

# Painter

SUMMER 2015 VOLUME 12, #2

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Drywall Patching



Solo or Boss?



New Products

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"Pro Painter Magazine"

# PRO Painter

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By Steve Maxwell

## Skills and Humility

There's something about skill that always impresses me, especially natural-born skill. I always feel a tingle of the divine when I come across a person who can just do something astonishingly well, without much practice or training. A young lady I was painting beside this spring offered a case in point. Though she'd never painted before in her life, she had her heart set on tackling one of the hardest painting challenges around.

The job involved applying a pickled white finish to the underside of exposed wooden ceiling boards. This ceiling also had wooden beams every two feet, and the pickling detail needed to stay on the ceiling boards only. The rough beams had to stay paint-free.

The job took some trial and error on my part to figure out, but I eventually settled on a process for her: dilute white latex paint 15 per cent with water; mask sides of beams where they meet ceiling boards to keep paint off while wiping; brush paint over a small area; wipe off excess; continue until that section of ceiling was done.

As I was showing this woman how to do all this, I realized the situation was a minefield of potential problems. She probably shouldn't even attempt it. The wiping stain was thin and drip-prone; the surface was overhead; the beams were rough and eager to hold onto drips, spatters and runs if they extended beyond the masking tape. On top of all this was the ever-present risk of inconsistent wiping and a mottled and ugly result. The work was also slow and boring enough to test the patience of Gandhi.

I turned over the paint pot, brush and wad of shop towels to my young student without much hope. Working elsewhere for a couple of hours, I came back to see a stunning pickled effect applied to a substantial part of the ceiling. No drips, no mistakes, no inconsistencies. Her clothes were clean and there was a lot more progress than I expected. It was a divine tingle moment, and that always gets me thinking.

We tradespeople are prone to a type of pride that ordinary people never know. We're often in danger of thinking that our skills are entirely our own, and that we've pulled ourselves into competency entirely by our bootstraps. I'm not so sure. While we can be proud of the time and effort we put into getting better at what we do, isn't it also true that we really can't take credit for the biggest part of our skills, the part that's there from the start? Perhaps this is why the best tradespeople I know are just as skilled at humility as they are at their work.

PP

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# A FACEBOOK CONVERSATION

*Pro Painter magazine's* Facebook group page has attracted a loyal following in the last year. 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**

**Is there more professional painting in the world, or less?  
Is it true that the proportion of professional painting  
versus DIY painting is on the rise?**



Daniel Petrulak

**Daniel Petrulak**

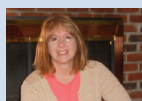
I believe this to be true. I knew of just one painter growing up, and he subbed almost strictly for an interior design company in the city of Pittsburgh. Seems to me that painting company's popped up through the mid 90s.



Tim Laur

**Tim Laur**

In the 70's it was a different economy. Now there are more two income households and who has time to paint with both spouses working? Houses are bigger, bedrooms are larger. Labor is more expensive so many people place too much value on their time.



Olive Leighton

**Olive Leighton**

Wallpaper was big in our area during the earlier times. In fact, 30 years ago, a retired paperhanger was selling some leftover paper at his yard sale. I bought some, hung it and then put an ad in the paper for paperhanger.



Craig Estey

**Craig Estey**

Tim is right. I have many clients who can paint and do a professional job. It takes them more time, and that's where I come in. They get a job to their standards (or higher) and it free's up the time they need for other things. Also, many of my clients used to paint for themselves, but are getting older and just couldn't be bothered with it anymore. 60% of my residential work is with clients who are 60+.

**Join the conversation on Facebook: "Pro Painter Magazine"**



### DynaPatch Pro

How many times does a repaint job not need some kind of wall repair before the roller gets wet? Not often, right? That's why you need a professional grade spackle. DynaPatch Pro does everything a great spackle should. It resists shrinking and cracking, it dries fast, sands clean, and it works on just about any surface you'll run into: drywall, wood, fiberboard, MDF and even metal doors. Hardly any smell, works indoors or outside and has a low odour. The water-based formulation cleans up easily with soap and water. Got some especially small flaws to fix? DynaPatch Light works like the Pro formulation, but dries white and doesn't need sanding as long as you're neat with the drywall knife. DynaPatch Pro comes in four sizes from 236ml to 850ml, and DynaPatch Light from 240ml to the whopping 3.78L tub.

### Dynamic Disposable Coveralls

No matter how careful you are, getting paint on yourself is simply a reality of the painting profession. And when you don't necessarily want to put on your regular whites, these ultra light coveralls can help. An extra-large pair weighs only 5 ounces, so you won't even notice you're wearing them. Although officially called "disposable", these coveralls can actually last for multiple uses as long as you're careful with them. The elasticized head, ankle and wrist holes keep dust, dirt and contaminants out for jobs beyond painting. Perfect for working on vehicles, working with wood, or working around dangerous materials where you want to get rid of your clothing afterwards. Available in M, L, XL and XXL sizes, these professional-grade coveralls are made with breathable fabric that lets moisture escape.



**Dynamic Protective Footwear Covers**

No matter how good a paint job you do, you'll still get in trouble if you track dirt into some buildings or scratch floors. Saving you the trouble of taking off potentially damaging footwear is one of the things these protective covers are designed to do. Great for all painters, contractors, real estate agents, appliance repair people or anyone else who has to go into homes with potentially dirty shoes. Fits over almost any kind of shoe, the elasticized cuff and slip-resistant sole mean you can put them on then forget they're there.

