

Wonderwalls

If choosing paint colors doesn't give you a headache, the fumes probably will—unless you pick from the growing array formulated to be easy on the body, the planet, and not least the eyes.



A Note on Our Expert

Clayton Hubbard started painting houses as a summer job during high school. In his hometown of Syracuse, New York, he perfected his brush skills and honed his eye for color, learning patience with panicked clients when extreme weather threatened to damage their new paint jobs. Now firmly established in San Francisco, Hubbard enjoys the relative rarity of inclement weather, and his West Coast clients' willingness to have low- and zero-VOC paints in their homes.

Story by Sarah Rich
Photos by Laurie Frankel

Even if you've saved every J. Crew catalog since the dawn of time, it's unlikely you have as many quirky color names under your bed as the nearest home-improvement store has in its paint aisle. Given the overwhelming process of selecting palettes for interior walls—how to decide between **Kiss of Spring** or **Frappe Mint**—we've often thought it would be faster (and more fun) to weave names into oddball narratives, then see how the corresponding colors match up.

For instance:

A **Cool Dude** walked into the **Corner Cafe** and paid for his **Bananas Foster** with a **Shiny Nickel**.

The **Log Jam** near the **Hunting Lodge** couldn't keep **Intrepid Isabella** from arriving at **High Noon**.

Westie White's Regal Attitude concealed her **Secret Dreams of Cocoa Crunch**.

Heather Glen, a **Red Headed Beauty**, dreamed of spending an **Evening in Venice**, but could not **Escape the Everyday** grind of her **Industrial Steel** town.

Of course, this could prove dangerous unless you're willing to have your living room resemble the interior of a circus tent. Fortunately, there are both expert color consultants and an increasing number of online tools to help you pick hues. We asked painter Clayton Hubbard for his opinion on a selection of eco-friendly interior paints and learned in the process that the real pros forgo name games altogether and order paint by number.

Benjamin Moore Natura

\$49.99 per gallon for all interior / benjaminmoore.com/natura

Expert Opinion: Benjamin Moore has really got the interior thing down. This is the first time I've tried the Natura line and I'm very impressed. The gray sample covers so well it feels like a conspiracy! It took just one coat to cover completely, which is unusually good. I have to hand it to them; this is my favorite of the lot.

What We Think: In selecting paints for review, many people suggested we try Benjamin Moore's popular Aura line, but since we heard nothing but rave reviews across the board, we decided instead to put its Natura line to the test. We agree with Hubbard that all of the color samples—even the dark tones—went on with impressive smoothness and coverage. This is a top choice. ▶



YOLO Colorhouse

\$39.99 per gallon for all interior / yolocolorhouse.com

Expert Opinion: I found YOLO to be competitive with the others in terms of flow and adhesion. The stone color was a covering hero and left minimal brush marks. The darker clay color took two coats to cover sufficiently, but a double coat is standard for almost all paint, so I'd say overall I was quite satisfied. It dried nicely and washed well.

What We Think: YOLO Colorhouse has gotten a lot of attention for its high-quality, nontoxic products, and YOLO's paints definitely live up to the beautiful overall presentation. They don't have as many color choices as some of the others, but they do manage a decent selection of bold and deep tones and offer a special collection of earth colors. We would choose YOLO for a more neutral room but perhaps not for bright trim.

AFM Safecoat

\$41.99 per gallon for zero-VOC eggshell / afmsafecoat.com

Expert Opinion: I started with the darkest of the three AFM color samples, Espresso. Dark tones can really vary in quality with the low- and zero-VOC paints because the standard tinting process adds VOCs to the base. The Espresso covers fairly well with one coat, but I'd definitely use two for a professional job.

What We Think: We were eager to try AFM after hearing it mentioned often among eco-friendly paint products. Testing with a paintbrush instead of a roller, we found that the Espresso went on fairly smoothly for a dark color, but the white and yellow had better adhesion and flow on the first coat (the brush marks weren't obvious). Applying these with a roller on a large surface would be ideal.

Mythic

\$50.99 per gallon for interior latex eggshell enamel / mythicpaint.com

Expert Opinion: Mythic beat out all of the rest in terms of flow. Even with a low-quality brush, it looked great when it went on. I don't expect much from bright whites but I'd say the coverage here was above average. One thing that stood out about Mythic was the odor: It was the only one with a distinct scent, and while it didn't smell as toxic as standard latex paint, it wasn't particularly pleasant.

What We Think: Mythic is an independent up-and-comer in the eco-friendly paint industry, and we've admired the quality of its product as well as the classic design of its logo and packaging. Mythic comes in a huge array of colors, and our samples—including a shockingly bright yellow—had good saturation. We, too, were perplexed by the strong odor, given this is a zero-VOC paint. ■■■



