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**NEW TECHNOLOGY
IN PAINT STRIPPING**

Is There an Eco in Here?

Part Deux

Why Natura?



By Scott Burt

Benjamin Moore launched its new Natura line around the country in recent months and raised the collective question among paint contractors: “Don’t they have enough lines already?” Apparently not. My paint contracting company received a healthy batch of Natura during its test market phase last fall and began dabbling with it in a number of different scenarios. Usually, field tests and product reviews focus more on the “how.” As in, how did it spread/dry/smell/look/feel? For the purposes of this discussion, the more appropriate and resonant question from paint contractors appears to be why?

Among the paint products that my company purchases, Benjamin Moore is one of the most commonly used. We use a lot of Aura. Before we used a lot of Aura, we used a lot of Regal. In fact, in the spring of 07’, I have it on pretty good authority that I was perhaps the first to put out a field test/product review of Aura for a print publication. I remember feeling at that time (very much like I did when I received Natura last year) that I liked the product that I was already using. But it worked...very well, in fact. Since 07’, Aura has established itself, in my com-

pany, as a true ultra-premium product. This time around, Natura was the new stuff, but we were already quite happy with Regal and Aura. So, why Natura?

One of the things I have learned sleuthing around the paint industry is that two of the ingredients of paint product success are marketing and chemistry. This is why, when I am researching a product, I speak with a

work building Aura in a semigloss and a kitchen and bathroom blend and even tweaked the existing Aura base to make it a bit more user friendly. In their spare time they are creating, the new ben line, and the zero-VOC Eco-Spec. So, just where exactly did Natura come from and how does it fit into this fleet of products?

Natura seems to have been born from concern for the ever-tightening and perpetually impending tightening of VOC restrictions on paints. For those who may be thinking that the “green” movement is a big fat marketing ploy, it is time to reconsider, for a number of reasons. It is safe to say that the research and development dollars that go into creating and marketing the launch of a new premium product that is not headed for the big-box

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factory product marketing representative and a senior chemist from the manufacturer whenever possible. Most companies are pretty good about facilitating this communication. Rather than load this column up with gratuitous quotations, I will paraphrase and interpret. What I learned on speaking with a Benjamin Moore marketing executive was that they are never satisfied. It’s not enough for them to have grown firm roots under Aura in a relatively short time, but they have still been back to

stores is no small undertaking. Natura is a can of paint with a manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP) of around \$49/gallon. This is not something that shows up on the paint store shelf haphazardly. Further, if in 2010 all interior paints are required to come in under 50 grams per liter (g/l), Regal as we know it would be in danger because it falls closer to 100 g/l. Would it be a sound business decision to reformulate this product to meet anticipated VOC restrictions, or would it

make more sense to move to a new technology? The answer lies somewhere in the future, and perhaps a future where Regal's number gets retired and raised to the rafters at BM headquarters.

Let's take a look at the facts. Regal, historically the graceful workhorse in the Benjamin Moore stable, is not low-VOC. Its colors are still fueled by the old-school glycol tint technology. Aura is low-VOC and uses the Benjamin Moore patented and proprietary Gennex zero-VOC colorant system. What may seem to be a small detail is actually a pretty big deal when you consider the reality that many zero-VOC paints use colorants with VOC levels as high as 150 g/l. Natura is a true zero-VOC, complete with the zero-VOC Gennex colorants. When you do the research, this is where the cream starts to rise to the top.

What we found

When we used the test marketing incarnation of Natura last November, our crew was honestly not expecting to be impressed. At that point, in our opinion, any new Benjamin Moore paint that came along without the name Aura stamped on the side would likely not satisfy. We were wrong and pleasantly surprised.

In the initial rounds of product testing we used flat, eggshell and semigloss in I and II bases. Every can we cracked open was just as good as the last. From a performance standpoint, we found the coverage on cutting and rolling to be superior to Regal in every color we used, but perhaps falling just shy of the Aura coverage benchmark. The dry time was quicker than Regal's, and slower than Aura's. Not slow, just slow compared to Aura. The positive spin on this discovery was that the open time was just right for all our painters regardless of their rate of production with brush and roller.

Sometimes manufacturers take it on the chin from paint contractors for overpromising on product performance in their marketing. Sometimes this is also a function of paint contractors not being entirely clear in their understanding of what the manufacturer is promising. With Natura, it appears that Benjamin



Moore has taken an underpromise and overdeliver approach. The marketing message is a simple, practical and well-executed series of product claims that, most important, the product can effortlessly deliver.

Without venturing further into the technical manifestations of our field experiences with Natura so far, it is sufficient for me to add in conclusion the following true account: My company recently began paint work on a 3,000-square-foot contemporary-style new construction that has been designed and built with the intention of achieving

LEED Platinum certification—the highest rank in the rating system. The homeowner is an environmental attorney with a young family—a wife and 3-month-old baby—who will be moving into the home immediately on completion of our paint work. We have purchased many gallons of Natura for the project so far, and we have a few gallons to go. Why Natura? Why anything else? **APC**

Scott Burt is a painting contractor who owns and operates Topcoat Finishes Inc. of Jericho, Vt. He can be reached at www.topcoatfinishes.com.