These covers may not be stylish, but they sure do show that you understand detail and that you respect customer property. They also help keep your footwear clean and paint-free.



**Dynamic Painter's Hand Cleaner**

Your skin absorbs chemicals and that's why a non-toxic hand cleaner makes sense. Just don't think that non-toxic means non-effective. Far from it. This Dynamic hand cleaner works exceptionally quickly with or without water. It's pumice-free, so instead of mineral abrasives it contains engineered plastic scrubbers for noticeably better abrasive action. Made to remove paints, resins, adhesives, urethanes, lacquers and caulking from hands and surfaces, performance is more than you can expect from homeowner-grade cleaners. Contains no parabens and is lanolin-free to reduce the chance of allergic reactions. This formulations smells great and contains enough aloe vera to keep your hands soft and healthy, too. Available in 60ml, 500ml and 3.5L (with pump) sizes.





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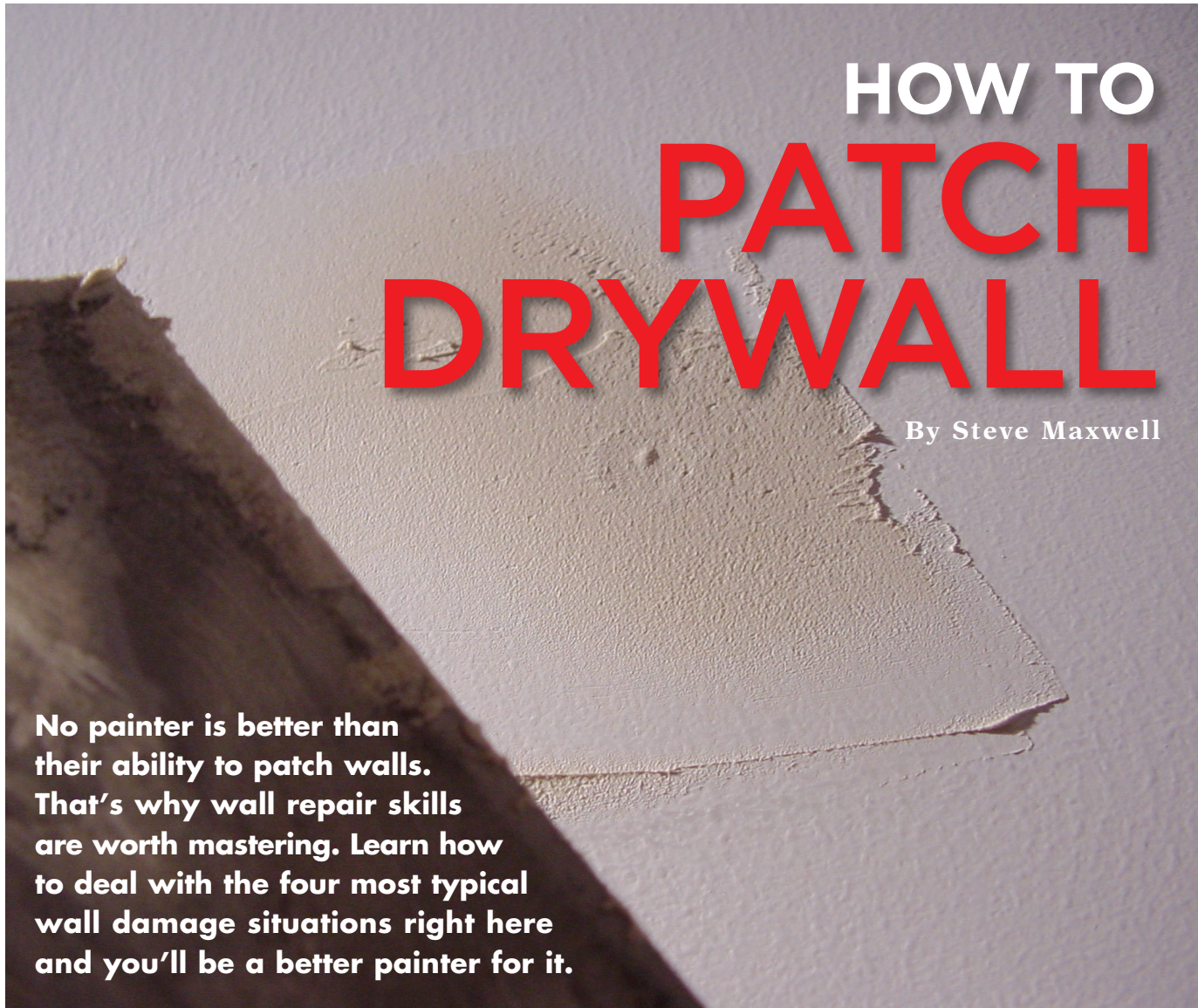
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**No painter is better than their ability to patch walls. That's why wall repair skills are worth mastering. Learn how to deal with the four most typical wall damage situations right here and you'll be a better painter for it.**

### Patching Old Nail and Screw Holes



The key to invisible repair here is something call dimpling. Grab the handle with your fist, with the rounded end of the handle pointing towards the wall. Give the nail hole three or



four good hits with the end of the handle to create a dimpled depression in the drywall. This creates a place for a critical mass of spackle to sit, harden securely and get sanded later. Less obvious but more important is the way dimpling drives down any loose paper fibers around the nail hole. Nothing will be sticking up above the wall surface when you've

## Basic Wall Patching Tool Kit

*Every painter needs a wall prep kit that contains these essentials:*

### Utility knife:

You'll use this to slice drywall paper and loose bits of drywall away from areas of damage. My favourite type of utility knife for wall patching uses the widest type of segmented blades.

