



# **TIPS** FROM DESIGN PROFESSIONALS

## **WORKING WITH PAINTING CONTRACTORS**

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## Selecting a Painting Contractor

It's always wise to keep an updated file of the contractors who you know and trust. If you have an emergency repair, you probably won't have time to go through the lengthy process of selecting the right contractor for your design needs. Some of the best ways to find a good, reputable contractor are to talk with employees at a favorite paint store, get references from other designers and architects, and ask paint industry professionals and realtors.

Once you have some names, meet with the contractor personally. See if there is a good rapport between you and the contractor and observe his/her level of professionalism. In addition to basic competency, look for courtesy, respect, punctuality and an ability to communicate well. If a contractor doesn't "click" with you on these points, keep looking for one who does. Only hire a licensed, insured painting contractor and ask if the contractor is a member of any trade associations, such as PDCA (Painting and Decorating Contractors of America).

Be diligent and check out references. The references should be for jobs of similar size and scope to the project you're planning. Some of the contractor's projects you evaluate should be old enough that the performance of the construction and materials can be gauged.

### Questions to ask when checking reference

- Was the job started on schedule?
- Did the contractor stick to the schedule and finish on time?
- Did the crew arrive on time?
- Were the painters easy to work with?
- Was the painting crew polite and did the crew members make an effort to be non-intrusive?
- Did they prep each area before painting (washing, scraping, fixing holes, removing and replacing caulk, sanding, taping edges and trim, priming)?
- Did they use quality paint, instead of whatever was on sale at the hardware store? (Quality paint lasts longer, covers better, and has a nicer look).
- Did they cover areas that were not designated to be painted (furniture, floors, carpets, lamps, etc.)?
- Did they clean up each day before they left and at the end of the job?
- Did they stay on budget and did the final price match the quote?
- Were there any problems; if so, how were they resolved?
- Would you hire them again?



## Considerations for hiring a painting contractor

- Do they have a State Contractor's License (they must provide the number, if licensed) and do they have any complaints filed or disciplinary actions taken against them?
- Do they have insurance? Ask to see their certificates. Workmans' Compensation and General Liability are important.
- How long have they been in business? The longer, the better (more than five years is recommended).
- Do they have a business office and phone number, a home office (and answering machine) or a cell phone contact? A physical business office/address is best.
- References. Positive, current references from at least five customers is recommended.
- Experience. It is best if the contractor specializes in the type of work you want performed.
- Scope and price (all items are strongly recommended)

Detailed description of the scope of work.

Assumptions (if any) are clear and specific.

Contractor should not offer high-pressure "sign today" discounts (it is important to take time to do background research).

Contractor will guarantee all work performed.

All verbal representations are followed up in writing.

No more than 25% to 33% of total cost of the project is asked for up front.

Final payment is not required until the work is completed.



## Reviewing Paint Bids

### Considerations when reviewing paint bids

Review the scope of work with the contractor so he/she can provide a thorough listing of all the work you want completed – problem areas, protection of surrounding areas, clean up, etc.

Important mandatories: know how long the job will take, when the painting contractor will start and finish the job, what's being painted, the number of paint colors, any foreseeable problems, etc.

Understand how the painting contractor will prepare the surface (this "makes or breaks" a job). Is he hand-scraping all loose paint (recommended) or power washing the exterior (be careful as this can damage surrounding areas)? The walls must dry fully before he proceeds with work, priming (recommended) and spot priming (acceptable). Also, define the number of coats of paint, brand, quality, etc.

Review what is and is not included in the bid. Sometimes a contractor must make allowances or assumptions in the bid, such as material, quantity, access to the home, etc. Also, they will sometimes specify what is excluded. Carefully review assumptions and exclusions with the contractor and question to make sure you have full disclosure – otherwise these items will likely result in a change order.

When reviewing the bid, check to see that the contractor is willing to put any verbal representations made in writing. If oral commitments are made but they refuse to put them in writing, reject the bid.

