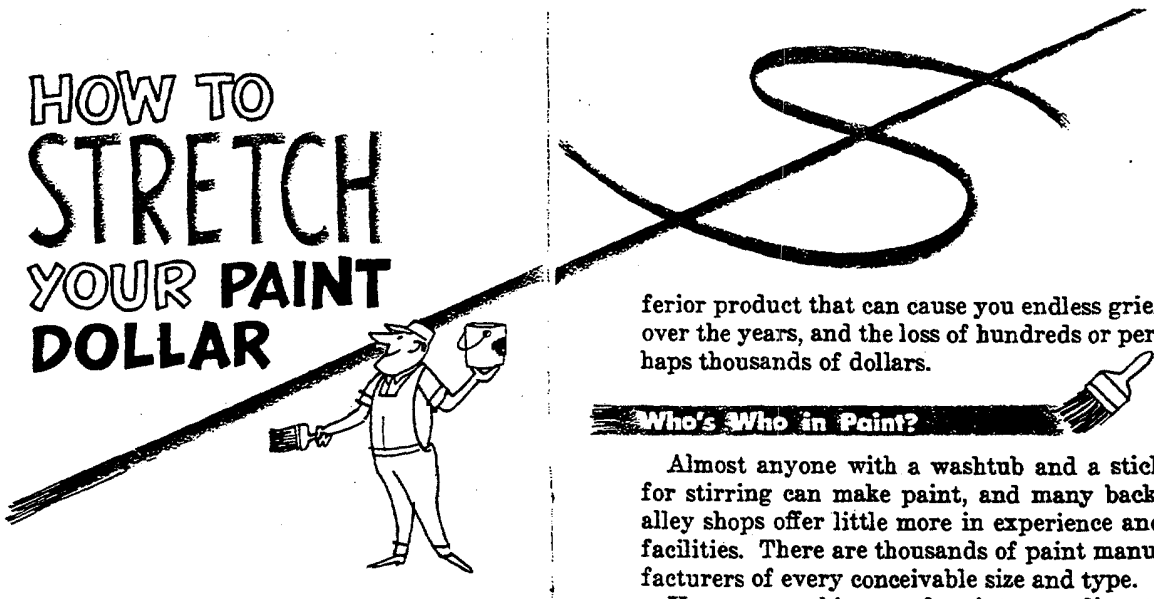
# STRETCH YOUR PAINT DOLLAR



Report from the BETTER BUSINESS BUREA

# HOW TO STRETCH YOUR PAINT DOLLAR



**by David R. Buschman**

GOOD paint, properly applied, is the single most important essential in keeping this nation's homes attractive and guarding them against the weather.

There is no sight that quite compares with the clean sparkle of newly painted outside walls, or the warmth and eye-pleasure of a newly painted room.

Paint manufacturers have done their part in contributing to the needs of a color-conscious nation by making tremendous strides in paint quality and performance during recent years. The result is that you can obtain greater values in paint and related products than ever before . . . if you know a few facts about paint.

The single most important fact about paint is that you get what you pay for. It is a rule of thumb that wild claims about "fantastic" price bargains almost always refer to an inferior product that can cause you endless grief over the years, and the loss of hundreds or perhaps thousands of dollars.

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## Who's Who in Paint?

Almost anyone with a washtub and a stick for stirring can make paint, and many back-alley shops offer little more in experience and facilities. There are thousands of paint manufacturers of every conceivable size and type.

However, making good paint according to modern standards is an art and a science.

Many people still think of paint in terms of the long-gone days when the product consisted of white lead stirred in linseed oil, with turpentine added as a thinner. Modern paints are as different from this as day is from night. Even though they may retain the same basic ingredients, many new ones have been added, so that good paint can do a far, far better job for you.

Modern paints are born and perfected in extensive research laboratories. The chemist has taken over, with exacting formulas and new ingredients . . . each specifically added to do a particular job in improving quality and durability.

Thousands of carefully controlled laboratory tests may precede a major change in formula. Then the finished product is subjected to months or even several years of outdoor weathering and testing in various climates under various conditions . . . all before a single can is offered to the public.

Few amateurs are qualified to evaluate and judge the merits of as complex a chemical product as today's modern, ready-mixed paint.

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The customer must rely on the reputation of the manufacturer and the contractor, and buy paint by reputation rather than price alone.

Any other course can cause real problems, as reflected by countless complaints to Better Business Bureaus throughout the nation.

## "No Cracking, Peeling, Etc."

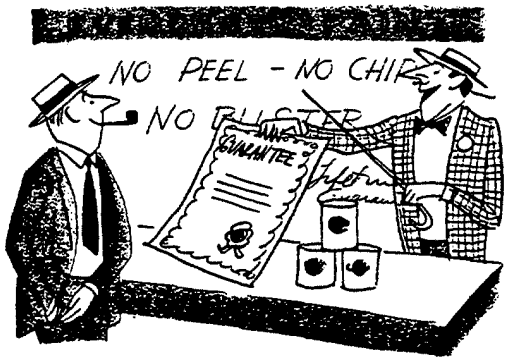
"No cracking, no blistering, no chipping," the ad said.

