks in that look for up to four or five years or so I'm told.

These two little wonders can be bought for about £12 for the pair in various DIY or paint outlets.

Bungalow walls peeling paint

Q. Our bungalow's exterior walls are shedding paint that we painted only one year ago with a well-known exterior paint, what is the cure? Jim Keating.

A. This is not altogether an uncommon problem, and there is a relatively easy and low cost solution. First of all, it is fairly safe to say that the reason your paint is peeling off is because of inadequate surface preparation, and not bad paint.

You must first remove all traces of loose paint, preferably with a stiff sweeping brush or with a power washer, which you can hire at your local Tool Hire shop, if you don't own one. This is best accomplished by aiming the washer water jet at a sharp angle to the surface rather than direct. Paint comes off easier, and you are not "injecting" the wall with water, which must dry out properly prior to any painting. (Allow at least a week of good drying.)

After wall has been properly cleaned, you must ensure the new paint sticks properly to the wall, and this is best done by using a stabiliser. There are various well known makes available such as Sandtex, which you apply like a coat of paint prior to applying the actual paint. Alternatively, there is a stabiliser that I've used successfully many times, called Emulsa-Bond (or E-B), which is mixed into your first coat of paint only. This saves you the job of applying the stabiliser altogether. E-B is a more expensive option, but it saves you the time and hard work!

After your first coat has fully dried, apply a second coat of paint and your job is finished. To sum up, clean wall thoroughly, apply stabiliser (or mix in E-B in first coat, see above) and two coats of good exterior paint.

Q: My concrete path turns green after rain, any cures? Mary Farrelly.

A: Thanks Mary. This is a form of algae that thrives happily in a damp environment. Lots of trees or shrubs nearby does not help, and it has, as you well know, a habit of coming back again and again. You can control it fairly well with a product called Net-Trol, mentioned on previous occasions in relation to other un-related problems. You could also use a bleach and water mixture 50:50 but it would be generally considered very harmful to any surrounding vegetation, etc.

I would suggest you do the following. (a) Wet the concrete path (a manageable area) thoroughly. (b) Mix one part Net-Trol with two parts water; apply with an old sweeping brush or the like. (c) After 10 minutes agitate the wetted surface with a stiff brush of some sort, and leave then it for about twenty minutes. This is best done on a damp day as the chemical action will not take place if it dries before it has a chance to act. (d) Rinse off fully. Don't worry about it getting on to clay nearby, as it is totally environmentally friendly. If you have a power washer, you could use that to rinse the Net-Trol off for an even better job.

Q. I have a 90-year-old cast iron bath that is in bad need of restoration. I was thinking of getting in one of those companies who do baths but a friend told me you can get a special paint to renew baths and that I could treat it myself in my spare time. Have you heard of it and what would you recommend? Jim Higgins

A. You have two choices basically. The easiest one being as you mentioned to call in a bath re-surfacing company which you can easily find in the Golden / Yellow Pages under the same heading,

They are totally geared to come in, do all the relevant preparation, and generally they spray on a brand new surface of any colour within reason, in no time at all, leaving your bath just like new. Not cheap usually, but the upside is they do all the business from beginning to end.

Alternatively, if you've got some spare time, like doing a bit of DIY and are reasonably competent with a paintbrush; you can do the job yourself with a new product I recently came across. It comes from the U.S A, and its called Tough as Tile Sink & Tub Finish.

As with all paint jobs, you must first prepare the surface properly for it to work. This product is a two-part epoxy coating designed especially for refinishing and restoring sinks, baths and tiles. If you are not prepared to clean the bath thoroughly, don't even bother doing it because it will probably peel off and you will have wasted your time and money.

To prepare the bath you need to remove all flaky bits, use a very fine wire wool and sugar soap to really get into the pores and to remove all traces of scum that tends to gather. I would suggest you do this at least three times and give it a final rinse of hot water to finish it off. It would be an idea to mask off any areas you don't want to paint also. Don't spare the elbow grease!

When you apply the paint (if you go that route) keep the room warm and dry and leave it for a few days as per the makers instructions to cure properly before using the bath again. (Use somebody else's shower meanwhile!)

The product mentioned above, is a self levelling, brush-on finish that won't leave brush marks and leaves a high gloss porcelain-like finish that remains beautiful for years or so I'm told. Tough as Tile is designed to stand up to hot water.

It is available in white & almond only. (I understand it can be tinted, but you would have to consult your paint stockist about that.)

