

12 WAYS to ‘Go With the Faux’ in 2012

Headling into 2012, there is hope that faux-finishing sales will surge and reclaim additional market share after a sales slump that impacted the entire paint and decorating industry.

Economic experts agree that we are not yet out of the woods in terms of economic recovery. However, you can do well in the faux category if you put in place a strategy for success. Getting more specific, we present 12 ways to help you make the most of faux-finishing sales in 2012.

Idea #1: Follow the Trends

First, familiarize yourself with market trends in order to position yourself where the sales are going to be. For 2012, many believe that the most lucrative sales potential is with products that shimmer—specifically metallic paints and plasters as well as luminous Venetian plasters and stone finishes.

Modern Masters Inc. predicted that its most popular products in the coming year will be Metallic Paint Collection, Metallic Plasters and Masterclear.

“Metallic Paint is a timeless product with a metallic shimmer,” said Kelly S. King, director of education and product development for the company. “It can be used on just about any surface with the proper primer. Walls and ceiling are a mainstay for these products, which give a clean fresh lively feel to the room. The Metallic Paint Collection is also phenomenal over other surfaces that may not be so commonly realized, such as kitchen cabinets, wood trim, furniture, floors and accessories in your home—even lamp shades.”

Available in 50 colors as well as Sheer Flash Colors, the Metallic Paint Collection is noted for its versatility and durability. “It takes any room or surface from plain or boring to a more significant appeal,” King said.

Similarly, King observed that Modern Masters’ Metallic Plasters takes interior surfaces to new levels. “The material acts like a chameleon,” he said. “If you apply it on walls in a room where the interior design setting is more traditional, it melts in with its surroundings giving a sense of elegance to the room. If it is applied in a room where the design setting is more contemporary, it makes a statement suggestive of sleek clean and crisp design. When applied in an eclectic setting, it makes a magical blended statement that pulls everything together in the room.”

Metallic Plasters can be intermingled with the Metallic Paint Collection for even more exciting effects, satisfying what King called the desire for elegant and tasteful finishes in today’s interior design. The Metallic Plaster comes in more than 50 beautiful colors, but can be intermixed to create thousands of additional colors or lightly



● Stephanie Gabel of Roux Designs created this beautiful medallion effect with Crescent Bronze products.

tinted to expand the color palette to an infinite number of choices.

An exciting direction from Crescent Bronze come with the introduction of a dozen new silver latex metallic paints for 2012. “Decorative painters and DIYers may choose ready-mixed latex silvers ranging in character from superfine to extra brilliant with leafing and non-leafing options,” reported Rebecca Spurlock, sales and marketing for Crescent Bronze. “As a bonus, the company’s color-rich Chromatone® latex line gets a fresh label and includes new hues in Pewter, Champagne, Gold Leaf and true Black.”

The extensive Crescent Bronze product line encompasses more than 130 metallic, pearlescent, fluorescent and phosphorescent color choices. Spurlock described them as ranging from pale to rich golds, fiery to deep coppers, light to dark bronzes, fine to extra brilliant silvers, luminescent pearl tones of various hues and a dozen vibrant fluorescents. Among the 16 designer tones are such hues as Mauvetone, Imperial Venetian, Buckskin and Fire Mist.

Products are available in seven resin systems, including zero-VOC or standard acrylic lacquers, a fast-drying modified alkyd enamel, easy-to-use la-

ter shimmer and more depth than any other product in the industry.”

Among the professional painters who frequently choose Crescent Bronze products to transform their clients’ spaces is Stephanie Gabel, owner of Chicago-based Roux Design. “My clients want the one-of-a-kind design potential metallics offer and they love the variety of colors available from Crescent Bronze,” said Gabel. “I am using metallics in both contemporary and traditional settings and Crescent Bronze offers me the versatility that

parlays into increased sales.”

Roman Architectural Finishes, in partnership with another manufacturer, has carved out a unique position with ArmorMetallix™ 100% Pure Metallic Coatings, what company president Jerry Russo called the most durable metallic in the industry with the added bonus that it offers one-coat coverage in either a spray or roll-on application.

