

PRO

SUMMER 2017 VOLUME 12, #1

Painter

Residential | Commercial | Institutional | Industrial

KEEPING HIS BALANCE

How Simon Kuhl, Sombrio Painting, Vancouver Island, keeps painting in perspective



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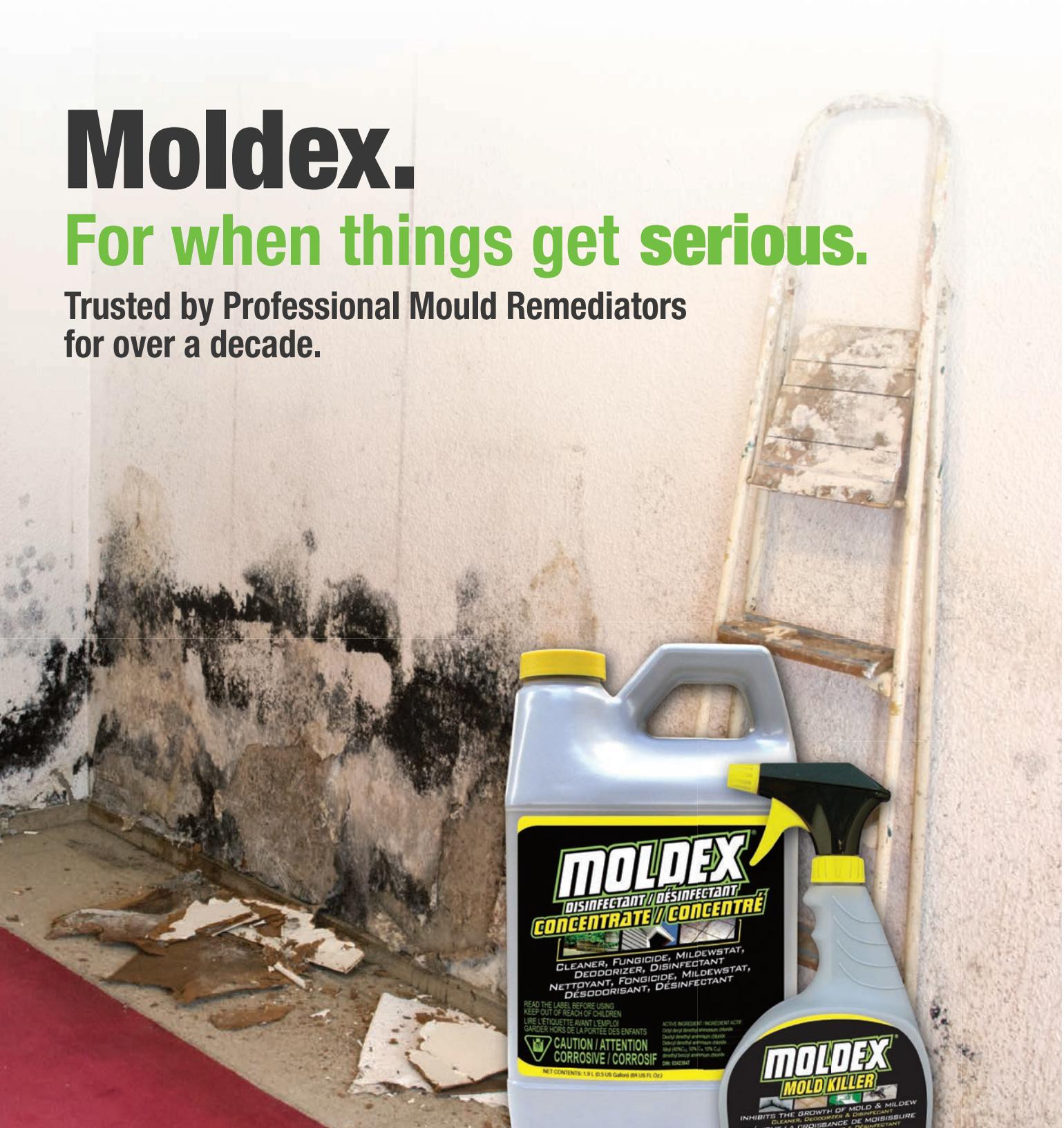
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Boosting Business >> New Products >> Latex Primers

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By Steve Maxwell

Do You Have a Business or a Job?

It takes more to build a business than just working without a boss. Does your painting work fit the definition of a business?

While it's good to feel the vibrancy of being a young, independent painter, isn't there something to be said for building a little organization with value beyond the well painted homes and businesses it has left behind?

If you're like most painters who work for themselves, you have an entrepreneurial streak. That's a great personal quality because the world needs more entrepreneurs. The thing is, you might think you own a painting business when you really have a painting job of your own creation. What's the difference? A job provides no money when you stop working it. A business, by contrast, is something you can sell some day because it has value beyond the efforts you put into brush and roller. And while there's nothing wrong with having a painting job of your own making, if you want a business with marketable value, you need to make that happen intentionally.

Every young painter I've met has had strength, independence and a go-getter attitude. These are essential qualities, but dangerous, too. They often hide the need to build marketable value into your work. If our young painting contractor never does anything to change the natural trajectory of things, the once-young painter might be thinking differently about their career choice when they're on the downhill side of 50, with nothing to cash in on when the ladders get taller and the rollers heavier.

The root of this situation is the lack of a succession plan. Even if our solo painter hires subs, but there's never a succession plan designed to keep the business running without the founder there's no business to sell. The hallmark of a business is that the founder is no longer essential. Important, yes, but also replaceable. You can't sell your business otherwise.

