

Painted Finishes for Special Effects

HouseFax series... quick 'n easy tips to make your home more comfortable, affordably

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Special techniques with paints and glazes are an alternative to wallpaper and can achieve a custom look for low cost. With basic painting supplies, do-it-yourselfers can use these techniques to add interest to one wall, an entire room, or furniture.

Numerous effects can be achieved through simple techniques, such as combing or stippling, which texturize the top coat of paint or glaze. Resulting patterns can simulate wood grain, marble or other natural materials. Other techniques like spatter painting and sponging add softness or boldness, depending on colors and supplies used.

Maybe you have heard about or seen a special effect you would like to duplicate, or perhaps your walls need a fresh look. Scan these brief descriptions, then try one or several on a piece of wallboard or accessory. Determine whether you like the effect. Some of the techniques might be suitable for a family creativity project.

Selecting the Look

Following are brief descriptions of techniques to help you determine which, if any, you will use in your home. Experiment with these techniques on accessories such as picture frames, to determine your skill. **Please seek additional references for step-by-step techniques, specific supplies and safety precautions.**

ANTIQUING, often used for furniture or woodwork, creates a two-tone look that distresses or softens a painted finish to simulate age. The worn look is achieved by adding a glaze and then rubbing it down. A spattered look is achieved using a neutral color or black.

Antiquing is created by brushing on a base coat of paint, adding a special toner glaze, and wiping it to produce a streaked effect. If a wood-grain effect is desired, use fine steel wool, a terry towel, or even a piece of carpet to wipe the surface.

Proper sanding is the key to a professional-looking job. It ensures adhesion of the paint, and also makes the wood look older and more time-worn. For small projects, kits containing paint and glaze are readily available in paint stores.

CISSING is a mottled paint finish created by overlaying colored glazes and partially lifting the color with a solvent.

Cissing is done by scattering mineral spirits on oils, and water on latex. To give a natural stone or limestone-like effect, colors suggested are pink, beige, grey, oyster or ivory, charcoal and grey-green. Colors will seem to fade as they dry, but can be brightened with a coat of polyurethane.

COLOR RUBBING simulates an aging painted surface or old parchment. The partially dry glaze layer is rubbed to create this effect.

Color rubbing is to literally rub the color away. Rubbing the partially dry glaze layer produces a weathered look which emphasizes mouldings and high relief areas and deepens shadows.

The glaze is spread on extra thin, so the glaze should be tinted several times darker than the desired end color. A soft, absorbent rag is dipped into the glaze and smeared on the surface. The glaze is then rubbed, as if polishing, until the desired color is obtained.

COLOR WASHING creates a soft, hazy, paint or much-thinned glaze is applied over a typically white or light base coat. Darker colors create a "distressing" quality; lighter shades produce a more delicate appearance.

Color washing requires a dilute latex paint solution of one part paint to eight or nine parts water (for a milky effect use less water, for a dappled effect use more water). Using a 4-inch brush, apply the thin wash in loose horizontal strokes, leaving some of the ground coat color exposed. Allow the first coat to dry approximately 24 hours before applying a second coat. To protect the surface, a matte polyurethane varnish may be applied.

COMBING provides a textured surface. A large comb is moved through wet paint or glaze applied over the base coat.

Combing is most effective with contrasting ground and finish coats. The top coat can be either thinned paint or glaze.

If you are using combing on only one wall as an accent, paint the other walls first. Because combing will make the wall appear darker, mix the paint for the combed wall with white paint in a 50/50 ratio. If you prefer the combed wall to be darker than the other walls, do not add white to the paint.

If a large, wide-toothed comb is used to run through the wet surface, the comb marks will be more visible and the job will go faster. Wipe the comb after each line to prevent the thinned paint or glaze from building up.

DRAGGING results in a subtle, fairly formal surface of irregular lines. A dry brush is dragged through the wet layer of transparent glaze or wash of thinned paint.

Dragging is similar to combing, but requires a brush. Special dragging brushes are suggested, but a wallpaper or large paintbrush will also work. It is best to work a section at a time, such as in 18-inch strips. Brush the painted wall with the transparent glaze or wash of thinned paint. Then drag a dry brush lightly (this will maintain a consistent stroke) through the glaze to produce irregular lines. It is important to clean the brush after each stroke, since the purpose is to remove color from the wall.