“It’s unique because it is made with true metallic pigment whereas other products are made with mica,” Russo explained. “We truly produce a metallic paint, not a paint the colors of metallic. With a true metallic pigment, ArmorMetallix has a much bet-



● A new product from Modern Masters, MasterClear.

ter shimmer and more depth than any other product in the industry.”

Another major trend is the use of luminous stone finishes. A great example of this is Faux Effects International’s highly successful LusterStone®. “Its natural reflective qualities, ease of application and variation in applications make it a perfect finish for all marketplaces—from residential to commercial, and for the seasoned professional decorative finisher or the DIYer,” reported Rachel Sandor-VanHouten, Director, Faux Effects International Inc.

Idea #2: Focus on New Products

Focusing on new products can put you on the leading edge. Among new products is Modern Masters’ MasterClear. King described MasterClear as a great way to achieve the look of lacquered walls without the downside of using a lacquered-based solvent material whose smell, he noted, “can bring you to your knees.”

King explained that MasterClear can be used over any common latex paint and pull the sheen levels up to semi-gloss or gloss levels by simply applying the product in the sheen desired. Used over the Metallic Paint Collection and the Metallic Plaster Collection, MasterClear adds a whole new dimension.”

“Not only does MasterClear have the ability to give a beautiful lacquered sheen, it adds such a layer of depth that it looks as if you could literally dive into the wall as if it were a pool,” King enthused. “It will enhance all the visually stunning application you can do with Metallic Paint and Metallic Plaster and take them to another level. What lacquered glossy wall once meant is being redefined by MasterClear and with a far more pleasurable smell.”

King added that all of these products work in all markets—residential, commercial and industrial as well as the do-it-your-

selfer. "They are all very durable, scrubbable, cleanable and so easy to apply."

Idea #3: Promote the Use of Quality

Having a quality line of faux-finishing products ensures good quality results. This starts with having a good quality paint line as well as glazes, textured paints, metallic paints, plasters and tools.

"First and foremost, what you want is a premium paint," stated Lucianna Samu, a professional faux painter from Sarasota Springs, N.Y., who also blogs on Benjamin Moore's behalf at www.colorchats.com. "You want the product to be reliable, and then there's the color."

Samu is able to create a wide range of faux effect finishes using Benjamin Moore's premium paint Aura. "For instance, I created a crackled finish with Aura and a wax-resist technique," she reported. "I can achieve this effect without using a crackle finish. I save a step, and I have a lot more control."

Another product Samu uses quite often is Benjamin Moore's textured paint. "This is a real 'sleeper' product that I use quite extensively," Samu said. "It's a cross between a paint and a wall compound. It has a lot of body to it, and you can use it in any color you want. I use it to create stone finishes and weaves. I recently used it to create a wall finish that had the appearance of bark."

Benjamin More has both an alkyd and a latex glazing liquid as well as an extender. Samu uses all of these products where appropriate, noting that the alkyd glazing liquid allows her to work for a longer period of time. "I buy it for the open time," she reported. "Diehard finishers like me are reluctant to give that up."

The need for quality products also extends to faux-finishing tools. As an example, a quality tape is needed to create many faux-painted effects. Frog-Tape® has a tape in a Delicate Surface



● Faux Effects International Inc.'s LusterStone.

technology that is ideal for faux painting. The company's PaintBlock technology prevents bleed-through to ensure very sharp paint lines. From 3M, ScotchBlue™ Painter's Tape Advanced Delicate Surface features Edge-Lock™ Paint Line Protector to ensure super-sharp paint lines on smooth surfaces.

Patricia Presto, an Atlanta-based faux finisher, can attest to the need for a good quality tape. For instance, a recent striping effect that she created for a dining room required her to tape out 1-foot vertical lines. A premium-quality tape prevented seepage and meant that she did not have to go back to do touchup.

"Tape has to work on these lines to prevent seepage, or it is a few days extra work for me to go back and touch up all of the seepage," said Presto, whose business is called On the Surface. "With inferior tape, striping is a nightmare. With good quality tape, the finish is spectacular."

