

# Paint Primers: Providing a Solid Foundation

**A**ny successful project—from constructing a building to painting one—starts with a solid foundation. That’s what paint primers offer: a solid foundation. A good primer will do a number of things: promote adhesion, enhance the hiding power of the topcoat and, in some instances, prevent stains or odors from making their way back to the surface.

While there are already many paint primers on the market, new ones continue to be introduced, which prompts the question: Does the world really need all of these paint primers? Of course, the manufacturers introducing them would say, “Yes.” There are many different paint applications requiring many different types of primers. There also are universal primers that meet varying conditions on a given project.

Cindy J. Mansfield, brand manager for ICI’s Devoc Paint line, reported that more and more people are beginning to understand the importance of primers. “We’ve seen them grow in market share,” she reported. “I think people have become much more savvy about their painting products and know that primers help make the project look better and last longer.”

Nonetheless, there is still a need to spread the word about the importance of priming, according to Jason Long, brand manager for Masterchem. “On the consumer side, and to a lesser extent with pro painters, the big challenge is education



● Zinsser offers a complete line of paint primers.

on why and when to prime,” he said. According to Long, Masterchem recognizes that the majority of consumers aren’t priming before they paint. Because of this, the company has planned a major marketing communication effort for 2007 that will focus on building the need and desire to prime before painting.

Masterchem also is pursuing the goal of increasing the use of primers with the introduction of the Kilz Premium All-in-One Primer & Applicator. The product comes in a small tube with a built-in applicator, thus eliminating the need for a brush or a roller and making it ideal for covering small stains or water markers. The product is merchandised on clip-strips for easy cross-

● Kilz All-In-One Primer and Applicator makes priming easy and convenient.



merchandising opportunities in the paint department, the patch and repair aisle, etc., helping to expose the product to customers who might otherwise not be in the market for primers.

## Water-Based Demand

One of the major trends driving the introduction of new paint primers is the growing demand for water-based formulations. “Trends are toward water-based products due to convenience and continued VOC regulations,” said Long.

“Water-base technology as a replacement for oil-base technology continues to be a focus, particularly in performance primers,” concurred Tim O’Reilly, Business Manager for Primers and Clear Finishes at Zinsser Co. “Quick-curing adhesion and stain sealing in disaster restoration environments—even sealing soot from candles in the home—has traditionally been the territory of oil and shellac-base primers. Our expertise in understanding why oil



● **The high-build characteristics of Peel Bond helped fill and level the uneven surface of this redwood shingle home.**

and shellac-base primers perform in severe circumstances has helped us to advance water-base primer technology to address these challenges. We will be demonstrating these advancements within the next year.”

O’Reilly added that Zinsser has devoted considerable resources to improving its water-based technology so that it will meet the performance standards associated with traditional solvent-based coatings. “We have spent a great deal of time over the last year working with air quality regulators to ensure we can continue to offer specialty products with unique performance to support professional trades and DIY enthusiasts,” he said, noting that the company is working toward preserving access to its solvent-base primers for specialty applications as well as the availability of B-I-N, the company’s unique shellac-based primer-sealer.

In addition, O’Reilly reported that Zinsser is moving its Bulls Eye Odorless to a single national 350-VOC formula. “This is a premium product with a unique formula where we use pure odorless solvent, and professionals can tell,” he said. “Sales have been climbing nicely since it was introduced.”

According to O’Reilly, Zinsser is the first to launch a 350-VOC odorless solvent formula, which has an advantage over traditional 450-VOC formulas in that it is truly sprayable. “Some products could be made sprayable by adding hotter solvents, but adding solvents that smell eliminates the value of an odorless primer,” O’Reilly pointed out.

The rising demand for low-VOC

products is one of the driving forces behind the introduction of a new paint primer from XIM Products Inc.—a specialty bonding primer called Peel Bond™, which has become the primer of choice for repainting the interior block and cement walls at Alcatraz.

“Peel Bond is a low-VOC (less than 100 g/l) water-based primer that dries to a hazy clear,” said XIM President Richard Hardy. “One of its main attributes is that it is very high-building and can bridge and fill rough surfaces. It is used by contractors to reduce their labor and improve the appearance of the painted surface by filling and leveling the surface before painting.”

According to Hardy, Peel Bond can be applied up to 30 mils wet in one application without sagging. “It is white during application and dries to a hazy clear. Therefore, it tells the painter when it is ready to paint.”

