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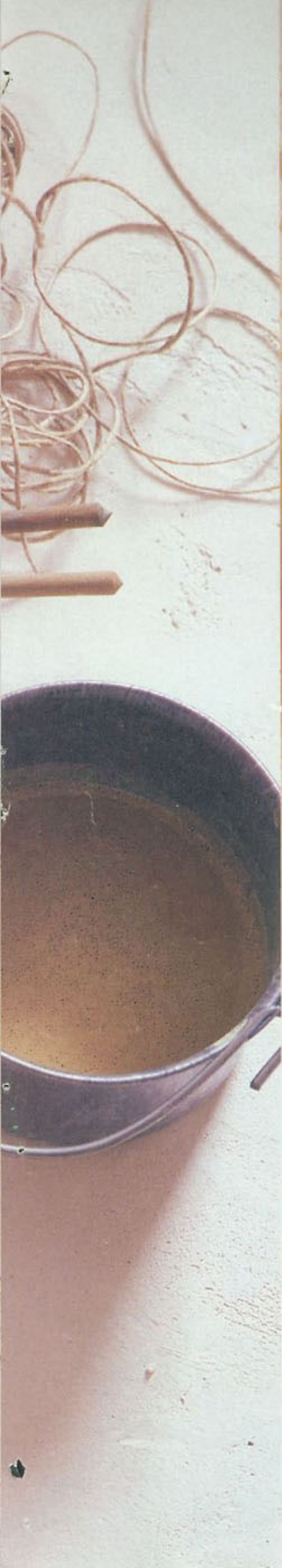


# A brush with *tradition*

From an ethereal, translucent wash of colour  
to a vibrant, pigment-rich velvety coating,  
the effects that limewash creates  
have inspired decorators for centuries

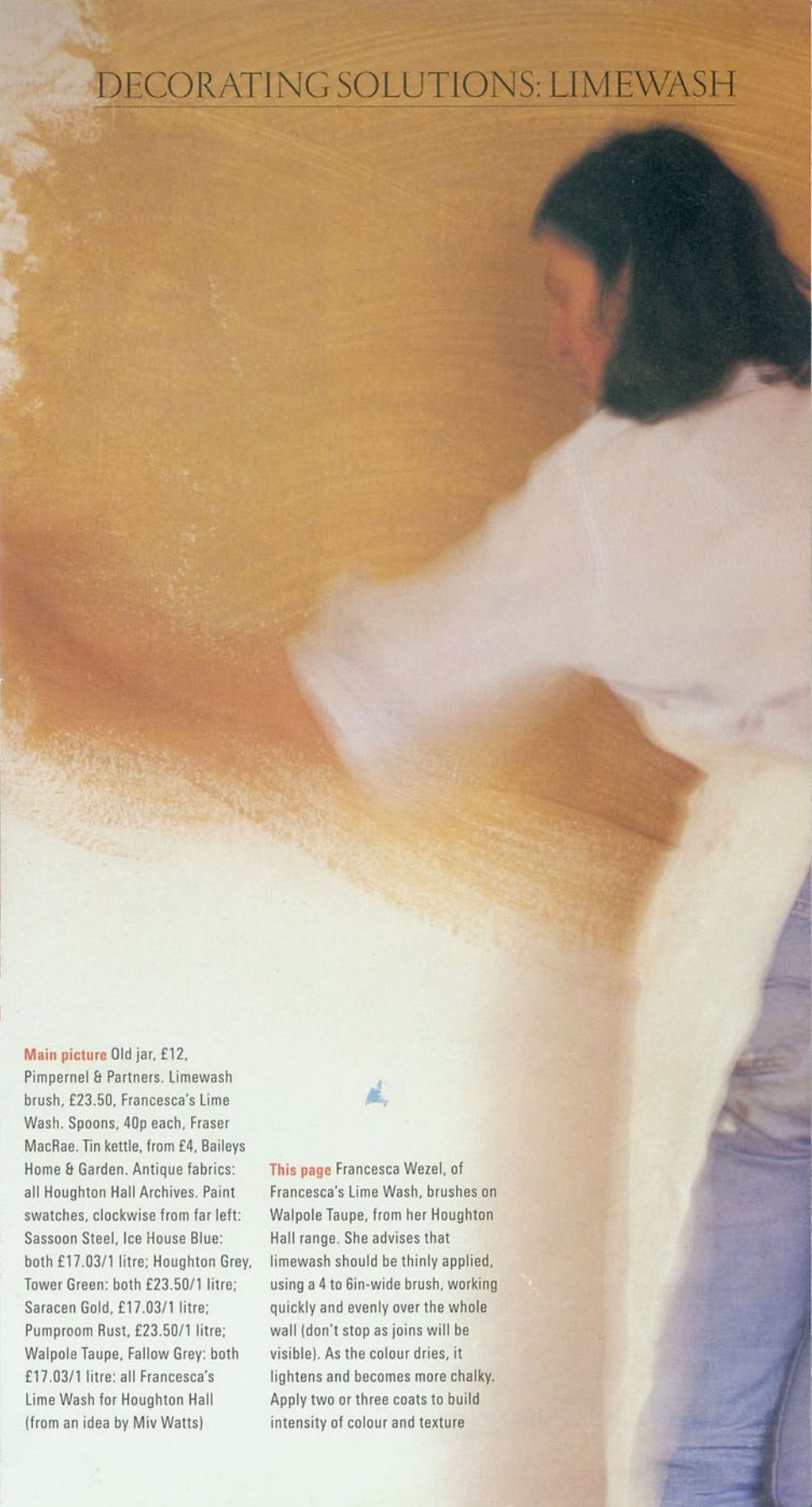
TEXT BY KATE ELMS/STYLING BY PIPPA RIMMER  
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## DECORATING SOLUTIONS: LIMEWASH