For the past several months, Presto has been using Bloc-It from Intertape Polymer Group. She has blogged on behalf of IPG, touting the advantages of using a quality tape to ensure no bleed-through and clean removal even after seven or eight days. "Tape is one of the most important things in a faux finisher's toolbox," Presto said.

Idea #4: Break Into New Markets

Don't limit yourself to the markets you have been pursuing in the past.

If you've been focusing strictly on the consumer side of the market, consider expanding into the commercial sector. If you are already doing commercial, consider new venues such as hospitality or healthcare.

It is best to carry the products that appeal to the market you wish to pursue. For instance, ArmorFaux is a product from Roman Architectural Finishes that is well suited to the commercial market. "It's an

exceptionally durable product that is designed to be installed easily by painters and faux finishers," Russo said.

Easy enough for painting contractors who are not well-versed in faux finishing, the product is excellent for production work that has to be quickly and easily duplicated throughout a large square footage. "A crew can move quickly, doing 100 rooms, and all 100 rooms will look the same," Russo explained. "No special technique is needed. All you do is squeegee off the glaze."

The product permits the use of a virtually endless color palette. "Any color desired, we can match," Russo said.

The advantage of this product is that it does open many opportunities for retailers in the commercial market that otherwise might have been inaccessible. "This is the type of product that will allow you to penetrate industries like hospitality and healthcare, where it was not previously used," Russo said. "The durability makes it excellent for hallways. One-coat coverage means that faux painters will expend less material cost and less time. It's easier to install. That's important in a competitive marketplace, allowing the painter to provide a job at a lower price point."

Idea #5: Promote New Surfaces

Walls and ceilings are not the only surfaces that can be transformed by faux-techniques. Consider floors, countertops, furniture and other surfaces.

As King described, the Metallic Paint Collection makes a great way to redo old cabinets. "Simply clean them, sand them and apply a bonding primer such as Zinsser Bullseye 1-2-3 Waterbased, then apply a few coats of Metallic Paint and you have a brand new look in your kitchen," he said.

Want to learn more about decorative products for concrete floors, patios, driveways, countertops and more? See the article on page 47.



● Patricia Presto created this effect using premium-quality tape.

Idea #6: Seek Out the High-End Market

Elias Benalloun of DecoFinish LLC, which offers the OIKOS products in the U.S., reported that the one area that has seemed to be unaffected by the economic slowdown is the high-end residential. "With a tough economy, many people have turned to straight painting. However, the high-end segment of the market is still doing faux painting in their homes," Benalloun reported.

The one concession is that perhaps these finishes are not being used as extensively as they once were. "Instead of a whole apartment, people are doing a single wall or a single area, making an impact in a powder room, for example, versus a more extensive area," Benalloun explained.

The high-end finishes offered in the OIKOS product line-up fit the high-end demographic. Among the products for a high-end clientele are Aureum, a Venetian plaster with a 24K gold effect. Additional products from DecoFinish include Multidecor, a semi-transparent decorative paint that makes it possible to create colored, iridescent or pearlescent finishes that bring new light to the walls of a home. Another product is Ardesia, an innovative solution that reproduces the finish of natural stone. These and other products in the OIKOS line can be combined to create unique effects.

While the products are very rich-

looking, consumers can buy and apply them themselves if they so desire. The fact that they have a good coverage rate makes them appealing from a square-footage cost. So, while the products appeal to the high end, their square-footage cost gives them a broader appeal.

Idea #7: Present Affordable Solutions

While high-end market opportunities do exist, the ability to offer an economical solution also can be important for capturing residential and commercial business.

Dan Schiefelbein, Owner of Specialized Building Products and the manufacturer of Vella Venetian Plaster Systems, pointed out that Vella Venetian Plaster is a unique product when it comes to price. "It's the most economical high-end smooth wall finish on the market. That's especially important in a tough economy. The price is \$25 a gallon and \$57 for a 3-1/2 gallon pail."

