

decorator

So you've chosen to get someone else to help out with your renovating. Just remember that correcting a bad paint or papering job can be difficult, expensive, time consuming and more hassle than it's worth. The key to success when using a decorator is to choose a good tradesperson before you begin.



The best way to find a good decorator is through word of mouth – a recommendation from a trusted source is worth its weight in gold. If you don't know anyone who's renovated recently, you can always ask the store you're buying your paint or wallpaper from to recommend a painter or paperhanger, says interior design consultant Judi Bagust of judibagustdesign.

If you're painting, the Master Painters trade association can provide leads. Working with a master painter also has the advantage of providing a process to resolve issues should any arise. Finally, Resene offers an online Professionals Wanted trade listing, with more than 400 contacts for architects, designers and decorators. The company also has a free Find-A-Painter service – just fill in a job sheet in-store or online at: www.resene.co.nz, and wait for the painters to call you.

And when you're considering who you want to work with, don't be afraid to ask to inspect previous projects. Look at the job to assess the quality for yourself and talk to the homeowners to see how reliable the decorator was.

When inspecting wallpaper, look at the joins in the paper – the pattern should match perfectly – and at the skirtings and scotias to see that the paper is finished tidily and there's no old glue left on the paintwork. With painted walls, however, the quality of the paint job is largely dictated by the quality of the preparation work. Painting is a skilled trade that requires training and appropriate tools. Professional painters know how to prepare the surface properly, which paints to use in each situation, and how to get the job done with minimal disruption.

Next is the business of getting the quote. It's a good idea to talk to at least three decorators, and Judi says you should ask for a contract price rather than an hourly rate. Always discuss the job thoroughly with your tradesperson before starting, to avoid confusion and disappointment – and make sure the decorator who starts the job is the one who finishes it. Also, as many of them have more than one job on at a time, she recommends trying to pin them down to a schedule.

"You need to be specific – and fussy – to get the perfect job," she says.

You also need to think about:

- > Making sure you provide a clear description of the scope of the project, including any surface preparation work. Be specific and concise.

- > Discuss and detail in writing the products and colours you want, including brand name of paint, and make sure through the project that those are actually used.
- > Get an estimate of the time the job will take to complete, and make sure you are aware of any additional costs, such as travel and whether the quote includes GST.
- > Make sure you both sign and date the quote once you've accepted it.

While anyone can slap paint onto your walls, it takes expertise and experience to get a really high-quality finish.

"And remember, you can't blame the painter if your groundwork is no good," says designer Murray Thompson of Rapello Design. "Get the painter to look at the wall beforehand, so a plasterboard-stopper can fix any problems. Check that they will clean up after sanding between coats – too often, the dust is left to blow about and sticks to the walls, leaving a bitty finish."

A painted wall should be smooth to touch, which may mean it needs skimming with a product such as Resene Broadwall Surface Prep. If cost is an issue, Murray suggests just skimming the walls that get the most light, as they are the ones that will show the most imperfections. The wall should also have perfectly straight lines where two colours meet. This shows that the painter has used masking tape, rather than the eye alone, to achieve the line.

Getting a perfect finish when renovating an older home can be tricky. Walls are often out of plumb and not straight. Murray says it's best to re-plasterboard the walls altogether, and this also offers the ideal chance to reconfigure your power points and add insulation. However, as the framing in old homes will be rough-hewn, the walls will need packing to ensure the new plasterboard sits flat.

"All this prep work can be pricey, but it makes the world of difference," he says. "It's ideal to re-plasterboard, but if that's out of reach, choose a less glossy paint, such as low-sheen Resene Zylone SpaceCote, which will mask imperfections."

Finally, do be realistic about the amount of time and money you have budgeted to get the job done. Good decorators are in demand and will usually charge more than the average market price. And in today's busy building climate, you may have to wait for a good painter or paperhanger to become available. However, if you don't want to do it yourself – and want to avoid costly headaches – it's worth it. **H**

For more information, visit: www.masterpainters.org.nz, www.akmasterpainters.co.nz (Auckland) or www.mpa.org.au.