**Main picture** Old jar, £12, Pimpernel & Partners. Limewash brush, £23.50, Francesca's Lime Wash. Spoons, 40p each, Fraser MacRae. Tin kettle, from £4, Baileys Home & Garden. Antique fabrics: all Houghton Hall Archives. Paint swatches, clockwise from far left: Sassoon Steel, Ice House Blue: both £17.03/1 litre; Houghton Grey, Tower Green: both £23.50/1 litre; Saracen Gold, £17.03/1 litre; Pumproom Rust, £23.50/1 litre; Walpole Taupe, Fallow Grey: both £17.03/1 litre: all Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall (from an idea by Miv Watts)

**This page** Francesca Wezel, of Francesca's Lime Wash, brushes on Walpole Taupe, from her Houghton Hall range. She advises that limewash should be thinly applied, using a 4 to 6in-wide brush, working quickly and evenly over the whole wall (don't stop as joins will be visible). As the colour dries, it lightens and becomes more chalky. Apply two or three coats to build intensity of colour and texture





**L**imewash is one of the simplest, most traditional paints available today. For centuries, it has been used to provide a beautiful, durable and protective finish for walls and ceilings. Most of us are familiar with it in certain contexts – think of the dazzling white houses of Greek island villages, or the warm, earth-toned façades of buildings across Italy – but few of us realise just how effective it can be in our own homes.

From an ethereal, translucent wash of colour to a vibrant, pigment-rich velvety coating, limewash can be used to create a variety of effects. It has practical advantages, too. A natural, water-based product, it is made without the chemicals and plastics that are found in many “modern” paints, and was traditionally used because it allowed walls to “breathe”. Although this makes it particularly suitable for the bare walls of old buildings, which can be prone to damp and rot, limewash can be applied to many porous surfaces, including plaster, stone and some types of brick.

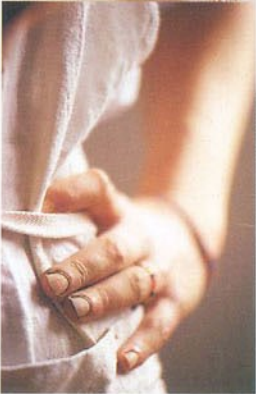
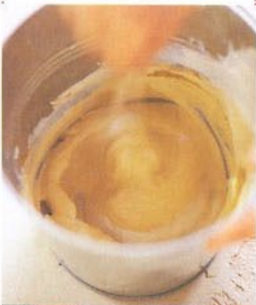
### How is limewash made?

Limewash is derived from limestone, a sedimentary rock that is quarried all over the world and fired at high temperatures to produce calcium oxide or quicklime. This is then “slaked” or mixed with water to ➤ ➤ ➤



### Using limewash

- Prepare limewash according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Make sure you have enough to cover the whole room.
- If you've tinted the limewash yourself, paint a bit on paper and allow to dry to check the colour.
- Working in large sections, dampen the walls with a fine spray of water before painting.
- Work out of direct heat, sunlight, draughts or wind.
- Leave to dry for at least 24 hours. Repeat the process, including dampening, to apply further coats for a richer colour.



**THIS PAGE** Bucket, from £4, Baileys Home & Garden. Lime Putty, £14.69/5 litres; mixed with Yellow Ochre Water Stain, £5.69/100ml; both Farrow & Ball. Brush, as before, Francesca's Lime Wash. Oriental Red pigment, £6.85/75g, Holzweg Spoon, as before, Fraser MacRae.

**OPPOSITE Walls** Stripes in Houghton Grey and Walpole Taupe (one coat each); centre wall in Pumproom Rust (two coats); far right wall in Walpole Taupe (one coat); all as before, Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall.

**Furniture** Old round table, £795, Josephine Ryan. Antique chair (near right), £1,100 for five, Decorative Living. Old bentwood chairs, £165 for six; old leaf-pattern plates, £14 for four; all Pimpernel & Partners. Antique fabric (as tablecloth), £150, Nicole Fabre. Slipware jug, £38, William Lloyd. Terracotta pots painted in (from left): Tower Green, Walpole Taupe. Fallow Grey; all as before, Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall. Glasses, £10.50 each, Sasha Waddell. Old hat, from a selection, Risky Business. Ribbon, from a selection, V V Rouleaux.

