

"I SURVIVED A KILLER AVALANCHE"

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# The Smell Test

Anyone who has laid brush to wall knows that a roomful of fresh paint can smell to headache-inducing heights. Vapors aren't just annoying—a paint-caused dizzy spell can cut your work short. To solve this problem, a slew of new low-odor and low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints purports to take the stench out of redecorating, and the chemicals out of the environment. We put three such paints to the test, measuring their odor, how well they covered drywall and how many swipes of sandpaper it took to grind through a layer. In the end, a clear winner emerged—but only by a nose. — Erin McCarthy

ABUSIVE LAB TEST | PM UPGRADE



**BENJAMIN MOORE AURA INTERIOR MATTE PAINT**  
\$55/gal.  
[myaurapaint.com](http://myaurapaint.com)



**FRESHAIRE CHOICE INTERIOR FLAT PAINT**  
\$35/gal.  
[thefreshairechoice.com](http://thefreshairechoice.com)



**MYTHIC NON-TOXIC FLAT PAINT**  
\$43/gal.  
[mythicpaint.com](http://mythicpaint.com)

ODOR

The smell was only noticeable from **2 ft.** away, but still, this was the stinkiest sample in our test. And unlike the other paints, which claimed to have no VOCs, this was low-VOC.

To pick up the scent of our smell test's nearly odorless contestant, we had to crawl to within **1.75 in.** of the wall—just a nose away. The lack of VOCs kept our heads clear.

We needed to stand within **6 in.** to smell the freshly painted (and VOC-free) Mythic—about the length of our tester's hand.

COVERAGE AND SPREADABILITY

When it came to coverage, Aura was the clear winner—**1 ROLLER PASS** laid a nearly perfect layer. Our testers also raved about its "outstanding spreadability" and "creamlike texture."

Not only did Freshaire require **4 roller passes** for a complete coat, but it made the roller stick and slide, resulting in an unseemly finish and more work.

A complete coat of Mythic took just **2 roller passes**. Coverage and spreadability were very good, and there was very little ridging. Still, the paint did cause the roller to slide slightly.

DURABILITY

This paint was made of tough stuff—it took **20 STROKES** with coarse-grained sandpaper to wipe through just one dried coat of Aura.

Freshaire didn't stand a chance against our sandpaper: It took just **6 strokes** to turn a layer to dust.

One layer of Mythic stood strong through **12 strokes** of sandpaper.

## BOTTOM LINE

Flowers they're not, but all three paints smelled significantly less than traditional latex. While Freshaire was the least odorous, it was also the least effective. Mythic was of fine quality and barely stank, but the clear winner was Aura, which made up for its slight smell with superior quality and ease of use. We'd use it again—but we'd still crack a window.