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What is a High Quality Paint Job

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As a painting and decorative plasters contractor I often hear a homeowner or designer say, "We want a high quality job." I'll also hear contractors (myself included) promise that "We do high quality work." What exactly does that mean?

For interior painting work, the most obvious answer is the final appearance of the work. Straight, even lines against the ceiling and moldings are a must when painting the walls, particularly with the bolder and darker colors that are so prevalent in today's design schemes. Full color coverage with uniform sheen is also extremely important to the final appearance.

Of course, caulking of cracks and spackling of holes and doing any needed texture repairs prior to painting is necessary to achieve the desired finished look. It is also important where the paint isn't. There should be no wall colors on the ceiling or trim, and of course no paint drips on the floor or furnishings. Similarly, for painted woodwork the lines should be straight and clean.

If the woodwork is spray painted, there should be no runs, the surface should be smooth, and the gloss should be uniform. For woodwork with the more traditional brush painted look, there should be no missed or dry looking spots, and the brush strokes should have flowed to a soft, satiny appearance with no ropy or frosty look. The correct preparation should have been followed so that there is good adhesion from the new paint to the old.

As important as the look of the finished job is, there are also several less talked-about factors that define overall job quality.

Quality of the materials: There are a lot of manufacturers that produce very good paint. However, they all make economy lines, too. It is very important to use top-of-the line products to ensure the best possible appearance and durability. I also believe strongly in the value of the low odor, low VOC products we now have available to us. They are much more pleasant for the homeowner to be around, in addition to being much healthier for all of us.

Communication: It starts with the initial consultation or bid. When will the work need to be finished? What colors go where? What sheen or gloss paint is to be used? What is the total cost? The written proposal should spell out all these things. A contractor with the correct attention to detail will also continuously communicate with the customer about what has been done, what will be done the next day, and ask if there are any issues that have arisen that need to be addressed.

Trust: I think we've all had the experience of hiring somebody to do work on our house because the owner (or maybe his estimator) came across as very professional and trustworthy, only to find that the actual employees who show up to do the work leave a lot to be desired. It is a very fair question to ask who will be doing the actual work.

On the subject of trust, how will the money be handled? Will the contractor stand by his quote, or is it merely an estimate? 1/4 to 1/3 of the total amount as a deposit is appropriate to buy materials and hold a spot on the contractor's schedule.

In my opinion, paying a contractor in full before work is started or even totally completed should not even be considered. Unless you are hiring somebody that comes recommended to you by someone you trust, I strongly suggest getting references and calling them. If you have above-average standards, you need somebody who has experience in high-end, high-demands work. You also want only people you can trust in the home around the people who live there and their valuable possessions. Keep in mind that bigger projects can take awhile, and that there will be people working on the house many times when no one else is at home.

Neatness and cleanliness: Remodeling and painting work by its nature creates some mess. However, tools and materials should not be scattered about, especially in walking areas. The jobsite should also be cleaned and straightened up at the end of each work day.

Teamwork: When working for a designer, it is the contractor's job to enhance the designer's reputation, not detract from it. The same holds true when hired by another contractor.

The final details: Before a job is called done, touchups should be completed and everything cleaned and straightened up to give that all finished look. There should be touchup paint of each color left on the job and clearly marked.

So now it's time to rate the job. Was the work that was agreed upon done to the level promised at the price quoted? Was this a pleasant experience? Most important, would you recommend your contractor to your neighbors and friends with confidence? The answers to these questions define the true quality of the work.

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