

# 50plus Handyman



## Decorating – how much!

50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick discusses the pricing of decorating

Many people telephone 50plus Handyman to ask about decorating costs. A typical remark is 'we just need it painting'. Whilst determining the cost of painting or papering a room of known size is fairly simple, it is the existing condition of the room which plays the most significant part in determining the overall cost of decorating it. This is because it is the preparation, which takes at least an equal amount and possibly more time than putting on the paint or paper. Why is this?

Put simply, preparation is the key to a good decorating finish. Neglect at the preparation stage can not only ruin the final appearance, but can also result in the new décor being short lived, perhaps through paint flaking or paper peeling.

Sadly a number of 'fast turn-around' home improvement television programmes have encouraged the neglect of decorating preparation. The problem is that preparation is a somewhat tedious task and to the untutored eye delivers little in the way of progress. Indeed the preparation stage often results in the appearance of a room deteriorating significantly!

Other than removing the dirt, grease and loose material from surfaces to be decorated it is vital to repair defects before decorating, remembering that new surfaces as well as old require a certain amount of preparation before work starts. Some key points are:

- If at all possible remove radiators, it's far faster than trying to decorate around them
- Light switches and power sockets can be lifted and then screwed down again. It stops paint getting on them and provides a much neater finish
- Make good any defects in walls. If any re-plastering is needed remember this should always be allowed to dry thoroughly before it is decorated (alternatively use an emulsion paint designed especially for new plaster, which will allow the moisture to continue to evaporate). Prime any new plaster
- Any powdery surface should be dusted off and sealed with stabilising solution
- Wash down existing paint with sugar soap. This cleans away grease and dirt and etches the paint surface to provide a mechanical key for the new paint
- Where required sand down woodwork to provide a smooth surface and a good key for the new paint
- In the case of wood apply primer before the final coat unless you have an excellent surface to work on. It produces a longer lasting finish (some newer paints don't need primer but tend to produce a good result only where there is an existing good finish)
- Strip and loose wall paper, even if painting over. If the paper is loose painting it will only make matters worse. And if one part needs to be stripped then it should all be removed to provide a consistency of finish.

It is the activities outlined above which take the time. There are few rules of thumb to enable preparation time to be calculated as much depends on the existing condition. For example taking wallpaper off takes about the same time as putting the

new on, but if the wall beneath the paper is in poor condition then that will need to be made good before starting to redecorate.

So before getting estimates or quotes for decorating think about what you wish to achieve. If it is just a 'freshen up' make that clear to the decorators and don't expect the finish to significantly improve or last too long. If on the other hand you wish the décor to last, take a good look at what need to be done before the final finish needs to go on and be prepared to invest either the time or money, it will be well spent in the long run.

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