One U.S. quart will do the average bath for about €45 inc VAT. It is available in the more specialised paint outlets and I don't think the big DIY stores have it yet, but I am open to correction.

General Aerosol Spraying Tips

SURFACE PREPARATION:

Surfaces to be painted should be clean, dry and free of oil, grease, rust, wax, loose paint and other contaminates.

Extremely slick glossy or previously painted surfaces should be lightly sanded to provide better paint adhesion. If aerosol contains either a water or oil based coating you could use a great time and work saver like ESP, an easy surface prep primer to act as a gripper instead of sanding.

Areas with exposed rust should be scraped clean with a scraper or wire brush and treated with a good rust inhibitor like Owatrol oil, that penetrates the pores and cavities and gets in to the steel behind rather than just sit on top which tend to be not so effective.

Always apply a good-quality primer before painting over wood, bare metal or when changing the colour dramatically.

Cover adjacent areas to protect them from overspray. You can use old sheets on the floor or over furniture etc. There are many different varieties of masking products available now that will make life very easy on the preparation side. Masking tape is available in several widths usually 1, 1.1/2 and 2". Another very useful product are the rolls of brown masking paper with the masking tape already stuck on one end overlapping so that you can attach the pre-taped paper directly to where you want it. Usually it is available in 2, 6, 9 and 15" widths. You can also obtain rolls of pre-taped plastic masking material, which open out to about 6 feet and are very handy. Paints should be applied under dry conditions at or near room temperature. Humidity and temperature conditions can have a significant impact on drying times.

APPLICATION: Shake can vigorously for one minute to ensure that the contents are mixed thoroughly. Make sure agitator ball is rattling inside the can. Shake occasionally during use.

Hold can approximately 12" from surface to be sprayed and apply finish in several thin coats for best results. Depress the spray nozzle only while moving and let go at the end of each pass to avoid double application of paint at end of each pass. For better results avoid spraying in an arc pattern because you will get a heavier coat in the middle and less at side / end of each pass. Overlap each pass by about 25% to maintain even finish. Applying a single, heavy coat may result in unsightly runs or drips.

The second coat of paint should be applied either immediately after the first coat or after the first coat has completely dried. Always refer to the product packaging for specific application procedures and dry times. **CLEAN UP & STORAGE:** Clean aerosol nozzles by **turning the can upside and pressing the nozzle until only gas emerges**. Store in a cool; dry place away from heat sources and direct sunlight.

CLOGGING: If a spray nozzle becomes clogged, rotate the nozzle a quarter turn and back. If this fails, pull the nozzle off the can and run your thumbnail through the slit at the end of nozzle stem. Rinse nozzle in lacquer thinner. **NEVER STICK ANY SHARP OBJECT INTO THE OPENING AT THE TOP OF THE CAN.** Prevention is always better than cure, so I'd recommend you do the following after every spraying operation.

Do I need to treat my new pressure treated deck?

George, a few weeks ago you did an article regarding treatment of decks etc. I recently purchased some good quality pressure treated deck timber that I'm planning to install myself. Do your comments on Seasonite refer to pressure treated timber as well as non-pressure treated timber, or is there another process I should follow. I am anxious to treat it properly in case it gets damaged by rain etc. Any advice you may provide would be greatly appreciated. Thanks in advance, regards, John McCarthy.

Thanks John. Sorry if I did not make it clear about whether pressure treated wood needs protection. The simple answer to your question is yes, it should be protected. The pressure treatment provides protection against rotting and insect damage etc, It does not save the wood from the effects of constant rain, and wind driven rain, freeze – thaw cycles etc. Rain will get into the wood after a while if left untreated. As soon as that rare bit of sun appears, the water inside the wood causes the boards to swell, which in turn, can cause cracking, splitting, cupping etc. So the trick is to keep that water out in the first place and save all that hassle and potential damage to your pride and joy investment. As I mentioned in this column before, there is a lot of confusion and mis-information about this whole issue. Some deck installers / sellers say that 'my decks are pressure treated' and don't need any after care. Maybe they genuinely don't know themselves, and in turn cannot tell their customers. I suppose, if you don't mind your deck looking like a bunch of old pallets laid out side by side, then you don't need after care. If you left your new car with its €2000 +/- paint job out there without the odd clean up or polish it wouldn't look well for long and the same applies to your wooden deck or wooden garden furniture. (Common sense says - take care of it and it will look fabulous for years and enhance your home for years to come.)

