

Approaching the home straight

BY LYNDA WILSON

The New Year started with more of a whimper than a bang. I had an annual engagement with Camp Creative in Bellingen, which just could not be missed – especially after months of thinking about nothing but building! The chance to spend a week without a phone, computer or having to answer questions was just what I need, and I came back refreshed and raring to go!

To VOC or not to VOC

Having spent a lot of time researching and deciding on the paint to be used, I have to admit that the whole scenario of 'green' paints is terribly confusing and often 'open to interpretation.'

The aim at each phase of building has been to meet as many of the items on our wish list as possible (see TOB 156 Dec 2009/ Jan 2010), with the realisation that meeting all of them was in most cases impossible. The items relevant to the choice of paint include: sustainable, eco-friendly and

healthy choices; with Australian made preferable.

Early on I discounted making my own paint – I am quite aware of my own limitations, thank you!

First of all I considered 'natural paint,' made from naturally occurring substances. I had previously used casein marble paint from The Natural Paint Company for a feature wall, which required mixing the powdered paint and tint with water to create the liquid paint. These paints are zero VOC and contain no petrochemicals.

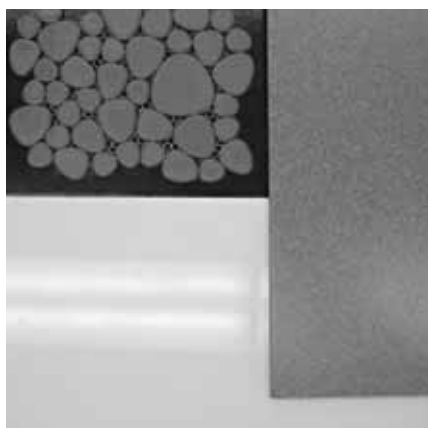
Next I considered pre-mixed natural wall paints, from Bio Products and Livos Australia. The paints are made from natural, non-toxic ingredients, come in a conventional liquid form, but require self-tinting. These paints are zero/low VOC.

I then started looking at more conventional paints, but with environmental credentials. I checked the GreenPainters website (www.greenpainters.com.au) to see which brands they recommended; apart

from those already mentioned, these included Bauwerk (low VOC), Rockcote (low VOC), Ecotrend (zero VOC) and eColour (zero VOC). I also considered Porter's Paints (zero VOC), Resene (low VOC) and Murobond. In New Zealand, check out the following additional environmentally friendly paint options: EnviroPaints (www.enviropaints.co.nz), Eco Paints (www.ecopaints.co.nz).

I finally settled on eColour (www.eColour.com.au), for a number of reasons: zero VOC, price comparable to conventional paint, ease of application, Australian made by an Australian owned company, and carbon neutral due to the reuse of waste engine oil. However, it should be stressed that my choice was a very personal one, based on a number of individual properties that met my specific needs. Any of the other products mentioned, as well as a number of others on the market, would have also done the job.

