

Unlocking My Muse with Benjamin Moore

by Lynn Rothenberg

Sitting down to begin a new writing project, 20 minutes pass and I've been staring alternately at my computer keys and the monitor the entire time and realize my creative aura is stuck because of the Sage Green walls. How can I write, so closed in, this Sherwin Williams darkness sucking all the oxygen out of the room.

Clearly, I have to paint my office. I must paint it white to encourage my muse to meander freely around my neural pathways, now coiled like a large intestine, clogged like cholesterol-packed carotid arteries. No one could write under these conditions.

I head to the hardware store and buy Benjamin Moore's second thickest paint appropriately named Regal. This is *my* project I inform my husband who usually does the painting but now he isn't paying much attention because he has a bad case of Lyme. Timing is everything. Like when my teen-age son asked if we could get ultra-premium cable as I lay on the living room sofa recovering from a concussion after someone smacked into the back of my Miata while I was waiting to turn left on a busy road. "Yes," I uncharacteristically agreed unable to recall why I was ever opposed to allowing hundreds of television stations into our home.

Lyme has distracted my husband. Although I am sorry he is feeling so poorly, I sense a relaxation of his near constant state of hypervigilance when I take on a home improvement project—rare—because he's compulsive and I'm not and he's pretty sure I won't be as thorough or won't finish or I'll exhibit some other non-

compulsive behavior that will taint the job. But that quality of mine, that tendency to accept a “good enough” standard rather than a perfect standard is as much a part of my personality as compulsiveness is a part of his. Yin and Yang.

Deliberately avoiding any discussion about painting, I surreptitiously rustle through paint chip brochures in the creamy folder “House/Paint” so labeled in my husband’s meticulous printing. If he gets involved in color selection, we’ll end up buying pint after pint of this white and that white and likely end up with no white. That’s how it goes.

Like the time we were going to paint our living room.

We’d flipped through the Sherwin Williams wheel for weeks, months. Two years later we knew we wanted green. But which green? Coastal, Privilege, Cilantro? He drove to the hardware store and bought many “sample” pints. Two years later we painted it Georgian Brick.

What a relief it was now, feeling unleashed, looking at a single brochure and selecting Benjamin Moore’s 2016 Color of the Year: Simply White, Simplemente Blanco. Without a word, I go to the hardware store and buy the paint. As soon as he sees me walk in carrying the gallon, he goes down the cellar to his workshop and comes up with a couple of rollers and a brush, some muslin to put on the floor—just in case—even though I assure him it’s unlikely I’m going to spill any paint. But okay. I’ll take the muslin. Here, he says handing me a small cotton cloth, take this cloth and dampen it a just a little in case you get paint on the wood. I’m careful, I assure him, but, okay, I’ll take the cloth, just in case.

My office is small. Rather than empty the room I push things around, put on some music, assess the job and figure I'll polish it off in three days. Then came the heatwave and without air conditioning, the job started to drag. And I had two zoom meetings a week I had to attend, and that broke my momentum. And painting is kind of boring. How many contiguous hours can a person layer paint on walls?

That paint turned out not to be so thick after all. I soaked the roller, then placed it against the wall and some of that paint did happen to drip onto the wood floor so I had to find the cloth, which I forgot to dampen, but was able to remove most of the paint, leaving a shadow of white, which I didn't mind.

As the days passed, during my zoom meetings, I couldn't help noticing my colleague's backgrounds: large exotic plants, art, bookcases. Behind me, they saw a wall, half Sage Green, half Simply White, and a light switch without a cover. I had been happy to paint carefully around the plate but when my husband peeked in he said that's not how you do it, you have to remove it so you can paint properly.

It surprised me to learn that paint dries instantaneously on raw wood, like on the beams in our post and beam house. By the time I climbed down the ladder to get that little mistake cloth, climbed back up the ladder to wipe the white paint off, it was already dry! Then the roller got kind of clumsy at times and kept nicking the post as though it had a mind of its own, as though magnetically drawn to the wood. Wood is very absorbent.

Another thing I learned is it's probably easier to paint in an empty room because each time I tripped on a chair or the floor fan or the piles of books I had removed from the shelf, my arm holding the roller whacked against the wall,

invariably hit the post, once again necessitating a clean-up with that little cloth. And more than once, when I was rolling high up standing on my tiptoes because it seemed easier at times than climbing up the ladder, I unconsciously placed my left hand on the wall to steady myself and on more than one occasion, the paint was wet. That must be how I got the white paint on my shorts.

Two months later, while finishing the job, my husband dropped by to have a look and I told him I thought there was something wrong with the paint—too thin—and something was wrong with the brush—poor quality. He went downstairs to his workshop and returned holding a brush comparable in size to mine. In his left hand he held my brush and in his right hand, he held the other. Do you see this? he asked waving it in the air. I've had this brush for 15 years. I had to admit that brush did indeed look new. Then he held up my brush, bristles with dried paint stuck together, some separated into a stand-alone clump, the metal part of the handle covered with dried white paint.

Now this is your brush, he said waving it, looking at me. Well, I don't know how it got like *that* I said. He tells me I have to wash the brush *each* time, *really* wash it and put it in plastic *each* time I finish with it.

Then he did what I had hoped he wouldn't. He slowly surveyed the room then said in a voice filled with regret: So much paint got on the wood! I'm going to have to sand that off. I'll sand it, I offered never having used a sander. No, no. it's okay. I'll sand it, he insisted.

We both agree we now want to paint our Georgian Brick living room some shade of white. Since he will be painting, there will be many shades of white from

which to choose. I figure he can select the color since he has made it clear *he* will be the one putting it on the walls. And for that, I am grateful.