### Drywall knife:

A 4" model is best and it's important that you keep your drywall knives clean and polished so they slide over the spackling compound smoothly.

### Wall patching compound:

There are many different kinds available, but my current favorite needs no priming before painting.

### Couple of sanding sponges:

Sanding sponges come in different grades and I keep two types in my own kit: an 80-grit and a 120-grit.



pounded a nail hole properly, and that's what you need.

Next, open your tub of spackle, dip into the compound with the corner of your drywall knife, then smear the spackle into the hole. Swipe some on generously at first, followed by removal of most of the excess with a second or third swipe of your drywall knife. The ideal result has the whole dimpled area filled, with the level of spackle slightly higher than the surrounding wall.

When the spackle feels dry, gently start sanding the area with your 80-grit sanding sponge held flat to the wall. If you run into gummy or moist looking compound, stop sanding.



You need to let the patched zone dry more. As you sand, use a circular motion over the patched area, extending out beyond it. The aim is not just to smooth the dry spackle, but also to ease the transition between the patched zone and surrounding wall. There's nothing as effective as a bright light shining at a shallow angle across the wall to highlight areas that need more sanding. Don't get lazy and forget the light. When you've finished with the 80-grit sponge, repeat the process with the 120-grit to make the area smooth. As long as you used a spackle that's ready to paint after it dries, no primer is necessary.

### Fixing Drywall Screw Pops



There are four steps to this job: removal of all existing drywall compound over the screw head; tightening the screw with a hand-held screwdriver; filling the space over the screw with spackling compound; then sanding the hardened spackle with a sanding sponge.



The tip of a utility knife with the blade pulled in is an excellent tool for picking out compound from screw pops. Clean old compound from the Phillips head of the screw, then tighten the screw so the head sits just below the surrounding drywall surface. At this stage you should have a smooth, slightly recessed screw head with frazzle-free drywall around it. Now's the time to get out your drywall knife and your tub of spackle, then swipe a coat of filler into the slight depression. Apply enough to fill the space, with the compound sitting slightly higher than the surrounding wall – just like you did with the nail hole repair.



Leave the compound to dry, then take your 80-grit sanding sponge and rub the area with circular motions to smooth and level it. This work doesn't take much pressure, but it does take a good eye. You want to sand enough to make the patched area flat, but not so much that it starts to become dished again. Use a hand-held light when sanding.

### Fixing Holes as Big as a Walnut



Removing big wall anchors can sometimes leave ugly, gaping holes, and so can impacts from door knobs and over-enthusiastically propelled kids' toys. Frazzled edges of the paper around the edges of the hole poses the first challenge, and you'll need to do some surgery with your utility knife to fix the problem. Break off the tip of your blade if it's not sharp, then make a circular cut that encompasses the entire damaged area.



Apply enough pressure on the knife to go right through the paper in one pass. Lift one corner of the paper with the tip of your knife, grab it with your fingers, then pull the paper off, ideally in one, donut-shaped piece. The objective is to create a smooth, frazzle-free transition where the undamaged paper meets the area of wall damage. If any paper frazzles are present, they'll stick up and remain visible after filling. That's why cutting the paper cleanly is key.



Now's the time to fill the clean cavity you've created, and setting type compounds are the thing to use. These come as a powder that you mix with water into a paste. Once the water has been added, the paste gets hard by chemical reaction. How long does it take? That depends on the product you've chosen, but cure time is generally 45 to 90 minutes. Some setting type compounds are meant to be sanded after they're hard, and others are unsandable. Sandable compounds are better because they can be smoothed with your sanding sponge before going on to the final filling step with spackle. Add water slowly to the powder until the mixed consistency is similar to spackle, then use your drywall knife to smear the setting compound into the cavity. Smooth it over so there's no excess above the surface, then let it harden. This is not the final filling stage, only the first of two stages.

Next, apply spackle so it's fairly smooth and a tiny bit higher than the surrounding wall – just like you did before.



When the spackle has dried, sand the area with circular motions of your sanding sponge, making sure the area of patching feathers away to nothing as it meets surrounding drywall. Start with the 80-grit sponge and finish with the 120-grit.

## Repairing Holes Bigger Than a Walnut

When drywall holes are big, the initial coat of filler you apply will just flop out. This is when adding strips of wood to form a backing becomes necessary before filling.

Start the repair process using the same method of cutting frazzled paper from the perimeter of the hole and remove loose chunks of drywall in the middle of the damage zone. Next, use drywall screws to secure strips of wood behind the



hole. These can be 1/2" thick plywood or strips of 3/4" softwood. Overall width of about 1 1/2" works well. Just use a handsaw to cut the strips 3" or 4" longer than needed to span the opening, extending at least 1" into areas of drywall with undisturbed paper above them. Use a single drywall screw to secure each end of each strip. Keep adding strips like this until you have the space covered, with about 1/4" of space between each strip. You won't be able to hold the last strip with your fingers, so drive a single screw part way into the middle of the strip as a handle, move the strip into position into the last remaining area of the hole while holding onto this screw, anchor both ends of the strip with two more drywall screws, then remove your handle screw.

Fill the area using setting type compound like before. For repair areas larger than a grapefruit, you'll find it easier to spread the compound using a 12" plasterer's trowel, not your drywall knife. The plasterer's trowel is longer and better able to create smooth, wave-free results. If any significant craters remain after this initial filling, you may need to apply setting compound again, followed by a coat of spackle and sanding. Smooth the surface with circular motions from a sanding block, feathering the edges of the repair zone seamlessly with the surrounding wall.