However, I would doubt if that's what you or anybody else would want. Some die-hards out there hold the view that decks are not suitable for this climate. If you don't know how to take care of your deck properly to suit our less than perfect climate, you may have some problems, but none that cannot be addressed or solved. If you do know the various tricks you will have no problem, simple as that. Products have been developed over many decades that are capable of withstanding all sorts of climates ranging from tropical to semi- arctic and by some of those standards; our relatively mild climate is very easy to handle deck-wise.

On a new wooden decks, cladding and wooden garden furniture, I would usually apply one good coat of Seasonite. If you know of something else out there the same as it fine, but I have not come across anything similar as yet. I found that this stuff penetrates new wood very well, and it acts like a one-way valve in the wood's pores, i.e. it allows existing water or moisture to escape but will not let 'new' water in. The result of this is your deck / timber will be protected from the very damaging effects of all water and moisture related problems. Another important point is, the Seasonite will protect the new timber from algae and stuff like that. These organisms can, and do make deck surfaces very slippery when wet and you don't need to land on your back out there. The method described above is what I would describe as only the first part of a proper treatment for your new deck etc.

If you simply go ahead right away and prematurely oil the new deck or whatever with one of those oil treatments, even the deep penetrating Textrol, they generally cannot penetrate the pores of the new wood, because they are closed from the planing process at the sawmill, and as well as that, there is usually an oily kind of film on the newly planed timber called mill glaze which tends to not let most treatments penetrate properly, and if they don't penetrate properly they are not going to last.

Both of those factors prevent proper penetration by the 'oils' and as a result they don't do a proper job and you are wasting your money in my humble opinion. That's why, I suggest using the Seasonite as the first part of your new deck" treatment. Another point worth mentioning is I don't think Seasonite is intended to beautify your wood per say; that comes later after it has settled down properly. You need to be patient. Again, like a new car engine, you need to 'run it in' and later on, after about six months to a year, you can think about making it look pretty. Any fading that does occur can be totally removed with something like Net-Trol, Deck Rins or Prep Deck and after that you can finally apply your Textrol or whatever. At that point, the timber's pores will be more receptive and will allow proper treatment. My thinking is, if you are going to do anything with it, do it right first time, because it will pay you in the long run.

P.S. Here are three good deck tips you may find useful.

If you're having a bar-b-que out there on your deck, pick up a sheet of aluminium about 4 x 4 ft and place it on your deck beneath your b-b-q. This will catch any hot ash or grease etc from spilling on it. When you are finished with it just slide it in underneath the deck for use again.

Secondly, If you do have potted plants etc on it, move them around a foot or so every week or so and this will help prevent strange looking shading rings from different exposure to sunlight, dirt etc.

If you do decide to powerwash your deck, be very careful; keep your pump pressure down to about 500 p.s.i. maximum and wash with the grain, board by board. Personally I'd prefer to clean the deck properly with Net-Trol, Deck Rins or Prep Deck and better still powerwash it off after the cleaner has done its job. If you wash it at too high a pressure, or wash it against the grain you may damage the wood fibres and cause splinters which can be most unpleasant if walked on by bare feet.

I got a shed built thirty years ago, the concrete floor is thick with dust and the more I sweep it, the worse it seems to get. How can I treat it? M Forde.

Concrete floors can be a pain, especially when they've been down a while like yours has. New concrete floors frequently have a smooth troweled finish and tend to be a bit better dust-wise. Here's what I would suggest, having done a similar job a few years ago in a converted garage.

First you need to remove any obvious dirt and then vacuum the entire floor. If there's any blobs of oil or grease etc on the floor, try removing it with some cellulose thinners and a stiff brush.

If need be, hire an industrial vacuum from your local hire shop, in case your own home unit cannot cope. Don't even think about sweeping it because you need to clean it properly, and right now, and a good strong vac is the way to go.

When cleaned, you have two choices depending on whether you would like a clear concrete look or whether you would like a colour.

If you would like the clear look, all you have to do is apply one good coat of Owatrol oil which you can get from most of the better paint outlets. This will sort out your dust problem and will last for years and years. The Owatrol oil binds the concrete thereby preventing the re-occurrence of the dust, at least for a very long time.

You can do it another way also, (my favourite idea) i.e. colour the floor with a colour of your choice. Say you want the floor a nice red, just add about 40% of the same Owatrol oil to the red gloss, or a matte finish if you'd prefer that. Apply, and the colour will soak into the floor leaving a lovely, easy to maintain surface that again will last for years and years. By the way, you can apply either of the above with a standard, relatively smooth-haired, clean sweeping brush not a yard brush.