"The paint is blistering, peeling, cracking," said the letter to the Better Business Bureau from the customer who bought this paint. Her comment is par for the course for people who fall for one of these ads.

The reason is that the overwhelming majority of reputable manufacturers stick to the truth and make no claims of "fantastic" performance, while the tiny minority of sharp operators are willing to make any kind of extravagant claim to trap your dollars. They have no reputation to uphold, and can promise anything, since they will begin operating under another name as soon as the public catches up to them.

"Everlasting" and "lifetime guarantee" are other favorite phrases of the unethical operators in the paint field.

Let's look at the experience of a family that paid $1400 for a "lifetime" paint job.




"This summer, just a year after the work was done, we noticed the paint changing colors, from cream to peach. So now the sides are peach and cream, and it really looks awful. We called the company that did it and they are gone," the family wrote the Better Business Bureau.

## Trick Guarantees

This family had a fancy guarantee, as do thousands of others who complain to the Better Business Bureau about paint problems. In fact, the worse the paint performs, the fancier the guarantee you receive.

For example, one product called "a successor to paint" advertised "No Peel! No Chip! No Crack! No Blister! Oh! What a difference! Brings New Life to Wood, Shingles, Brick, Stucco, Cement and Cinder Block. Lasts 3 times as long as Paint. Guaranteed 5 Years."




A customer who fell for this ad wrote that the paint began to blister and crack immediately and refused to pay, feeling sure that her guarantee would protect her against a lawsuit filed by the contractor.

The guarantee, a handsome and impressive document with a glib headline entitled, "Five Year Guarantee," promised the customer "sufficient material for such replacement as is made necessary as a sole and direct result of inherent defects of the basic materials."

In other words, the customer was entitled to a free can of paint to be applied by himself, if he could get the manufacturer to admit the product was worthless.

As if this didn't leave the manufacturer a loophole big enough to drive a truck through, the reverse side of the guarantee contained this statement:

"The obligations under the guarantee on the face hereof shall not become effective or binding until an original and duplicate thereof . . . have been filed in New York City . . . and the guarantee on the face of the original signed by one of the (manufacturer's) officers there."

In other words, all the company had to do was file copies of all guarantees away unsigned, and it had no responsibility whatever. In our opinion, such a guarantee has as much meaning as a deed to the Brooklyn Bridge.

Another handsome guarantee . . . featuring an artist's rendering of the U.S. Capital, the American eagle and a shield with stars and stripes . . . says that if a roof application fails "to last for ten years . . . and make a waterproof roof, we agree to furnish without further




charge sufficient quantity to keep the roof in good condition for this length of time."

A customer who bought $200 worth of this material wrote three times asking for satisfaction after his roof began to leak, and received not even a can of paint.

The Yellow Pages directory in a large city contains ad after ad for enameled metal siding supposed to "stop paint worries," "eliminate




costly and continuous house painting," and provide a guarantee "for the life of your home."

Many of these jobs are sold by slick "Home Improvement" salesmen who tell the homeowner that he has been specially selected for a model installation, and is going to receive a deluxe job at a low price. Better Business Bureau experience indicates that the life-time claims and the "model home" pitches are the worst type of bunk.

The customer is on the hook for $1000 or even $2000 or more. Brown spots appear or the surface otherwise deteriorates and the customer complains. If lucky, he may obtain a free can of second-grade paint to apply himself while he gnashes his teeth at the thought of the "easy" monthly payments still being sent to the finance company.

## Facts on Blistering

Blistering and peeling of paint actually are usually caused by moisture escaping from inside the home. Everytime you boil water, wash the floors, take a bath, or do the dishes, you release moisture into the air. This moisture eventually finds its way to the outdoors, and much of it gets there through the walls.

Hot sunlight may pull out the moisture faster than it can pass through any paint film, no matter how good the quality of the paint. The pressure of the moisture trying to get through the paint causes blistering if the

paint job is relatively new and the paint film is still flexible. Older paint films will crack or peel.

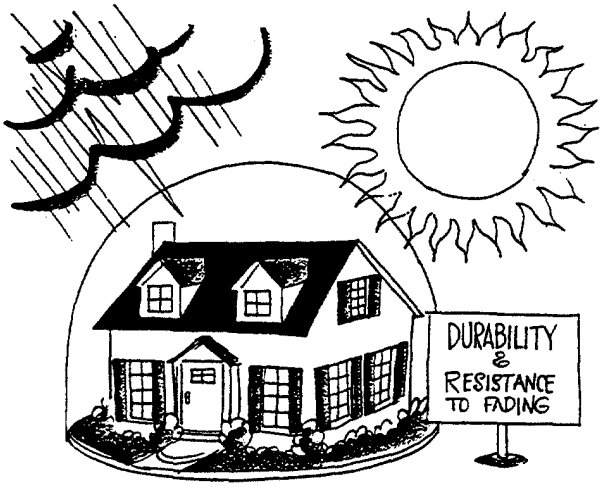
Moisture in a home can be controlled by venting gas appliances, fixing leaky radiator valves or plumbing, providing good ventilation in rooms where there is always a source of moisture, or even by opening a window if you wash a floor or hang up clothing to dry.

