

Paint Finish Cheat Sheet

Choose the right finish for every room. Get the look. Avoid the mistakes.

Paint finish — also called sheen level — determines how light reflects off your walls, how washable the surface is, and how visible every imperfection becomes. It can be the difference between a room that feels polished and one that feels unfinished. Use this guide to choose the right finish every time.

THE SHEEN SCALE

FLAT / MATTE 0–5%	EGGSHELL 10–25%	SATIN 25–35%	SEMI-GLOSS 35–70%	HIGH-GLOSS 70–90%+
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Sheen increases left to right. Higher sheen = more washable, more reflective, and more unforgiving of surface imperfections.

QUICK REFERENCE

FINISH	SHEEN	WASHABILITY	HIDES FLAWS	BEST ROOMS
Flat / Matte	0–5%	★●●●●	★★★★★	Ceilings, accent walls
Eggshell	10–25%	★★★★●	★★★★●	Living rooms, bedrooms
Satin	25–35%	★★★★●	★★★●●	Hallways, kids' rooms, kitchens
Semi-Gloss	35–70%	★★★★★	★★●●●	Trim, doors, bathrooms
High-Gloss	70–90%+	★★★★★	★●●●●	Cabinets, furniture, accents

A Closer Look at Each Finish

Every finish has a purpose. Use these cards to match the right finish to the right surface in your home.

Flat / Matte		0 – 5% sheen
BEST FOR	Ceilings · Low-traffic walls · Adult bedrooms · Formal dining rooms	
✓ PROS	Hides wall imperfections beautifully · Richest, most velvety color depth · Non-reflective and glare-free	
✗ CONS	Not washable · Marks and scuffs easily · Shows fingerprints	
■ ■	<i>The bumpier your walls, the flatter your finish should be. Flat paint hides drywall imperfections that eggshell would highlight. Perfect for textured or older walls.</i>	
■ ■	Avoid: Kitchens, bathrooms, hallways, or any surface that gets touched or wiped regularly.	

Eggshell		10 – 25% sheen
BEST FOR	Living rooms · Bedrooms · Dining rooms · Home offices · Most interior walls	
✓ PROS	Slight glow that adds warmth · Wipeable for light cleaning · The most popular interior finish	
✗ CONS	Not ideal for very high-traffic zones · Still shows imperfections if walls are rough	
■ ■	<i>When in doubt, choose eggshell. It is the designer default for interior walls — beautiful enough for formal rooms, durable enough for everyday spaces.</i>	
■ ■	Avoid: High-moisture areas like bathrooms and kitchens where satin or semi-gloss holds up better.	

Satin

25 – 35% sheen

BEST FOR Hallways · Kids' rooms · Kitchen walls · Bathrooms (walls) · Laundry rooms

✓ **PROS** Scrubbable and very durable · Moisture-resistant · Soft glow without being too shiny

✗ **CONS** Shows brush marks and roller lines if applied unevenly · Harder to touch up invisibly

■ *Satin is the go-to finish for families with kids and pets. Crayon, mud, and handprints wipe right off. Use it wherever life actually happens.*

■ **Avoid:** Walls with lots of imperfections — the sheen will catch the light and highlight every bump.



Semi-Gloss

35 – 70% sheen

BEST FOR Trim · Baseboards · Doors · Window frames · Wainscoting · Kitchen & bathroom walls

✓ **PROS** Highly durable and moisture-resistant · Easy to wipe clean · Beautiful contrast against eggshell walls

✗ **CONS** Prep work is critical — sheen amplifies every imperfection · Lap marks show if not applied carefully

■ *Always use semi-gloss on trim. The slight contrast between eggshell walls and semi-gloss trim is a signature of a professionally painted room. It creates definition and polish.*

■ **Avoid:** Large wall areas in main living spaces — the reflectivity becomes overwhelming at scale.



High-Gloss

70 – 90%+ sheen

BEST FOR

Cabinets · Furniture · Front doors · Accent ceilings · Built-ins · Powder rooms

✓ PROS

Most durable and washable of all finishes · Dramatic, lacquer-like effect · Highly moisture-resistant

✗ CONS

Shows EVERY imperfection — extensive prep and sanding required · Professional application recommended



A high-gloss ceiling in a powder room or dining room creates a jewel-box effect — one of the most dramatic and affordable design moves available. Paint the ceiling a deep color in high-gloss for maximum impact.



Avoid: Standard interior walls. High-gloss is a special-use finish, not an everyday one. Only use it where you want drama and have done the prep work.

Which Finish Goes Where

ROOM / SURFACE	WALLS	TRIM / DOORS	CEILING
Living Room	Eggshell	Semi-Gloss	Flat
Bedroom	Eggshell	Semi-Gloss	Flat
Kids' Room	Satin	Semi-Gloss	Flat
Hallway	Satin	Semi-Gloss	Flat or Eggshell
Kitchen (walls)	Satin	Semi-Gloss	Flat or Eggshell
Bathroom (walls)	Satin	Semi-Gloss	Flat or Eggshell
Dining Room	Eggshell	Semi-Gloss	Flat
Home Office	Eggshell	Semi-Gloss	Flat
Laundry Room	Satin	Semi-Gloss	Flat or Eggshell
Cabinets	High-Gloss or Satin	—	—
Furniture	High-Gloss or Satin	—	—
Front Door	High-Gloss (exterior)	—	—
Accent Ceiling	High-Gloss or Eggshell	—	—

