

High FAUX

IT'S the Nashville effect, or something like that. Someone writes a bad poem and thinks he's a country songwriter—even though he can't tell a major chord from a minor. But on the strength of his friends being bullied into saying they love his "new song," he's giving up everything and moving to Music Row!

Don't think it hasn't happened.

Well... for what it's worth, row rhymes with faux, even though it doesn't look much the same.

Rebecca Slaton is a faux artist; she's co-owner and artistic director of Surfaces Decorative Arts Studio in Kansas City, MO. She'll tell you that just because you're a painter doesn't make you a decorative finish artist. It's a good start, but the apartment repaint guy isn't going to turn into the upscale Venetian plaster guy without some training.

"Painters come into the profession with advantages," she emphasizes. "You already have the basic equipment and know how to prep a room. Your paint clients may have asked you to do faux, so you have a built-in demand for a new service."

But as Alan Jackson put it, "She likes the violin, I like the

fiddle." While you're working with the same materials, it's not necessarily the same thing.

Slaton points up some differences. "Painters want to smooth the plaster with a trowel and faux artists want to create more texture. You usually apply one color and we may apply three to five at one time. Clients can look at a paint deck and select their pre-mixed colors. In faux, you create the look through layering of materials and colors on a sample."

Still, you gotta start somewhere, and you'll never get that first job until you can convince a few people that you know what you're doing. Part of this is your personal relations skills—you need to be able to communicate to your customer what you're going to achieve and show some professional samples of what you can do.

"Focus on the professional transformation of your end result," says Stephanie Gabel, president of Roux Design, a decorative finishing studio in Chicago. "If the client is still reluctant to give you the job, you may want to offer a discount just to secure the experience for your portfolio."

If you can't get the paying jobs up front, friends and family will be happy to let you try out their walls for free! "Clients do not seem to care about where your shots come from as much as how good they look," says Gabel. Here's an idea—find a good photographer, paint his walls, then let him take your pix. Now you both have a better portfolio!

When you're not painting, she adds, you should be reading. "It's important to read a lot and keep up with the trends."

It's your portfolio that's going to make the difference. Kelly S. King, director of education and product development for Modern Masters, continues on that same line of thought. Based in Nebraska, he's in charge of setting up training programs for Modern Masters throughout the country and internationally. "Your portfolio is what sets you apart from the competition," he says. "The world is becoming much more competitive so the contractor that has that ultimate portfolio is going to have a definite advantage."

Along with walls, he suggests, try some furniture. Lamps, tables, anything around the house. Make sure to pick up the

BY JERRY RABUSHKA

All photos are of projects created with Crescent Bronze products. The two photos at the far right were from a Chicago penthouse done by Stephanie Gabel. The foyer walls (first photo) were treated with two tone



-lutin!

Getting Educated On Decorative Finishes.

old box of pizza crusts before you take the photos!

LET'S MAKE A RECORD!

So okay, the guy who plays guitar once a week and wants to make a record, vs. the guy who practices every night, is in a working band, studies the masters, and just put out his third CD of original music. If you're going to be a professional, you need to know what's goin' down in the professional segment of the biz.

Some faux seminars have what seem to be big price tags—you know... \$795 for three days, that kind of thing. Plus, you've got to fly to Akron, OH, or Las Cruces, NM, or some place out of your time zone. But, King says, this will be better than sitting in the local Home Depot with a bunch of beginners—those classes aren't designed for the pro. That, and Home Depot probably isn't selling the advanced products you need.

“The small store classes and the intermediate classes are teaching things that are not necessarily cutting edge,” says Kelly. “When you step up into the more advanced classes, you might be spending more money but you're getting finishes that are cutting edge. You need to be resourceful and search out a school that has cutting edge finish and technology.”

These schools, he adds, might also sell products that you can't get anywhere else, further allowing you to distinguish and differentiate yourself.

LET'S LEARN A SONG, FIRST

While training doesn't guarantee success, says Rebecca Slaton, she comments that usually the most successful finishers are the ones that take the most classes. “A good class will

teach you the best way to manage your project while teaching the right technique with the right products,” she says. “You should leave with a curriculum and a portfolio of sellable sample boards.”

Don't just go on the web and plunk down your money, even if the class is in your favorite vacation spot. Everyone looks great on the web; even that guy who just plays guitar on the weekend because... well...his girlfriend designed his web page. The web page for the guy who played at the Borders down the street can be as exciting as the star who's toured to Japan, Lithuania and Kamchatka. Read the fine print!

