

Time to DIY or hire a professional painter?

Why hire a professional painter?

You may be a keen DIY'er, but perhaps that steeply pitched roof is a little beyond your reach. After all, painting may be fun, but preparing the surface can be a very time consuming process, not to mention dangerous if roofs or double storey buildings are involved. If time is more important to you than money, hiring a professional painter may be a smart investment. On the other hand, if saving money is more important, doing the painting yourself will enable you to reduce the total costs of the job.

In making your decision, remember...

- Painting is a skilled trade that requires training and appropriate tools - Professional painters know how to properly prepare the surface, which paints to use in each situation and how to get the job done quickly with minimal disruption. Professional painters also have all the tools required to achieve a quality finish.
- Painting can be dangerous and/or hazardous - Working on ladders and dealing with solvents and dusts can be hazardous. Older houses may be coated in poisonous lead paints. Professional painters know how to handle these dangerous situations and substances and minimise the risks. They also have the appropriate safety equipment to keep you and your family and themselves safe.
- Painting requires cleanup and disposal - Professional painters will take care of these tasks on your behalf as part of their service.

If you do decide to hire a professional here are some tips to help you choose...

Making a start

Hiring a professional painter to paint your home is not a decision to take lightly. While anybody can slap paint onto your walls, it takes considerable expertise and experience to get a truly high quality finish. It may take you some searching to find the right person for the job.

The best way to find a good painter is through word of mouth. Ask friends, family and neighbours who have had some similar work done recently for personal recommendations - find out why they would and wouldn't recommend different painters. This will give you guidelines on important questions to ask your shortlist of painters. A good recommendation from a trusted source is worth its weight in gold.

The Master Painters trade association can also provide recommendations. While membership of a trade association does not guarantee good quality work, the association will have a process to resolve problems should things go wrong. Local painters can also be easily located in local community newspapers and directories like the Yellow Pages.

Resene offers a free Find-A-Painter service to help you make contact with Master Painters - complete a Find-A-Painter job sheet in store or check out the Resene Find-A-Professional listings on the Resene website. Hundreds and hundreds of tradespeople from painters through to design professionals, such as architects and colour consultants, are listed for your convenience.

Never select a painter on price alone - the cheapest quote will seldom be the best value in the long run. If there is a wide variation in the quotes you receive, ask each painter to itemise the main expenses so that you can compare how the money is being spent. This will also give you an idea of the extra work that some painters are preparing to do that you may not have thought about.

First impressions count! Assess the initial service you get from each painter and how efficient and effective it seems - this will be a guide to the service you receive once you hire the painter. The most important thing to remember when hiring contractors, typically you will get what you pay for - negotiating a low rate may be a false economy if the painter cuts corners to get the job done quickly.

Always check painters are qualified to do the work.

Ask for the names of satisfied customers or for references and make sure you check them out. If possible, visit completed jobs so that you can see the quality of the work for yourself. Ask the references whether the job was completed in a timely manner? Was the result satisfactory? Did the painter charge the amount that had been agreed? How much did the painter disrupt the household? Would they hire the painter again? Once you have a shortlist of three contractors who seem suitable, ask them to visit your home and provide a quote. Meeting someone face to face and discussing the project will help narrow your choices.

Be clear about what you want to achieve

Make sure everyone who needs to be there is present at the initial meeting with the painter to ensure that all ideas and expectations are tabled before the work starts. Put one person in charge of the project on the household's behalf so that the painter has one person to refer to should they need any questions answered. This will minimise confusion when perhaps one partner asks for work to be done that is contrary to what the other partner has already requested.

If you are planning to have exterior painting done, the initial meeting should be scheduled during daylight so you can show the painter what work is required and they can assess the state of the existing paint finish. The condition of the existing paintwork will have a bearing on the scope of work they are required to do.

For a large job prepare a written specification of your requirements, outlining the scope of the work, the timeframe and who will be responsible for cleaning up and disposing of paint debris. Where possible, follow the same process for smaller jobs - while it may seem unnecessary to write a specification for small jobs, it may save you arguments later.