Effects can be varied: use glaze and ground coat of the same color or contrasting colors; layer different colors; drag vertically and then horizontally to create a texture like linen.

GLAZING, covering the painted surface with a transparent layer, is the basis of many of the techniques such as marbling, rag rolling and wood graining. In each of those techniques a different pattern is created by removing the glaze.

Glazing begins with the application of a base coat. When the base coat is dry, the glaze, a semi-transparent tinted film, is applied. Although paint supply stores have a selection of ready-made glazes, there are also many recipes for glazes; check with your paint dealer or reference books.

Before dry, the glaze is removed with materials such as bunched-up rags, wadded cheesecloth, or crumpled plastic wrapping to create a unique pattern.

MALACHITE is meant to imitate the green-blue surface of the semi-precious stone. Paint is applied with a rag, then a piece of cardboard is gently dragged and wiggled through the wet paint to create striations, a striped effect such as is in the stone.

Malachite finishes look difficult, but are simply done in steps. Use a rag to apply the paint, then drag a piece of corrugated cardboard gently through the paint, wiggling it side to side to create the striations of malachite.

MARBLEIZING is a technique for imitating the texture of natural marble by painting, dabbing, and blending various colors.

Marbleizing first requires a good base coat or, on new walls, at least two coats of primer applied with a soft brush to provide a glass-like surface.

A basic technique is to brush a tinted glaze over a white ground, then sponge lightly. Veining can be added by applying oil colors with a small brush, then blurring the lines by dry-brushing. Another technique is to employ crumpled plastic wrap to make wrinkles and bubbles. A topcoat of varnish may be applied.

PICKLING means to bleach wood of its natural color and stain by rubbing white paint on and off the surface. Although this works best on an unfinished wood surface, it is also a suggested technique for lightening dark wood paneling.

Pickling is achieved by letting the paint penetrate the wood surface, so no primer is used. Instead use a two-step bleach, available at most paint supply stores. Apply a clear, non-yellowing alkyd or latex paint for the topcoat, rubbing it on and off with cheesecloth. Pickling should stain the surface, allowing the natural wood surface to show through; whitewashing coats the surface.

RAGGING is a technique for creating a textured effect by using lint-free rags to apply and remove paint. The finished look is one of random patterns due to variation in pressure applied and shape of the rag.

RAG ROLLING creates a watermarked effect. Rags are rolled across a wet layer of glaze laid over the dry paint layer.

Ragging and rag rolling are easy forms of stippling. In ragging, a bunched-up rag (cotton, burlap, cheesecloth, gauze, chamois, tissue paper, newsprint or other) is used to apply and remove the paint. An irregular and varied pattern results. Because being inconsistent with the pressure applied is desirable, this might be a fun project for a junior painter.

In rag rolling, the rag is rolled across the glaze coat. After either type application, the wall can be ragged with another full coat of wash to get a deeper tone or a different look.

SPATTER PAINTING produces speckles of color. The painted surface is showered with a thinned paint or glaze. One or more colors can be used. Check your leftover paint supply; you might have a usable color in just the amount needed.

This technique also works well for craft items. Try it on trays, baskets, picture frames or furniture. If doing a set, try to complete all during the same work period for consistent results.

Spatter painting, the art of flicking specks of diluted latex paint onto a surface, takes practice to master. Use a stiff brush for spattering small surfaces and a paint atomizer for large surfaces. A toothbrush works well for spattering accessories or trim.

Gradually dilute the latex paint with water and practice spattering until you find the right consistency for easy application. Variation of heaviness of the spatters, amount of spattering and number of colors used gives unlimited effects.

In order to control the spray when using a brush, avoid loading the bristles with too much paint. Run your index and middle fingers across the bristles while aiming at the wall surface.

Be sure to let each spatter coat dry before applying subsequent colors. Some combinations that work well are black, gray and a little bit of white over a white base coat; pink, gray and white over a white base coat; and white over a medium beige base.

SPONGING is a way of creating a delicately colored, cloudy effect by applying a layer of paint or colored glaze with a natural sea sponge.

