

# MOUNT VERNON

*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*

## “Nothing Is More Expensive than Cheap Paint”

Fine Paints of Europe Introduces 120 Mount Vernon Colors in High Performance Paint

**T**here is nothing more expensive than cheap paint.”

For more than two decades that’s been the motto of Fine Paints of Europe, an American company that introduced high performance paints from the Netherlands to North America in 1987.

The motto’s meaning, of course, is simple—labor usually represents 90 percent of the cost of a paint job, so a higher quality, more expensive paint will last much longer and remain more true-to-color over time.



John Lahey, president of Fine Paints of Europe, directs a training session with his son, John Lahey, Jr.

The savings can be dramatic when calculated on an annualized basis.

“It sounds like George Washington would have been a fan of dutch paint,” commented Dennis Pogue, Mount Vernon’s associate director in charge of preservation. “Because there are few things that made him happier than getting value for his money. All you have to do is take a quick stroll through the Mansion to see that Washington was into bright and bold paints that set the tone for the entire room.”

Undoubtedly, Washington would be pleased that Mount Vernon has signed a licensing contract with the only company in America to offer high-performance dutch paints. Fine Paints of Europe has introduced a complete collection of Mount Vernon colors to the general public, in addition to supplying all the paint needed by Mount Vernon’s craftsmen to maintain the structures, inside and out, in the historic area of the estate.

The Mount Vernon Collection includes 120 colors, some of which are dead ringers for the vivacious hues which grace the rooms in the Mansion. All Mount Vernon colors may be ordered by phone or internet in a variety of finishes, for both interior and exterior application. Orders are promptly delivered by UPS ground, and Fine Paints phone consultants make the task of color selection and coverage estimating quite painless.

Fine Paints of Europe was founded by the current president,

John Lahey, to fill a niche among quality-conscious homeowners. He still spends much of his time explaining why Fine Paints cost about three times more per ounce than the average American is used to paying.

“It’s customary for first-quality dutch paints to beautify and protect homes for upwards of 12 or 15 years as compared to domestic paints that frequently need to be recoated after only a few years,” says Lahey. “Most Americans are not aware that the Netherlands has been the world leader in coatings technology for over 200 years.”

Lahey understands the reasons for the American paint manufacturers’ failure to meet the same standards as some of their Dutch counterparts. He acknowledges that both American and European paint manufacturers are simply responding to differing cultural realities that dictate the standards of their products.

“Key to understanding these differences is recognizing that the average European family resides for more than 15 years in a home which they own, while the average American family moves to a new residence every four years” notes Lahey. American mobility has inspired domestic paint companies to produce water-based or latex paints of modest quality that are inexpensive and easy to apply. Lahey observes, “We now have two or three generations of Americans who have never even seen a first class paint job or touched a first class enamel.”

To make their prices competitive, most American firms often use ingredients inferior to those employed by Dutch paint makers, even though this cost-cutting dramatically shortens the protective life of the paint and reduces the depth of color, according to Lahey.

Headquartered in Woodstock, Vermont, Fine Paints of Europe was born in 1987, when Lahey decided to switch from the wine business to what would appear to be a more ordinary and far less exotic liquid—good old-fashioned paint.

At the time, Lahey owned and was living in a 250-year-old farmhouse in the Hudson River Valley which once served as the post-war residence of one of Washington’s generals. Try as he might, he could not find any paint on the market that would give his home the kind of appearance and long-life protection that he felt the house needed and deserved.

During his odyssey through the American paint market in search of a high performance paint that did

not exist, he discovered that he was not alone. He met others who were also frustrated by the absence in the market of house paint that offered the kind of durability they were seeking. “I wanted something better and was prepared to pay for

On average, American paints sell for under \$25 per gallon. Premium European coatings run around \$80 for a 2.5 liter “Eurogallon”, which provides the same coverage as a U.S. gallon, explains Lahey. But Lahey decided

Prussian Blue - West Parlor  
MV30



Verdigris - Large Dining Room  
MV13



Blue - Nelly Custis Room  
MV24



The Mount Vernon Collection includes 120 different colors, some of which are dead ringers for the Mansion hues.

it,” notes Lahey.

Lahey discovered that in their headlong rush to meet the demands of the great majority of American paint consumers, domestic manufacturers totally ignored a significant niche— those who keep their homes for decades or generations and desire durable, high performance products. He notes, “We paint our Fords and Chevys in this country with coatings that cost more than \$300 per gallon, we paint our boats with paint that costs \$150 per gallon, and yet we paint our homes with paint that costs \$25 per gallon and complain three years later when it fails.”

Some of these people, fortunate in that they traveled in Europe, were bringing back European paints for their personal use. Since Lahey traveled in Europe on behalf of his wine business, he was able to do the same and was delighted with the results. But, at first glance, the price of imported paints seemed to prohibit their entry into the American market.

to fill the empty niche despite these obstacles, and over the past 15 years the firm has experienced “spectacular growth,” he says.

Mount Vernon is the first historic property to form a licensing partnership with Fine Paints of Europe, but, according to longtime licensing director Beverly Addington, it’s a match made in heaven. “The better the house and the longer you plan to stay there, the more sense it makes to purchase one of the Mount Vernon colors from Fine Paints of Europe,” notes Addington. “George Washington lived at Mount Vernon for more than 40 years, so I know it’s the choice he would have made, because the finished job would have been both beautiful and ultimately cost-effective.”

To learn more about the dutch quality difference or to discuss your personal paint needs with a paint expert, please call Fine Paints of Europe at 1-800-332-1556 or visit [finepaintsofeurope.com](http://finepaintsofeurope.com).