Is a business what you want, not a job? If you manage yourself with that in mind, you'll eventually sit at the top of an organization. It may not be a large organization, but it no longer requires your constant attention, exertion and youthful vigour. The business might even be able to run on auto-pilot, at least for short bursts and in most ways. And while it's good to feel the vibrancy of being a young, independent painter, isn't there something to be said for building a little organization with value beyond the well painted homes and businesses it has left behind? Your answer makes all the difference. pp

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A FACEBOOK CONVERSATION

Pro Painter magazine's Facebook page group has attracted a loyal following over the years. The conversation below is a small part of what our Facebook painters are talking about while they help each other learn and grow professionally.

WE ASKED >>

What things could the government do to get out of your hair and make it easier for you to run your painting business?



Paintbox Painters:
Hire my company to paint their offices.



Harvey Follis: Instead of having Working at Heights, Fall Arrest, WHMIS, etc... a new general safety certification should be created. And let people choose other certifications that apply to them. It can cost a lot to certify each of your guys and do checks on valid certificates for new employees.



Steven Haas:
Get rid of the IRS



Kevin Gunn:
Lessen all of the tax burdens on a small business



Jeff Lockwood:
Hey. Found out last night at our local homebuilders meeting that the government will pay for Working At Heights training through a government program. Nice.



Marcelo Cruz:
Lower rates for WSIB.

Join the conversation on Facebook: "Pro Painter Magazine" in the Facebook search bar. Wait for your request to join is approved, then participate!



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Pools and other aquatic fixtures demand a superior epoxy that creates a tough, long lasting finish. RAMUC's® EP Hi-Build Epoxy protects and beautifies any concrete, plaster, and fiberglass/gelcoat surfaces. This two-part epoxy is self-priming, rolls easily and renders smoothing qualities on rough surfaces, making it a cost-efficient alternative to plastering. With up to 8 years' service life, the need to recoat frequently is reduced and provides more time for enjoyment. Blend it with Skid-Tex Additive to create a slip-free surface. VOC compliant in the U.S. and Canada, EP Hi Build Epoxy is available in multiple colors.

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STANLEY STHT77363 INSPECTION CAMERA

Every contractor could use an inspection camera from time to time, but that doesn't mean you can justify the cost of owning an expensive one. At \$149, the Stanley STHT77363 offers the best combination of performance and low price I've seen. The simple, no-nonsense design uses 4AA batteries to power the 1 3/4" x 1 3/8" screen. You don't need to be a computer geek to understand the simple 4-button control, either: ON/OFF; image orientation; screen brightness adjustment and adjustment of headlight brightness on the end of the 36"-long flexible wand. The camera does a great job even in complete darkness. Hooks, a magnet and a mirror are included in the kit and can all be fitted to the end of the wand to retrieve objects or inspect more closely. Remote video output port lets you watch the footage on a separate screen. All in all, an impressive, economically priced tool with a 2-year warranty.

FESTOOL SYSLITE DUO

The SYSLITE DUO from Festool will let you truly see the surface you are working on - in the correct color - without hot spots in the center. It's a hard-wired AC lighting solution with 8000 Lumens projecting an evenly diffused light over 180° with a color temperature of 5000 Kelvin. SYSLITE DUO is impact and water resistant and has a service life of 10,000 hours with an optional tripod for a firm and stable base.



MILWAUKEE WIDE BLADE TAPE MEASURE

Milwaukee's new wide blade tapes are the most recent example of evolutionary improvement in a tool that every trade uses every day. Their new 16' and 25' models are big league tapes for all the reasons you'd expect, plus a few new ones. Blades on these tapes are wide, strong and abrasion resistant, like any pro-grade tape needs to be. The locking button is the easiest to activate of any tape I've used over the years, and the blades easily stood out more than 11 feet without buckling during my tests. The tape cases have a high-friction overwrap covering making them easy to grab comfortably. Evolutionary improvements include a wire-style belt hook that won't cut fabric, and a lanyard lug on the backside for tethering the tape when working at heights. The case is also thicker than on other tapes I've pulled apart, with internal bracing for extra strength. Cost for the 16' and 25' models is less than \$30. Available in Imperial only or Imperial-metric graduations at Home Depot.





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Latex Lessons

A behind-the-scenes look at the world's most common paint



Latex paint is used on most jobs these days, and that's a good thing. Your life as a painter is considerably healthier and more pleasant since oil-based and alkyds are disappearing from the painting scene. And while chances are good that most of what you do during each work day involves rolling, brushing or spraying latex paint or primer, did you know that these coatings don't actually have latex in them at all? Not any more, anyway. If a client with a latex allergy is fearful of paint, tell them to rest easy. They'll be fine. The name "latex" comes from original formulations of non-alkyd paints that were made with liquid latex rubber once upon a time. While we still cling to the term "latex" here in Canada, in the UK the same stuff is called "emulsion" paint. That's a more accurate term given how this stuff is made.

How It's Made

Latex paint base is what's used to make any of the thousands of colours you can get from a fan deck, and latex bases are made with the following ingredients:

- water - about 60% of total volume
- acrylic or polyvinyl resins - provides film strength and bonding properties
- extender - makes paint brush and roll more easily
- thickener - adds viscosity for better rollout
- titanium dioxide - adds opacity and whiteness
- glycol - increases open time
- calcium carbonate - one of several dry pigments
- zinc - imparts mildew-resistance
- flattening agents - reduces sheen
- defoamer - reduces bubble formation.

All the ingredients except the resins are combined in a large industrial mixing vat in a paint plant. Think of a 10,000 litre mixing bowl with an electric beater in the middle. That's what the initial mixing set up looks like. The liquids and dry pigment powders are blended during the initial part of the manufacturing process. The resins are added in a sepa-

rate step as part of a second mixing process that goes on for 5 to 6 hours. Why so long? Homogenization through a process called "the let down". It's essential that all the ingredients be broken down into tiny particles that resist settling out. Some settling of paint in the can is inevitable, but it's much less than during the days of oil-based paints. The legendary ability of modern latex to avoid settling out in storage is due in part to this homogenization process.

