

OTTAWA CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Painting

Interior and exterior painting questions for Ottawa
homeowners

9 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Table of Contents

1. What paint is best for ceilings?
.....
2. How do I choose paint colors for my home?
.....
3. How much does professional painting cost?
.....
4. Should I prime before painting?
.....
5. How long does interior paint last?
.....
6. What causes paint to peel?
.....
7. What is the difference between paint sheens?
.....
8. How do I paint a room like a professional?
.....
9. What paint finish is best for walls?
.....

Q1

What paint is best for ceilings?

For most Ottawa homes, a high-quality flat or matte finish ceiling paint in white or off-white provides the best results, offering excellent coverage while minimizing imperfections and glare.

The flat finish is ideal for ceilings because it doesn't reflect light, which helps hide minor surface irregularities, nail pops, and texture variations that are common in older Ottawa homes. Unlike walls that get touched and scuffed, ceilings rarely need cleaning, so the washability concerns with flat paint don't apply here.

Paint quality matters significantly for ceiling work. Premium paints like Benjamin Moore Waterborne Ceiling Paint, Sherwin-Williams ProMar 200 Zero VOC, or Dulux Ceiling Paint offer better coverage, reducing the number of coats needed. In Ottawa's market, expect to pay \$45-65 per gallon for quality ceiling paint, compared to \$25-35 for basic builder-grade options. The extra cost is worthwhile since you'll typically need fewer coats and get better long-term results.

Color choice impacts your space dramatically. Pure white remains the most popular choice as it maximizes light reflection in Ottawa's often gray winter months. However, subtle off-whites or very light grays can add warmth and sophistication. Avoid stark white if your walls are warm-toned, as it can create an unpleasant contrast.

Special considerations for Ottawa homes include moisture management in older houses with limited vapor barriers. Look for paints with mildew resistance, especially in bathrooms and basements. For heritage homes in areas like the Glebe or New Edinburgh, consider period-appropriate off-white shades rather than modern bright whites.

Application technique is crucial for ceiling work. Use a high-quality roller with appropriate nap (3/8" for smooth ceilings, 1/2" for textured), and always cut in edges with a brush first. Work in 4x4 foot sections, maintaining a wet edge to avoid lap marks.

Professional guidance becomes valuable for high ceilings, heavily textured surfaces, or when dealing with stains from roof leaks or water damage. Many Ottawa painters charge \$1.50-3.00 per square foot for ceiling painting, which often proves worthwhile given the physical demands and technique required for quality results.

Q2

How do I choose paint colors for my home?

Choosing paint colors for your Ottawa home requires considering your lighting, existing décor, and the specific function of each room. Start by gathering inspiration from magazines, Pinterest, or paint manufacturer websites, then test your top choices with sample patches before committing to full rooms.

The most successful approach begins with understanding your home's natural light patterns. **Ottawa homes face unique lighting challenges** due to our northern latitude and frequent overcast days during fall and winter months. North-facing rooms receive cooler, more consistent light throughout the day, making them ideal for warmer paint tones like soft yellows, warm grays, or cream colors. South-facing rooms get abundant warm light, so they can handle cooler colors like blues, greens, or crisp whites without feeling cold.

Consider your home's architectural style and era when selecting colors. Ottawa's heritage homes in areas like the Glebe or New Edinburgh often feature traditional color palettes with rich, deeper tones that complement original woodwork and period details. Post-war bungalows in Alta Vista or Elmvale typically work well with mid-century inspired colors, while newer builds in Barrhaven or Kanata offer more flexibility for contemporary color schemes.

Test colors extensively before making final decisions. Purchase sample sizes and paint large swatches (at least 2x2 feet) on different walls in each room. Observe these samples at various times of day and under both natural and artificial lighting. Ottawa's seasonal light changes dramatically - colors that look perfect in bright summer sunlight may appear dull during our gray winter months.

Room function should guide your color choices. Bedrooms benefit from calming, restful colors like soft blues, greens, or neutral tones. Living areas can handle more dramatic colors but consider how they'll work with your furniture and décor. Kitchens and bathrooms need colors that work well with fixtures and cabinetry, and remember that these rooms often have less natural light.

For Ottawa homeowners, **consider the long-term maintenance** aspects of your color choices. Lighter colors show scuffs and marks more easily but make spaces feel larger - important in many of Ottawa's older homes with smaller rooms. Darker colors hide imperfections but can make spaces feel cramped.

Professional color consultation can be valuable, especially for whole-home projects or if you're struggling with challenging spaces. Many local paint retailers offer color matching services and can help coordinate colors throughout your home. When hiring painters, discuss color selection during your initial consultations - experienced painters often have excellent insights into how colors will look in your specific space and lighting conditions.