I was not planning to paint the new house myself and couldn't find a local

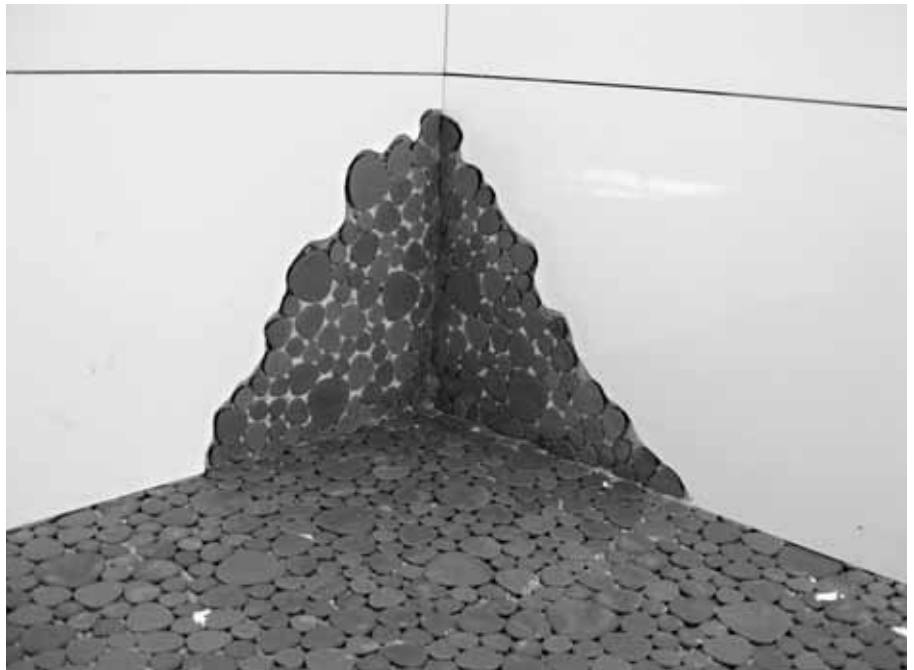


painter willing to work with natural paints – go figure – so I contacted GreenPainter Andrew Albore of All Eco Painting (based on the Central Coast). Yes, I could have physically tackled the task myself, but once again I was realistic; I HATE painting with a passion, and I really would like to move into the house before Christmas 2011... Andrew commented that eColour is very similar to Rockcote (which he uses most often) in application and coverage. He spent five long days here, applying a coat of primer and then two coats of paint. There are no cornices as everything is square set, so he had his work cut out for him keeping neat lines between the ceiling and walls. The ceilings are painted flat white, and the walls a very light shade of grey Taubmans *Mink Scorpion* 1/4 shade. eColour use *EcoTint* from Wattyl, as they are all 99.7% VOC free and can produce most colours from any paint company. For *Mink Scorpion* 1/4, about 30ml of tint was used in a 15 litre bucket.

Wet areas

The exciting part of tiling had arrived. Initially, I had ideas of doing wonderful mosaics on the ensuite shower wall, but as time pressure increased I realised this was just not going to happen. I like clean lines so chose large format (300 x 600mm) white rectified edge wall tiles and dark grey porcelain floor tiles, all grouted with dark grey (Dunlop *Charred Ash*). I thought that would look a little stark so I decided to look at some of the smaller mosaic and pebble tiles available, settling on a grey pebble tile. This has been used on the shower floor and bath surround, as well as in corners and behind basins to add a small feature. As they came in tile sizes based on a webbing background, they were relatively easy to lay, but they did use up a lot of grout.

Choosing tiles was one of those times when customer service really paid off. The large tileware house close by has great prices but a limited range, and is understaffed. One of top-end showrooms in town has a fantastic range but some of the staff were a little snooty, and the prices were well outside my budget. I struck it lucky when I headed into Tile Power (www.tilepowernewcastle.com.au) – it was a quiet afternoon and Wendy was more than happy to help me ‘play’



with colours and sizes until I struck the perfect combination. Hooray for friendly and helpful assistants!

In total for the ensuite, bathroom and laundry, we used 15m² of floor tiles, 50m² of wall tiles, and 3.5m² of pebbles. I had originally slightly under-ordered on floor tiles, but as they were stock items I could pop in and buy two extra boxes; almost spot on with wall tiles with only one whole tile left over and not that much wastage; the 1.5m² of pebble tiles left will be used as the kitchen splashback, along with a glass sheet behind the cooktop.

A local tiler, Terry Martens, spent two days screeding the wet area floors, followed by 11 days doing the tiling and grouting. He did a fantastic job, with incredibly neat 1.5mm spacings. Council requires a waterproofing certificate as part of my building approval, which meant I had to use someone licensed who could provide me with a certificate for the waterproofing. Terry recommended a tiler he regularly works with and it was done in a day, using low VOC products.

The plumber, Luke Wagner, popped in every now and then as work progressed, to fit another component. The latest was once the floor tiling was completed and before wall tiling started, at which stage he could fit the in-wall cisterns. These have no tolerance as with wall mounted cisterns, and have to be dead accurate, which is why he waited until the floor tiles were

in. Being the pessimist I am, I have located both toilets on walls that are backed by bedroom wardrobes, and have removable panels in those to allow access to the cisterns.

Timber floors

We used our break away to mull over the floor choices, as mentioned in last issue's diary. We both decided that solid Australian timber was our preferred choice, and although it was more expensive than the bamboo we felt it was worth it. We managed to get a quote on the timber flooring down to around the \$16,000 mark (supplied, fitted and finished) by compromising and using 80mm boards, as the wider 130mm boards were a lot more expensive. Once again we chose a local firm – very local, only about four blocks down the road – dealing with Steve Huen from Jacobean Timber Floors (www.jacobeantimber.com.au).

The timber chosen was feature grade Australian Reds with high Janka (hardness) ratings – a mix of red mahogany (12), grey gum (14) and bloodwood/amber ash (8.8). This was sourced from Australian Solar Timbers, who are Chain of Custody certified under the Australian Forest Certification Scheme (www.astfloors.com.au).

I had initially made the decision to have all the plastering and painting done before the floors were laid, as I had not yet decided on the floor finish and I was

worried that trades would damage the floors. This would have been true for pre-finished timber or bamboo floors but is not the case for solid timber. And my worry about paint being messed on the floors was totally unfounded; I have been assured more than once that it all disappears once the sanding is done! So, in hindsight, had I decided on solid timber flooring a lot earlier in the piece, then it could have been laid before the plasterboard was installed and the painting completed. The benefit would have been that the boards closest to the walls would have been able to be secret nailed rather than top nailed, as the secret nailer cannot be used close to plastered walls due to the hammer action required to fire it (see 'how to use a secret nail gun' on www.youtube.com). There would have also been no concern about the painted walls being dirtied – I have become a bit of a terror, walking around saying 'now don't forget NOT to touch the walls' and moving things that have been leaned up against my beautifully painted walls!