Just because a batch of paint has been mixed according to a recipe doesn't mean that it goes out the door in cans for sale. Samples from each batch are run through various tests before packaging. One test uses a machine called a viscometer to analyze liquid paint.

Think of a restaurant milk shake machine, except this one assesses viscosity by measuring the resistance to the spinning of a mixing paddle. The more resistance, the higher the viscosity of the paint. Paint manufacturers have pushed viscosity higher to reduce runs and increase the ability of rollers and brushes to hold more paint. But too much viscosity is a bad thing since it boosts resistance to paint spread. Ensuring that each batch of paint hits the viscosity sweet spot is a big thing on the list of post-production tests.

Another test checks liquid paint for tintability. Every paint supplier you deal with has recipes that include very specific volumes of different tinting pigments to

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How Paint is Packaged

Most major paint manufacturers use similar equipment for labeling cans and filling them. Cans roll along a chute where small blobs of hot-melt glue are applied in a band along one side of the cans. A few feet later the can rolls over an inverted paper label that sticks to the hot melt. As the empty cans roll more, the chute changes the orientation of the can to upright for filling. The average paint packaging line can fill 40 to 60 cans per minute, with each can filled by weight, not volume.





achieve different paint colour results. Testing how a given batch of base reacts to the tinting process is essential for colour consistency across a brand. Samples of each batch are spread using a test called the “draw down”. A sample of paint is applied to a cardboard test card, then a bar is drawn down to create an even thickness of paint on that card. When it’s dried, the sample is tested for colour, the ability to cover other colours and sheen level as determined by a device called a gloss meter.

Durability is another parameter that each batch of latex paint is subjected to, and the testing process involves measured abrasion. A test brush is charged with an abrasive liquid, then the brush is drawn over a painted surface by machine. The number of strokes are counted to determine if the paint meets durability standards. Only after passing these quality control tests and final filtration is a given batch of paint released for packaging.

How to Choose Latex Colours

Optical testing equipment is a big part of what happens in the paint testing labs and it’s sophisticated enough these days that this equipment can identify colour variations beyond with the human eye can detect. This technology can also help you to help your

“ Hand-held spectrophotometers are showing up in more and more paint stores. Interior designers use them and so do a growing number of painters.

Teaching Clients About Sheens

Paint choice is about more than just choosing colour. You also need to educate your clients on the basics of sheen. As a professional painter you’ll know this stuff, but all that most clients know about paint is colour. Be sure to mention the basics of sheen before paint is chosen and mixed.

Flat sheen: Hides imperfections best. Ideal for ceilings, too.

Gloss: Maximum durability, but requires a near-perfect surface.

Once upon a time, flat paints wore out easily. Not so today, but the reputation endures. Today’s best flat paints are at least as durable as the glosses of yesteryear. Be sure your clients understand this.

clients choose paint colour better.

Most people think the whole issue of colour choice is nothing but personal opinion, but there’s actually math behind colour choice. In the same way there’s math behind different pitches of sound that seem pleasant or irritating, the same applies to colour. Couple this fact with the ability to precisely measure the wavelength of different colours electronically, and you’ve got a powerful tool for helping people choose paint colours that please them.

The electronic technology involved in all this is called a spectrophotometry, and it’s like a super-sensitive colour-picking eye ball. There are two kinds of spectrophotometers: hand-held and desktop.

Hand-held spectrophotometers are showing up in more and more paint stores. Interior designers use them and so do a growing number of painters. Hold the device up to a coloured surface, press a button and the device tells you a couple of things. First, it finds the closest colour match from a given brand-specific fan deck to match the surface you’re working with. Second, a hand-held spectrophotometer also makes mathematical suggestions about complimentary colours. Sounds crazy? You should try it. It’s amazing how accurately these little devices identify specific colours in a fan deck. I’ve never seen a hand-held spectrophotometer make a mistake identifying a colour



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Why Paint Choice Matters

As a professional painter, you're only as good as the paint you apply. This fact isn't entirely fair, but it's true because most clients judge the painter by results, not paint chemistry. So if a job fails to live up to expectations because of bad paint, this is probably going to come back and bite you in some way. How can you protect yourself? Choosing 100% acrylic latex paints and primers when the budget allows is one way. Not all latex paint is 100% acrylic because it's the most expensive option. Acrylic resins cost manufacturers twice as much as vinyl resins, so typical house paints are a blend of 20% acrylic and 80% vinyl. Advantages of 100% acrylic include better hiding, better washability and more resistance to cracking, peeling and flaking. Never let a tightwad client force you to use paint that won't work well. If anything goes wrong, it'll be your headache.

chip. Complimentary colours usually look great, too. A spectrophotometer in your pocket can go a long way to helping indecisive clients make paint colour choices.

Most paint suppliers these days have desktop spectrophotometers and they can do more than hand-held versions. Although they measure the colour of a given material precisely and can suggest specific colours from a fan deck, desktop spectrophotometers can also provide recipes for custom colours. Need to match existing trim, fabric or a neighbouring wall? You won't do better than bringing a sample of the surface to a paint store and having it analyzed and reproduced. You'll get suggestions about complimentary colours, if you want, but more useful is the ability to match colours. Leading edge desktop spectrophotometers can create custom colours based on nothing more than a quick look at a piece of fabric, wood or metal.

You don't need to know how latex paint is made or the leading edge methods for choosing colours to be a good painter. But the public sees you as more than just an applicator of paint. The more you can do to boost your guru status the more you'll win better and more profitable projects. **pp**



“ Durability is another parameter that each batch of latex paint is subjected to, and the testing process involves measured abrasion. A test brush is charged with an abrasive liquid, then the brush is drawn over a painted surface by machine.

One Of These Paint Contractors Is Leaving Money On The Table



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Driving Cheap

How to earn more by spending less on your work vehicle

The financial success of your painting business depends a lot on how well you manage and cover overhead costs, and of all the overhead costs involved in professional painting, owning and operating a vehicle is one of the biggest. It's also the cost that you have the most control over. Every penny you save with economical decisions on your painting vehicle go directly in your pocket sooner or later. Here are some ways to drive cheaper.