Beautiful Venetian plaster finishes can be achieved with Vella Ultra Premium and Liscio products, which are sold untinted but can be customized to any color the client desires with universal colorants. The company also offers aggregate finishes—specifically crushed marble aggregate and silica aggregate—to create a Marmorino and Silverstone effect, the latter of which looks like sandstone. The aggregate, too, is priced eco-

nomically. "For \$8 to \$10 for a bag of aggregate and \$50 for 5-gallons of Vella, a finisher can do a lot of work," Schiefelbein said.

Two new products introduced by the company are Vella Veneer Plaster and Level Wall-5, which provide an ultra-smooth wall finish. This is especially important for residences or businesses that have a problem wall.

"These products can take everyone's problems and make them go away,"

Schiefelbein said. "If there's a home that has orange peel, you can use Level Wall-5 or Vella Veneer Plaster and product a smooth wall with absolutely no sanding necessary. It's a smooth wall system to prime and paint. Put a Venetian plaster on it, or use a decorative media such as crushed marble aggregate or sandstone to create a beautiful effect. You can also create murals or do stenciling over Vella. There's no product like ours in the marketplace."

One way to be more economical in this market is to streamline your product assortment so that you can maximize turns and profits. This is a great advantage of Roman's Armor-



● Aureum from DecoFinish LLC

Faux and ArmorMetallix product lineup. "For many retailers a traditional faux program has too many SKUs," said Russo. With our line, you don't have to carry a myriad of products. We have about 20 percent of the SKUs of other programs. In this market, everyone is trying to gain a competitive advantage. Not having money tied up in product can be very important. You can get the inventory turns you need to be more profitable."

Idea #8: Put the Focus on Training

Proper training is a prerequisite for being effective in the faux-finishing market. "Education is the beginning of everything," King said. "It is the seed that grows and becomes the vision you imagined. At Modern Masters, we have a network of over 30 Platinum Training Centers that are trained and equipped to train your customers, and floor staff on the technical aspects and application options of these products."

King himself will come to dealer stores to do an inspirational, motivational and educational training session for a group of painting contractors, decorative painters or anyone else interested in learning about the Modern Masters line. These training sessions are a proven model for stores to significantly increase their sale of Modern Masters products, both by helping decorative painters to increase their existing sales and teaching painting contractors how to break into this business. (Those interested in having King come to their stores can contact him via email at kellyking@modernmasters.com to set up a phone appointment to discuss the specifics or to be connected to the Platinum Training Center closest to them.)

Crescent Bronze also places a strong focus on education. Spurlock reported that the company enjoys relationships with a number of distributors who offer faux-finishing and decorative painting



● **Lucianna Samu created this backsplash with Benjamin Moore's Aura and a wax-resist technique.**

instruction to their customers. "In addition, Crescent Bronze employees go on the road regularly, attending faux expos, trade shows and conventions designed to promote faux finishing and specialty paints," she said.

Training is also a central theme of Faux Effects International Inc. Sandor-VanHouten reported that the company prides itself on the level of product and technical support that it provides its dealers. "We are always here to assist whether by 'live' telephone support or 24/7 online services," she said.

Vella Venetian Plaster will provide retailers with extensive training in the use of its products, both for sales staff and contractor customers. "If you have one, two three or four stores, we will treat you the same as if you were Sherwin-William," Schiefelbein said. "Training is our first and foremost consideration."

In addition to training seminars, the company has an instructional DVD, technical telephone support and an informative website at www.vellaplaster.com.

Schiefelbein stressed the product training, along with effective promotion, will allow retailers to enhance their performance in the faux-finishing and decorative painting categories. "Possibly one of the reasons that the industry stalemated is because people got away from these principles," he said. "Training and promotion will allow you to turn this category into a money-maker. We will work with retailers to show them how to make money from our products."

To teach contractors about the advantages of the OIKOS product line from DecoFinish, Benalloun conducts hands-on seminars. Participants leave with several sample boards that equip them to gain business. "Classes lead to orders," he said. "Once people get their hands on the product, they have a better understanding. They

become your customer."