Manufacturers of quality paints are making progress in turning out products that are blister-resistant, but any claims that a paint is entirely blister-proof are strictly false and are made only by unethical operators.

## Chalking and Fading

Most good white paints are made with a special controlled chalking effect often called "self-cleaning" . . . that is a very small part of the paint film constantly washes away with each rain. This is essential to keep the paint fresh-appearing and bright, because it would otherwise gather dust and pollution from the air and become dark and grimy in a relatively short time.

Complaints often are received by Better Business Bureaus about white streaks that appear when white paint is applied above an area that is of a darker color. In buying paint for such areas you should specify a "non-chalking white" or "trim white". These actually wear away or chalk so little that no pigment streaks will appear on the darker surface below.




Cheap paints often chalk too rapidly, but it should be remembered that most good standard paints are made to weather with a gradual chalking process which begins about six months after the paint is applied and keeps the surface bright and clean each time there is a heavy rain. Also, several years after painting, the film will be worn away and ready for repainting. Actually this is most desirable because you avoid building up a thick coating over the years which might eventually cause cracking troubles.

Fading is another problem. Any paint will fade over a period of time. However, durability and resistance to fading are characteristics of good paint. When you buy the lowest priced paint you can find, you can be virtually certain that it will fade quickly and provide only a fraction of the durability assured by a high-quality product.

## The Contractor

If you are having your painting done by a contractor, which often may save you substantial sums in the long run, remember that it is all important to buy his service by reputation as well as price.



Since labor costs are likely to be the same for all contractors in a given area, the only

way one firm can save money over another is by skimping on the quality of the workmanship or by using inferior paint.

A cheap contractor seldom bothers to scrape off old paint or prepare the surface properly. He may not use an adequate undercoating, or may dilute the paint in one way or another. Such a contractor may be out of business or operating under a new name by the time you realize he has not done an adequate job.

If you are buying a new home, you'd better also take time for a close look at the interior paint.

Some contractors, on the train of a quick dollar, will tape the joints on wallboards, then cover this and all other imperfections with one coat of thick, cheap paint. The first time you try to wash the wall, half of the mess comes off onto the floor and furniture.

## In the Long Run

We could go on with a great many other causes of customer complaints.

There is one crook who sends out broadsides offering "fantastic" values in "high-quality titanium paint." The junk he sells actually is the waste paint that drips onto the floor in various industrial spray-painting processes.



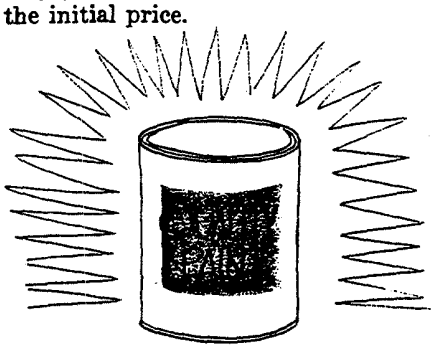
You can buy latex paints with so little latex that it might as well not be present. In some states an adequate label on the can is not even a legal requirement.

Plastic or "mastic" paints have been sold with wild claims of long service, which are meaningless unless the plastic covering is applied under carefully controlled factory procedures. These paints may shut off the supply of air to former layers of paint on an old house, and cause harmful chemical changes.

No one, not even a trained expert, can look at one open can of paint and say for certain that it is better than the next can. In fact, a batch of inferior white paint can easily be doctored to look thicker and whiter than a high-quality paint . . . before being applied, that is.

You also may find that you need two or three times as much "cheap" paint to cover a given surface as if a high-quality product were used.

In the long run, you'll always find that a quality paint is your best buy . . . regardless of the initial price.



## HOW TO BE SURE

The old theory that "paint is paint" has been long since outmoded. Whether you are buying exterior paint, indoor paint, varnish, enamels, waterproofing compounds, or any similar products, these simple rules can assure you a good buy.

1. Remember that the original cost of paint should be the least important factor in your decision. The difference in what you pay for a quality paint is more than made up by the savings in time and effort required to apply it, and the long-range wearing and protective qualities.

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2. Always consult an expert. Buy only from recognized dealers who know all the facts about penetrating qualities, types of undercoating, durability and differences in the quality of ingredients. Amateurs are the world's worst judges of paint quality.

3. Do not be misled by wild claims and fancy guarantees about five-year, 10-year and lifetime service from a can of paint or any product advertised as a substitute for paint. No guarantee is any stronger than the reputation of the firm which issues it. Two coats of a good modern exterior finish will last about four years on the first application, and five or six years when additional coats are added later.

4. Check the reputation of your contractor carefully before you sign any papers or enter into any agreement with him. Remember that a reputable contractor may charge a slightly higher price, but you will get a much better job that will protect your home and maintain its worth, so that you actually enjoy a much greater value in the long run.

When you buy paint and painting service by quality and reputation instead of price, you make a long-range investment that is hard to beat . . . and you enjoy the benefits of the unprecedented progress made by a great industry to preserve your home and make it a more pleasant and attractive place to live.

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