Money-Saving Tip#1 Buy Used

Everyone knows that used is cheaper than new. What you might not realize is just how much more expensive new can be. Besides the higher purchase price, you've got the higher cost of insurance for a brand new vehicle. There's also the need for dealer-servicing. But the biggest drawback of all when buying new wheels is depreciation.

The last vehicle I bought was one model year old. It cost me \$39,000, it had 28,000 km on the clock and it cost \$15,000 less than the same make and model available new. Depreciation during the first year I owned the vehicle was probably less than \$7,000, saving me \$8,000

from the steepest part of the depreciation curve. Buying new saved me more than \$650 per month in depreciation avoided. And I am still driving this vehicle at more than 300,000 km.

Money-Saving Tip#2 Buy Reliability

Once upon a time, consumers didn't have much to go by when it came to choosing a reliable vehicle. You could buy brand names and hope for the best, but that wasn't much to go by. None of us ever got the chance to learn from the experience of many previous owners of the same model, so we bought in the dark, often suffering the consequences. These days, things are different. The results of large and trustworthy vehicle reliability studies are easy to find and often surprising. Consumer Reports compiles one of the largest collections of vehicle reliability information in the world, involving data from about 500,000 vehicles each year. The difference between best and worst vehicles is huge. The cost of owning a trouble-prone vehicle can easily be 300 to 400 per cent higher than a trouble-free make and model – not to mention the hassles of

dealing with a vehicle that breaks down when it shouldn't. A couple of makes consistently have much higher reliability ratings than others from brands that can't seem to get their act together.

Money-Saving Tip#3 Remember Body Maintenance

Almost all of Canada is hard on vehicle bodies. Except for a few locations in this country, road salt and moist spring conditions cause lots of vehicle rusting. And rusting is the one thing that can never be repaired properly. Sure, you can use body filler and paint to fix body rust, but that's expensive and ultimately ineffective. Structural rust kills Canadian vehicles faster than mechanical issues, and this means unnecessarily higher overhead costs for you. So how do you stop rust? Creeping oil spray treatments, that's how.

There are many rust-preventative treatments on the market, but most don't work. My oldest vehicle is a 1990 F-150 that has always been driven in the salt country of Ontario, yet it's completely free of rust. I know for sure because I had it repainted professionally when the old paint got chalky and dull. Not a spec of filler was required.

A simple sanding job and a \$2,000 coat of new paint and the old truck still shines, five years after that paint job.

I've used both Krown and Rust Check and I find them equally good. These days I spray my own vehicles with product I buy in 20 litre pails. A couple of hours and \$50 worth of rust compound does each of my three vehicles. Body maintenance like this makes vehicle rust a non-issue, and it's the foundation for the next money-saving tip. In my experience if a rust preventative product doesn't creep and lead to oily, dusty residue along the bottoms of doors and body panels months after application, then it doesn't work.

Money-Saving Tip#4 Maintenance is Cheaper Than Replacement

People replace vehicles for all kinds of emotional reasons, and many of these reasons are justified with something that's simply not true. The flaw in logic usually goes something like this: "Why should I pay \$3000 for repairs on a used vehicle that's only worth \$2000? That doesn't make sense."

Well, actually, a repair like this probably does make sense if you've kept up with the rust preventative maintenance work in Tip#3 and you've chosen a reliable model. Here's the logic . . .

Let's say the transmission goes on your otherwise-good work truck, and it'll cost \$3K for a new one. What's the monthly payments for owning a new vehicle? It could easily be \$400 to \$600, not including depreciation. Will that new transmission keep working for another 5 to 7 months? Of course it will. It will probably last many years. Will something else go wrong in the mean time? Yes, it could, but the same logic about the value of repairs applies. As vehicles age, more than one thing might go wrong with them, and you could end up averaging hundreds or even thousands of dollars a month in repairs for a while. But when the wear items have been replaced, you'll probably get many years of repair-free service from that same vehicle assuming two vital things: Have you made rust a non-issue with regular oil sprays? Have you chosen a vehicle that's got a proven, multi-year track record of reliability? Repairs arrive in bumps. Get over

the bump and you'll be fine for a long time.

Money-Saving Tip#5 Choose a Vehicle for Practicality, Not Ego

Painting is one of the few trades where a big vehicle is not always necessary. Sure, it's nice to have a honking big truck and a work trailer and some painting businesses can justify this. Many can't. Remember, the definition of being able to afford something is not if you can come up with a loan to pay for it. Even having enough cash is not the definition of "affordability". When it comes to a work vehicle, the big question is "does it pay?" Does that big, fancy painting truck that costs you twice as much two run pay for itself in double the profits? I know painters whose main work vehicle is a medium-sized car. The smaller and simpler the vehicle you own, the cheaper the fuel bill, spare parts, tires and insurance. pp





PAINT PERSPECTIVE



Simon Kuhl is the kind of guy who does a lot of things well, and managing his life as a painter is one of them. He owns Sombrio Painting (sombriopainting.com) on Vancouver Island, and his story is as much about aiming for a balanced professional life as it is about running a profitable painting enterprise. Simon is not the kind of guy who's content to let his business run him, and his experiences have something to teach anyone who wants more than just a 9 to 5 work experience as a painter. As a family man he's got a bottom line to meet, as well as interests, passions and experiences that need to get their time, too. This story is about

how one Canadian painter strives to make all these things happen in a beautiful part of our country.

Simon's specialty is craftsman quality interior and exterior painting of residential and small commercial projects. He's also into wood finishing and refinishing, restoration and custom projects that require a careful eye. And like a lot of people worth learning from, Simon's work today is an extension of his past.

