

Beating Down Doors

Michael Durso brings a product to a new market.

by Jerry Rabushka, Editor

If you're tired of reading articles about painters who started brushing when they were three, rolling when they were four, and spraying when they were five, this one's for you. Michael Durso started out with a career in law enforcement, then followed a calling to the ministry, then rolled into paint when the right job opened up.



Because we like to be up front, there was a little bait involved here. Durso was looking to try out Hollandlac, a (very) high gloss paint from Fine Paints of Europe, so we lured FPE into giving him a free starter kit with a promise we'd publish the results. And we lured Durso, on his 33rd birthday yet, to an interview over some pancakes and eggs at Bob Evans. We're not hard to please.

Before we get to Fine Paints, let's just get to fine painting. And pioneering, as Michael Durso of Durso Painting and Fine Finishing is set to be the first Fine Paints Certified Contractor in Missouri, where he is looking to build up interest in this product largely from scratch. Except, he'll tell you, Hollandlac is very scratch resistant.

Learn from the Burn

"I was in the Air Force, then went to college for ministry and I was a pastor for a year in northern rural Michigan, but there were no opportunities for ministry anywhere else," runs Durso's timeline. He ministered three hundred applications to the ministry, but his job offer came from a paint contractor. "I had a friend in St. Louis who was a painter. His brother owned a bigger company, and I needed work, so he agreed to hire me. I started as a helper for \$10 an hour." Turned out there

was a painter in his soul waiting to get out. "I happened to be a natural at it," Durso said. "I learned fast and within eight months I was working for myself."

A quick jolt into your own business is not necessarily the path he recommends for everyone—there was a lot of crash and burn learning, but Durso likes to dive in, crash, smolder, and rise again. He'll learn through failure if that's what it takes. "You have to fail at something a few times before you really get it," he said. "Even if you are taught all the right ways before you try it, you're not going to know why those ways are right until you fail a few times."

Along with his own perseverance, he also credits his success to support he's sourced from retailers and other more experienced painters. "I had a few people around me who have been painting for a long time," he said. "They didn't treat me like the new guy; they treated me like a peer and taught me a lot. Having constructive and encouraging input of other people at the top of their game made a huge difference."

It wasn't all laws and laypeople growing up; he grew an eye for color and design from earlier hobbies. "I did artistic landscape painting when I was younger, and photography has been a hobby for a lot of years, so I came into painting with some background knowledge of color and how products work. I already knew how to do color consulting and I understand how color schemes work—but I still have a lot to learn."



Before Durso painted homes, he painted landscapes.



Durso reflects in the finished front door coated with Hollandlac from Fine Paints of Europe. See the gloss? Sure you do!



was immediately entranced by this high gloss product—and why not, you can see your own reflection in it—and he began finding out everything about it he could. One thing he decided immediately was “don’t do it on a customer’s property without practice.”

Fortunately, his parents live in St. Charles, just northwest across the wide Missouri River from St. Louis, and they offered up the interior of their front door. The family loves it! Their guests love it! Durso tolerates it—he sees dust that got in between coats along with other imperfections he wants to fix up. But it’s better to be your own worst critic than it be a customer finding fault, and it’s better that it’s Mom’s door than anyone else’s.

It’s in the Mail

From there, Emmett Fiore at Fine Paints sent Durso some product so he could show all y’all how it looks on a door. While you may think this kind of product is only for your upscale customers, it can also show itself off in a more modest home. Michael tells us that

Fox Hunt

Flip back to our March issue and you’ll see a good sized article on Adam Fox, a pro contractor and faux painter who has also made some hay and way with Hollandlac; a few contractors have called him up to ask for advice and info. Durso made the short list and he and Adam are in continuous contact. In St. Louis, Michael hangs out at the West County outpost of Flanagan’s Paint, where store manager Jay Donnelly and staff help him network with other painters, designers and customers. “It’s made a huge difference,” he said.

Durso has stalked a few painters on social media, and any contractor who’s in one of the many painters groups knows that folks like to talk about new products, what works and how, what doesn’t and why, and how some painters are drawn to apartment painting and others to more high end products and projects. And others do whatever for a paycheck; there’s no shame in paying your bills.

When Durso asked if anyone was familiar with Hollandlac, Fox stepped up to offer his expertise. Durso

this was not a wealthy client, but someone who lived in a neighborhood with a Homeowners Association that saved its residents the pain of picking color with a decree that every door in the neighborhood had to be black. Remember that most color experts will tell you the front door is the best place to express individuality! Not here. However (so far), they haven’t specified gloss level, so Durso’s customer wanted to express identity by using the ultra-high gloss of Hollandlac. Durso tells us that in his opinion, it out-glosses any other paint he’s seen. It’s an oil base, and it would be hard for a latex to compete, he believes.

There’s a system to it, he notes. While some painters he consulted with said they used conventional primer rather than the recommended Fine Paints Oil Primer/Undercoat—Durso feels it’s better to do the whole thing using Fine Paints products.

For a week, he was a frequent visitor at this customer’s front door. He used two coats of Oil Primer/Undercoat, plus he filled in some dings with



Top: Durso used Fine Paints' Swedish Putty to even out some dings in the door. **Below:** Durso used Benjamin Moore paints to spruce up this 1915 mansion in St. Louis. "I removed wallpaper, skim coated and painted the ceiling, painted the walls and trim, then restored the gold accents," he said.

the company's Swedish Putty. After that, he put on two finish coats. Each step needed a day's dry time, so he would work on other projects during the day and come a knockin' at night—hopefully just in time for dinner!

"Swedish putty fills in dings cracks and rough spots," he said. "This door had a decal that said *hello* or something like that. It didn't scrape off properly and left a lumpy area so I had to skim that spot. I did that in between the two prime coats."

As we finished up the eggs and pancakes, Durso shared his hopes of going to Fine Paints' certified painter training in November, and a couple weeks later confirmed he was selected to attend. He wants to build a customer base for this product in the St. Louis area where there are no dealers and not a ton of product awareness. Having a customer base would encourage a dealer to make the investment, and Durso's five fingers might just be the hand to expand this product from behind his mother's door.

Even if it costs more than most paints, it'll last longer; he estimates that the product will stay on a door or wall for about 15 years before it needs a maintenance coat.

As the waiter cleared the table and poured

that last cup of coffee—and Bob Evans' coffee is always worth another cup—Durso noted that choosing where you buy paint can actually make a difference in your business. As someone who loves to network, he commented how an independent dealer, unlike a box store, can tailor itself to certain types of customers. If they work at it like Flanagan's does, a retailer can link painters, homeowners, and designers together so people can learn from each other and do business together.

"Good retailers are in unique position to unite designers, painters, and others in the trade," he said.

"It takes a unique retailer to say 'I want to introduce you to other painters and network people together.' The big picture of that is working to change the landscape of the painting trade which is inundated with a whole lot of low end products."

One reason he started shopping Flanagan's was to get stain from General Finishes, a high end product you can't get in a home store. "There are a few companies like that who don't make paint to a price point, they make it to a performance level and say who cares about the cost." From here, Durso will continue to make inroads with high end products, rolling on his own road rather than waiting for someone to pave his way. Sometimes all your careers in life come together. Maybe he can't lay down the law about quality products, but he can certainly preach it. [TPC](#)

