

Ask the Experts • Caulks and Sealants

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Understanding Your Airless Sprayer

Low-VOC Coatings
Update



Editor's Note: Ask the Experts is a new column being launched this month and includes answers to reader questions provided by industry professionals. Each issue will offer expert advice on some of your most perplexing issues from application techniques to management tips to product failure. Or better yet, submit your own question to shelmer@douglaspublications.com.

Color Selection

Lately, my customers have been asking more detailed questions about color trends, but I'm hesitant to make recommendations. What advice would you give to contractors about discussing color with their customers?

B. G., St. Louis, Mo.

First, understand that customers are much more sophisticated than when you first started in the business — unless you are very young! Today, homeowners are more individual in their approach to color than they were just five years ago. Sure, they are still influenced by stunning photos of spectacular homes in shelter magazines and TV programs showing home makeovers. But now they are requesting a special combination of colors that matches not only their furnishings but also their own personalities. Many are upwardly mobile baby boomers with a greater sense of style than previous generations. They want to carve out their own style on their own terms.

Be prepared to show your customers that you keep up with the latest trends. Visit the Web sites of the American Society of Interior Designers (asid.org) and the Color Marketing Group (colormarketing.org) to see what they are saying about color. Consider attending events at the local ASID chapter. No one is expecting you to predict which colors will be the hottest a few years from now, but knowing something about the latest trends will help you drive the conversation with customers.

And don't forget green — not the color, but the movement toward environmentally friendly products, which many customers will already be familiar with. Explain to homeowners about the importance of not only using low-VOC paints, but also which paints will last longer and thus have less of an impact on the environment.

No matter how sophisticated customers are — or think they are — about color, the



Encourage customers to place color sheets on the wall to "feel" the color before investing in paint.

environment and other trends, they still need your help in choosing the right products. This is especially true for those who do not hire interior decorators.

Some homeowners may have already researched different colors at the paint store before you meet them. They may have looked through thousands of color chips, color wheels and brochures. They may have tried different colors using manufacturers' online color selection tools. And they may have even gotten ideas from home magazines. But many will be coming at you with an overriding feeling: confusion! It is up to you to steer them in the right direction.

Start by listening to them — even if you have to wait for them to spew out everything they know about color before letting you respond. Then explain that the first step is choosing a manufacturer that produces high-quality paints that will last longer and showcase the beautiful colors longer.

The paint manufacturer should also have practical color selection tools that the customer can use. Computer software may

work to get that initial color direction, but it is not the same as the hands-on approach that most homeowners prefer. This could include user-friendly tools, such as large color sheets or wet color samples. Encourage your customers to use these tools. For example, have them place the sheets on the wall to "feel" the color before investing in paint. They may also want to paint a few color samples on the wall for comparison in different lighting conditions and to see how they complement the furnishings in the room.

Talking to customers about color boils down to showing them that you understand color and selecting long-lasting, top-quality paints. You also need to involve them in the selection process. The rest is up to you and your personality — as well as your painting expertise. **APC**

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Color Sheets



Muralo Paints' new color sheets are designed to assist users in determining which colors are right for walls and how they complement fixtures, fabrics and furnishings. The 7.5-inch by 11-inch color sheets are part of the Color Fashions program, which also includes tintable samples and single-color chips in each of 304 contemporary colors. The color sheets are sold individually or as part of a set of two decorator binders comprising all 304 colors.

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