Look for a contract price that is clearly broken down and easily understood. If it's unclear, discuss the job until you and the contractor understand the price breakdown. Make sure the contract is adjusted to reflect this understanding.

It should be considered a "red flag" if a contractor offers you a discount or cash incentive for signing the contract immediately.

Ask to be invoiced by mail after the work is completed. Most contractors want payment right after the work is done. If they want cash, that's not a good sign. If materials are required before work can start, they will want an initial payment for materials. Try not to pay more than 33% up front and only agree to advance payment with a very reputable company.

Discuss the guarantee or warranty that the contractor may offer. Ask about the manufacturer's warranty on materials that will be used on your projects.

You want long-term durability from the paint job. Using high-quality products is as important as the selection and performance of the contractor.

If you're designing a home or business that was built before 1978, it may have been painted with lead-based paint, which can cause serious health problems when it's scraped or sanded in preparation for repainting. Professional painters know how to take appropriate steps to protect themselves and the jobsite. The contractors are required to furnish EPA-produced pamphlets to their residential customers before they begin a job that involves disturbing lead-based paint in or on a building or residence. Professional painters understand these requirements and will be willing to comply with them.



## How Much Paint Will Your Contractor Need?

Work with your paint contractor to determine the amount of paint necessary to do the job.

The best paint system consists of a coat of quality primer, followed by two coats of top-quality paint. However, if the surface to be painted was previously painted and the old paint is still sound, a single coat of top-grade paint may be all that is required.

When covering a dark paint with a lighter shade, two or more coats may be necessary to completely block out the dark color.



## Managing a Painting Contractor

During the workday, it is generally wise to leave the contractor alone. Be friendly but stay out of the way. Casually observe the contractor and crew. If you are concerned about something, ask the contractor about it and let him/her get back to the work.

Discuss the rights of the contractor to access the home when you're not there, including the use of restrooms, water, electricity, etc. You or a project manager should be onsite if possible – this protects both you and the contractor.

Once of the most difficult issues you'll face when dealing with painting contractors are the change order requests. They result in added costs that you can't always carry over to your client, which is why you need a clearly defined scope of work. A change order is reasonable only if the contractor runs into situations on that job that weren't reasonably anticipated or there is a change in scope that you mandated.

If you do get a change order, review it with the contractor. If there was a change in the scope of work or the project took more time because of you, then pay it. If, however, it's something that was always part of the job, you should not be responsible. If something was assumed incorrectly, you could possibly negotiate terms, such as splitting the price down the middle. Long-term relationships and fairness should be key motives for a healthy solution.

When the job is complete, review the work in person before you make a final payment to the contractor. Make sure the jobsite is cleaned as expected, and the work looks good. Don't be rushed into final payment for any reason.

Get a warranty for the work. This should stipulate the length of time the work is warranted, the type of failures covered, and remedies for such failures.

Ensure that the products you specify are being used by including them in writing as part of the signed contract – include both your brand and product preferences.

Visit the jobsite regularly and review the contractor's work and products used.

Be sure to get color approval from the client and contractor in writing before painting begins. Create a formalized image library with inspiring pictures and word associations to review with the client. The list of adjectives and pictures will help narrow down the ideas for the space/building and the color to be applied.

Check to make sure that the right colors are being applied. Write the color name and number, brand of paint and product on a piece of masking tape and place on the back of one of the light-switch plates in the room.



## Protecting Property During Painting

If you don't want paint on an object, you need to mask or cover the item to avoid paint splatters and contact with chemicals. Many items can and should be removed before painting begins. These items include furniture, furnishings, lights, switch plates and outlet covers. Some items cannot be removed and must be covered and protected.

When masking interiors, be sure to include windows, doors, baseboard, trim, cabinets and floors. Exterior masking includes windows, doors, trim, brick, and other items you will not be painting.

Drop cloths are commonly used to cover the floors, carpeting, and any furniture or fixtures that cannot be removed.