"While growing up, my dad painted on the side for a few years and so I got a little exposure to the trade that way", remembers Simon. "In my teens I wanted to become a self employed entrepreneur (I actually put that in my junior high yearbook as the answer to what I wanted to do for work when I grew up). I had this idea of owning a truck, running around serving my painting clients. But in my twenties I got involved in the wine industry in Alberta. I had a great experience, learned a lot about wine and spirits, but mostly about customer service, sales, and accountability. These skills serve me well today as a painter. After 10 years of wine, I needed a change. My wife and I moved to Penticton, BC, scrounged to find any job I could, and had the good fortune of being fired from a job I really disliked. That opened the door to entrepreneurship via a government program that provided a modest income and mentorship while completing an intense 3 week comprehensive business plan workshop. That early support was incredibly valuable and I continue to benefit from it. My brother-in-law is a 30-year pro-painter. He taught me and still teaches me a lot about the technical side of painting and about how to make money in the trade."

After Simon ran his successful painting business in the South Okanagan valley for 10 years, he realized it was time for another

PAINTING IN EFFECTIVE

How one west coast painter stays profitable, energized and true to himself

More Than Painting

Simon Kuhl is a creative man, and this fact extends beyond his work as a painter. His blog at microcontractor.org is one of the best you'll find anywhere. It's worth reading because it combines valuable insights into what it takes to run a small trade business well, while staying sane. "I'm allergic to chaos and unreasonableness", explains Simon, "so I'm sensitive to situations where someone is trying to impose those into my work life and I try to set boundaries." His blog explains how to do this and more. It's a by-product of his day to day painting business and a way to create value for a whole other market.

Good painters often have a good eye, and that's probably why Simon's photos are good enough that people hire him for weddings, engagements, anniversaries and portraits. You'll be impressed by his work at kuhlphoto.ca.

“ I don't yet feel like I've even attained my own modest definition of success,” explains Simon. “But I'm getting closer than ever and the experience has taught me so much.

change. “Most of the objectives I could have dreamed for my little business were achieved”, explains Simon. “10 years in business, \$1 million in total sales, a happy customer base of 300+, good relations with suppliers and competitors. But looking forward 10 years I didn't want to be in the same place.”

Some of the challenge and aspirations that originally energized Simon were gone. As he tells the story, “there was a lot of resistance in our life at that time. I needed a new challenge and opportunity. We

needed to find a community that was better suited to raising a family. I wanted to sell my business to extract some of the value that I'd worked hard to create. I wanted to mentor young painters and help them grow and learn as much as I had. I wanted to try and get back into the workforce before I felt like it was too late (body breaking down, skills too narrow or obsolete, etc). So we took a risk again and moved to Victoria, BC, on Vancouver Island.”

That's where Simon took a job with a major paint manufacturer. “I learned a ton, but after 6 months it was clear that this job wasn't right for me. Construction is booming here so I went back to doing what I know best and started a new business from scratch. This was an interesting experience because it is much smoother the second time around, and in a bigger market the growth came faster, with less mistakes. We've already surpassed our peak sales numbers from the previous business.”

When Simon says “we”, he doesn't



mean himself and some employees. He found out the hard way that the employee model didn't work for him. "There was a time when I hired employees, and it really changed my business. After the first three years on my own, I hired painters and a bookkeeper to do payroll. My business immediately went from being in the black to going into the red. I much prefer the simplicity and flexibility of having subcontractors."

These days Simon's painting enterprise involves a varied list of situations, making use of sub contractors as the need arises. In Penticton he did a lot of residential repaints, with a select few custom home new construction jobs. There was small and medium-sized commercial jobs, insurance work and spec homes, but the mainstays of the business were residential repaints and custom homes. In Victoria the work is mostly insurance and restoration, general contractor reno painting, and residential repainting.

"I always strive to exceed expectations in service and quality. These

are the only two things we can really control, and it goes beyond just applying paint. In talking with many successful business people over the years, it has become clear that the secret to success is how you treat people. Sounds simple, but that's what it comes down to. Aside from that, my favourite mantra is a quote from Pablo Picasso: 'Action is the foundational key to success.' Always move the ball forward somehow."

One of the best ways of learning from a business is by looking at the challenges it faces and the solutions that arise. In the case of Simon, his three main challenges include: scaling up, scheduling and keeping work in its place.

"I know its very possible to grow beyond the work that two or three painters can handle because a lot of companies grow way beyond this size. I do the best I can in my comfort zone, rather than push to grow and not have it be manageable. But it would be nice to figure out the secret to breaking through the mental barrier I have. For now, I'm content to stay small. Many smarter

and more experienced people tell me to stay small. They say it's more profitable and less stressful. I just have this internal programming where I feel like I always has to be getting bigger, and this makes for an internal struggle. Part of this may have to do with scheduling. I'm still underestimating how long projects take, not allocating slack for extras and over-booking."

Keeping work in its place is another ongoing challenge for Simon, as it is for many small business owners. "Painting and running the business could easily fill my weekdays from 7am to 7pm and beyond if I let it. This doesn't leave much time for family, which frustrates me to no end. I'm always looking for ways to reduce the footprint my business takes up in my life."

When Simon talks about sub contracting, it's not just about painters. "Over the past 3+ years I've teamed up with a good drywall repair specialist, both in Penticton and now here in Victoria. We send work each other's way. Here in Vic I take on quite a few jobs that require insula-



tion, boarding, taping and painting. Being able to take on projects that go beyond painting gives me the flexibility to start jobs quickly and to have multiple jobs on the go at the same time. It works well. I don't make as much on the drywall portion, but I can take on and manage multiple jobs while delivering great service and quality. As for painters, having them on a sub-contracting basis is essential. Their labour is a cost of sales allocated to each job rather than being business overhead as if they were on payroll. Sub contracting also keeps the arrangement flexible and fluid. If a painter needs time off, all I ask is for a little notice to adjust our schedule. I give up some control but it is well worth the flexibility. We have an understanding that if they prioritize the work I have for them, then I will continue to offer them right of first refusal on my extra work. So far my sweet spot is having two part time painters besides myself. This way I don't have to do all the work, but I still get to paint on most projects and maintain a presence on site. I prefer to work by myself on Mondays, whereas Tuesday through Friday is full production days. I've gotten

to the stage where I generally don't work evenings and weekends and can take most long weekends off.

