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HOUSE & GARDEN[®]

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO STYLISH LIVING

STYLE CONTRASTS

■ GLAMOROUS CHINTZ
IN A GEORGIAN
TOWN HOUSE

■ TECHNICAL WIZARDRY
IN A PENTHOUSE
CONVERSION

■ CLASSIC COMFORT
IN A BARBADOS
MANSION

ECO-CONSCIOUS LIVING

PAINTS, LIGHTING,
DESIGN & DECORATION

WILLIAM YEOWARD
SHARES HIS IDEAS
FOR SMART,
ORIGINAL
TABLE SETTINGS



Paint stripping

Continuing his series in which he reports on developments for greener living and explains how technological innovations apply to domestic buildings, PAUL BROWN recommends solvent-free paint



The late Princess Margaret, talking about the implications of being a member of the royal family, was quoted as saying, 'One gets so sick of the smell of fresh paint.'

Most of us do not have to endure the smell of drying paint quite as often as do royalty, but it is familiar to us all. Sometimes the smell is a useful warning to avoid spoiling clothes through inadvertent contact with wet paint, but the substances which smell so unpleasant can also be harmful. They are evaporating solvents called volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and frequent exposure to some types has been linked to certain cancers. Even those VOCs believed to be harmless to otherwise healthy people can cause distress to asthmatics or others with breathing difficulties, and are an important contributor to air pollution.

As a result, paint manufacturers are being forced to change their paint formulas - earlier this year, legislation began restricting the permitted quantity of VOCs in paint. The regulations are being tightened gradually - had Princess Margaret, who died in 2002, lived another 10 years, she would have had trouble detecting the smell of new paint. By 2012, virtually all VOCs will have been eliminated from the formulas of the 300 million litres of paint sold in the UK each year.

While the new regulations have been a headache for large-scale paint manufacturers, who have had to maintain a large output while being obliged to reformulate their best-selling products to meet new standards, they have been a business opportunity for makers of greener products, who were already well within the regulations and have increased volumes to meet sales demand.

Two such suppliers, both exhibitors at *The Daily Telegraph/House & Garden Fair* in June, sell nontoxic, high-quality, water-based paints that were created to meet a growing demand for environmentally friendly products. These paints are excellent alternatives to solvent-based versions, and are suitable for internal and external use.

One of the specialists is Francesca Wezel (tel: 020-72287694, website: www.francescaspaint.com), managing director of her own paint company, Francesca's Paints. She has a remarkable range of 138 colours and offers to mix new ones to order. Her external paints are solvent-free limewash, used for centuries across southern Europe and beyond for the outside of houses. She has travelled as far as Chichén Itzá in Mexico to study the best formulas. It was here that she saw red limewash still standing up to the weather: according to the archaeologists, it was painted on the walls 3,000 years ago. Francesca says Princess Margaret was not the only royal averse to the smell of paint: Prince Charles has used her odour-less products at his house on the Balmoral Estate in Scotland. Limewash costs £14.50 a litre.

Another, larger-scale paint manufacturer to have cracked this problem and claim its paints are more durable than solvent-based paints is Marston & Langinger (tel: 020-7881 5783, website: www.marston-and-langinger.com). Its solvent-free, water-based external paints are made of acrylic resins and are flexible, allowing natural movement of surfaces without cracking. The company claims that after 10 years, repainting only requires a single coat.

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GREEN GIZMO For those who frequently travel overseas or holiday in remote spots, charging a mobile phone can be problematic, usually requiring an adapter as well as the phone charger. For these occasions, or for saving power at home, a **solar-powered mobile-phone charger** is ideal. The pocket-size fold-up solar panel is dual purpose, too, because it provides enough power to recharge five rechargeable AAA batteries. If you go out for the day with your phone, leaving the solar panel powering up the batteries, the phone can be charged at night from the power stored in the batteries. The panel comes with a series of adapters to fit sockets in most mobile phones, and costs £25.50, including batteries, from Sunshine Solar (tel: 01603-666676, website: www.sunshinesolar.co.uk)