Peel Bond has a variety of uses, including old home restoration, multi-family housing units, repaint, commercial repaint, government housing repainting and more. “Al-

though still a niche product, the XIM Peel Bond is a primer that can really help the painter save time, save labor, turn the job quicker and improve his profits,” Hardy said.

Concurring with other manufacturers, Hardy observed that primer formulations continue to evolve largely because of continuing governmental pressure to lower the solvent content of paints and coatings. “At one time, it was thought that water-based coatings would be the answer to lower VOC requirements. However, the VOC rule limits are now pushing so low that paint manufacturers are forced to consider reducing or removing the anti-freeze solvent added to water-based coatings to stabilize the coatings in freeze/thaw situations. This is forcing paint manufacturers to look at non-traditional ways to stabilize the latex polymers. These efforts affect those manufacturers of water-based primers as well.”

Tom Dougherty, marketing manager for Pittsburgh Paints, noted that environmental regulations are having just as much impact on paint primers as they are on other paints and coatings. “The key is to offer a product line with the kind of performance that consumers are used to under these increasingly restrictive VOC regulations,” he said.

Pittsburgh Paints’ already has introduced stain-blocking and universal primers under its Seal Grip brand that meet the most stringent regulations as set forth by the Ozone Transport Commission (OTC) in the Northeast, the South



● From Devco Paint: Kilstain-WB primer.

● Pittsburgh Paints' Seal Grip line includes both universal and specialty primers.

Coast Air Quality District in California, and the national AIM VOC rule.

**New Primers for New Needs**

Another trend that Pittsburgh Paints has addressed is the need for low-odor primers. "More and more people are using low-odor paint, but they sometimes overlook the fact that primers can be pretty odorous as well," Dougherty said.

The company is meeting the need for low-odor with its Seal Grip Ultra Stain-Killing Primer (17-931). This interior/exterior coating is formulated to block out stains associated with smoke and water damage on areas such as ceiling tiles, wood, cement and concrete block. In addition to its low odor, the product is also quick-dry.

"This is a synthetic stain-killing primer," Dougherty said. "Most primers are 100-percent acrylics or alkyds. However, this is a hybrid synthetic using technology that didn't even exist a few years ago."

New products in the marketplace also address one drawback that has plagued the primer category: the fact that including a primer in the project adds considerably more time to the completion schedule. At Cabot, among the latest technological advances is the introduction of a quick-dry product, according to Stacey Sherman, technical consultant.

"We now offer consumers a Quick-Dry Primer in our Problem-Solver line that is suitable for the painter, homeowner and weekend warrior," Sherman said. "This cuts down concerns about the weather and the possibility of rain, given that it dries in just four to six hours."

According to Sherman, making the job more efficient is an important consideration in this day and age. "People



want to get the job done quickly," she said. "They don't have a lot of time. Old oil-based products would take 24 to 48 hours to dry."

Cabot's Quick-Dry Primer is an alkyd-based product, suitable for both decks and siding, offering superior adhesion to the topcoat. "It comes in two tones—white and gray—for tinting purposes, offering better hide," Sherman noted.

Cabot also offers a variety of other oil-based primers as well as an acrylic primer, all under the Problem-Solver label. Sherman noted that using a quality primer is part of the surface prep process that is so critical to a successful project. "Good surface prep is the key to any job," she commented.

California Paints, meanwhile, has expanded its line of primers with a new oil-based deck and fence primer. "We're the first in the industry to have a primer for decks and fences," reported Ron Boyajian, product marketing manager for the company.

The product is called Storm Stain EnduraDeck Deck & Fence Primer, and Boyajian observed that primer ad-

dresses a major problem area for consumers: deck maintenance. Use of the primer is designed to greatly enhance a solid-color deck coating's ability to stand up to sun and other harsh weather elements. "Our testing shows that this primer will double the life of the deck coating," Boyajian added.

California Paints recommends using its new deck and fence primer in conjunction with Storm Stain EnduraDeck, an alkyd-modified acrylic latex solid deck stain, or other solid finishes. "The primer promotes adhesion for a solid topcoat on decks and stains," Boyajian added. "It works on all types of wood, including exotic wood types, as well as on composite lumber products such as Trex."

The product dries in as little as four to six hours under normal drying conditions, meaning that the consumer or painting professional can proceed with the top-coating in very short order.