While it's true that a good drywall repair is a beautiful thing on its own, it's also the essential foundation for a great looking paint job. You can't be really good at painting if you're not also good at patching.

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## Fix Small Cracks Fast

Drywall joints often develop non-expanding cracks, and latex caulking is the easiest way to fix them. Scrape off any loose paint around the crack, then smear in some latex caulking with your finger. Scrape off all caulking that's on the surface of the wall, let the remaining caulking dry, then paint.

**SUPERCHARGE YOUR PAINTING:**

**5** Little-known products to make you better



As impressive as modern paints and painting supplies are, they're not perfect. Some situations still require properties that simply don't yet come packed in a can. That's where specialty painting and finishing options can help. Knowing how and when to use them gives you advantages when it comes to the quality and speed of your work. Check out these five little-known painting products and see the problems they can solve for you.

**Paint Extenders** 1

Add these to paint and urethane and it slows drying time, increases flow out and makes it easier to maintain a wet edge. Thinning out paint with solvent or water does the same thing, but at the expense of paint body and solids content. Extenders deliver their results without compromising paint quality.

Never used extenders before? They're available for latex and solvent-based coatings, and work just as well with paints, clear coats and urethanes. Useful when brushing, rolling or spraying, extenders deliver the following benefits:

- increased open time;
- elimination of brush marks
- increase coating coverage
- elimination of "dry spray" pebbling

Worried that extenders might damaged your finished results? Try some on a test patch and you'll find that there's no yellowing, clouding or brittleness. The chemistry is mature and tested, and extenders don't affect colour or sheen. You'll even find extenders make it easier to apply paint because of lower friction. Depending on your situation, add 60 to 180ml of extender for every gallon of paint. You'll know it's there because paint brushes and rollers work so much more easily.

**Eco-Friendly TSP Substitutes** 2

Trisodium Phosphate (TSP for short) is one of the mainstay surface cleaners used before painting. It's cheap, traditional and highly effective, but it's also far from perfect. That's why the popularity of TSP is on the decline. it persists in the environment, runoff must be kept from lakes and rivers, and you need to wear protective clothing and gear before you can use TSP safely. Failure to remove all TSP residue from surfaces before it dries will also cause issues with the adhesion of new paint you apply. No wonder substitutes are on the rise. Besides being safer for the environment, they also work better. The biggest plus of all may just be that there's no need to flush TSP substitutes off surfaces before painting. They won't affect new coats of paint.

**Chemical Surface Etchers** 3

Every painter knows that surface prep is key, but proper prep isn't always easy. Applying a new coating over a shiny, previously-finished surface is a case in point and this is where chemical etching products can help.

Mechanical sanding with sandpaper or steel wool is one option for creating tooth on the surface so new coatings will stick, but sanding is slow and prone to errors, especially on contoured surfaces. Chemical etching offers a faster and more complete prep job than can happen with sandpaper. No need to rinse surfaces after the etcher has dried, either. Etchers are especially useful for the growing trend of painting old stained, wooden cabinets.

**High-Friction Additives** 4

An aging population and rising legal liability risks mean that no-slip surfaces are getting more and more important for professional painters. Better and more reliable traction is why you need to know about friction texture additives. Ideal for floor and stair tread surfaces, powdered friction additives are not added to coatings before they go on. Instead, they're sprinkled onto wet surfaces after application but before the coating has dried.

Think of it like sprinkling seasoning on your food. Apply on an excess of the powder, wait for the coating to dry completely, then blow or vacuum off the excess powder.

You'll be left with a consistent coverage, a high-friction surface, and a far lower risk of having someone blame you for a fall.

**Rubbing Pads** 5

In a world that's being taken over by water-based coatings, steel wool substitutes have become more and more important. Even tiny bits of steel wool residue can cause large and ugly rust blossoms, and that's one reason synthetics are in.

But synthetic abrasive pads offer other advantages, too. Used underneath a random orbit sander, they turn an ordinary painted or clear-coat surface into something that's as smooth as glass. You can't beat abrasive pads for knocking down the dust bumps between coats. They're also perfect for cleaning drywall knives and other patching tools.

It doesn't cost much to keep small, problem solving products on hand with your painting gear, yet small as they are, these items can make a difference out of all proportion to their size and cost. It's all about being ready for anything this unpredictable painting world can throw your way.

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# GOING FROM SOLO TO **BOSS?**

**REAL-WORLD  
INSIGHTS  
ABOUT HIRING  
PAINTERS AND  
GROWING  
A PAINTING  
BUSINESS**

By Robert Walton



**6  
Tips**

**G**ot a dream to hire painters and expand? There's good money to be made if you're the right kind of person, but you

need to understand the challenges up front. Learn from what real painters have to say about their experiences moving from solo to boss.



**EXPECT IT  
TO BE HARD  
TO FIND AND  
KEEP GOOD  
HELP**

“ I’ve hired painters in the past, and they all start out eager and take pride in their work. But as time goes by, the more comfortable they get the more their work suffers. They start showing up late, leaving early or calling in sick. Work gets sloppy. If I have to micro-manage an employee, or I don’t have 100 per cent faith in the quality of their work, I’d prefer to work alone and keep my high standards.

“ I’m a solo painter, but over the years I’ve hired help. The first was a temp guy. I asked for a non-smoker, and he lit up in the church bathroom during our job. I trained a nephew and niece, and they were the best summer helpers but moved on to careers. Things were getting busy, so I hired a relative part time to help with the office work, and hired a full-time lady as a painter who needed training. That lasted 4 months.