For any reader that's interested, you can do the same colouring trick on wooden floor boards, concrete driveways or even roof tiles that are a bit off colour.

Paint flaking off sills.

Q Can you please recommend a removal agent for old concrete external sills having layers of flaking white paint? I also intend re-painting them black. How should I retreat (if necessary) and what paint will I use? Also what paint would you recommend for newly plastered (3 years) reveals and plinth. This is for a renovated cottage. I intend to paint the sills and plinth

(top/btm/sides) black with white reveals in order to brighten up the front façade and your advice would be appreciated. E Scott

Thank you. You didn't say if the old paint was gloss, but I suspect it is. I think the handiest way to remove the remaining paint is with a blowtorch and a 3" scraper knife.

My suggestion would be, remove all the loose stuff with the scraper and wire brush the rest as best you can. Sweep off any remaining particles with a dry paintbrush or a hand brush.

If you absolutely want a super smooth surface to work on, you'll need to put in more effort and sand the surface as well, but from an adhesion standpoint there's no need to go over the top about all this, because you can get a first class result if you follow the following tips.

Prepare as outlined above, and when clean and dry, assuming you are going to paint with gloss, add about 30% Owatrol oil (paint conditioner) to your first coat and apply to the sill. That will ensure the paint will stick tight. On your second coat add in about 10 to 15% Owatrol and apply, & this will suffice. As regards the plinths etc, you could do the same as you did with the sill. Or, if you would prefer a matte appearance, choose an emulsion black and add about 30% E-B (Emulsa-Bond) to your first coat only and apply. That will take care of the adhesion and you will get excellent hiding and coverage as well. Note: If you decide to apply a second coat of that emulsion, apply without the E-B.

Q. When is a roller better to use than a paintbrush? Jim McKenna.

A. Use a roller where possible when painting larger areas, as this will provide a much more even finish and will also be quicker than a brush.

Where a roller may be unsuitable use a 4" inch or 6" inch emulsion brush.

Radiator brushes and rollers are available to help paint hard to reach places. Also Brush and Roller extension poles are available to assist painting ceiling and high walls.

Paint brush sizes 1/2" to 4" can be used to paint gloss etc on to wood surfaces.

To speed up the painting of door frames, window frames and skirting low tack masking tape can be used to protect the surrounding painted areas.

When finished don't forget to wash out brushes and rollers ready for the next time. Emulsion can be washed out with water, but glosses etc require a sprit based cleaner or a Brush Cleaner.

Swollen wooden window frames and chipboard worktops.

Problem: Here's a problem that several people have asked about, i.e. water or moisture getting on to wood, chipboard etc causing it to swell and become both unsightly, and in many cases needing replacement.

Solution: Allow the wood, or chipboard to dry for a couple of days, you can aid that process by removing or turning off source of moisture, ventilate, heat room, etc.

After wood has reasonably dried out, sand off the main swelling using a medium wet & dry sandpaper.

Next saturate the wood with several coats of Owatrol oil within a one to two hour period. (i.e. feed the wood's pores with the oil)

Next use 240 to 320 grit wet and dry paper using your Owatrol oil as a buffing liquid to smooth the area off to a nice even finish. Left as is you will have a nice matte finish. If you'd rather have a glossy or painted finish, use any good Polyurethane varnish with about 20% Owatrol oil mixed in or a Gloss paint ditto.

Wooden window frame bottoms can be a major problem area because of gathering moisture from condensation etc. Usually they swell and rot if not dealt with properly. Here's how to deal with a bad window frame.

First, remove any putty, and dry out the wood for a few days as best you can as above. Sand and then saturate the wood with several coats of Owatrol oil (as above). (Some people drill a small hole on the

inside about 6mm at a 45 degree angle down through the bottom of the frame allowing any water etc to escape to the outside - if you decide to do this, after wood is dry, inject the hole well with Owatrol oil to prevent moisture or water ingress)

Make sure you get the oil well into the joints and end grain areas. When the oiled wood dries after a day or so, apply your putty and smooth it off properly.

Next you need to paint or varnish it, (oil based) and a good tip here is when repainting the whole window frame, apply an extra coat or two to the bottom third of your frame for extra protection. Adding about 10 to 20% Owatrol oil to your paint or varnish will help adhesion and levelling.