The floors have been laid – and they look absolutely stunning! As for the finishing, Steve and I have been 'negotiating.' His preferred finish is Polycure *Naturol*, which is a single pack, clear, oil based synthetic coating – not what I want... I have my heart set on a natural oiled look, using Livos *Kunos* natural oil sealer. I accept that this will not provide me with the near bullet-proof surface protection that synthetic coatings do, but the healthier indoor air quality plus the fact that no removal or sanding back is required before recoating is more than enough to compensate. To his credit, Steve has said he will investigate further and do some testing, to make sure that he feels they can finish to the standard he expects – and I am confident we will be going that way. And I may just have helped convert another flooring company to the use of natural finishes.

Kitchens and things

In mid December, I had a kitchen designer from Kitchen Connection (www.kitchenconnection.com.au) come out to do a plan and quote. I already knew almost exactly what I wanted, it was just a case of deciding on the individual carcass sizes to fit the space assigned: mostly drawers not cupboards, no top cupboards, L-shaped with a central island, low/no VOC finishes,

stone benchtops, simple design. They were not the cheapest, but I liked the quality of their showroom kitchens, they offer a good service, and they are the only ones who do an in-line corner pantry as standard – it is amazing how a small thing like that can sway your decision! As for VOC, I had to settle for an Emission class E1 ($\leq 1.0\text{mg/l}$ formaldehyde emission) rating, but found this was the same for the other kitchen companies I tried. I could have got Emission class E0 ($\leq 0.5\text{mg/l}$ formaldehyde emission) carcasses elsewhere, but the painted door finishes are always the killer. I had considered timber fronts as a low VOC choice, but with the timber floors I thought it would be a bit overpowering.

Once the initial shock of the +\$20,000 quote (excluding appliances) had worn off, we reworked the design so that I kept most of my criteria but compromised slightly. By swapping a few drawer units for cupboards (drawers are far more expensive) we managed to get it down to \$18,000 installed. This includes four drawer units, oven unit, in-line corner pantry, fridge unit, central island with six cupboard units and one microwave unit, *Caesarstone* benchtops with two waterfall ends on the central island and one on the floor units (a waterfall end is a vertical continuation of the stone down the cabinet side to the floor). Installation is going ahead early March.

Affordable Wardrobes (www.affordablewardrobes.net.au) came in to measure up and quote on wardrobes, shower screens and the laundry; installation is scheduled for 8 March. The plain white melamine laundry with laminated benchtop includes a shallow shelved section with removable backing to allow access to the recessed power box and cabling; solar work still needs doing. Each of the three bedrooms will have wardrobes with sliding doors (two glass plus one mirror door in each), with plenty of drawer, shelf and hanging space. The two that back onto the in-wall cisterns will have the shelving in front of the access panels easily removable.

Lighting

I think I have mentioned before that I seem to work best under pressure, even though I hate it. Well, lighting was another demonstration of this. I had

Ongoing costs to date

Brought forward	\$301,000
(See TOB 163 Feb/Mar 2011)	
Plumbing	\$4400
Insulation	\$3600
Kitchen deposit	\$1430
Painting – material & labour	\$4020
Plastering – material & labour	\$10,300
Flooring	\$8100
Tiling – material & labour	\$7000
Lighting	\$1500
Carpentry supplies	\$2600
Total to date	\$344,000

been looking – and procrastinating – for months, when I suddenly realised that the electrician was due back to do all the fit out in less than four weeks. A quick whiz around the local Beacon Lighting store (www.beaconlighting.com.au) had me selecting fittings in less time than it takes to decide on which outfit to wear! Nevertheless, because I had been looking for so long, I already had a pretty good idea of what I wanted – low energy use, understated, nearly invisible fittings. The only exception is the entrance hall, which with a 4m ceiling deserves something spectacular. I am waiting until the right fitting 'finds' me, so we may just have a bare bulb there for quite some time.

Finish trim

All that is left to do is the door jambs, doors, skirting and architraves. I have chosen solid timber internal doors to reduce noise ingress, in line with the heavily insulated walls. Skirtings are 90 x 19mm and architraves 42 x 19mm pencil round finger jointed pine. All trim is to be painted low gloss white.

Hindsight again... I really don't like architraves, and now that I can see how great the square set laundry and internal windows look, I wish I had done the whole lot that way. Unfortunately, as the painting has already been done, it is too late – unless I am prepared to paint every wall that has a window in again!

So, we are nearly there and by the time this issue makes it to you, we will be in! But what about the budget? Oh dear, I'm not sure I want to go there right now... ■



1. The kitchen cabinetry all in place, awaiting the stone benchtops and waterfall ends down the sides of the island and floor unit.
2. Early morning sunshine bathes the living area through the bi-folds, accentuating the subtle grey of the walls, which fades to almost white to match the ceiling during the brightest part of the day.
3. The solid timber floor was glued and secret-nailed to the suspended particleboard floor, and will be finished with a low sheen natural oil.