

# Training Day

*Why the painting trade in Canada is out of shape*

By Bruce MacKinnon



**W**hat do you know about paint? How long was your painting apprenticeship? Where did you go to school to learn the painting trade?

You might hear yourself ask these questions of a potential employee, but if he is younger than 40, the answers to questions about apprenticeships and schooling will likely fall on deaf ears. The reality in Canada today is that there are virtually no opportunities for young people to receive a solid, formal education in the painting trade. It is as if painting—unlike carpentry, plumbing or electrical—has fallen by the wayside as a respected career choice.

Not only is there little opportunity for formal training, there are few incentives for the only alternative left to apprentices: paint contractors properly training employees on the job.

"It means a commitment of hours and hours of work, usually by two people—the owner of the company and the foreman—and low wages," says Chris Ottaway of Golden Brush Painting and Decorating in Dartmouth, N.S. "The new guy has to be shown how to do everything, from preparation to clean up and everything in between. I have to have him with me in the beginning to give instruction and observe him.

It's not just teaching new habits but catching and getting rid of old bad habits." And after all that, there is no guarantee that the employee, once trained, will stay on.

Ottaway gives his new recruits three weeks at most before the axe falls or he moves them onto one of his regular crews. "It's a watch-and-learn philosophy, really. They learn by seeing and doing. What else can a small company do to train painters?"

### Hit and miss

It seems that most independent small businesses have to approach on-the-job training this way, says Terry Musgrave of Topcoat Painting in Vancouver.

It makes for real hit-and-miss results. Most of his new beginners do

"grunt work" for the first few months, says Musgrave, during which he evaluates whether the new employee is worth the effort to train and is willing to learn. Once training starts in earnest, Musgrave says it requires that he be "physically next to the new guy" all the time because he prefers to teach the recruits by letting them make mistakes that they then have to fix. "It's harder for me, but they understand very quick-

ly the key lessons of clean preparation and neat painting."

For Graham Audenart, owner of several paint businesses in Alberta, training is as formal as he can make it without actually sending anyone to school. He has four experienced men leading crews with a total of about 20 employees. The new guys work closely with the managers and an experienced journeyman painter. "Most of what they learn

## The quickie painter's course

*Maybe you can't afford to send your new guy to school, but you can't afford NOT to show him these seven things.*

### 1. Surface and site preparation

- Protecting the site from spills and spatters.
- How to fill nail holes in trim.
- Sanding technique, with both paper, sanding pole and sponge.

### 2. Brush technique with priming

- Brushing with both hands.
- Wood priming.
- Keeping paint pails clean.
- Proper rag use.

### 4. Rolling

- Proper rolling direction.
- Proper paint loading.
- How to avoid lines and drips.

### 5. Paint information

- The difference between latex and alkyd paints.
- Advantages and disadvantages of different types of paints, varnishes and finishes.
- Proper handling and storage information.

### 6. Cleanup

- Brush and roller cleanup.
- It's vital to show how both latex and alkyd paint brushes are cleaned—warm water for the polyester latex brush and thinner for bristle brushes. They should be wrapped in paper to absorb water or thinner and to keep the brush's shape.

### 7. Safety

- Ladder, scaffold and lift safety.
- Basic paint and solvent chemistry.
- Proper clothing, mask and other body protection. ■■■



is on the job, but we also have a paint company brochure used to describe paints and where they are used. And we'll use other aids as they come along. The (Spring 2005) *Professional Painter* magazine on how to brush is one example," says the owner of Student Painters and Quality Painters Inc., in Edmonton and Calgary.

### **Learning safety**

"I spend the first day with the new person, showing them how to use ladders safely and a spray gun properly, and I'm very explicit about how to use safety equipment, like a mask," continues Audenart. The key to keeping the cost of training down for Audenart is to take the philosophy that with experience comes responsibility. He is not above making a relatively new guy fix a major mistake on his own time, especially if Audenart feels it was something he was properly trained to avoid.

But when it comes to training beyond what he can provide on the job, Audenart recites a familiar refrain. "I've never sent anyone out for training, mainly because I've never heard of any in our area," he says. "I would if I could. It would benefit us all in the long run."

### **What training there is**

Right now, only the Maritimes and British Columbia have vocational schools at the high-school level that offer painter apprenticeship training, primarily due to a lack of interest on the part of students in the other provinces. Only B.C. and Ontario have post-secondary education facilities for three-term apprenticeship painter programs.