The following items are recommended to protect almost any item or surface:

Drop cloths — this is the only protection you will have for your floors and sidewalks. Cleaning paint drips out of carpet or off concrete will convince you that it is worth spending some money on rubber-backed drop cloths.

Safe release tape — “Blue tape,” as it's commonly known (although it comes in a variety of colors, including orange), is a good tape choice if it will be left in place for more than a day. It will not remove existing finishes.

Masking paper and plastic masking film— this is the foundation of a good masking system and is significantly better than newspaper and regular plastic film. The paper is available in various widths from 6 to 12 inches and is resistant to paints and solvents. Two types are available – regular craft-style and green, solvent-resistant paper.

Plastic masking film is better than plain lightweight plastic. It is available in many lengths from 24 inches to 99 inches.

### Interior Projects

- Cover floors and furniture with drop cloths.
- Cover doorknobs, electric switches, faucets and other items that you do not want to get paint on with masking tape. An alternative is to use aluminum foil. This is a good tool because it can be crimped to fit the shape of the object, remaining in place until the painting job is completed.
- To protect woodwork, paint the wood with a coat of lemon oil before starting – any paint speckles will wipe right off.

### Exterior Projects

- Tie back and cover plants to avoid damage during painting. Advise your client to trim plants and trees before painting begins. Regular canvas and butyl-backed canvas cloths are great for covering plants and bushes. Avoid plastic tarps, which can heat up quickly and kill the plants you're trying to protect.
- Make sure painters don't stop for the day when they are in the middle of working on a board. They should complete painting before stopping – otherwise, there may be streaking or inconsistencies in the finish.
- Make sure to paint the utility box so it blends in with the house or use a complementary color to enhance the look if you want it to show.



## How to Care for Newly Painted Walls

When a project is complete, a great way to bring added value to your customer relationship is to talk to them about how to maintain their newly painted walls.

Interior painted walls get dirty for many reasons: hand prints around switches and knobs; splashes in kitchens and bathrooms; marks on hallways and corridors; and soot accumulating above electric lamps and other heat sources.

### Preventative Steps

Washing dirt from painted walls before it accumulates not only improves the appearance, it reduces the chances of the dirt becoming permanently embedded in the film.

Make sure to check for dirt periodically and assume it will be present in and around cooking areas (airborne cooking oil) and on areas that are touched frequently.

### Gloss Levels

As a general rule, gloss and semi-gloss paints hold up better to cleaning than do flat paints. Also, better-quality paints wash and clean up easier and last longer than poor-quality paints.

### Easy Does It

When washing walls or removing stains, do only the minimum amount of cleaning required, using the lightest pressure necessary, in order to avoid eroding the paint or creating any shiny spots (burnishing).

Always use the least aggressive cleaner (such as mild soap solution) and cleaning method that will remove the dirt or stain. And always wet a sponge before use to prevent excessive surface abrasion.

### Rinsing

Always rinse all surfaces sufficiently with warm water. This is an important step because it prevents any cleaning solution residue from attracting dust and dirt.

### Residual Stains

It's not always possible to wash off all stains, such as those created by permanent markers. These and other stains may bleed or show through when painted.

If there is any doubt about residual stains, consider applying a high-quality, stain-blocking primer before painting.



## Follow-Up and Referrals

### Leave-Behinds Add Value

Once you've completed a job, provide them with a "Thank You" packet that includes items such as:

- A personalized "Thank You" letter
- A customer satisfaction survey postcard
- Information about how to care for the newly painted walls
- Information about proper storage and disposal of paint
- Business cards

### Referrals

An important way to build business is to ask your clients if they can be used as a reference. One satisfied customer leads to another and, soon, much of your new business will come from referrals.

Providing that the client agrees, you'll want to:

- Take photographs of the work
- Ask for customer testimonials – get their permission to use them on your website and in other advertising materials.
- Ask clients if they would put their recommendations in writing, such as a short letter.
- Ask if prospective clients can contact them regarding your work.
- When a client gives you a good referral, always call and thank them.