**BE SURE YOU  
UNDERSTAND  
YOURSELF**

“ I’ve had 12 guys working for me, I’ve painted solo, and I’ve painted every way in between. For my money, I like the smaller feel. I keep a guy or two around pretty much all year full time. It’s manageable. Finding the right people is everything. I’ve had one guy for seven years, and another for two years straight.

“ I did all my own work for a number of years and never had an issue. Not one complaint. So when the work was too much, I decided to hire a friend who was looking for work. Why not share with a friend, right? Well, that’s when the complaints started rolling in!

“You can’t expect what you don’t inspect. That’s rule #1 of having others work in your company.”



**GET BIG  
ENOUGH  
TO MAKE IT  
WORTHWHILE**

“ I had nine employees during my best year, three of which had their papers and six didn’t. It was my best grossing year ever, but it burnt me out. The best advise I ever got was from a caterer. If you really wanna make money, you gotta get a bigger crew. Six guys or 60 are gonna be the same headaches. So which direction do you wanna go? I went small.

“ I hired a guy five years ago and have kept him busy ever since. Last year I had a client recommend a helper who was a recent university grad. I was only going to use him for the summer but have kept him gainfully employed for the last 12 months. When I was solo, I worked less and socialized more with vendors and clients. With two people on board you have a sounding board for ideas. Days go by quicker and you can leave your painter alone to attend to banking, estimates, sick days with kids, etc. You’ve also got another body to clean the shop. But with your second painter hired, you can’t have downtime. The income statement needs to be the main focus. Estimation accuracy as well as cash-flow management are key. Fast forward today and I’m booked three months out with interior projects. I’m trying to say no, but clients are willing to wait. Most of my days are in the field, nights spent estimating, even later nights typing them up. Early mornings I do payroll, meet deduction deadlines, lists for materials, etc. With two painters on board there’s no breathing room for me. Three painters might actually be better so I can focus more on sales and administration and less in the field.

*Continued on page 19.*

“I’ll never hire again.  
I’ll work as part of  
somebody else’s project  
but that’s it.”

“One extra guy is  
almost a necessity.  
Together we often do the  
job of a three-man crew.”





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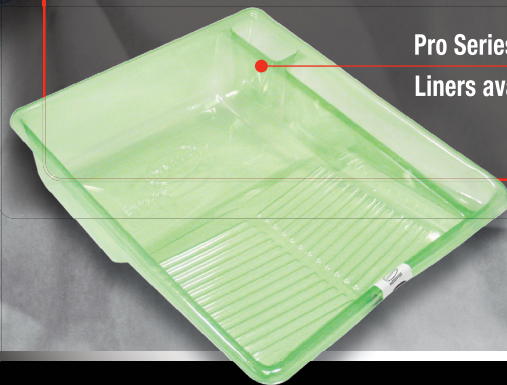
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Continued from page 16.

**4**

**HIRE FOR  
ATTITUDE,  
TRAIN FOR  
SKILL**

“ I wouldn’t work alone. Never did, never will. My suggestion is to find someone younger and mold them. There are good people out there. Just avoid the ones into drinking, drugs, showing up late and those who’ve become painters by default. In my opinion you can make a lot more money with a crew working for you. The big hitters have one to five crews. Is it easy finding the right people? No, it’s not. But ultimately if you want to grow you need more hands. Stop hiring know-it-alls!

“ I constantly manage crews of one to 12 people who have little or no experience. We get it done and I swear it’s all about the prep, teaching and supervision. On average we deal with only five or six deficiencies for 25 homes.

“ I’ve seen people who think that the longer your roller sits on the wall the faster you’re painting. I call those people dry rollers. In my opinion, it’s the amount of time that roller is not on the wall – the time between dips – that matters. I’ve worked with guys that I dip three times to their one. I go farther on the wall and put more paint on per square foot, so obviously my work looks better. And be sure to teach your painters to keep that cut pot within easy reach for dips. I worked next to a guy who would cut out of a 5 gallon pail. One day when I saw him going up and down a ladder for every dip I was extremely annoyed, and he wasn’t even my employee.

**5**

**YOU’LL NEED  
TO BE  
PATIENT &  
PERSISTENT**

“ I’ve had up to 14 painters employed – seven painters and seven guys who thought they were painters. Quality help is difficult to find. I’ve had three ads on *Craigslist* with no luck. I’ve had a couple of guys filling in with me on the weekends and I now have a part time apprentice who works when she’s not in school. Needless to say I am still searching.

“ I have ONE guy that I call when I need REAL help...not just another pair of hands. He does what he’s there for and he’s a damn good painter!

**6**

**YOU’VE GOT  
TO BE AN  
EFFECTIVE  
AND FAIR  
LEADER**

“ If you’re going to hire someone – especially if you want to eventually delegate responsibility to them – it becomes your job to teach the heart of why you make the decisions you do. You always have to explain everything 100 times to employees before there’s a problem. Explain until you see their eyes glaze over, then explain things a little more – always with humor and fun. And be sure to pay them well when they make you money!

“ I hope you’re using an app called Joist or something similar for typing up estimates. I usually reserve one day a week for office work, or I work a 6-hour painting day then spend time in the evening on administration.