In Ontario, the program is run by the Industrial and Finishing Skills Centre in Toronto. "There were a number of community colleges that were offering painter apprenticeships, but we've taken them over," says the school's head instructor, Stuart McGovarin. The province, through the U.S.-based International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades (IBPAT), subsidi-



dizes funding for the school. The union pays the \$400 per term tuition, while the contractor employing the apprentice continues to pay the apprentice's wages. Each of the three terms is eight weeks long. Completing the three terms along with 5,280 hours of work experience qualifies the apprentice for journeyman's papers. In all, the 720 hours of academic training represents an investment of \$7,000 to \$10,000 on the part of the employee. In B.C., the Painting Industry Joint Trade Board Training Centre in Vancouver offers a similar full three-semester apprenticeship program, also paid for by the union and the employers. The B.C. program is available to non-union companies as well.

### Reality bites

Both training facilities are fully enrolled and have turned out hundreds of well-trained professional painters, but the graduates still represent only a small fraction of the total demand for new painter tradesmen in Canada. The bottleneck continues to be the reluctance on the part of painting companies to commit the resources necessary to properly train new painters. "Few employers are willing to risk investing thousands of dollars to train a man," says Barry Law, manager of B.C.'s Master Painter and Decorators Association, "only to see him go to another company, or open his own business and take customers with him."

For the non-union contractor, there is a scaled-down version of the training offered in B.C. and Ontario by the unions that is available through the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America (PDCA). The association sets up training programs in conjunction with local construction safety associations at the request of its member companies when the demand warrants. As with the union training, the employee must be paid a regular salary during the training by the employer, while the tuition is paid by the employer's annual PDCA dues. "The PDCA training is from the "Wheels of Learning" series of manuals, which the union schools also use," says Canadian PDCA vice president Mike Connor. "It's turned into modular programs locally to offer employers and employees smaller manageable chunks of teaching. It's taught on site during slow periods or at a local CSA classroom when a group of contractors gather enough painters for a class."

Any contractor can also access free safety training put on a local worker's compensation board, and a local CSA can bring in instructors for the benefit of contractors. ■■■



# A guidebook for training

For those who don't have a vocational school, union painting school or Painting & Decorators Contractors of America chapter nearby, here is an outline of the topics generally covered there. You can use it as a checklist to ensure the training you offer your employees is complete. This list is modelled after the course offered at the Industrial and Finishing Skills Centre in Toronto.

## Workplace Health and Safety:

- Identify legislation related to the trade.
- Proper ventilation procedures, use of respirators and personal protection equipment.
- Good housekeeping in the workplace.
- Dangers associated with designated substances.
- Safety procedures with ladders, scaffolding and powered elevating platforms, and fall protection devices.
- Use of barrier creams to protect skin.
- Confined spaces training.
- Dangers of removal or abatement of lead-based paints.
- Platform, staging and suspended access safety.
- Containment structures.
- Perform lead abatement procedures.

## Trade Calculation and Science:

- Basic math operations.
- Solving trade-related problems using tools suited to the task.
- Physical properties of substances and materials in paint trade.
- Using a computer to perform common tasks.
- Properties of liquids used in painting.
- Introduction to and interpretation of architectural drawings and detail.
- Using a computer to perform workplace tasks.
- Physical properties of substances and materials used in painting trade.
- Effects of moisture and dryness on materials.
- Trade science principles to test materials.
- Estimating to determine if task can be completed with allotted time and materials.

## Tools and Equipment:

- Use and maintenance of painting, construction and wall covering hand tools.
- Use and maintenance of power tools and trade-specific and testing equipment.
- Use and maintenance of surface preparation equipment.

## Surface Preparation:

- Prepare and repair substrates for coatings or wall coverings.
- Structures and building materials.
- Prepare gypsum board and plaster surfaces for painting.
- Prepare new and previously coated interior and exterior wood, metal, concrete and masonry surfaces.
- Describe acid wash and high-pressure water cleaning of concrete, high-pressure wash of masonry and metal surfaces.
- Perform acid cleaning.
- Clean substrates using hand tools.
- Prepare plastic and vinyl surfaces.
- Basic sandblasting on structural steel and concrete surfaces.

## Coating Applications:

- Describe basic paint technology and the application of various media and materials.
- Prepare job by protecting items not to be painted.
- Apply paint by brush and roller; maintaining tools in effective condition.
- Basic paint technology and application of various media and materials.
- Pigments and dyes and match colours using tints.
- Finish new and previously painted substrates and surfaces.
- Use of colour to create desired effects.
- Apply decorative patterns in accordance with blueprints and specifications.
- Apply complex decorative patterns.
- Special effects and gilding procedures.
- Moisture and temperature testing.
- Testing mil thicknesses of wet and dry paints.

## Wall Covering

- Commercial and residential applications.
- Characteristics of wall coverings and specialty coverings.
- Handling coverings to prevent damage.
- Lay out and set up start and finish points.
- Adhesives and application to coverings.
- Apply and cut coverings.
- Describe application of commercial vinyl wall coverings, then apply, cut and trim.

## Spray Coating Applications

- Preparation of job and surfaces for spraying.
- Operate airless spray equipment.
- Special coatings and electrostatic spraying and metalizing theory.