Start with neutrals if you're uncertain, then add personality through accent walls, furniture, and accessories. This approach allows you to experiment with bolder colors without the commitment and expense of painting entire rooms.

How much does professional painting cost?

Professional painting in Ottawa typically ranges from \$2-4 per square foot for interior work and \$3-6 per square foot for exterior painting, though final costs depend heavily on your specific project scope and home condition.

For interior painting, you can expect to pay \$300-600 per average-sized room (12x12 feet) including materials and labor. This covers standard prep work like filling nail holes, light sanding, and one coat of primer plus two coats of quality paint. **Whole-house interior projects** typically run \$3,000-8,000 for a 1,500-2,000 square foot home, depending on the number of rooms, ceiling height, and amount of trim work.

Exterior painting costs are generally higher due to weather exposure requirements and safety considerations. A typical Ottawa home exterior runs \$4,000-12,000, with factors like siding material, home height, and prep work significantly affecting the price. Homes with cedar siding, extensive trim work, or multiple stories will be on the higher end. **Preparation work** often accounts for 60-70% of exterior painting costs, especially on older Ottawa homes where lead paint remediation or significant scraping may be required.

Ottawa-specific factors that affect pricing include our harsh freeze-thaw cycles, which create more exterior prep work, and the prevalence of heritage homes in neighborhoods like the Glebe and New Edinburgh that require specialized techniques. Many Ottawa painters are busiest from May through September, so booking early or scheduling off-season work can sometimes reduce costs by 10-15%.

What's typically included in professional quotes: surface preparation, primer, paint materials, labor, and cleanup. **Additional costs** might include moving furniture (\$100-300), extensive patching or drywall repair (\$200-800), or specialty finishes like textured walls or high-end paint products.

Professional guidance is essential for exterior work above single-story height due to safety requirements, and for any lead paint situations common in pre-1960 Ottawa homes. Interior work can sometimes be DIY-friendly for experienced homeowners, but professionals ensure proper surface prep, even coverage, and clean lines around trim work.

Next steps: Get 2-3 detailed written quotes that break down materials, labor, and prep work separately. Verify the contractor carries WSIB coverage and liability insurance, and ask to see recent local references. Quality painters book 4-8 weeks ahead during peak season, so plan accordingly for your timeline.

Q4

Should I prime before painting?

Yes, you should prime before painting in most situations. Primer creates better paint adhesion, improves coverage, and ensures your topcoat looks its best and lasts longer.

When primer is essential: You absolutely need primer when painting over bare wood, drywall, metal, or previously painted surfaces with a different sheen or color. If you're going from dark to light colors, switching paint types (oil to latex or vice versa), or painting over stains, water damage, or crayon marks, primer is non-negotiable. New drywall is particularly porous and will drink up paint without primer, leaving you with uneven coverage and requiring multiple expensive topcoats.

Ottawa's climate considerations make primer even more important for exterior projects. Our harsh freeze-thaw cycles, UV exposure, and moisture from snow and rain demand maximum paint adhesion. Skipping primer on exterior surfaces like siding, trim, or decks often leads to premature peeling and costly repainting within 2-3 years instead of the expected 7-10 years.

When you might skip primer: High-quality paint-and-primer-in-one products can work for similar color changes over previously painted, well-prepared surfaces in good condition. However, these combination products cost \$60-80 per gallon compared to \$30-40 for separate primer and paint, so the convenience comes at a premium.

Professional guidance: For interior work, use a high-quality latex primer (\$25-35/gallon) followed by your chosen topcoat. For exteriors, especially on Ottawa's older homes with multiple paint layers, consider having a contractor assess whether specialized primers are needed for adhesion or stain-blocking. Oil-based primers work best for bleeding woods like cedar or redwood common in Ottawa-area homes.

Next steps: Clean and sand your surfaces first, then apply primer with the same technique you'll use for the topcoat. Allow full cure time (usually 4-6 hours for latex primer) before applying paint. For large projects or exterior work, consider consulting our directory of painting professionals who understand Ottawa's specific climate challenges.

Q5

How long does interior paint last?

Interior paint typically lasts 5-10 years in most Ottawa homes, though high-quality paints in low-traffic areas can look good for up to 15 years. The lifespan depends heavily on the paint quality, surface preparation,

room usage, and Ottawa's seasonal humidity changes.

Paint durability varies significantly by location and usage. High-traffic areas like hallways, children's rooms, and kitchens may need refreshing every 3-5 years due to scuffs, fingerprints, and frequent cleaning. Bedrooms and formal living spaces with minimal wear can often go 8-12 years before showing noticeable fading or wear. Bathrooms face unique challenges from Ottawa's humid summers and dry winters, which can cause paint to peel or develop mildew if proper ventilation isn't maintained.