Slaton suggests you call the school, talk to the instructor (if they want you to drop \$800 on three days' instruction, they better have time to talk to you!) Make sure what they teach is what you want to learn, and also that this instructor demonstrates experience and product knowledge. “People will say anything on a web site,” she reminds us.

Besides, if you get a few good jobs out of it, it will make the class worthwhile. “As a customer, I would want to talk to someone who is knowledgeable about the applications,” says Stephanie Gabel. “That kind of credibility translates into sales!”

DON'T SOLVE THIS MYSTERY!

An important question is, of course, *how much more can I earn?* “I believe that a painter can make between 25-50% more profit on a room with a decorative paint treatment versus a flat coat of paint,” Gabel says. “This is assuming a lot of factors are in place... that a painter understands how to run a business plus has studied his market, which can take years.



tuxedo stripes using a Crescent Bronze metallic grey with pearl white. In the master bedroom she used a pale gold overlay to increase the quality of an already-stenciled damask pattern.

Photos courtesy of Modern Masters. The company has recently come out with a new metallic paint collection called "In Demand," which includes a palette of 10 on-trend semi-opaque and opaque hues.



You also need to make sure that what you do is done well, clean and efficiently.”

That’s important, says Slaton, who sums up that if you can’t successfully manage a regular paint job, you can really hit the skids on a faux project. A botched faux job is in danger of losing more money than a conventional painting job.

You’ll be able to charge more per wall, in part because your supplies are more expensive and you’re on the job longer.

There’s also the mystery of it all. A lot of customers, right or wrong, think painting is a no-brainer, but faux? That’s a mystery! “If you offer something no one else can do, then it becomes more valuable,” she says. “In my experience, painters pursue faux because they want to make more money,” she says. “The painters who stick with it do so because it is more creative and this desire drives them more than potential profits.”

Faux can make you more money, adds King, simply because it takes longer to do—hence more billable hours. It also brings you into more jobs—hence more work.

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE da VINCI

Even in a category that values creativity, you don’t have to continually reinvent the wheel. “If you are familiar with base coats and trowels and painting techniques, you can systemize a finish and it doesn’t have to be that creative,” King says. “Some jobs are going to be more high end, but some will more commercial and production oriented.”

You can learn some of each.... Some finishes look good but they’re fast and easy. It can get you in and out of a commercial establishment that wants more than flat paint but doesn’t want to spend a lot of money on a high end decorative finish. “In your portfolio you should have both some faster and longer techniques, which will enable you to sell more projects,” he says.

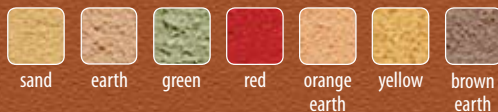
Once you’ve talked your customer into your services, it’s time to get to work, says Slaton. Despite what you’ve seen on *Desperate Housewives*, most homeowners don’t want to cozy up to the painter—they want their homes back to normal as soon as possible. “I know a lot of artists who are fun and charming but can’t complete a single project on time or within a budget,” she says. “Of course you need to be pleasant and professional but most clients want the job done



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THE FINISH THAT GIVES BACK

From Defi Products (pronounced Deffy) comes Argildéco, a natural coating made up of clay and silica. For customers looking for green products, as well as contractors looking to work in less odorous conditions, this product has several selling points, according to President Brian Olson; it even helps insulate and humidify!

- Argildéco is earth-friendly and human-friendly.
- Consumes little energy to produce with no chemical process.
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- Clay material absorbs excess dampness and gives it back when the air is dry. This helps to keep coolness in summer and warmth in winter.

It's relatively easy to apply and repair, and allows you to experiment with a variety of decorative techniques. "The only tools needed are a putty knife and trowel, sponge or brush as desired for your finish. You can apply a personal touch to the walls: raw, steel, scraped or sponged are just a few possible finishing techniques," says Brian. "In addition, you can choose a special finish by adding straw, mother-of-pearl or mica to Argildéco for a truly personalized wall."



These coatings from Defi Products allow the painter to apply them with a variety of techniques.

right more than they want a fun friend. For the most part, we are commissioned artists on the clock and people want us out of their homes."

Still, adds Gabel, leave a bit of yourself behind. "It's critical to put yourself and your creativity into the project to make it come to life," she insists. "Make sure you're asking plenty of questions and listening to your client to get the best result—something you're proud of and something you love!"

And since it's *their* money, make it something *they* love, too. [TPC](#)



Faux artist Rebecca Slaton demonstrates a finishing technique for one of her classes.

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