Sidelines That Pay

One of the ways Simon adds variety to his work is by taking on jobs related to painting but different. Interior wall plastering with clay is one example. "I generally use products by a company called American Clay (www.americanclay.com; 866.404.1634). It comes as a powder that you mix with water, then trowel on. It's natural, beautiful, timeless, temperature and moisture regulating, and easy to repair. It repels dust and absorbs oils from hands, it releases negative ions into the air which are good for our well being, and it never fades and never needs painting. I recommend clay walls for wineries, spas, and custom homes where clients want an alternative to paint in some areas. So often with custom homes the client puts a lot of thought into picking the right piece of granite for the countertops, the right faucets and lighting fixtures, even special door hardware, then they just paint all the walls beige. Many people don't realize there are options for their

walls beyond paint."

Wood finishing is another of Simon's specialties. "For simple furniture refinishing I use the Saman stain line or Varathane for custom stairs and interior woodwork. For exterior applications I prefer Penofin Marine Oil for beams, new decks and fences. I've given up on film-forming clear coats for exterior applications because sooner or later they peel. For solid stain I use Super Deck or Arbor Coat.

The restoration work we do is over-flow from local restoration companies. They send us their extra drywall, trim and painting work. It's a valuable business builder for us as the margins are pretty good. There's more work in the off-season, and we get spin-off jobs from the homeowners and their neighbours and friends."

Simon is quick to point out that his business is not a model of success compared to many other painting businesses, or even compared to the potential in the market. "I don't yet feel like I've even attained my own modest definition of success", explains Simon. "But I'm getting closer than ever and the experience has taught me so much." pp



Q&A With Simon Kuhl



Q: What are your favourite time management strategies?

A: Write stuff down in The Book. Delegate as much as you can. Focus on one or two main things for the day. Keep paperwork organized. (I learned a principle long ago that you should be able to find any document in 2 minutes or less.) Stay up to date with bills and taxes. Set a weekly schedule. I estimate on Friday

afternoons, check mail, do bank deposits, pay bills on Friday evening. Mondays I work by myself to set up the week. I don't take a lot of breaks, don't answer the phone much during the day, try not to leave the site for materials, coffee, estimates, etc. Starting and stopping kills effectiveness.

Q: How do you decide who to contract with?

A: For sub-contractors I always choose character over skill. For general contractors I choose to work for, the main factor here is trust. It takes time to build trust over successful projects.

Q: How do you decide which clients to accept or reject?

A: Quality attracts quality. My branding and prices communicate certain values that repel incompatible customers and attract the right ones. I won't work with unreasonableness. Most of my work is repeats and referrals from satisfied customers.

Q: What's the toughest painting job you've had?

A: Poplar Grove Winery. The day I was awarded the contract I traded in my work truck for a new family vehicle. Scheduling was crazy-making. They were several weeks behind by the time the painting started, and they were not going to adjust the completion date. So we were working around other trades - some were still there that should have been finished, some were there that should not have been starting yet. That puts a lot of pressure on the painters. We were trying to paint while the drywallers were trying to finish the walls and the electrician was installing lights. Often there would be five tradespeople trying to work in the same 10 square feet. We had half the time we needed and the work was taking more than twice as long as it should have. I almost fell off a double section of bakers racks as I forgot to lock the wheels. Fortunately one of our painters was close by and was able to run over and steady the scaffold. I was within 10 seconds of dropping 12 feet onto a concrete floor. I think its important to note that

in the end we completed the projected successfully and it became a show-piece facility in the city and for our portfolio. We received a nice referral from the builder.

Q: What's your perfect work day?

A: In Penticton I had the pleasure of working with some of my best friends and we'd sometimes get these large exterior wood staining projects up in the hills. The owners would offer fresh baked muffins and coffee for us. We'd start at 7 am to stay ahead of the heat, working in the shade as the day got warmer. By 3 pm we'd cool off in Skaha Lake before heading home for the gorgeous Okanagan summer evenings.

Q: How do you keep good contractors interested in working with you?

A: Tell them how much you appreciate working with them. A micro business is a personal business. That's its competitive advantage. I don't believe the saying "it's not personal, its just business." Business is a transaction from one human to another and we're all looking for decent human connections.

Q: What are your favourite technical things in the painting world?

A: I appreciate great coatings (great flow for production, great hide, great leveling, great adhesion, self-priming, low VOC, mildew resistant, interior/exterior capability) and I'm liking flatter sheens more and more. Health is really important to me. With a bucket under my chin all day, I want to make sure the paint is as clean as possible. Some of my current interior coatings of choice are BM Regal Select, Cloverdale Super II, and S-W Solo.

Q: What are your aims for the future?

A: I'm always looking for new ways to improve and create more value for my family, my painters, my customers and other entrepreneurs on the same road I'm on. My blog www.microcontractor.org is part of this. It helps me reflect on experiences and it lets me pass on what I've learned to other painters on a similar path. I think that entrepreneurial success goes beyond problem solving and value creation, to the separation of time from income. Time is infinitely more valuable than money, so if we are seeking to create maximum value, it must include using our business to create more time for ourselves. This is a difficult pursuit, but beyond survival, it has to be one of the main reasons we all got into business in the first place - to earn our freedom. If we don't realize that goal of time freedom, then it is doubly troubling because we have no one to blame but ourselves. Its an ongoing struggle for me, but it is my main goal for my business going forward. pp

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Boosting Business

Five ways to take home more money with less effort

Money might not be the only reason you paint, but it's important just the same. Maybe even the most important part of your work. You give up time with your family and time doing things you enjoy in exchange for money, so it better be worthwhile. Professional painting is not a hobby. Are you interested in earning more money in less time? These five tips can help.