“ I was foreman of nine crews of two guys for a boss. I did estimates, scheduling, supervising, client relations, color and design collaboration and payroll. Buying paint, delivering supplies, setting up jobs and cleaning up afterwards. Follow up visits, cold calls, advertising ideas, laying off when times were slow. I never did the hiring, training or bookkeeping. I had to use my own vehicle for all this, too. The final straw was when I found out my boss had spent three days driving around the Maritimes trying to get the best deal on a pickup truck. He brought me into the office and said times were slow (I was working 60 to 80 hours a week), and told me he had to cut my pay from \$16/ hr. to \$12.50/hr. I walked out to work on my own and never looked back. BTW, that old boss never did get his truck and went out of business two years later.

“ I’ve had hundreds of different men and women work for me. I can name at least two who had been convicted and served for murder. I can name three who had been convicted and served for bank robbery. (BTW, bank robbers seem to be pretty honourable guys for some weird reason.) I’ve had drunks, junkies, coke freaks and worse. I’m now down to a five man crew and I’m back on the tools myself because I kinda like it. At my age maybe it’s time to get off the horse and leave the game to others. I feel that those entering the trades will be able to ask for open cheques – as real tradespeople are becoming rare.

*So, does being your own painting boss sound like it’s for you? It really comes down to what you want from the trade and what kind of person you are.*

PP

Three-man painting crew at Ecclesiastical Studios and Sons restores the awe and majesty of grand old churches.

# Holy



*Don Wendt (left) and son Alex (right) are second and third generation church painters. They specialize in all areas of interior churches, travelling up to 500 miles from home for jobs.*

# Rolling



BY STEVE MAXWELL

If you haven't been to church for a while, you might consider going for professional reasons. There's a lot more painting skill behind traditional churches than you might realize, and it's definitely worth looking at. Alex Wendt, his father Don and long-time friend and painting colleague Cliff Foth are the three men behind Ecclesiastical Studios & Sons, Kansas City, Mo. This third generation firm specializes in the restoration of traditional church interiors, and you'd be hard pressed to find situations that involve more variety and that demand more skill than what these guys deal with on every project.

"About 80 per cent of the painting we do is entire interior church restorations", says Alex. "The rest of our church work consists of statuary and altar restorations. I like restoring these old churches because you can be as creative as you want doing a variety of things – decorative and architectural painting, plaster repair, stenciling, gold gilding and trompe l'oeil painting. Every day is different."

Alex grew up around the painting business and was on jobsites with his father starting when he was 3. "I began painting full time after high school in 2007. Before that I was only part time. Growing up I always wanted to be a painter. Having a father in the business gave me a leg up, along with on-the-job training that started early."



*All types of painting tools and techniques are used for restoring old churches. Everything from rollers and sprayers to the finest bristle brushes and air brushes.*

All photos: KlixPix / Chris Bendet



Alex Wendt (left) and his dad Don (right) continue the church painting tradition first brought to the family by Don's uncle.

### Art On A Huge Scale

In many ways, restoring lavish, old church interiors blends the skills of a classical artist with that of a modern commercial painter. Church spaces are often large and tall, and this makes for challenges of scale. Scaffolding, spray equipment and gallons of paint are all part of ordinary life as an ecclesiastical painter. At the same time, church painting also involves brushes small enough to color the eyeball on a statue of a saint being refurbished. What could be a wider range of scale than that? These high-stakes, high-variety situations lead to another extreme that you don't often see on painting jobs. An extreme that affects how jobs are estimated.

"We always use the very best quality products we can find because materials are only a small fraction of the bid", says Alex. "Cost of materials is no object with these projects. The

majority of our job cost is labor, so we don't focus on materials cost at all. We've heard that some contractors nickel and dime their clients on every little expense, including the use of cheaper materials. We don't buy in to this philosophy. Why would we want to trust all our hard work on materials that are lacking in quality and performance? We definitely don't want call backs because a stenciled ceiling or gold gilding has started to fail."

Painting traditional church interiors is not something that's easy to learn. You could hire on with a crew that does this work and learn from them, but that's not a situation that's easy to find. In the case of Ecclesiastical Studios, the skill came into the family a generation before Alex's father, Don.

"Dad learned on the job from his uncle Michael Wendt, starting in the mid 70's. Mike originally married into the



Painting church interiors means painting everything. Here Alex is refurbishing a stations of the cross element.



Old churches usually involve lots of interior wood and this means lots of masking. Painter's tape means no fussing around to get crisp results.



Gold gilding like this involves real gold powder mixed with lacquer, then sealed under clear coat.

## Specialized Skills

Alex, Don and Cliff tackle details that most painters never get to try. It's all part of the ecclesiastical painting world and it includes ancient techniques such as:

**Trompe l'oeil:** This is a French term meaning "deceive the eye". It's an art technique that uses realistic images to create the impression of three dimensions. Trompe l'oeil has been around since ancient times, but was perfected as a technique in 15th century Renaissance Italy. "We sometimes restore existing trompe l'oeil," explains Alex, "but we create them mostly from scratch. It can be challenging work, but I wouldn't say it's the most difficult thing we do."

**Gold gilding:** "We typically use a lacquer gold process," explains Alex. "This involves mixing a gold powder into bronzing lacquer that's either sprayed or brushed on. After that we apply an acrylic clear coat to protect the gold."

**Stenciling:** "Our stencils are made from sheets of mylar plastic," says Alex. "We make the cut out by first drawing the design onto the material, and then use a stencil burner to cut out the shape. This tool is just a very hot needle that melts through the plastic. When it comes to painting with the stencil, we don't actually use a brush very often. Our tool of choice is an air brush to apply gold or colored lacquer."