If you want to have a clear finish on exterior wood you could use the Owatrol oil as your main prep step and then topcoat the wood with three or four coats of a Scandinavian marine clear flexible varnish called Deks Olje D2. Most of the better paint speciality stores will carry those products.

Wood Finish: Know Your Products

There is a lot of confusion about the types of products that are available for the treatment of exterior architectural woods. Treating new wood can be a tricky procedure, so you need to know exactly what you're talking about. The following may help.

Stabilising treatments are a new type of protection. They are generally recommended as protection during the first year of exposure. This can be very practical, because finishing during the first year is not always recommended with some of the pressure-treated woods (PTW). PTW can also be prone to cracking and splitting while it's drying out. Stabilising treatments such as Seasonite etc offer a type of protection that is inexpensive and can be coated later with any type of finish.

Wood preservatives cover a wide range of products. To use the term, a company must register its product with the EPA and completely disclose its formulation. The active ingredients and their percentages must be listed on the label, although this is no guarantee that the product will actually be effective for its intended use. These active ingredients are almost always mildewcides and fungicides. Many clear finishes and stains also have mildewcides and fungicides, even if they do not register with the EPA or make pesticidal claims. As a class of product, wood preservatives do not offer the protection of a finish or stain, and they are generally less expensive. If a wood preservative is to be used, however, it will not be effective unless all existing mildew is first removed.

Water repellents. To be a water repellent, the product must pass a standard water repellency test. A simple test of water repellency is whether the water will bead on a surface after it is treated. Again, many clear finishes and stains are also water-repellent.

Exterior clear finishes technically refer to any finish which is non-pigmented and protects and beautifies the wood. This would include clear varnishes (now in limited use), as well as penetrating clear wood finishes. Exterior clears should offer all the advantages of water repellents and wood preservatives, but they also should hold a natural wood colour for a reasonable length of time (two to three years, depending on the climate and exposure). Naturally, they are more expensive than wood preservatives or water repellents. They are also quite easy to touch up and maintain as they wear out.

Lightly pigmented stains are similar to exterior clear finishes in that they should offer all the same benefits, but they also offer colour. But beware: Not all exterior stains offer the protection they should. Some products rely too heavily on the pigmentation to provide the protection against sunlight and moisture. Many exterior stains are difficult to touch up, because they are too heavily pigmented and the pigment changes colour with exposure.

Black Mould on bathroom ceiling

Q Could you give me any advice on treating a bathroom ceiling to eradicate black mould which spreads all over. I use Dettol Anti-Bacterial Mould & Mildew remover once or twice a year and keep two windows open when having a shower. Also there's no heat in the room. Do you think a

fan would be effective and would you recommend one on the ceiling or wall or would an extractor fan on the windows be best? F O'Reilly

A. Thanks You. The excess steam is the prime cause of your ceiling problem. The damp ceiling after a shower creates a perfect home for mould spores etc and your fan installation idea is the way to go I would suggest. Yes you can get fans that are mounted right in the windowpane, probably would be the easiest to install. I'd suggest a good quality wall mounted fan, about 6" to 10" diameter located fairly high up on your perimeter wall as near to the steam source as possible. Ideally it should be wired to come on automatically when shower in action, probably linked to the light switch. Your electrician will be best able to advise you there. The wall-mounted unit will necessitate a bit more work but it probably be the better job in the end.

A ceiling extractor is not really that practical unless you have a flat roof situation and even then, you'd have to bore a hole in your roof which I would not recommend at all. That could open a whole new can of worms. There you have it as regards the fan situation.

To deal with the existing mould etc I would suggest the following: Wash the area thoroughly with a 50:50 bleach / warm water mix taking care of your clothes, skin etc as the bleach can be rough stuff. Re-paint your ceiling etc, and stir in some paint additive called Mold Stop VC175 available from lots of paint stores around the place. A 10ml bottle will treat up to 10 litres of paint. Just follow instructions on package. It works in all paint oil or water based, and I found it to really useful in preventing mould coming back on paintwork irrespective of whether it is woodwork or walls, ceilings etc.

There are a few great wood cleaners now on the market. These can have a wide variety of active ingredients, or can merely be detergent-type cleaners. The best ones on the market both clean and brighten the wood to give a better appearance before a clear finish or lightly pigmented stain is used. The one I've used with great success many times was a product called Net-Trol. They will also be effective in removing most types of mildew -- there are so many strains of mildew that no cleaner will kill all of them, I usually suggest to use a 50:50 mix of bleach and water.

