



Skillful Brushwork for Doors and Windows

Follow these tips and techniques for a flawless finish

BY PHILIP HANSELL

The paint protecting your doors and windows has a tough and important job to do. It must endure hostile weather, punishing wear, and up-close scrutiny every day. Paint made for doors and windows used to be judged by how much lead it contained—the more lead, the better. These coatings worked great. The heavy metal helped the paint to stick and to move seasonally. As is well-known now, however, lead is toxic and is especially dangerous to kids. For this reason, lead has been banned from household paint since 1978.

Old doors and windows generally have high concentrations of lead paint, so it's important to protect yourself and any children who live in the house by working lead safe. This means containing and collecting dust and chips and minimizing airborne particles. Wear a good particle mask when scraping and sanding, and use a HEPA vacuum. Thoroughly clean up the work area every day, and change your clothes before playing with the kids. See “Best Practices for Lead-Safe Remodeling” (*FHB* #214) for more on working lead safe.

Key preparations

As with all painting projects, proper preparation is key for painting doors and windows. Before starting, my painters and I wash the glass with glass cleaner and paper towels. We then mask the hardware and the perimeter of the glass panes.

Once the door is cleaned and masked, we fill any damaged areas with two-part auto-body filler and sand the dry filler with 180-grit paper. For the initial sanding on the rest of the door, we use 220-grit paper on the interior and 180-grit on the exterior. For the second sanding (between the first and second

ALL PAINTING STARTS WITH PREP

The prep work is the same for both windows and doors. The surrounding area is protected with disposable drop cloths, and the glass is cleaned and masked to prevent scratches. Any scratches or damage are repaired and spot-primed with oil primer. New doors and windows get a full coat of oil primer before painting. Tinted primer helps dark-colored topcoats to cover the surface fully.



MASK GLASS AND HARDWARE

Clean the glass, then mask the glass perimeter and any nearby hardware with painter's tape. High-quality tapes may seem expensive, but they are less likely to leave a sticky residue.



SCRAPE LOOSE PAINT

Using a paint scraper or a painter's tool, scrape any loose paint. Sand out any scratches that don't reach the underlying surface.



FILL DEEP SCRATCHES

Two-part auto-body filler is great for repairing dog scratches and other deep imperfections. Apply it with a putty knife.



SAND REPAIRS

Once it's dry (in about 15 min.), sand the filler with 180-grit paper. Repairing significant damage may take more than one application.

PAINTING DOORS: START OUTSIDE

Painting an entry door requires leaving it open for several hours. You'll need to manage small children and pets accordingly. If the sun is directly on the door, open it fully so that it's shaded by the home's interior. Keeping the door cool prevents lap marks and deep brush marks. (In the photos on the facing page, the panes of glass are completely taped over. I would not do this ordinarily, but the photographer was unable to get good pictures with the western sun streaming through the glass.)



SPOT-PRIME AS NEEDED

Once any damage is repaired, lightly sand the rest of the door surface with 180-grit (exterior) or 220-grit (interior) paper. Cover repairs with stain-blocking oil-based primer.



REMOVE WEATHERSTRIPPING

Most exterior doors have kerf-in weatherstripping that's removed by gently pulling on it. Removing it eliminates a lot of tedious masking.



APPLY THE FIRST COAT

Starting at the top of the door, paint all of the rails and muntins, and then paint the stiles one at a time.



APPLY THE SECOND COAT

The second coat is applied in the same order as the first. For the second pass, though, remove the masking tape so that the paint laps onto the glass by about $\frac{1}{16}$ in.



CLEAN UP AS YOU GO

Wipe off excess paint and drips right away. Remove masking materials when the paint is dry to the touch. Reinstall weatherstripping when the paint is fully dry (one day for latex; four days for oil).

coats), we use 320-grit paper for interior work and 220-grit for exterior work. A rougher grit on the outside gives the surface a little more “tooth” for better paint adhesion.

The weatherstripping on modern doors is generally easy to remove for painting. The vinyl-covered foam, sometimes identified as “Q-Lon” after one brand, is removed by starting at one end and gently pulling it out of the kerf that holds it. Removing the strip eliminates a lot of tedious masking. I replace it when the door is fully dry—24 hours for latex and about four days for oil. It easily pushes back into the slot it came out of.

