

6-1-1965

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Recommended Citation

Kerns, Ken (1965) "The Owner Built Home - Chapter 9 Volume III - Form and Function - Do-It-Yourself Painting," *Green Revolution*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 6 , Article 20.

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The Owner-Built Home — Chapter 9
Volume III — Form and Function
Do-It-Yourself Painting

By Ken Kern

Nothing much has really changed today in the painting industry from the formation of the first medieval closed shop. Modern house painters have their own particular brand of price-fixing exclusiveness; and their union, too, is careful to enforce maximum-size brush widths and to outlaw fast-working renegade spray or roller equipment. Thank God, a man may still work on his own home. And thanks to a tremendous chemical advance in recent years with unbiased reports from countless agencies, the "secrets of the mistery" are no longer the private property of an inner circle!

The chemical advance has been very rapid. It has not been long since a painter himself mixed and ground his paints. His pigment was first zinc, then the improved titanium dioxide—first used in 1920. From earliest days he had used linseed oil as binder or vehicle.

Then in 1930 we had what is known in the industry as the *alkyd revolution*. Alkyd resin has all but replaced linseed oil in commercially prepared paints. More recently the synthetic paint industry has developed other remarkable vehicles such as phenolics, vinyls, urethanes, silicones, epoxies, acrylics, and latex.

Exterior wood siding should not have to be painted less than six years after the first application. Planed lumber requires more frequent treatment than rough-sawn or rough-planed wood. As a matter of fact, rough-sawn redwood and cedar weather beautifully without any preservation whatever. Experimentally-minded home builders have found that any number of *natural* finishes can be concocted from readily available inexpensive materials. To create an aged-appearing flat finish, a mixture of discarded crankcase oil and gasoline has been used with success on rough-sawn siding. A mixture of creosote and pigment-stain is another often-used natural finish. After several years a second coat of clear creosote and oil mixture is applied to restore protective qualities.

Conventional exterior paint uses titanium dioxide as the white paint-solid, and linseed oil and mineral spirits as the nonvolatile and volatile ingredients of the vehicle. But alkyds are more stain-and-blister-and-mildew-resistant than linseed oil paints. The finish coat should have zinc oxide pigments in it to control the rate of chalking. As a paint ages it collects dirt, changes color, and chalks. If the paint is correctly controlled, rain will wash off the dirt along with the chalking. The chalking effect is thus utilized to keep the paint cleaner and brighter, and so to prolong its usefulness. Applying a prime coat of shellac or aluminum paint over knotholes and flat-grained siding is an especially good practice.

Lacquer and varnish films break down sooner on outside exposure than do regular paints having protective pigments. The use of three coats of a high grade spar varnish is a minimum requirement for an outside transparent finish. Butyl phenol resin-based varnishes are definitely superior to the old type in hardness, durability, and water resistance.

Polyurethane-based, phenolic gum and phenolic tung oil are the best commercially available natural finishes, though they last only two years at the longest. An eight-year natural finish was developed some years ago by the Forest Products Laboratory, which publishes this formula for a 5-gallon batch, cedar color:

Raw linseed oil 3 gals.
Mineral spirits of turp 1 gal.
Burnt sienna, oil color 1 pt.
Raw umber, oil color 1 pt.
Paraffin wax 1 lb.
Penta concentrate 10:1 ½ gal.
Zinc stearate 2 oz.

Pour the gallon of mineral spirits into a 5-gal., open-top can. Put paraffin and zinc stearate in another pan and heat over flame, stirring until uniform mixture results. Pour this into the mineral spirits, stirring vigorously. Keep flame away from mineral spirits. When solution has cooled to room temperature, add pentachlorophenol concentrate, then linseed. Stir in colors until mixture is uniform, and it's ready for use. For redwood color, use ½ pt. burnt sienna and ½ pt. raw umber, plus 1 pt. pure red oxide color-in-oil.

Shingle stains can be used also on rough-sawn siding. Linseed or oil-modified alkyd coatings are the best here, as a porous paint film is necessary to allow moisture to escape and thereby prevent blistering. Regular shingle stain is composed of a color dissolved in oil-containing solvents and a wood preservative such as creosote. Preservation of the shingle depends upon adequate penetration of the stain rather than the formation of a protective outside film, while with regular paint, on the contrary, adhesion of the film to the surface is more important than penetration.

It has been found that 90% of all paint failures are due to the poor lumber used as the base—mainly the high moisture content of the wood, or moisture entering the back side of the wood after it has been painted—through condensation due to faulty gutter and flashing. Blistering is a common result of moisture destroying the paint bond. Paint will adhere best to slow-grown spring wood and will tend to peel from fast-grown summer wood. Paint will also last longer upon narrow-band, edge-grain boards than upon wide-band, flat-grain boards.