Bad plaster on old interior walls

Q. The inside walls of our old summer house in Wexford, seem to bubble out and burst, and on other walls the plaster is being eaten away and flaking off in patches. The house has been checked for water leaks but none found, some people say the problem is caused by sea sand used in initial construction. Would you know of any ways to deal with the problem? We enjoy your column very much. A O'Reilly

A. They could be right about the sand. I would suggest you scrape or brush off all the loose stuff and then apply a good heavy coat of E-B (Emulsa-Bond) which penetrates deep and binds the loose sandy particles together. If you want to have some colour on the wall, throw in about 25% emulsion into the E-B and it will colour the wall to some degree. If the job needs another coat to bring up the colour, apply it neat without E-B. If you wish, try this suggestion on one area before going full hog.

Q. Have you come across anything that will take biro ink out of a white woollen sweater.

P Kelly

I get lots of new products in here from different suppliers to try out, and when I read your post card, I decided to try out one such item in my samples box aptly called Oops! on an ink stain like you mentioned, to see for myself what might happen. Normally I would have thought ink on a woollen sweater would not be too easy to remove successfully without possibly damaging the wool itself.

I found an old woollen, pure white pullover and squeezed out a blurb of ink from a ball point refill onto a section of the sweater. I rubbed it in and spread it around as much as possible. This was as good a mess as you are ever likely to find. The ink went right through to the other side. I left the pullover for a day or so to let the ink dry in fully.

Next I got my bottle of Oops! and applied the cleaner directly on top of the ink liberally, I then got a kitchen paper towel roll and pressed a few sheets of that on to the ink stain several times. I re-applied the Oops! and repeated the exercise with the kitchen towel.

The result was quite amazing... about 80% of the ink was taken out. After that, while the wool was still wet I washed it in a normal woollen wash, and when it came out of the washing machine, there was not a single trace of the ink!

Yep! I'm impressed with Oops! And it might be the answer to your problem. Oops! is also said to be highly effective removing dried in emulsion paint, shoe polish, oil, grease, crayon, and is safe to use on furniture, hardwood floors, carpet, fibreglass, vinyl, metal, glass, Formica and more.

Interestingly enough, one friend of mine, when I mentioned it to her, said she used Oops! recently to remove white dried in emulsion paint spatters from her new wooden deck, and she said it did a perfect job!

How do you make a rectangular room look more square?

Q. George, How do you make a rectangular room look more square? I'm moving into a new apartment and my bedroom is long and narrow. Is there a colour I should paint it to make it look bigger?

O Mannion

A. The main way would be by using special effects, or as some people call it Faux Finishing. (Faux comes from the French word and means something like false) There are a variety of Faux effects, but the one I would recommend in this instance is called ragging.

Assuming you want your room looking bright and airy, I would suggest the following:

If you want to try out all this stuff, you could experiment on a sheet of board like melamine or something like that, rather than going 'live' straight off.

Choose a medium base coat like a creamy yellow / vinyl silk or a soft sheen finish and apply to the wall, and allow it to dry. Next get yourself about six old, but clean, dry cotton tee shirts.

Next, mix up about one litre of the base colour (above) with one litre of vinyl matte or soft sheen white and mix into that about one a half litre of a paint additive called Floetrol. (The Floetrol is used to keep the 'wet edge' open and can be increased or decreased depending on how long you want a wet edge)

Now, starting at the top right corner or the top left hand corner of the smallest wall (depending on your yourself) apply the mix to about a three square foot area.

Now, get one of the tee shirts, ball it up and apply it vigorously to the painted section creating a pattern. Apply the paint to the next three square foot section and repeat the above, taking care not to have straight lines and overlap the earlier ragged area. An important point about the rags is not to wet them too much., the whole idea here is that the cloths are used to remove - by absorbing, some of the paint you've actually applied already, so if the cloth is too wet your finish will be inconsistent.

If you discover that the first area has dried, or lost its wet edge before you catch up – add more Floetrol. Again, you can discover all that first on a test piece.

When you have that small wall finished, repeat the exercise on the opposite wall, rather than the wall beside where you started. Then do the remaining walls and blend in the corners.

One important tip is, after you start, don't stop and mix up enough material to do the whole room. In that regard the average paint requirement is about three litres for a 12 x 12 ft room. This type of painting is actually great fun and you can do all sorts of things, just let your imagination run wild!