Idea #9: Build Partnerships

"Retailers who network and creatively build mutually beneficial relationships with faux and decorative painters will increase niche-market sales," suggested Spurlock. "For those stores without the available square footage to house instructional facilities or without the shelf space for faux finishing and



● **ArmorFaux from Roman Architectural Finishes.**

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decorative paints, developing community-based networks with commercial painters, interior designers, art stores, or community colleges can prove fruitful. The partnerships can be for instructional purposes or can be event-focused."

In the case of instructional purposes, the non-retail partner might be a school of interior design, a local interior designer or decorative painter—even the art or theatre department of a local college.

Special events can be accomplished via a partnership with the paint retailer and a community partner teaming up. Spurlock suggested an event or special outing: "Perhaps a tour of homes where faux-finishing techniques have been used to great effect or an evening behind-the-scenes at a restoration site where metallic paints are being used to re-capture past splendor."

If you need help develop a marketing plan for this, Spurlock suggested bringing in a college student working

on a marketing internship to help with these endeavors.

Idea #10: Promote, Promote, Promote

Let your customers know that you are truly in the faux-finishing business by giving it prominent space in your showroom.

If you have the space, Spurlock suggested creating a faux-finishing "nook." "Creating a 'Getting Started' section for would-be faux finishers that combines 'how-to' books and magazines with instructional videos and brochures directing the buyer to user-friendly websites can help orient and meet the needs of DIYers," she advised. "Point-of-purchase displays could be geared to expertise levels. Albums of photographs of completed projects—from simple to complex—as well as a prepared list of local decorative painters, complete with professional contact information, and references could be useful."

Faux is a visual medium, so it's important to do in-store demos, conduct seminars and drive people to the Internet where they can see photos and watch videos of products in action.

Russo reported that Roman is working on creating videos of its product line and also is gung-ho about doing product demonstrations at trade shows. "Our claims are very bold, and we feel we can best back them up by showing the products at trade shows or through video," Russo said. "Once the consumer sees our products in action, they will understand the advantages. What can't speak can't lie."

Faux Effects International Inc. promotes its products via a mix of print and online advertising, online newsletters and product updates, and also an iPhone App. "Keeping it simple is our motto," stated Raymond Sandor, company founder. "In an age of constant 24/7 information, it can almost get to where most do not pay attention

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because it all becomes too common. There still is nothing like having an actual sample or catalog in one's hands to use for reference."

Idea #11: Sell the Color

Color is a key component that will sell your faux-finishing products. Samu reported that Benjamin Moore's Color Stories, featuring 240 full-spectrum paint colors, has brought color to a whole new level. "Each recipe of color is the result of four to seven different tint additives," she reports. "The colors are beyond belief—so rich and fabulous with great vibrancy and movement. As a decorative painter, I've spent my whole career trying to get color on a wall to do certain things. The fact that paint coming out of can is able to provide this effect is amazing."

Another product for which color is key is the Ralph Lauren Paint line. The line has six Lifestyle color palettes: Vintage Masters, inspired by the works



● Candlelight from Ralph Lauren

of the world's most beloved master painters; Urban Loft, featuring a modern palette of sophisticated neutrals and cool tonal shades; Naturals, showcasing earth-tone hues; Thoroughbred, offering rich jewel tones for the most distinguished environments; White-wash, focusing on off-whites from

clean and bright to soft and subtle; and Island Brights, celebrating the pure, clean colors of the Caribbean.

Originally introduced with these lifestyle palettes, the Ralph Lauren line has grown to include faux and specialty finishes. There are four finishes to choose from: Regent Metallics, offering a shimmering richness to classic colors; Candlelight, featuring a shimmering topcoat that varies throughout the day with the interplay of natural light and shadow; Suede, evoking the look of brush suede; and River Rock, featuring a rough, distinctive look that delivers timeworn beauty.

Idea #12: Connect with Customers Via New Media

Connect with customers through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, webinars, blogging and interactive websites. See page 39 for information on how faux-finishing companies are using social media to full advantage. ■

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