Quality makes a dramatic difference in longevity. Premium paints with higher resin content and better pigments will maintain their color and finish much longer than builder-grade options. In Ottawa's climate, where homes experience significant temperature swings and humidity changes throughout the year, investing in quality paint pays off. Proper surface preparation is equally important – paint applied over poorly prepped surfaces or existing peeling paint will fail quickly regardless of quality.

Ottawa's seasonal conditions affect paint performance. The city's cold, dry winters followed by humid summers create expansion and contraction cycles that can stress paint films. Homes with poor ventilation or moisture issues may see paint deterioration faster, particularly in basements where Ottawa's clay soil can contribute to humidity problems. Newer homes in areas like Barrhaven and Kanata may have better climate control, while older homes in neighborhoods like the Glebe or Centretown might experience more dramatic seasonal variations.

Professional guidance helps maximize paint life. When repainting, address any underlying moisture issues, use appropriate primers, and choose paints suited to each room's specific conditions. If you're seeing premature paint failure, cracking, or peeling within 2-3 years, there may be underlying issues with surface preparation, moisture, or product selection that warrant professional assessment.

Next steps: Evaluate your current paint's condition room by room, considering both age and usage patterns. Plan repainting projects during Ottawa's ideal painting season (late spring through early fall) when humidity levels are more stable and proper ventilation is easier to maintain.

Q6

What causes paint to peel?

Paint peeling is primarily caused by poor adhesion between the paint and the surface underneath, which happens when moisture gets behind the paint film or when the surface wasn't properly prepared before painting.

The most common culprit in Ottawa homes is **moisture infiltration**. This can come from several sources: high humidity levels (especially in bathrooms and kitchens), water leaks from plumbing or roofing, or exterior moisture penetrating through siding or around windows. When moisture gets trapped behind paint, it breaks the bond between the paint and the surface, causing the paint to lift and peel away in sheets or flakes.

Surface preparation issues are equally problematic. If the previous paint was glossy and wasn't properly sanded or primed, the new paint can't grip properly. Similarly, painting over dirt, grease, or chalky surfaces creates a weak foundation that will eventually fail. Many Ottawa homeowners discover peeling paint when they try to paint over old oil-based paints with latex paint without using a proper bonding primer.

Temperature and humidity fluctuations are particularly challenging in Ottawa's climate. Our extreme temperature swings from -30°C winters to +35°C summers cause building materials to expand and contract repeatedly. This movement can stress paint films, especially on exterior surfaces like siding, trim, and decks. Interior rooms with poor ventilation, such as basements or bathrooms without proper exhaust fans, create conditions where paint is more likely to fail.

Age and quality of materials also play a role. Cheaper paints or those applied too thinly may not have the flexibility to handle normal building movement. Lead-based paints common in Ottawa homes built before 1978 become brittle over time and are more prone to peeling, though these require special handling due to health concerns.

For exterior peeling, check for clogged gutters, damaged caulking around windows and doors, or siding issues that allow water penetration. Interior peeling often indicates ventilation problems or hidden moisture sources like leaking pipes in walls.

Professional assessment is recommended when peeling is widespread, occurs in multiple rooms, or if you suspect lead paint in pre-1978 homes. A qualified painter can identify the root cause and recommend proper surface preparation, primer selection, and paint systems that will perform well in Ottawa's challenging climate. Addressing only the symptoms without fixing the underlying moisture or adhesion issues will result in the problem returning within a year or two.

What is the difference between paint sheens?

Paint sheen refers to how much light the paint reflects, ranging from flat (no shine) to high gloss (very reflective). The sheen level affects both the appearance and performance of your paint, making it crucial to choose the right one for each room and surface in your Ottawa home.

Flat or matte paint reflects the least light and provides excellent coverage for hiding wall imperfections like nail holes, texture variations, or minor drywall repairs. However, flat paint is the most difficult to clean and can show scuff marks easily. It's ideal for low-traffic areas like adult bedrooms, dining rooms, and ceilings. In Ottawa's older homes, particularly heritage properties in areas like the Glebe or New Edinburgh, flat paint works well on textured plaster walls where you want to minimize the appearance of age-related imperfections.

Eggshell and satin sheens offer a subtle glow while still hiding minor wall flaws reasonably well. Eggshell has just a hint of shine, while satin is slightly more reflective. Both are more washable than flat paint, making them excellent choices for living rooms, hallways, and bedrooms where you might need occasional cleaning. Satin works particularly well in Ottawa homes with children or pets, as it can handle gentle scrubbing without damage.