Sponging has two variations. **Sponging on** refers to using a natural sponge to apply, or dab on, the tinted glaze or paint wash. A marbled effect can be obtained by sponging on with two different color glazes. **Sponging off**, done after the wall has been coated with a glaze, results in a more delicate and regular surface. The sponge is used to remove some glaze and to distress the wet surface.

STENCILING produces designs, letters, numbers or other patterns. The cutout area of the stencil is painted. Although stenciling is an Early American art form, pattern books are now available for Victorian, art nouveau and art deco motifs. Or you might prefer to create your own patterns.

Stenciling can be completed with purchased stencils or your own designs. A stencil can be made using thin cardboard. Many stencil artists now use transparent Mylar or similar plastics that allow you to see through the working surface. The stencil should be clean-cut, with no rough edges. This ensures sharp edges on the finished design. Depending on the design size and repetition, several copies of the stencils might make painting easier.

Quick-drying float paints or water-base latex work well; acrylic paints especially formulated for stenciling are also widely available. Drying speed is important because stencil designs are built up one color at a time.

Load the brush or sponge with only a little paint before applying it to the working surface. Some stencilers daub the applicator a few times on plain newsprint.

STIPLING was first used to delete paintbrush marks by dabbing a stiff brush or sponge into wet glaze on the dry paint layer. This technique also creates a softened, subtly uneven background.

Stippling, or making small touches over the wet paint with a large stippling brush, interrupts the paint brush lines to provide a matte, slightly roughened texture. Decorative stippled finishes are created by stippling a thinly applied wet glaze layer. The effect varies depending on the tool; a stippling brush, shoe brush, fluffy paint roller or wad of cloth may be used.

TORTOISE-SHELLING is created by using dark-colored artist's oils or dark-colored glazes which are overlaid and patterned to appear like natural tortoise. It is usually used on woodwork.

Tortoise-shelling first requires a glossy, brown-colored varnish to be brushed over a yellow ground, then artist's colors (umbers, black) are painted into wet varnish in diagonals. The entire surface is then drybrushed on both diagonals. The result should be a mottled surface resembling a glossy tortoise shell.

A simpler method is to apply a heavy coat of glaze, then lightly tap the surface with your fingertips. Change the angle of your hand each time for a random effect. A larger tortoise pattern will result if heavy rubber gloves are worn.

WHITEWASHING is applying a thin coat of white paint to the surface. If whitewashing paneling, proper surface preparation, including a primer, is required. This results in an opaque look, rather than a pickled look where the wood grain shows through.

The Basic Techniques

To achieve the best results with any special effects finish, it is important to prepare the surface and to apply the base coats carefully. A clean surface is a must for any application. Remove all traces of grease and dirt with a light detergent or surface cleaner available at paint supply stores.

Be aware that finish techniques can highlight blemishes in the base coat, as well as disguise them. This can be an advantage if you want to achieve an old or distressed look, but not if the effect was chosen to revive worn walls.

Some of the techniques require a thinned paint. An oil-base paint may be thinned by adding 25 percent mineral spirits to 75 percent paint. Latex can be thinned with water. A thinned wash is usually four parts water to one part latex paint.

To protect and enhance special effects walls, a low-lustre satin varnish is suggested. Wait at least 24 hours before applying this final coat. Polyurethane is suggested to brighten colors.

During any paint application, proper equipment and adequate ventilation are extremely important to your health. For best results, read and follow label information and seek advice of paint experts.

Plan your work time to prevent interruptions. When working with glazes, it is best to brush on and wipe the glaze one section at a time, since the glaze must not dry before being wiped.

Proper disposal of containers is a consumer responsibility. Be an enviroshopper: buy only the quantity needed, check labels for product warnings, and store or dispose of leftovers as prescribed by local waste authorities.

Additional References

Consult your local library or bookstore for detailed descriptions and instructions for these and other painted finishes. Popular magazines are a source of colorful examples and ideas. Lumberyards and paint supply stores may also have helpful do-it-yourself manuals, or even provide workshops on topics from surface preparation to finishes.

There are many new paint products and supplies on the market that not only make the job easier but are safer for the environment and the user. Check with your local NDSU Extension Service office for more information.

Sources

National Paint & Coatings Association, *The Old House Journal*

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