

Painting the Walls of Jericho... Vermont, That Is.

If your customers are getting into green, but you're not, you're more or less telling them to shop someone else who is. Scott Burt, owner of Topcoat Finishes in Jericho, VT, runs a painting firm that specializes in high-end residential homes with an emphasis on new construction. In other words, he paints for people who can afford the best products and often want it Green.



"Lately, homeowner concern about indoor air quality is higher than ever, particularly among parents of young children," he points out. "There is also heightened awareness of paint dust and chips as by-products of the paint job, which may stem from the Chinese lead paint debacle." Also, contractors are starting to realize the benefits of working with products that won't damage their health over long-term use. "I think the new Green technologies are good for everyone involved."

You may have to do a bit of damage control, however, if your painters are blue over an older generation of Green that put them in the red. "Many painters have memories of early incarnations that spread thin, took forever to dry and weren't available in deep bases," says Burt. "Our dealer, Vermont Paint Company, has open houses a couple times a year where painters can come in and try new products. That's the best way to re-open your painters' minds—put the product in their hands."

VOC... Very Organized Chaos

You, your contractors and your homeowners may all have a different perception of how easy it is to be Green. "Many third party organizations try to define it—Greenguard, Green Seal, LEED—and that makes it even more complicated to understand." Burt says it's more than who can make the lowest-VOC product. If a product doesn't work and you have to use more of it, or it's being shipped in from Timbuktu, then it's not necessarily contributing to the planet's welfare. "In some cases a zero-VOC product can be impractical and wasteful,"

he says. "I try to steer people toward products with the right balance of green and performance for the application at hand."

With reputable products, however, it's pretty easy to get Green into the equation. "Often our customers are working with an architect or design professional and they are very open to environmentally-friendly alternatives," he says. "Once Green products become part of the discussion, that's usually what we end up using."

Without prejudice, we asked Burt to name a few products he really liked.

- Benjamin Moore Aura Interior has been the most significant addition to our arsenal," he says, with plans to incorporate Aura exterior as well.
- Mythic Non-Toxic. "It's a very legitimate Green alternative, especially at its price point."
- Zar Ultramax from UGL. "It's a waterborne oil-modified urethane, which is the best of both worlds."
- Bioshield Oil is also a product we have used on a rather large scale," he says.

"In all of these cases, it's pretty easy to sell homeowners on the value of using a more thoughtfully crafted product."

Burt tries out new technologies as soon as they are available—dealers who do this as well can stay on the cutting edge and get business from forward thinking painters.

"Some come with great expectations they don't quite live up to, and others really impress us," he observes. "It's important to stay on top of the new technologies because the product landscape is changing significantly each year. We need to know all of the alternatives coming down the pike." **TPD**



Above Left: Scott Burt of Topcoat Finishes. Below: Topcoat did all the painting in this model of sustainable building practices. The substrates were predominantly maple and cherry woods, plaster and a small component of drywall. Bioshield oil was applied to all the wood surfaces, with Benjamin Moore Aura on the paint grade elements.