**Fireplace** Dry brushed in Walpole Taupe; pots painted in (from left) Pumproom Rust, Sassoon Steel, Saracen Gold and Ice House Blue; all as before, Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall. Antique mirror, £195; old jar, £12; picture (at right), £17; all Pimpernel & Partners. Painting of girl, £38; picture of boat, £275; enamel jug, £38; all Decorative Living



A mix of three earthy  
shades creates a warm  
and inviting look in  
a dining room





make a paste or putty, which should be allowed to mature for several weeks. Limewash itself is created when the paste or putty is diluted with water until it is the consistency of milk, prior to application. For use on outside walls, it is usually combined with a small amount of linseed oil or casein (a milk protein) to improve its durability and water-shedding properties.

### Introducing colour

Although it is naturally white, limewash looks particularly beautiful when it has been tinted. There are various options for adding colour to a water-based paint such as this, but natural powder pigments are the traditional choice. Not only are they pure and water-soluble (and should be dissolved in water before being added to limewash), they also produce wonderfully subtle shades. "Raw pigments work well with the translucency and reflective qualities of lime and, as they contain no chemical additives, they're a good ecological choice," says Jonathan Scholfield, who teaches at Paint Magic in London.

It is important, however, to choose pigments carefully as not all are compatible with lime, itself a caustic and reactive substance. Most earth tones,



**Although it is naturally white, limewash looks particularly beautiful when it has been tinted with colour**

such as umbers and ochres, won't trigger a chemical reaction, but all pigments are different, so check before you buy. If the colour you want is too reactive or too expensive to use in raw pigment form, opt for artists' acrylics or universal stainers, which are widely available and easy to use.

Another option is to use a limewash that has been pre-tinted. Francesca Wezel set up her company, Francesca's Lime Wash, three years ago, when she was unable to find

**Walls** As before, Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall.

**Furniture and accessories** Flower picture, £150; antique wall sconce, £360 a pair; both Decorative Living. Portrait, £17; chair, £45; both Pimpernel & Partners. Cushion covered in Cabana Stripe, £49/m. Lee Jofa. Boxes painted in Rory's Mustard, Carlo's Red and Guglielmo's Navy; all £23.50/1 litre, Francesca's Milk Paint. Old blanket, £65, Baileys Home & Garden. On table; jug, £95; confit pots, from £125 each; all Nicole Fabre. Twig picture, £85, Katharine Pole at Alfies Antique Market. Terracotta pot, £10.50

(unpainted), Judy Green's Garden Store; painted in Ice House Blue and Walpole Taupe; both as before, Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall. Handmade journals, both to commission, Alexandra Gough. Paintbrush (cut-out), £10.95, Paint Magic



### Place settings

Limewash adheres well to the porous surface of terracotta. To make this simple place setting, brush limewash onto an old plant pot. Write on your guest's name in chalk and place a folded napkin inside. Antique ticking (as tablecloth), £150, Nicole Fabre. Glass, £10.50, Sasha Waddell.





Limewash dries to a protective coating that allows moisture to escape without peeling or cracking

**Pigments** Vivid Green, £8.55/500g, Potmolen Paint. Greek Blue, £9 plus p&p/500g, La Tienda

anything but white limewash in the shops. She has since developed a range of paints that are made in Italy to a traditional recipe, which she tints herself to create muted natural tones and brighter, more contemporary colours.

### Pros and cons

The greatest advantage of limewash is that, provided it is applied to a porous surface, it allows walls to breathe. Unlike vinyl emulsions, which effectively cover the wall with a plastic seal and tend to flake when damp, limewash forms a protective coating that allows moisture and salts to escape without cracking or peeling.

Another plus is its strength. Before limewash is applied, walls must be dampened with water to help slow the drying time. As the limewash dries, it reacts with carbon dioxide in the

air, causing its chemical composition to convert back into limestone. This explains why limewash is so robust and why it shouldn't become powdery or rub off on clothes.

Of course, there is also its visual appeal. According to period paint consultant Nathan Whorrell, no other protective coating offers such delicate pastel shades. "With its matt finish and the way the colours respond to different sources of light, limewash has a unique charm," says Whorrell, who has produced coloured limewash for many historic buildings, including the Henry VII chapel at Westminster Abbey.

There are drawbacks to using limewash,

however. The most significant is that it should be applied only to a porous surface – such as bare plaster (lime or gypsum), lime or old cement render, and some types of stone and brick. Limewash does not generally adhere to walls that have been previously painted with emulsion. While Francesca's Lime Wash has been formulated to adhere to water-based paints, when used in this way, it won't allow the walls to breathe. (If you love the look of limewash but have painted walls, try soft distemper for a similar effect.) Finally, once a surface has been limewashed, it cannot simply be painted with emulsion; the limewash has to be removed and the walls sealed before painting.

**For stockist details, see our Where to Buy page**



### How to paint stripes

First, mark off the lines on the wall. Francesca advises against using masking tape as it can lift off the surface of the plaster. Instead, place a long ruler against the wall, then gently score along the top with a scalpel. When painting close to this mark, the limewash will run into the groove rather than into neighbouring stripes. We used one coat of limewash only; if you want a more intense colour, apply a second coat. Painted in Houghton Grey and Walpole Taupe, as before: both Francesca's Lime Wash for Houghton Hall