PRO TIPS & COMMON MISTAKES

- Always test before you commit** Buy a sample pot and paint a 12" x 12" patch directly on the wall. View it at morning, midday, and evening light before buying a full gallon. A color that looks perfect on a chip can be a complete surprise on the wall.
- The imperfection rule: prep for your sheen** Higher sheen catches light — and light catches every dent, brush mark, and seam. Before applying satin, semi-gloss, or high-gloss, sand and prime thoroughly. The higher the sheen, the more your prep work will show.
- Match undertones, not just colors** Your wall paint, trim paint, and ceiling paint all have undertones — warm or cool. Mixing families (warm walls with cool trim) makes the room feel 'off' in a way that's hard to identify. Identify your undertone first and stay within it.
- Use the same finish throughout a room** Switching finishes mid-room (except intentionally, like walls vs. trim) creates an inconsistency that reads as unpolished. Commit to one finish for all four walls.

- **Spend more on paint, not more on gallons**

Premium paint covers in 2 coats. Cheap paint can require 3–4. Over a project, you spend the same — but premium paint lasts 10+ years longer. Buy quality once.

- **Never paint trim and walls the same finish**

Eggshell walls + semi-gloss trim is one of the most reliable professional combinations in interior design. The contrast adds definition and signals intention.

- **Low-VOC matters more than you think**

VOC (volatile organic compounds) affect air quality for weeks after painting. Choose low-VOC or zero-VOC paint especially in bedrooms, nurseries, and rooms with poor ventilation. All major premium brands now offer excellent low-VOC lines.

Best Paint Brands & Why

The brand you choose affects coverage, color accuracy, washability, and how long your paint job lasts. Here's an honest breakdown of the best options at every price point — from the designer favorite to the smart budget pick.

Benjamin Moore



DESIGNER
FAVORITE

\$55 – \$90 / gallon

BEST FOR Color accuracy, rich pigments, smooth application

WHY Benjamin Moore uses proprietary Gennex® Color Technology with the highest volume solids (~45%) in the industry — meaning richer color, fewer coats, and stronger adhesion. Their 3,500+ color palette is the widest available, with whites and neutrals that are genuinely unmatched for clarity and depth.

LINES Aura (flagship) · Regal Select · ben (budget line)

WHERE Benjamin Moore stores and independent dealers

- *BM Chantilly Lace (OC-17) and White Dove (OC-17) are the most-used designer whites in the industry. If you want a crisp or creamy white that photographs beautifully, start there.*
-

Sherwin-Williams



PRO'S CHOICE

\$60 – \$90 / gallon

BEST FOR Availability, consistent coverage, professional reliability

WHY With 4,700+ store locations and 40% volume solids on its Emerald line, Sherwin-Williams is the most widely available premium paint in North America. It's the first choice of most professional painters for its consistent performance. Frequent sales (30–40% off) make it excellent value.

LINES Emerald (flagship) · Duration · SuperPaint · Cashmere

WHERE Sherwin-Williams stores, Lowe's (limited lines)

- *Shop SW during their sales — held several times a year — and you can get the \$85/gal Emerald for around \$50. Sign up for their email list so you never miss a sale.*
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PPG Diamond



UNDERRATED
GEM

\$45 – \$65 / gallon

BEST FOR Professional-grade quality at a more accessible price

WHY PPG is the second-largest paint manufacturer in the world, yet it's often overlooked by homeowners. Their Diamond and Timeless lines deliver genuine professional-grade coverage and durability. Great for those who want quality without the premium price tag of BM or SW.

LINES Diamond (top line) · Timeless · Manor Hall

WHERE Home Depot, Menards, PPG stores

- *PPG Diamond is a hidden gem. It performs comparably to SW SuperPaint at a lower price. If your local Home Depot carries it, it's worth a strong look before defaulting to Behr.*
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Behr Marquee



BUDGET-FRIENDL
Y

\$35 – \$55 / gallon

BEST FOR DIY-friendly, widely available, good value for money

WHY Behr is exclusively available at Home Depot, making it the most accessible premium-adjacent option. The Marquee line (their best) includes paint and primer and offers solid coverage. It's a reasonable choice for lower-traffic rooms or rental properties where budget matters most.

LINES Marquee (best) · Premium Plus · Ultra Pure White

WHERE Home Depot (exclusive)

- *Always buy Marquee, not standard Behr. Standard Behr can require 3+ coats over dark colors. Marquee covers in 2 and lasts significantly longer. The upgrade is worth every dollar.*
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Farrow & Ball

LUXURY
SPECIALTY

\$115+ / gallon



BEST FOR Iconic, sophisticated colors you simply cannot find anywhere else

WHY Farrow & Ball uses a unique chalk-based formula that creates an incredibly rich, deep matte finish unlike any other brand. Their colors — Dead Salmon, Elephant's Breath, Hague Blue, Mole's Breath — have a tonal complexity that is instantly recognizable. One room in F&B; transforms an entire home's feel.

LINES Modern Emulsion (walls) · Estate Emulsion · Full Gloss (trim)

WHERE Farrow & Ball showrooms, authorized retailers

- *Use F&B; strategically. Paint one statement room or a single accent wall and use BM or SW for the rest of the house. The investment is worth it for a focal space — a library, dining room, or powder room in a deep Farrow & Ball color is unforgettable.*
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Not sure which color to choose? Take the free Style Quiz at interiorsbyterrell.com/style-quiz to get your personalized color direction and design style profile.

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