

We all know how difficult it is to decide on a color scheme for a small renovation project or a new house, but unfortunately, most of us don't have a real grasp of the magnitude of the task. Nowadays, you can't flip through the cable channels without running into at least two dozen programs that show you how to do it yourself. But come on, who really wants to make those decisions?

And if choosing colors seems like such a monumental task, choosing the brand or type of paint must require a college degree of some sort, right? What if you're interested in an environmentally friendly choice? Now we're talking nuclear physics!

Actually, choosing the type or brand of environmentally friendly paint is much easier than you think. When choosing the paint for any size project, I tell my clients that they need to make a couple of simple decisions.

- 1) What do you want this paint to achieve from a design factor?
- 2) What are your "environmental goals"?

Let's take the second question first. There are two types of "green" paint. First, there's what's called a low, or zero VOC paint, which is considered environmentally friendly on an outdoor level. Then, there's paint that is *environment-friendly*, meaning healthier for the indoor occupants. Low/zero VOC paint is quite common throughout the industry now, but has sparked a great deal of discussion about its level of "green." Although these paints have little or none of the regulated VOC's than could potentially create smog, they are not particularly well suited to those who suffer from chemical sensitivities, or therefore, any humans in general. These products still contain countless toxins and carcinogens such as acetone, ammonia, crystalline silica and formaldehyde precursors. We all know that formaldehyde was taken out of paint years ago. However, manufacturers have decided to use formaldehyde precursors to allow the paint to develop formaldehyde during the curing process, thus creating a paint that is formaldehyde free in the can. Tricky, yes, but still legal.

An indoor environment-friendly and healthy paint is one which is manufactured without the use of any regulated or unregulated health hazards or toxins, formaldehyde precursors and is formulated to not outgas. Most paints outgas for several years, but the healthier ones will not. These paints are typically tolerable for about 98% of the most chemically sensitive individuals who use it. If these canaries in the mineshaft can live with it, it must be better for everyone.

The first question is a bit easier to answer---what colors do you want? This is where I usually enlist a professional designer and leave it to the experts. You must remember, though, that most of the zero VOC paints are tinted with colorants that contain VOC's so your colors choices are limited to the pastels and light colors. Healthy paints such as AFM Safecoat can be tinted to thousands of colors from light to dark, without added VOC's or toxins. The interior designer's love that!

So there you have it. A crash course of what to look for the next time you are interested in pursuing an '*Environmental*' Home Makeover.