Also offering enhancements to its primer offering is XIM, which has incorporated new technology into a number of its water-based primers. The technology stabilizes the latex polymer without sacrificing the freeze/thaw resistance of the coating



● Cabot's Problem-Solver Primer features a fast-drying oil formula.



● The before photo below shows a house peeling badly in 1998. It was primed with Mad Dog primer, below left, and still looks great, per this 2006 photo at left.



during storage and shipping. “This may not seem like a big deal to the painter or the DIY consumer, but it is a big deal to the distributors and those shipping the coatings during cold months,” Hardy explained.

### Addressing Adhesion Problems

One of the most important properties that paint primers offer is adhesion. Without proper adhesion, the paint will peel and the surface will have to be prepped and recoated all over again.

In the case of the most extreme paint adhesion problems, there is a paint primer on the market that will offer a long-term solution. The product is Mad Dog Primer, which its manufacturer, Mad Dog Paint Products, bills as “The World’s Best Stabilizing Primer.”

“Mad Dog offers tenacious adhesion as well as incredible flexibility,” said company president Steve Ryan. “Other resins get hard and brittle after a few years. The paint cracks, moisture gets in, and that starts a vicious peeling cycle again.”

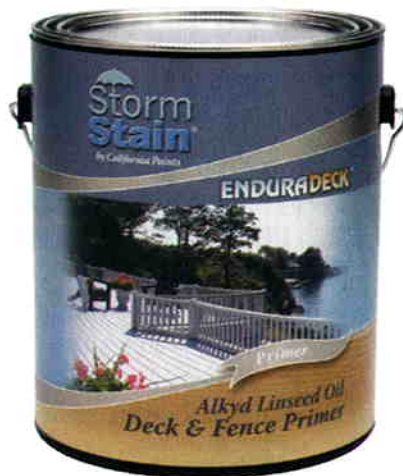
However, Mad Dog is designed to break this cycle. The product provides adhesion of up to 300 pounds per square inch, and 300-percent flexibility. “Peel-



ing paint doesn’t stand a chance,” Ryan stated. In addition, Mad Dog has 45-percent solids, compared to the typical paint primer that has less than 25 percent.

What this means, for homeowners, is a longer-lasting paint job. Ryan noted that a normal paint job lasts four to six years and may even start to show signs of failure in some areas after just one or two years. However, Mad Dog can effectively double the life of the coating, leading the paint job to last as long as 8 to 10 years or even longer.

“We applied Mad Dog on some houses nine or 10 years ago, and they still look brand new,” Ryan reported. “Mad Dog is designed to stabilize the substrate, so the topcoat can do its job



● California Paints offers a new alkyd deck and fence primer.

for 10 to 20 years as promised.”

Ryan acknowledged that Mad Dog is more costly than the typical primer. “It’s twice the price of a normal primer,” he explained. “That’s why we recommend that you use it on problem areas only. If 20 percent of the house is failing, then just use it on that portion. If the rest of the house doesn’t need a stabilizing primer, then you don’t need to use Mad Dog there.”

In addition to use on peeling siding and stucco, Mad Dog can be used in a variety of problem areas, including door and window frames, cracking plaster and deck railings and also on rusty, metal surfaces or surfaces marred by tannin-bleed.

“Mad Dog is a triple-play primer that: (1) takes care of peeling, unstable surface; (2) locks down rust and (3) prevents tannin-bleed proof,” Ryan said.

According to Ryan, Mad Dog can be effectively sold in paint stores to contractors and homeowners alike. He recommended that it be displayed along with other specialty primers, and noted that active salesmanship can sell the product effectively. “Salespeople should ask the question: ‘How much peeling paint or cracking wood do you have on your project?’ People come into your store because they have a problem. Mad Dog is a way to solve it. Specialty paint retailers make their living by solving problems. If they just need a product, they can go to Home Depot, but they come to the specialty paint store where they can take advantage of the staff’s knowledge and personal service.”

Ryan recommended presenting Mad Dog as an alternative for consumers who are tired of having to paint their house every four to six years. If a consumer can find a paint job that lasts twice that long, they can literally save thousands of dollars in material and labor costs.

In addition, Ryan suggested that retailers explain that Mad Dog need only be used on problem portions of the house. “Perhaps they don’t have peeling paint everywhere, but just on the south-

west side. You can upsell them to Mad Dog just on the portion of the house where it is needed," he explained.

