

Using natural paints



Luxury interiors, rooted in history



Pre-decoration tests & checks

This specification outlines best practice guidance for repainting heritage or period properties, particularly those with lime plaster, solid masonry walls or historic timber. The aim is to ensure breathability, moisture management, occupant health and long-term sustainability.

- ✓ Check for signs of damp, salts or trapped moisture before redecorating.
- ✓ Rectify sources of water ingress (gutters, flashings, drainage) before applying new finishes.
- ✓ Confirm substrate type (lime plaster, brick, existing coatings).
- ✓ Undertake small adhesion and breathability tests where existing paint is present.
- ✓ Carry out alcohol/acetone spot test to identify oil-based or acrylic coatings, or commission a small professional analysis. Conservators and heritage painters can identify coatings without harming the substrate.
- ✓ Use breathable finishes for lime and solid walls (mineral, clay, limewash or plant/emulsions).
- ✓ Choose low/zero VOC products for interiors (health and sustainability benefits).

Quick facts

- ✓ Common non-breathable paints: vinyl matt, soft sheen, silk, and acrylic-based paints are generally not breathable as they create a plastic film. "Heritage colours" are not necessarily paints suitable for heritage properties.
- ✓ Modern paints can be water or oil-based. Water-based wall emulsion is frequently acrylic-based or a blend of acrylic and vinyl, designed for durability and ease of use. While all acrylic paint is water-based, not all emulsion paint is pure acrylic, as it can also use lower-cost vinyl resins.
- ✓ If your walls are already painted with a water-based paint, it will generally be suitable for overpainting with a natural paint (such as clay, lime, or chalk-based paint), provided the surface is properly prepared. However, while natural paints are often used for their breathability, applying them over a non-porous plastic-based acrylic will seal that layer, meaning the wall will only be as breathable as the underlying acrylic layer.
- ✓ Oil-based paint is not suitable for overpainting with natural paints. The oil prevents other paints from adhering properly, and the wall will still not be breathable.
- ✓ When choosing a breathable paint look at its SD values, which should be disclosed on Safety Data sheets. The lower the value, the more breathable the paint (should be 1 or lower).

Work with us

Our mission is not just about creating beautiful interiors, but elegant spaces that resonate with warmth, functionality and personality.

We're dedicated to understanding your needs, translating them into tangible concepts, and ultimately crafting a space that exceeds your expectations.

If you'd like to work with us, we'd love to hear from you.

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Disclaimer: Please get the right professional advice. This document is only designed to give you a helpful overview of issues.