I recommend leaving hardware in place. Disassembly and keeping track of the many small parts is an unnecessary and sometimes expensive hassle. Asking a client to forego door-knobs and locks for two or three days is an even bigger problem.

Choosing paint

My favorite paint for interior work is Sherwin-Williams Pro Classic. I like both latex- and oil-based versions. Most clients choose satin or semigloss, which are easy to keep clean but don't produce an overly shiny finish.

For new exterior work, I prefer slow-dry oil primers because they penetrate and stick well and they prevent brown stains caused by wood tannins. Slow-dry primers must dry for four days or more before a topcoat is applied. Otherwise, the evaporating solvents in the primer can cause blistering and poor adhesion of the topcoat.

For a topcoat on both new and old work, I use acrylic latex paint, such as Sherwin-Williams Duration or Sherwin-Williams Emerald. Acrylic latex paints have greater elasticity and are

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WORK FROM THE TOP DOWN

After an initial sanding with 220-grit paper and a wipe down with a tack cloth, paint the top rail and any muntin bars. Because this door was painted previously and was free of damage, priming was unnecessary. New doors and repaired areas should be primed before painting, however.



PANELS FIRST, STILES LAST

Paint stiles one at a time. Brush away any drips where panels meet stiles and rails as soon as possible. Look for and correct drips near locks and hardware.



SAND, TACK, AND RECOAT

Sand the door with 320-grit paper, and wipe the surface clean with a tack cloth. Turn the cloth often to pick up the maximum amount of dust. Apply the second coat in the same order as the first. The inside of the door isn't exposed to weather, so you can leave the tape on the glass for both coats.

PAINTING WINDOWS: ONE SASH AT A TIME

To paint a double-hung window correctly, you must be able to operate both sashes. You often can free a stuck sash by cutting the paint seal between it and the frame with a utility knife and then gently prying on the sash with a painter's tool or a small pry bar. Start painting with the upper sash on the inside and the lower sash on the outside.



LOWER THE UPPER SASH

Begin by painting the muntin bars on the top sash, then lower the sash to coat the bottom rail and the lowest part of the stiles.



RAISE THE UPPER SASH

Raise the upper sash and lower the bottom sash to expose the stiles and the top rail of the upper sash. Leave the sash partly open to paint the top rail.



FINISH THE UPPER SASH

Paint the top rail and then the stiles. A final pass with a dry (undipped) brush yields straight and uniform brush marks. Push up the painted sash with a painter's tool.



PAINT THE BOTTOM SASH

Working from the top down, paint the lower sash. Once you're done, brush out any drips where vertical and horizontal parts meet.



PAINT THE TRIM

Start with the head casing, and then paint the sides. Finish by coating the stool and the apron. As you finish each part, make a final pass with a dry brush.



more vapor permeable than oil paints, which makes them better at dealing with seasonal moisture and wood movement.

The right equipment

For exterior painting on doors and windows, I like a 2½-in. angled-sash brush. My favorite is a Corona with Chinex bristles. It works well with both latex- and oil-based paint and cleans up easily, even on hot, sunny days.

For painting the interior of doors and windows, I like an “all-paints” 2½-in. nylon-bristle brush from Corona or Purdy. Indoors, where brushes don’t get baked by the sun, I prefer nylon bristles because they shed less than other bristle types.

When I’m painting large areas such as stiles, rails, and panels, I dip one-third of the bristle length into the paint and then slap both sides of the brush on the inside of the paint pot. For smaller, more precise locations such as muntin bars, I dip the brush, slap the sides of the pot, and scrape both sides of the brush along the rim. This removes excess paint from the sides of the brush, helping to prevent drips at corners.

The right order

It’s best to work from the inside out to prevent messing up work you’ve already completed. When painting the interior side of double-hung windows, I start with the upper sash; when working on the exterior side, I start with the lower sash. On doors, I start with the muntin bars and panels. Rails come next, and then the stiles. The edge of the door with hinges gets painted the exterior color. The latch edge is painted to match the door’s interior side. □

Philip Hansell is a painter in Durham, N.C. Photos by Patrick McCombe, except where noted.

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The right gear for the job

The tool kit below is all you need for painting doors and windows. You can find everything here at paint stores that cater to professionals.



TIP: STRAIN YOUR PAINT

Old paint should be strained before use. Squeezing the paint through the strainer with a gloved hand saves time. Afterward, pull the glove off inside-out to prevent a mess.