



MAXIMUM ARTISTRY...

...minimal impact

— by Cathy Kuntz

Whether it's putting a fresh coat of paint on a fabulous dresser from the ReStore or capturing a spectacular sunset on canvas, Muskoka's a place that brings out your inner artist. Fortunately, you can connect with your inner artist while minimizing your artistic impact on nature.

How? Purchase non-toxic products and be aware of where your waste is going.

Using natural paint products like milk and ochre paint is a great place to start. And while they can be simple to use, they're also a preferred tool of some professionals.

"We make our own paints and stains," says designer Alicia Viergever-Hughes of Thomas James Cabinetry. "Everything is water-based. We also use naturally-based wax and oil finishes."

Milk paint has been used for centuries. It contains milk protein, lime and pigment so it's water soluble and will give that dresser a rustic cottage look.

However, chalk paint can be either non-toxic or toxic, depending on the supplier.

Always read labels. Paints marked Zero VOC don't give off noxious vapors, which are released into the air and can negatively affect us and our environment. Some indoor latex paints are water-soluble and have low toxicity levels.

For a top coat or to finish raw wood, look for furniture finishes and waxes made from organic oils like pure beeswax and hemp oil.

Clean-up with a clean conscience

When using water-based finishes, you'll need to use water to clean the brushes. To capture the waste water, take advantage of the soil around us. "Rinse brushes over the ground where there are active bacteria," says Jonathan MacKay of Sustain Eco Living Store, a Huntsville store that specializes in green home improvement products. That kind of bacteria is not present in the lake, so compounds that go in the water tend to remain intact. "Even biodegradables should not go in the lake because water can't break them down."

Just be sure to clean the brushes well back from the water's edge.

If your paints are oil-based, use citrus-based and grain alcohol-based cleaners.

If you do clean your brushes in paint thinner, let the waste solvent sit and settle until it's clear. Strain it off and reuse it over and over again. When the solvent is just too dirty to use any more, take it to the hazardous waste site for disposal.

Waste not, want not

Artist Wendy Patricia Moses uses watercolour, acrylic and oil paints to create her vibrant work. "When I finish and have extra paint on my brush, I get another canvas and brush until I can't get any more paint on it," she says. "Then I have a background to a painting that sometimes turns out great. It creates something and gets rid of leftover paint."

"When I use water to clean brushes, I put the water in a container, put it outside and eventually it evaporates and a layer of scum is left. Then I get rid of the scum instead of pouring the water down the drain, clogging it and putting it into the septic system." **LS**