

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, August 28, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "ADVICE FOR LADY PAINTERS." Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, United States Department of Agriculture.

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A listener wrote me the other day and asked for a chat on furniture painting for housewives. She wrote: "You know, sooner or later every woman turns her hand to the paint brush. Right now I'm planning to do a little painting to brighten up my house for winter. But I'd appreciate some practical advice on the matter before I start."

That letter reminded me of a conversation I once had with a man who owns a paint shop. One day I happened to tell him my troubles in painting an old bedstead. He listened sympathetically to the whole story. A very understanding man he seemed to be, and I told him so.

"Why not?" said he. "Why not, when I've been a painter myself and have been selling paint for almost 25 years. I believe I know all the mistakes of beginners. And I could write a whole book of advice to lady painters."

I told him he was just the man I'd been looking for. "If you know how to keep me from making one mistake after another on my home paint jobs, I wish you'd start right now on your book of advice."

"Well," said he, "women are very impulsive. That's been my experience, anyway. A woman gets the urge to paint, all of a sudden. So she rushes out, buys a can of paint, dips in and goes to it. Ten to one, she feels sad about the result. Like as not she doesn't take time to prepare the surface she's going to paint. Then again, she'll use poor paint or the wrong kind of paint. Oh, I've seen many a woman try to put wall paint on the floor and screen paint on wood and -- "

I asked if paints were very different.

"My, yes," said the paint man. "Different as day from night, you might say. Quality paint makes a very different job from cheap paint. And then, paints are designed for different purposes. For example, floor or deck paint contains a binder that stands up against wear from feet. Wall paint doesn't have and doesn't need this kind of binder. So it won't last long if you use it on the floor. Paint for the outside of the house is designed to resist the effects of weather exposure. And screen paint is designed to coat the wire without filling the holes, and to prevent rust. Every paint for its own use, you see. So my first advice to lady painters is: Be sure to get the right kind of paint for the job. And don't try to use up left-over paint anywhere that strikes your fancy."

I told the paint man he had entirely convinced me about reading the label to be sure I had the right kind of paint.

"Read the directions, too," said he. "The manufacturer knows his product. He puts those directions there to help you get best results. Don't neglect his advice about sandpapering, removing grease, cleaning and so on before you start painting. As I was saying, women are --"

"Impulsive?" said I.

"Yes, and too hasty," said he. "Much too hasty. You can't do a good job on the spur of the moment. Careful preparation beforehand is as important as the painting."

He went on to say that you needed a smooth, clean surface to make the paint go on evenly. That might mean sandpapering, plugging holes or cracks with a filler, or even removing the old paint and washing the surface. He also said that you had to take off every trace of wax or grease because paint won't adhere to a "slick" surface, and that if the original finish happened to be glossy enamel, it needed a light rub with sandpaper or a wash with a paint cleaner to remove the gloss.

"Foundation coats must always be flat," said the paint man. "Additional undercoats must be flat, too. Use enamel only for the finish, flat paint for the base. Flat paint is best for hiding an undersurface, too."

He emphasized the need for an absolutely dry surface -- wood that is dry all the way through. He said if you had to wash the wood before painting, as you often do, it might take two or three days to dry. "An awful lot of failures, such as peeling, come from trying to paint over a damp surface," said he. And then he mentioned the weather. "A dry clear day is usually the best weather for painters. I even advise against painting out on the porch on a damp or cold or very dusty day. Dampness in the atmosphere may condense on the surface of the wood. Then paint doesn't brush easily in cold weather. As for dust, you know how it can gather on a freshly painted surface."

After that we talked about buying paint and brushes.

The paint man began, "Women are likely to be --"

"Impulsive and hasty?" I finished.

"Yes, and also what I call pennywise -- that is, falsely economical. They think they're saving by buying a cheap brush. Now, you know how cheap brushes shed bristles and make a lot of extra work and often spoil the finish. Women also are likely to try to save a few pennies on the can of paint, too. That's no economy in the end. The difference in price between good and poor paints is slight. The extra expense of good paint more than pays for itself in the job it does. The way to save on home painting is to buy good paint and brushes; work carefully; plan carefully; put the cover on the paint-can after using to keep the paint from thickening; and take good care of the brush. To have your brushes always ready for use, either keep them suspended in raw linseed oil, or clean them in turpentine, dry them, wrap them in paper, and lay them flat."

The paint man's last point was about planning before you start a paint job. "I've seen many a woman start painting a floor at the doorway. Toward the end she'd find herself caught over in the corner with no way of exit except across the newly painted floor. Start a floor in the corner farthest from the door. Work toward rather than away from the light if you can. Start a chair upside down, painting the legs first. Then turn it right side up, stand it on a newspaper and complete the job. That prevents working on your hands and knees."

I'm repeating this conversation for the sake of any housewife listening who may get the urge to paint this fall. But for fear you'll think my friend, the paint man, was pretty hard on us women, let me hasten to tell you that before he said good-bye he assured me that men make the same mistakes as women when they first start painting. Points to remember? I'll list them briefly: buy the right paint for the job and buy good paint and good brushes; read all directions on the can; prepare a clean, smooth, dry surface before you take up your brush; plan the job before you start; spread the paint evenly and carefully.

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