

Painter of the **MONTH**



Painting in Partnership created this unique wall in a wine closet.

Painting in Partnership Inc. Palatine, Ill.

by Erin F. Ansley

Painting is easy. Anyone can do it. Even a monkey can do it. At least that's the public's perception of the trade, says Mario Guertin, co-founder of Palatine, Ill.-based Painting in Partnership Inc. Guertin, who co-founded the business with his wife, Rita, as a spinoff of her interior design company, has diligently worked to alter this view. "It's not shared by everyone, but it's in the culture," he explains. "This belief has tremendously negative consequences for the industry and the consumer. Not anybody can do the work of painting well and make it last."

Guertin shared his beliefs with the industry earlier this year at the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America midyear national board meeting in St. Louis, where he presented a paper on the portrayal of painting in media and advertising. A board member for eight years, he also proposed to create a new class of awards, the Craftsman of the Year awards, for the PDCA. The Board unanimously accepted his proposal. But his service to the community doesn't end there. In fact, he's spent the last decade and a half learning about the trade and advocating on behalf of his fellow craftspeople.

It's been an interesting journey for the businessman who hadn't even conceived of entering the painting business prior to starting Painting in Partnership. The son of a blue-collar family from a small town in Quebec, the French-speaking Guertin moved to America in 1971 to earn an M.B.A. from New York University. Upon making his entry into the painting industry, Guertin had to discard a commonly held belief about education: "If I am well educated, I should not be using my hands." That awareness enabled him to see how his education could help him build a successful business and embrace the field he loved.

Since that realization, Guertin has made it his mission to learn everything he can about the trade — and share his knowledge with others. To begin his quest, however, he had to locate a few good mentors. "One lesson I learned is that if I enter a field I don't know anything about, I better surround myself with the best people I can find. PDCA did not have a chapter near me, so I had to drive a long distance to the nearest one, but I went anyway because I was highly motivated."

After countless tanks of gas and multiplying car miles, Guertin took matters into his own hands and founded the Schaumburg, Ill., Chapter of the PDCA in 1996. More than 10 years later, he has created a local community of painters with 50-plus members. His work continued when, in 2000, he acted to found the PDCA Craftsmanship Forum, a group dedicated to the advancement of craftsmanship across the industry. The group's primary focus at this moment is to develop Craftsmanship Operating Procedures (COPs) for the residential painting industry in the United States. Currently there are 20 finalized COPs, and the forum has begun working on an exterior series. The customizable quality assurance tools are enabling painting companies — such as Painting in Partnership — to standardize their operations. The result, Guertin says, is a business that functions properly and effectively serves its clients.

“Some people can look at that and say, ‘This is time you could be using for your business.’ I got to where I am because I’m willing to give back,” he explains. “It’s not just my

After 100 man-hours of work, gold decoration, a glazed ceiling, stenciled and glazed panels and color combine to create a stunning effect.



At times, the wall finish pulls together the richness of the surrounding colors in a room.

self-interest at stake. And it also gives me a reputation and credibility. Doing what I love has enabled me to use everything that I am, including being a businessman. It’s a net gain because I never had to abandon my business background.”

With so much volunteer time invested in the advocacy of the trade, it’s no wonder Painting in Partnership is gaining notoriety on a national level, and especially in the Chicago area. To be sure, Guertin’s team embodies the core values of the craft. In 2006, Painting in Partnership was the first company in the United States to become nationally accredited under the new PDCA accreditation program. And each of his painters is trained to be a Master Residential Painter. From decorative finishing and gilding to murals, exterior paint, and color and concept consulting (performed by Rita, who is also an art therapist and contributing muralist), the Painting in Partnership team is prepared to tackle any job — residential or commercial.

This professionalism and attention to detail is exemplified in one recent Arlington Heights project, formerly known as



Small details can add a lot to the overall impact of a room, even if those details are 22 feet up in the air.



Clients often request Painting in Partnership to “make things disappear.” The craftsman used faux finishing techniques to complete this task.




The “big white house on the corner,” before (left) and after (below) the Painting in Partnership treatment.




“the big white house on the corner.” The period house was greatly understated and did not do justice to its architecture, Guertin says. The owners had different opinions on the color scheme, so his muralist produced three five-color dimensional watercolor sketches of the home. When the couple settled on their favorite, Painting in Partnership brought the sketch to life. “It’s an absolute treasure. It went through a total transformation. People slow down to look at the house. It has not only impacted the owners but also the neighborhood. I love when we have an opportunity to consult clients because in the end, we produce a nurturing environment and an expression of the owners’ personalities.”

All his hard work has paid off in a big way. In 2006, the company won the PDCA National Residential Interior Award. This year, in addition to making American Painting Contractor magazine’s “Who’s Who” Top Honoree list and receiving the publication’s TOP JOB grand prize, the company swept the PDCA’s residential awards for mid-size companies.

“I stand for craftsmanship,” Guertin says. “I have built a business on craftsmanship. As an industry, we have failed to tell the story of who painters are and what it takes to really be a craftsman in the industry. I’m committed to getting the word out. In the end, it will make my life and others’ lives easier.

“Having people think well about what they do as painters. That’s what drives me to excellence. This is my legacy.” 

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