Profit Boosting Tip#1: Talk Less, Paint More

I've been alive long enough to notice that the more people talk the less they get done. This is not true all the time, but often enough to be worth remembering. Nobody pays tradespeople to talk, yet I still see many consume what probably adds up to an hour or two a day talking pointlessly. That's an hour or more away from the things that matter in your life, all for no financial gain. Chat if you like, but realize that it comes at a price. A proportionally high number of chatters I know have gone out of business. And although it's not talked about very much, the fact is that one of the leading causes of family breakdown is insufficient finances.

Profit Boosting Tip#2: Bid By the Job, Not By The Hour

Being a painter is like any other trade. It involves uncertainty, and that's why some painters work by the hour, not by the bid. Time and materials contracts eliminate all the risk of underbidding a job, but they also cost you big time in hidden ways. Hourly work harms you in two things. First it provides no financial incentive for you to work more efficiently. And second, if you do get better and faster and more efficient, all that gain goes to the client. Don't be unfair to yourself. You should be paid for the experience you bring to the job, not just for the time you spend spreading paint in pleasing ways. If an efficient painter can work twice as fast as a slow one, then that efficient painter deserves to take home twice as much money in a day. This can only happen by bidding on the job.

So what about the risk of bidding? If you're a new painter, the best way to get good at bidding is by paying attention to the hours

“ Estimating large projects is one of the areas where costly mistakes are possible, especially for painters just getting into commercial and institutional work.

different jobs take you. Start your bidding hourly if you like, to gain experience, but be sure to use that experience to hone your estimation skills. In the same way that it took time and practice to get good with a brush and roller, it takes time and practice to get good at estimating.

Profit Boosting Tip#3: Find Trusted Partners

At least half the painters I've met have tried to get bigger by hiring employees, but most regret the move. They give up and go back to solo work forever. Complication is the reason why. Employees come with hidden costs, paperwork is required of you, and there's no direct connection between what you pay an employee and the amount of money they earn for you. A drywaller I know jokes that he should pay \$10/hr less to anyone who smokes and owns a smartphone. That may be extreme, but the fact is that distractions on the jobsite today are a huge issue. Distracted workers can easily be half as productive as a painter who delivers 8 hours of actual work for 8 hours of pay. But don't make the mistake of thinking that you always need to work solo just because hourly-paid employees haven't worked out for you in the past. Some painters manage nicely connecting with the right kind of people, especially when those people fit into the right kind of financial structure. Partnering with trusted contractors paid for the work they complete can be a win-win situation. Since you only pay them for results, you're free of making sure they work efficiently. Hiring contractors instead of employees also saves on paperwork big-time.

Profit Boosting Tip#4: Collect and Use Testimonials

Besides painting work itself, your biggest challenge as a professional painter is ensuring a steady supply of work. While new clients might come to you automatically at some times, lean times are never far away, either. This is where testimonials can help. Nothing else convinces potential clients to become actual clients as effectively as testimonials delivered online. This is especially true if you're a good painter. Ultimately, as with all the manual trades in the world,

efficiency makes the difference between thriving and simply surviving. Collecting and using testimonials online in some way is the cheapest and most effective sales tool you can use.

Profit Boosting Tip#5: Claim All Tax Deductions

As a professional painter, you're entitled to deduct every last little business expense before paying Big Brother, but it's surprising how many professionals don't make full use of this option. Most of your expenses come in small chunks, but they add up. Gas, brushes, rollers, meals on the road, that new brake job on your work vehicle, the garage and office space in your house that you use for work – it adds up to a nice chunk taken off your bottom line before the tax man takes his cut. It's bad enough you need to buy these things in the first place, but you should never pay income taxes on these expenses. So how can you deal with all those little sales receipts in an efficient way? Add them up as you go. Here's what I do . . .

After collecting about a week's worth of receipts, I spend a few minutes typing the amounts into a spreadsheet. No big deal, I have half a dozen headings up top that correspond to the expense headings I'll use on my income tax return. I then put the paper sales slips in a cardboard accordion folder in case I need to present receipts to the government one day. This folder has internal dividers to keep the different categories of slips separate. Claiming legitimate expenses saves me thousands of dollars in tax each year, and the paperwork is almost automatic. Having a spread sheet also lets me see exactly what I spend on gas, supplies, vehicle repairs, restaurant meals and every other expense I incur. Knowledge is the best management tool.

Sooner or later, painting stops being fun. At least for a while it does. But at times like these, there is another source of professional enthusiasm. Unless you win the lottery, striving for better efficiencies and more profits is a goal that never seems to get stale. [pp](#)

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MOLDEX

Mold and Mildew Control

As a professional painter, you're more likely than most trades to encounter mold and mildew in your work. That's why you should know about killing this stuff, removing mold stains, and preventing regrowth. These days there are more options than just sloshing on bleach water and hoping for the best. New science and new products make success more certain, and these offer the chance to make you look better to your clients, too.

Mold growth happens when a food source and sufficient moisture come together, but mold isn't picky about what it eats. Almost anything will do. Wood, cardboard, drywall, carpet – even the dust that accumulates on inorganic materials such as plastic – can feed mold in the presence of moisture. The key to dealing with mold properly as a painter comes down to three things: Kill it, remove stains (if necessary), then discourage mold regrowth. One part of prevention comes down to products you can apply, in addition to educating clients about moisture control in their building.

While mold is nothing new, mold control with registered products hasn't been around all that long. Gone are the days when you simply painted over moldy surfaces and hope for the best. It's no longer sound professional practice and it simply makes no financial sense. Live mold under a coat of fresh paint is never a good idea because paint can't kill mold. It's just a serious callback waiting to happen after mold reappears.