Semi-gloss paint provides noticeable shine and excellent durability. It's highly washable and moisture-resistant, making it the preferred choice for kitchens, bathrooms, trim work, doors, and window frames. In Ottawa's climate with significant humidity changes between seasons, semi-gloss performs well in areas prone to condensation. Many contractors recommend semi-gloss for all trim work because it creates a nice contrast with wall colors and stands up to frequent cleaning.

High-gloss paint offers maximum durability and the easiest cleaning but shows every surface imperfection. It's typically reserved for cabinets, furniture, or high-traffic trim that needs frequent washing. Some Ottawa homeowners choose high-gloss for front doors to create a striking entrance that can withstand harsh winter weather.

For Ottawa homes specifically, consider that our freeze-thaw cycles can cause minor settling and wall movement, making flat or eggshell better choices for hiding these natural imperfections. In basement areas common to Ottawa homes, use satin or semi-gloss for better moisture resistance. Quality paint brands like Benjamin Moore or Sherwin-Williams offer excellent performance in our climate, with prices ranging from \$45-80 per gallon depending on sheen and quality level.

Choose your sheen based on the room's function and traffic level - flat for low-traffic areas, eggshell/satin for living spaces, and semi-gloss for kitchens, baths, and trim. When in doubt, consult with paint professionals who understand Ottawa's specific climate challenges and can recommend the best products for long-lasting results.

How do I paint a room like a professional?

That's a great project question! For specific painting techniques and professional tips, you'll want to check out resources focused on DIY painting and home improvement tutorials. Here at OCN, we focus on helping you find and work with the right contractor for your project.

If you're looking to hire a professional painter in Ottawa, here's what you need to know about the process:

For painting contractors in Ottawa, no special licensing is required, but you'll still want to verify they're legitimate businesses with proper insurance and WSIB coverage. The City of Ottawa doesn't require permits for interior painting, but if your project involves structural changes or electrical work (like moving outlets), you'll need permits from ottawa.ca/building.

When vetting painting contractors in Ottawa, always verify their WSIB clearance certificate at wsib.ca/clearances - this protects you if someone gets injured on your property. Ask for proof of liability insurance (minimum \$2 million is standard). Check references from recent Ottawa-area projects, particularly in neighborhoods like yours whether that's Kanata, Orleans, Barrhaven, or central Ottawa.

Get detailed written quotes that specify paint brands, number of coats, surface preparation included, and cleanup. Professional painters should assess your walls for repairs needed before painting. Be wary of door-to-door painters or anyone asking for large upfront payments - legitimate Ottawa contractors typically ask for minimal deposits.

Red flags include quotes significantly lower than others (often means corner-cutting), no fixed business address in the Ottawa area, pressure to sign immediately, or inability to provide local references. Quality painters book weeks in advance, especially during Ottawa's peak season (late spring through early fall).

If you're planning exterior painting, note that some Ottawa neighborhoods with heritage designations may have color restrictions - check with the City's Heritage Planning team at 613-580-2424 if you're in areas like the Glebe, New Edinburgh, or Sandy Hill.

For the actual painting techniques and professional tips you're looking for, home improvement sites and painting manufacturer websites offer excellent step-by-step guides!

What paint finish is best for walls?

That's a great project question! For specific renovation advice like paint finishes and product recommendations, check out resources focused on interior design and painting projects. Here at OCN, we focus on helping you find and work with the right contractor for your project.

If you're planning to hire a painter in Ottawa, here's what you need to know about the process:

Most interior painting projects in Ottawa don't require building permits from the City of Ottawa, but if your painter will be doing any electrical work (moving outlets, installing new fixtures), that requires an ESA permit. You can verify this by calling City of Ottawa Building Code Services at 613-580-2424.

When hiring a painter in Ottawa, make sure they carry WSIB coverage and general liability insurance - you can verify WSIB clearance at wsib.ca/clearances. Get detailed written quotes from at least three contractors that specify the paint quality, number of coats, surface preparation, and cleanup included.

For exterior painting projects involving lead paint (homes built before 1978), there may be additional safety regulations to follow. The painter should be knowledgeable about proper containment and disposal procedures.

Red flags to watch for: door-to-door painters offering "leftover paint from another job," requests for full payment upfront, or contractors who can't provide local references from recent Ottawa-area projects in neighborhoods like Kanata, Orleans, or Barrhaven.

A good painting contractor will provide a detailed contract outlining the scope of work, materials to be used, timeline, and payment schedule. For larger projects over \$500, consider holding back 10% for 10 days after completion to ensure you're satisfied with the work quality.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of October 4, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.