

# Choosing the Right Paint Sheen Level



Choosing the right sheen level is as important as getting the colour right!

Generally paints are available in either a gloss, satin or flat so let's look at the definitions. **Gloss** is a shiny durable tough finish sometimes called full or high gloss. **Semi-Gloss/ Satin** is a half way between gloss and flat and it can be called semi-gloss or low sheen. **Flat** is a non-reflective and is often termed as matt for this reason.

There are many considerations to influence your decision to use gloss, semi-gloss/satin or flat finishes and these can be either practical or personal reasons. Practical reasons may be as diverse as gloss to reflect the light, to camouflage a surface you know to be rough and imperfect.

Traditionally homeowners regarded flat for use in living rooms only and gloss for kitchens where scrubbing was necessary. There is still a lot of merit in that traditional approach; however, modern paints are formulated to provide a greater flexibility of use.

In general terms gloss should last longer than satin and satin longer than flat as the degree of gloss enhances the durability of the paint film. Normally it will take us more effort to scuff a hard gloss surface than a matt surface. Additionally a higher gloss can withstand a harsher cleaning effort and so preserve an un-marked finish longer.

The surface quality of a ceiling or wall can also influence the choice of finish. If renovating, for example, you should avoid using gloss as this will highlight and repaired cracks. However, where you have perfect level ceilings and flat walls the choice is wide open.

With the use of a gloss finish you will naturally increase the reflective capabilities of a wall or ceiling many times. With the trend nowadays towards down lighting and track lighting to create pools of illumination there is now a move towards full gloss ceilings and or walls to mirror and reflect the controlled lighting. By contrast with interior fashions the choice of an exterior gloss finish can be for the very practical reason of reflecting the harsh summer sun, when for example the brickwork is painting white.

Let's look at the average home and the reason for using flat, satin or gloss.

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## Choosing the Right Paint Sheen Level (cont.)



- 1. Ceilings** – usually painted flat in places like bedrooms, halls, lounges and dining rooms. Normally they are not prone to scuffing or spoiling except perhaps where a room has an open fireplace where as a result of smoke discolouration you may wish to consider using a satin finish to aid washability. Ceilings in kitchens, bathrooms and laundries where the cooking odours and steam accumulates you may need to use a semi-gloss. For maximum 'scrubbability' use a full gloss.
- 2. Walls** – need only the use of flat finish except kitchens, bathrooms and laundries. With younger children around a semi-gloss may be more appropriate. Gloss paint in bathrooms and laundries is of-ten popular as they easily cope with the effects of steam and condensation.
- 3. Woodwork** – in most cases the use of semi-gloss or high gloss paint is recommended. This is to aid washability and maintain durability. You could even use a tinted colour on the wood trim to complement the wall colour. If the grain quality is good and there are no unsightly blemishes in the wood try using a clear polyurethane finish to enhance the grain and give the natural look very popular nowadays.

Take care of your newly painted surfaces by regular cleaning to maintain that 'just paint' look. Gloss finishes may be scrubbed with non-abrasive cleaners as frequently as necessary. Semi-Gloss and Satin finishes are also suitable for easy cleaning; however, flat finishes should be cleaned carefully and never scrubbed. Hard rubbing will leave shiny marks therefore it is best to wash the whole wall no just the area to be cleaned.

Rule of Thumb:

Flat paints could be described as – Wipeable

Low Sheen Acrylic Paints could be described as – Washable

Semi-Gloss/ Satin/ Gloss Acrylic Paints could be described as - Scrubbable

By following these tips, you will see that choosing the right finish is just as important as deciding which colour to use.

**All preparation and painting works should be to the A/S 2311:2009 Painting of Buildings**

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