Be specific and concise - a clear specification will help prospective contractors prepare better quotes. The more information you give them, the more confidence they will have that they understand the requirements of the job, and the more likely they will be able to achieve the desired outcome.

Get a quote

When you are planning a large project, ask three painters for written quotes. A quote is a fixed price that won't vary unless you agree to pay for extra costs that were unforeseen at the time of quoting. The quote should include:

- The painter's contact details.
- Your contact details.
- A clear description of all the areas to be painted, including all surfaces and any surface preparation to be undertaken.
- The products and colours that will be used, including the brand name of the paint.
- An estimation of how long the job will take to complete.
- The cost and whether it includes or excludes GST.

Once agreed to, the quote should be signed and dated by both yourself and the painter.

For a small job, an estimate of costs may be sufficient. This is more elastic than a quote and usually more attractive as the contractor doesn't have to budget for the absolute worst case scenario. Ensure you make it clear to the contractor that you must be consulted and agree in writing before any extra costs are incurred. The final charge should be within 10 - 15% of the original estimate.

With all quotes and estimates check that all extra charges, such as travel allowances, and GST have been included.

If you get a job done and no price was agreed, the Consumer Guarantees Act offers you some protection, stating that the price charged must be 'reasonable' - i.e. the price must be similar to that that would be charged by other competent painters undertaking the same job. You are not obliged to pay more than is 'reasonable'.

Agree on payment terms and get it in writing

While it is common for the customer to pay an initial deposit for materials and/or instalments as the work progresses, never pay for the entire job in advance. Agree on a schedule of payments as key work is completed. The final payment should not be made until the entire job is complete and has been carefully inspected. Any extra work that arises once the project is underway must be specified, priced and agreed in writing before the work is undertaken and any costs are incurred. Only make payments by cheque, not cash, so that there is a paper trail should disputes over payment occur.

Be realistic about the amount and time you have budgeted - good painters are in demand and will therefore usually charge more than the market average and are unlikely to be able to start immediately.

Draw up a clear agreement and establish your ground rules on the project scope and payment schedule.

It is essential to get everything in writing before the job starts, otherwise it may end up costing you far more than expected.

Colour is key

Choosing colour is a critical part of the finish, so don't rush this part of the process. Many painters will help you select colours if you request this service, however, remember they are experts at painting not colour consultants, so if you are looking for a complicated colour scheme, it may be better to hire a colour consultant for this part of the work.

Always test your colour choices using testpots. These will also provide a useful colour check for the painter to ensure they are applying the correct colour. Colour scheme tools, such as Resene EzyPaint virtual painting software, are also a useful way of visualising the final finish and enable you to print out your colour scheme and give it to your painter as a guide of what you want to achieve.

If you are planning to have paint effects or textured coatings applied, ask your painter to prepare a sample panel. A myriad of paint and textured effects can be created depending on the style of application. If planning such an effect always agree on a sample panel before the contractor starts the work, otherwise the finished result may be vastly different to what was desired.

The number of coats required may vary depending on the colours you choose.



Don't accept substitutes

Make sure the painter uses the paint and colour specified - don't accept less expensive colour 'matches'. It is easy for a painter to try to substitute a cheaper paint, but this will result in a poorer finish. Check that the brand stated on the paint cans they bring to the job match the brand stated on the quote. Colours can be checked in the same way. Testpots are also useful as standard colour references.

Remember, the painter has quoted on using a specific product - don't let them substitute a cheaper product if you are paying for them to use a more expensive product. While two products may initially look identical, higher quality paint is more durable and will last longer. You will regret a moment of weakness in a few years' time when the inferior paint breaks down faster.

Or you can always do it yourself

If you decide to do the work yourself, allow plenty of time to complete the job. Surface preparation will almost always take longer than expected.



For ideas, inspiration and instructions:

In Australia: Call 1800 738 383, visit www.resene.com.au or email us at advice@resene.com.au

In New Zealand: Call 0800 RESENE (737 363), visit www.resene.co.nz or email us at advice@resene.co.nz