I've been covering mold since it became a hot topic in the late 1990s, and Moldex is one family of mold control and prevention products I've been testing recently. This brand uses a three-step approach to the job: kill, clean and discourage regrowth.

Moldex Mold Killer is the first thing to apply on active mold, and it carries the most complete list of verified credentials of any mold product I've seen so far. It's Health Canada Pest Management Regulatory

Agency (PMA) registered as a fungicide, mildewstat, virucide and disinfectant that's approved for residential and institutional settings. It's specifically verified to eliminate the hard-to-kill HIV-1 organism after ten minutes of wet contact time. If you're painting institutional surfaces that may have been contaminated with bodily fluids, this is the stuff to protect yourself with before you start serious wall prep. Although not completely non-toxic, Mold Killer is safe as long as you don't swallow it. The odour is pleasant, with no bleach smell to bother clients. Comes in ready-to-use spray bottles or concentrate for greater economy on large jobs.

Removing mold and mildew stains is something you won't always need to do. Paint alone covers stains from dead mold, but if you need a clean surface for translucent coatings, there are two stain removal technologies in the Moldex line. Their Instant Mold & Mildew Stain Remover uses bleach chemistry, and their non-bleach Mold & Mildew Stain Remover is oxygen based. I preferred the oxygen formulation in my tests. Unlike other oxygen-based stainer removers, this one needs no mixing. Just spray it on and it foams up as stain erasing oxygen is released.

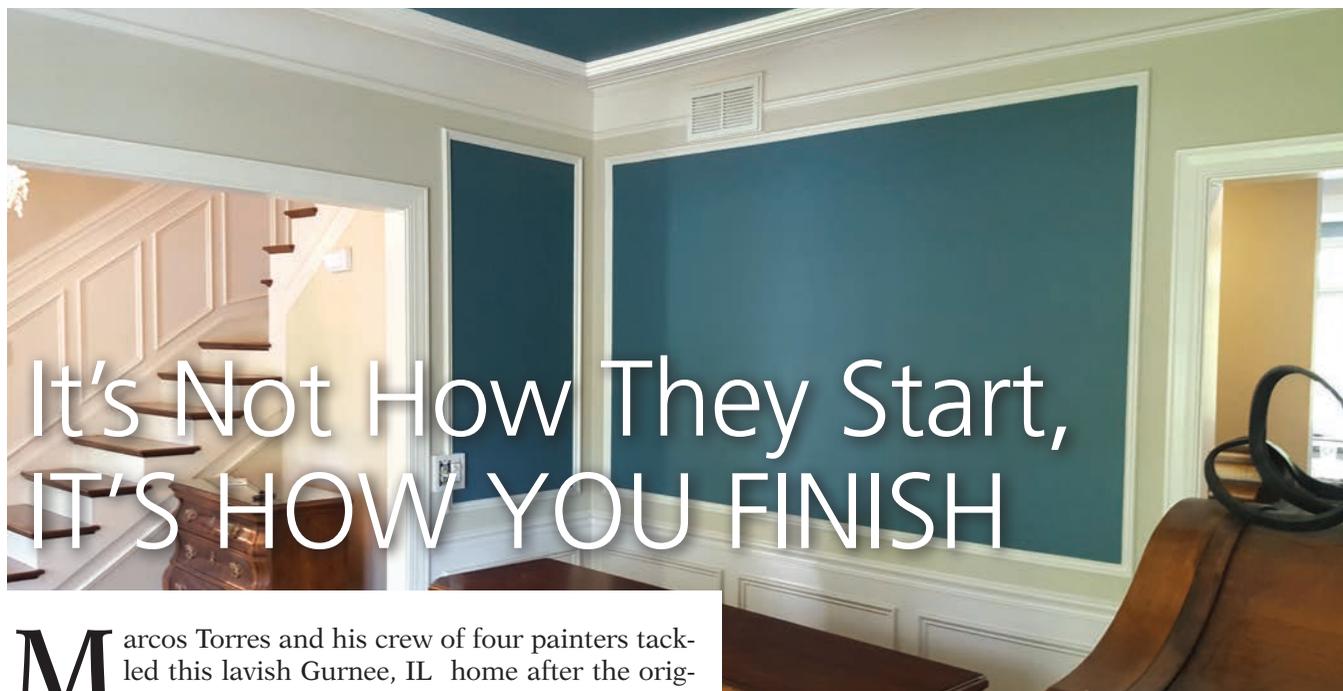
Preventing mold regrowth is the final step in the Moldex system, and that's where their Sealant product comes in. It's a water-based liquid that works over any kind of sealed wood, painted surface, plastic, metal, masonry or fabric. If you're dealing with a previously painted surface with mold that you've killed, apply Moldex Sealant after the last coat of new paint is thoroughly dry.

Twenty years of news stories and legal action around mold issues have made the public fearful of mold. Settle on an effective mold control protocol, then tell your clients about it. It'll give them one more reason to call you back and recommend you to others. [pp](#)





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It's Not How They Start, IT'S HOW YOU FINISH

Marcos Torres and his crew of four painters tackled this lavish Gurnee, IL home after the original painter baled out. “That first guy worked solo and spent two days priming raw wood, filling nail holes and patching. He figured he could paint the whole house in four days but quickly realized he was in over his head. We spent seven days with a crew of four completing this detailed project. We used Sherwin Williams paints: ProClassic semi-gloss on trim and Cashmere flat on walls – 7 colours in all.

A major challenge on this house was the homeowner’s dog. He was constantly in the way and rubbing up against the painted trim. With the owner’s approval we rigged up a temporary fence in the backyard to keep the dog out of the house.”

Marco started Torres Painting (www.torrespainting1.com) in Kenosha, WI in 2013 after working for a commercial painting contractor for 15 years. “We focus mainly on residential repaints, including wallpaper stripping and cabinet painting. I’m glad we could help bring the vision for this home to life.” pp



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