*Church restorations involves everything from painting massive walls and ceilings to intricate repainting of religious statues.*



*Alex Wendt (left) is a perfect example of a man who learned his trade the old-fashioned way. He's been following his dad, Don Wendt, on jobs since he was 3 years old.*

business when he was in his early 30's, and the skills passed to us through him."

It generally takes the trio 15 to 30 weeks to paint a church interior. "We don't do exteriors very often", says Alex. "We've done a few, but we like to focus on interiors. That's our specialty."

As you'd expect with projects that are always so old, patching is a big part of the prep work that happens before painting begins. And this kind of patching involves a lot more than just fixing nail holes in drywall. "First we hand scrape all loose and damage plaster and paint," explains Alex, "then put on a conditioner to harden the plaster so it forms a solid base for filling. Next, we trowel in new plaster to match the existing surface, shaping it as needed. If we've got peeling paint, sometimes it's better to consolidate it

rather than scraping everything off. That's when we'll use a peel bond product before patching."

Looking at the finished projects done by the Ecclesiastical team, you've got to wonder about the complication of church congregations choosing colors, patterns and painting styles. After all, it's hard enough for most married couples to agree on two or three paint colors for their home. How much more complicated would it be with a whole congregation fund-raising together and trying to agree on the dozens of paint choices that go into a church job? But sometimes when things get too complicated, it actually forces them to become simpler. That's the case here.

"We like to have complete control over the designs and colors used in each of our projects", says Alex. "But we sometimes have to work with the priest or church committee on





*Painting the interior of large churches is a big job, but the three-man crew completes most projects in just 15 to 30 weeks.*

some things like liturgical rules or designations. Having three generations worth of experience means we have acquired a good deal of knowledge on these historical structures.”

The oldest church that Ecclesiastical has ever painted is St. Joseph Catholic Church in Leavenworth, Kansas. It was 150 years old back in 2007 when they took on the job. The team rarely does new churches, and this means they often have to travel far from home for work. “The distances vary from job to job, but they all require a lot of travel time”, says Alex. “There are only so many churches close to home that need to be restored. On the jobs that are 500 plus miles away, we usually stay until the work is complete. My favorite part of this business is the restoration phase and seeing the transformation first hand. My least favorite part is being away from home for long periods of time.”

### Taking Care of Business

“When we’re not restoring majestic places of worship”, says Alex, “I fall back on interior and exterior residential repaints around the Kansas City area under my own painting business – AW Painting Co. My dad encouraged me to start this back in 2009 and it’s been a good thing. Working on homes keeps my skills sharp and gives me valuable experience dealing with customers, writing contracts, running a jobsite and problem solving.”

Word of mouth brings most of the work to Alex and Don, but active marketing is part of the mix, too. This includes direct mailings and cold calls. They’ll be trying social media ads soon.

“When we meet with a potential client, we always stress certain things”, says Alex. “First, we never sub anything out.



*Alex has painted many churches in his time, but he remains amazed at how these exceptional buildings were made.*

We do all work ourselves all the time. If we can't do the work, we won't bid on the job. We also only do one project at a time. This way each client gets our full attention. It helps that we own our scaffolding and rigging, too. We're comfortable using it and there's never any delay because subbed-out rigging didn't happen as it was supposed to. All bids are complete, with no charges added later."

What's the most surprising thing about the business side of painting churches? "You'd be amazed at all the legal red tape we have to go through just to get the project" says Alex. "You need an attorney just to decode the contract, all the insurances you need to carry, and the sheer volume of paper work takes a lot of time. It's not like the old days were you could seal the deal on a hand shake and good faith."

"The thing that impresses me most about our work is the chance to see how these churches were built. Even when you've seen as many as I have", says Alex, "you've got to be amazed how these wonderful creations went up, all without computers or heavy equipment. You gotta love these magnificent places."



pp



### Dulux Helps Out

Paint makes a big difference to the landscape of any community, and paint is just what 25 non-profit Canadian organizations in need will get this year – paint and the people to put it on. That's what a unique initiative by Dulux Paint is all about. "We're encouraging the public to nominate charities, non-profit organizations

and other community groups in need of renewal anywhere in Canada," explains Martin Tustin-Fuchs, brand manager for Dulux Paints. "This year we're aiming to transform the 25 organizations in greatest need."

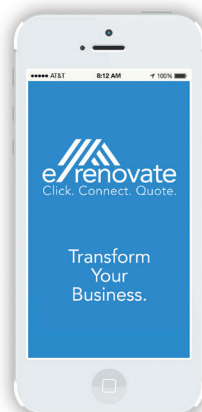
Dulux has already provided hundreds of thousands of dollars of paint and resources to community spaces since 2011, and the company also provides paint for all home building projects of Habitat for Humanity Canada. Nominations for the 2015 campaign are open right now for non-profits that need a facelift. Mention this initiative to your painting clients and make nominations yourself at [www.colourfulcommunities.ca](http://www.colourfulcommunities.ca)

### Painter Training

There's painting to be done in Greenburgh, New York and plenty of underemployed people looking for work. All that's missing is skills, and that's where something called the Fisherman's Project comes in. Led by the town of Greenburgh, it's both a training program and a painting company, and it uses the internet, hands-on skills development and an apprenticeship model to solve an ongoing community problem. "There are a significant number of unemployed people in this town," explains Marty Rolnick, an organizer behind the Fisherman's Project. "And at the same time many of our elderly, disabled and disadvantaged residents can't afford to maintain their homes properly, either. Empowering people to fill this community need is what we're doing." The motto of the not-for-profit venture "paint it forward", and is in its earliest stages right now. When it's all set up the Fisherman's Project will use online video training, hands-on teaching sessions and an apprenticeship model to help the community help itself. So what's with the name? Rolnick explains: "We call it the Fisherman's Project from that old saying: Give a person a fish and feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish and feed them for a lifetime." Email [martyrolnick@gmail.com](mailto:martyrolnick@gmail.com) for more information.