### Universal Vs. Specialty

One question that retailers have to consider is how many primers they should carry and what type. Can they get by with mostly universal primers? What about specialty primers? Like many questions in the paint retailing

world, the answers will vary by individual dealer and individual market.

Pittsburgh Paints' Seal Grip features both universal primers and specialty products. With a universal alkyd primer (17-941) already on the market, the company added a 100-percent acrylic (17-921) to the Seal Grip lineup as a water-based alternative. "We saw a need and introduced it a couple years ago," Dougherty reported.

The universal products are effective on most surfaces, including wood, concrete block, masonry, brick and stucco and for both interior and exterior applications. However, Pittsburgh Paints also offers numerous specialty primers as well.

"We felt it was important to offer a clearly defined lineup for different uses," Dougherty said. "Some jobs require a universal primer because you have different walls with different needs on the same job. However, if a project has a specific need, then you can go with a specialty primer."

Dougherty cited several examples of specialty primers available under the Seal Grip label, including Seal Grip Enamel Undercoater, available in both latex and alkyd formulations, specifically formulated for trim and wood surfaces; and Seal Grip Permanizer Plus Wood Stabilizer, specially designed to stabilize wood that is cracked or rotting or to bond loose fibers on deck railings. The aforementioned Seal Grip Ultra Stain Killing Primer also is a specialty product that many retailers will want to have in their store lineups.

"In my opinion, it's important to have both good universal primers (in acrylic and alkyd formulations) as well as a handful of specialty primers," stated Dougherty, adding that having such an assortment of products is not overwhelming or confusing. "The Seal-Grip line is easy to understand and easy to use for dealers, painters and DIYers. We work with dealers to determine what products will be best for their market area."



Dougherty added that dealers can sell primers effectively if they present a primer as part of a system with a top-coat. "We suggest that they market with the system approach in mind," he said. "For instance, if the customer is going to use Manor Hall as the top-coat, we feel it's better when they use it over one of our Seal Grip primers."

XIM's strategy is likewise to offer universal and specialty primers. "XIM manufactures universal primers," Hardy said. "However, when the per-

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formance requirements exceed what ordinary primers or even universal primers can achieve, then application-specific products are required. As materials of construction continue to change and evolve, special coatings will have to adapt as well. These coatings and primers will have to have specific adhesion promoters and other additives to meet the adhesion and durability requirements."

In addition, Hardy noted that XIM offers a series of "bonders." "These are bonding primers that go beyond the normal primer to achieve superior adhesion and long term durability," he said. "XIM's solvent bonders include 400 Clear, 400W White, 400W ES (100 g/l VOC), as well as Plastic and Vinyl Bonding Primer specifically for plastics including polypropylene and TPO surfaces. XIM's water-based bonders include UMA brand White and UMA brand deep base."

O'Reilly noted Zinsser formulates

and manufactures primers as a focus of its business and thus understands that both professionals and heavy DIYers lean heavily on universal primers. Having said that, he added, "We understand strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to priming, which is why we offer Shellac-Base, Oil-Base, Water-Base, Odorless Solvent Base, and a DEEP TINT primer among other specialty primers. The term 'universal' ties heavily to the variety of substrates to which each product is capable of adhering, but obviously there is still a need for primers that address specialty applications."

California Products offers a variety of specialty primers in its product lineup. In addition to the aforementioned Storm Stain Deck & Fence Primer, the company markets several other exterior primers under the Storm Stain line, including Storm Stain Trouble-Shooter Latex Primer, Storm Stain Trouble-Shooter Alkyd/Oil Primer and Storm

Stain Trouble-Shooter Fast Dry Alkyd Primer.

The California Paints lineup also includes several residential primers under the Fres-Coat label, including Exterior Acrylic Latex Trouble-Shooter, Exterior Oil Trouble-Shooter and Exterior Fast-Drying Alkyd Primer. Additional primers covering specialty uses include Wipe Out Low Odor Stain-Killing Primer Sealer, Wipe Out 100% Acrylic Latex Stain Killer, Wipe-Out Oil Stain Killer and Stopz All-Purpose Antimicrobial Mold and Mildew-Killing Primer, to name but a few.

Boyajian noted that the company's Trouble-Shooter family of exterior primers offers great penetration and hold-out, while the interior top-of-the-line products are 100-percent acrylics featuring superior performance. In addition, the company continues to work on primer product enhancements. "As we speak, we're working on a new

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