

AMERICAN PAINTING CONTRACTOR

APPLIED KNOWLEDGE

Improve jobsite productivity and performance with applicators designed to get the job done right

By Bruce Schneider



Even the most experienced residential paint contractors find the paint applicator aisle at the local paint store overwhelming at times. Some painters wish they could simply choose a 1" angular-trim brush for cutting in and get a high-capacity roller cover or a large general-purpose brush for everything else. However, the extraordinary selection of brush styles, filament types, fabrics and nap heights exists to enhance painter performance and maximize productivity. These materials are specially designed to help contractors get great results with a variety of coatings, surfaces, textures and environments.

While the guidance in this article is intended to be relevant to painters across North America, every painter is different and so are the working conditions in which contractors find themselves. What works best in Phoenix may not be the best choice in Toronto. So, in addition to the guidance below, consider asking for feedback from local paint store owners and peers before investing in a selection of new tools. Ultimately every individual should choose the tools that he or she discovers provide the most professional results with the fewest pos-

sible dips and reloads and the shortest clean-up times.

Where to Begin

When determining the best applicators to purchase for a project, contractors should ask themselves four questions.

- **Where am I painting?** The best brush for a hot, humid exterior project will be different from the ideal choice for a cool, dry interior project.

- **What type of coating am I using?** A number of synthetic filaments and natural bristles are available to provide peak performance with today's extraordinary selection of paints, stains, enamels and other coatings. For some applications, the ideal brush may include a blend

of several filaments and/or bristles.

- **What am I painting?** An extra-rough substrate will require a different brush than will an ultrasmooth surface. Likewise, you will need a 1" to 1-1/2" nap, or pile height, on a roller cover when painting a rough surface, while a 1/4" nap is often best for applying a varnish on a smooth surface.

- **What feels good in my hand?** Comfort and control are essential. Some



A brush with well-flagged filaments (as shown here under a microscope) will provide more surface contact for better coverage and a smooth finish.

painters prefer a beefy Beavertail or Shasta handle style. Other pros work best with a narrow Fluted or Rattail design. Most pros prefer untreated natural hardwood handles for durability and optimal control.

Interiors

Indoor projects allow for a wider range of applicator choices than do outdoor applications. Because temperature and humidity are controlled, the decision can be based more on the type of coating being applied and on personal preferences. That said, a professional-grade, solid, round, tapered, 100 percent DuPont nylon brush is usually the first choice for interior work. Why? Nylon has inherent

properties that make it an ideal filament for tipping and flagging. To clarify, nylon tips can be fashioned to a sharper point than can other synthetic materials, which improves performance when cutting into tight spots. The term “flagging” refers to a process that creates numerous split ends on individual filaments. A brush with well-flagged filaments will provide more surface contact for better coverage and a smooth finish.

Kitchens and Baths

In a kitchen or bathroom, where there is considerable cutting in to be done, a tool such as a 2 1/2" 100 percent nylon-filament brush is a good choice for most coatings. Yet if the paint is one of the newer

very thick, fast-drying acrylics, a 100 percent DuPont Chinex filament brush will be a better choice. The Chinex filaments provide a much stiffer design and make for quick cleanup, which enhances productivity.

For a roller cover choice in a kitchen or bathroom application, a woven, low-nap design is recommended. Why not simply use the same knitted, high-production roller cover contractors often purchase for exterior work? When rolling interior enamels, the finish takes priority over the volume of paint one can roll before reloading. Select a 1/4" or 3/8" nap height in a woven Dralon fabric and the result will be a smooth, lint-free finish.

Exterior Work

If working outside when the temperature or humidity is high, it is wise to select a brush that includes a blend of nylon and polyester. While a professional brush should never be made of polyester exclusively, the ability of polyester to maintain its integrity in heat and humidity makes it a great addition to stabilize nylon and other synthetic materials.

As stucco becomes increasingly popular in many parts of the country, some painters are unsure what to use to tackle the rough, uneven surface. Consider a high-capacity, abrasion-resistant roller cover with a polyamide fabric. Polyamide is a fancy name for a nylon polymer. Professional-grade polyamide roller cover fabrics quickly absorb, trap and evenly release a large quantity of paint in a smooth manner. For stucco, a 1" nap polyamide roller cover would be ideal to work paint into all the irregular shapes found on this type of surface.

Restoration

When performing furniture restoration, there are tools specifically made for this application. Experienced pros recall that natural bristle brushes or ox hair/bristle blends were the preferred tool for use with solvent-based stains, varnishes or polyurethanes. However, with today's move toward waterborne materials, bristle brushes are now being used less frequently. This is because the natural hair in the brush tends to mat down in the same way your own hair does when you swim or shower.



Applicators



A low pile height (l) is desirable for smooth surfaces, while a high pile height (r) is best for rough surfaces.

To overcome this problem, many pros are gravitating to synthetic filament alternatives that blend DuPont Chinex and Tynex filaments for a tool that provides optimal performance with both water-based and solvent-based coatings. If seeking the kind of piano finish once achieved with an ox hair brush, a professional-grade synthetic filament brush specifically designed for use with stains, varnishes and enamels will deliver optimal results.

These fine-finish applications sometimes require the use of a roller cover. The best bet is to choose a woven Dralon or mohair roller cover in a very low pile-height; otherwise contractors may encounter an undesirable texture, stipple or orange peel effect.

Throw Out Throwaways

With today's economic realities, some residential paint contractors may consider using throwaway brushes or low-quality coatings to trim costs. A sound recommendation is to do neither. Even in the hands of a pro, inferior tools and coatings will produce undesirable results that will damage a professional painter's reputation. In the long run, a bad reputation will doom a paint contractor more than any temporary economic situation.

Instead, use professional-grade tools

and top-quality coatings that delight existing customers today. If business is slowing, use the time to broaden skills and meet more professional painters and potential customers. Expand your professional network and uncover affordable educational opportunities. In the community, seek out chambers of commerce or similar civic networking events. Finally, expand your own vision and talents to cast a wider net and capture new clients. In other words, those with an interest in decorative concrete or faux-finishing should now learn to excel in these areas.

Right now, painting contractors should work smarter to position themselves for long-term success by continuing to do great work while expanding their network, talent and expertise. **APC**

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CUT TO THE CHASE: FIVE FAVORITES

If Bruce Schneider, Purdy's online Paint Doctor, had to narrow his brushes down to a short list of absolute essentials, he has five favorites to recommend to professional painters.

▶ **A 2 1/2" paintbrush with 100 percent DuPont Chinex filaments.** The stiff design is ideal for today's heavy-bodied coatings that set up quickly. Just as important, the Chinex filaments clean up fast, which saves time.

▶ **A short-handled, professional-grade brush.** This is for painting in tight spots. Look for a tool with a comfortable grip for superb control.

▶ **A polyamide fabric roller cover.** If you have never used polyamide, you will be amazed at how much paint a polyamide fabric roller cover absorbs during each reload.

▶ **A woven Dralon fabric roller cover.** When a smooth, lint-free finish is required.

▶ **A professional-grade extension pole.**

This productivity-boosting tool is one that every contractor should own. Shop carefully; as with brushes and rollers, not all extension poles are professional-grade. The ideal pole is secure and durable yet lightweight and comfortable. It should deliver minimal flex with maximum reach. Some models allow the user to swap out roller cover frames fast, which is a nice time-saver. Be selective and find the tool that best meets your needs.

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