### eRenovate

Winning good painting jobs is just about to get easier, and a new Canadian mobile phone app and website called eRen-



ovate is the reason why. Sign up and create a business profile that includes a description and a photo gallery. You can even add an intro video if you want. When property owners looking for a painter in your area post their job on the eRenovate system, it automatically sends an invitation to you for a bid. You can review project photos and details, provide a quote, and send an intro video with your info if you want. You get direct contact with interested clients and are free to exchange texts, emails or phone calls, prior to setting up an onsite meeting

to provide a quote. It's like a dating service for painters. Leads come to you, and you can deal with them more quickly than the old fashioned way. "Our motto is Click, Connect and Quote," says Tom Cordeiro, president of eRenovate. "Our goal is to make it easier for tradespeople of all kinds to get the jobs they want. The less time you spend looking for painting jobs, the more time you spend making money. The app also keeps out the riffraff, the tire-kickers and the fly-by-night painters through a professional verification process. eRenovate is open now for painters and contractors to sign up." The app opens its doors to the public this fall, and that's when job notifications will start coming through. Learn more and sign up at [erenovate.com/contractors/pro-app](http://erenovate.com/contractors/pro-app) or email them at [memberservices@erenovate.com](mailto:memberservices@erenovate.com).

### Nova Scotia Simplifies

Anyone running a small business knows the hassles of dealing with government paperwork, permits and regulations spread out across various departments. It's not just the work itself, but also the friction of dealing with disjointed government application processes, offices and permit requirements that's so much trouble. This is where the expansion of a Nova Scotia government website can teach other places how to be better. "We've been an analog government in a digital world," says Mark Furey, head of Service Nova Scotia, "and that puts us at a disadvantage from a business perspective." The updated and evolving provincial website "ignores departmental lines and instead focuses on what business people need," explains Furey. Currently active for the restaurant and accommodation sectors but expanding to other areas of the provincial economy, the website is a click-and-get-it-done place for permits, business names, licenses and all other government requirements. There's even an opportunity to sign up for notification of government tenders. "The need to transition into a truly digital government is absolutely necessary for us to be competitive across the country and to be competitive on a global scale," said Furey. See what evolving efficiency looks like at [novascotia.ca/sns/access/business.asp](http://novascotia.ca/sns/access/business.asp).

pp



## Fanciest Utility Poles in the World

By Agnes von Mehren

In the last issue of *Pro Painter* magazine, I told you about the work Tattoowall was doing with the West Queen Street West Business Improvement Association. We've partnered with them to cover graffiti on public planters using large works of art applied using unique Tattoowall process. We'll be doing the same with more planters this August, and the campaign to beautify the urban landscape has now expanded to include something brand new.

Rob Sysak, executive director of West Queen West Business Improvement Association, has been in discussions with the board of the BIA to beautify utility poles in the neighbourhood, and Tattoowall will be making this happen. Retailers and members of the BIA are innovative in their approach to merchandising, and this attitude moves beyond just the world-renowned shops and cafes in the area. Last year West Queen West was named "the coolest neighbourhood in the world" by *Vogue* magazine, so they've got a reputation to uphold.

Our new work will involve covering the concrete hydro poles on the north side of the street using the unique Tattoowall process. Large, colourful images are printed, then applied to surfaces seamlessly. In the case of our Queen Street West work, we also apply a protective sealant that prevents vandalism and damage.

Wires and street signs on these poles mean we can't go

higher than 9 feet with our art, but that's still where most people will be looking anyway. The BIA will choose the images that we'll print and apply. Once the poles have been inspected for damage and repaired as needed, we'll get to work.

The process will be the same as the work we've done on planters, except the Tattoowall images will be applied to wrap completely around each pole. The selected images will be sent to the printer, scaled for the 34-inch circumference of each pole, then printed and prepped on site for application. Adhesive is applied to both the image and the pole, with two installers doing the work. One manages the application while another holds the image away from the pole as it's going on.

The West Queen West neighbourhood is one of Canada's showcase urban destinations, and soon even the utility poles will look the part. In the next issue of *Pro Painter*, I'll report on the installation and how it all went.

pp



Agnes von Mehren is president of Masters Academy and the leading practitioner of the Tattoowall process in Canada. For more information on using Tattoowall in your work as a painter, visit [www.mada-arts.com](http://www.mada-arts.com); email [mastersTattoowall@gmail.com](mailto:mastersTattoowall@gmail.com) or call 647 346 3870

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**B**ig and beautiful. That's the best way to describe an epic, 10,000 square foot house in Pensacola, Florida, painted by Richard Ingram and his team at Richard Ingram LLC. Five bedrooms, 7 bathrooms, an office, a school room, dining room, mud room, finished basement, 4-car garage, a safe room and playroom – all sitting on 160 acres of land.

“Other than the size, the main challenge was all the different colours and stains used on different types of wood”, explains Ingram. “I’m thankful that the homeowners were very easy to get along with on this job.”

Ingram and two employees started the house in November 2014 and finished up in April 2015. “We painted the inside and outside of this place”, says Ingram, “including 1500 lineal feet of crown, 67 doors, plus fancy casings on every window.”

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