Alligatoring, the final stage of checking, is one common paint-mixture deficiency. It results from having too much oil in the prime coat. The prime coat should always be harder than the final coat. For this reason it is important to allow plenty of time between coats, as exposure to the air causes a hardening action (oxidation) to take place. The final coat should be elastic enough to respond to the expansion and contraction of weather change.

Lacquer, shellac, spar varnish, linseed, or alkyd can all be used on interior wood paneling and plywood. Alkyd is an excellent sealer for plywood. Alkyd gloss or semi-gloss paint will last as long and retain color as well as any paint now sold. If a colored surface is desired, one of the styrene-butadiene, polyvinyl acetate, or acrylic latex paints is an excellent choice. Already, the greatest volume of water-emulsion paint sold in the United States is of the latex type. Such paints dry rapidly, are easily applied, have no odor, have good scrub resistance (after hardening), excellent penetration, and good color-uniformity.

(to be continued)

What About Velvet Beans?

By O. A. Koepp
904 Michigan Ave.
Palm Harbor, Fla.

The velvet bean has been bean grown in the South for years as a standard livestock feed. I first became interested in it in 1927, and have been using it successfully as tasty human food for a long time. The standard practice here is to plant a row of velvet beans, a row of corn and a row of peanuts. All three are good protein foods, though both peanuts and velvet beans contain about three times as much protein as yellow corn. The corn serves mostly to hold the beans off the ground.

There are several kinds of velvet beans; some are bush beans, but I plant the old Florida, speckled, vine-growing bean which matures in 180 days. (Up north one would probably have to use the 90-day velvet bean.) We eat them in various stages of ripeness. When shelled green, they are pearly white, as large as large English peas. Soon small purpleish spots develop. I slit the pods with a knife, and it doesn't take long to shell enough large beans for a meal. Where the knife wounds a bean, a redish purple color appears. I believe this is prussic acid, but in such small amounts that it does

Letters, cont'd

pastures gives us all the pleasure and variety and spiritual enrichment that one could ask for.

We aren't roughing it, but when it gets to 25 below in winter and the road is snowed under, our respect for the almost non-existent old rugged Vermont individualist increases all the more. Economic dis-opportunity and the "big sell" are rapidly making the oldtime Vermonter a thing of the past. But for those who want to drop out of the rat race, and will make the requisite material sacrifice, as we are slowly going, there is still plenty of room left here.

We cherish each issue of our *Green Revolution*, and couldn't possibly think of not receiving it continuously.—Edith and Harold Bloom, North Montpelier, Vt.

Homestead, cont'd

ferred, or be sold out by the government of everything for taxes! After they pay the costs on borrowed money, the costs of producing and the taxes, there is too little left to live on. Taxation robs them directly and ruinously.

Q. Do you have any hopes for the green revolution?

A. There can be no true green revolution until human beings wake up and emancipate themselves from these things—the slavery of high land costs and high interests rates, and the tyranny of taxation.

Q. What do you suggest people do?

A. Most people see that there must be revenue for highways, and some common necessities. But this doesn't need to come via taxation. Why can't people see that the users, beneficiaries of such things, buy and pay for the services they use? If every person would tell his tax collector he prefers to buy what he wants of common services, and refuse to pay for what he does not order, there'd be some chance for a man to live on his land and make a go of it. I can envision a time when every man has his fair share of the earth free. He will be free to produce and construct to his heart's content. From that spot he can resist all exploitation. He can command the full value of any production he wants to exchange—or refuse to trade. This in my view is central to a green revolution.

(Note. The general economic principles that are pertinent to successful living on the land are discussed more fully in *A Way Out* and books and pamphlets available from School of Living. May 1965 is devoted to the Possessional Problem—the ethical possession of land and money, etc.—Editor)

not seem harmful to either beast or man. I prefer their flavor to green soya beans. They can be cooked with pork, or in any other way.

Beans Form Shaded Area

I am allergic to work, and the newest way to reduce work is to grow velvet beans and gather them from a shade they form beside our house. Beginning 40 feet from the house, I make a galvanized wire secure with a concrete block, and fasten the other end to the roof of the house. I place such a wire every four feet; then plant velvet beans near each wire. Soon they climb along the wires to the roof; the beans hang down, and I go out to pick them right outside the door. A good-sized family could live by making use of this fine velvet bean shade.

Seed can be obtained from the Hastings Seed Co., Atlanta, Ga., and more information can be obtained by writing me, or The University of Florida Agr. Experiment Station, Gainesville, Fla.

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