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FAUX-FINISHING MARKET: The Road Ahead

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- New Products in Faux
- Sundry Items: Sponges, Rags, Etc.
- Avoiding Automation Mistakes

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ABC AUDITED

BY GAIA CALCATERRA ARCHITEXTURE

Appliqués, the Myth-Buster!

Everyone would like to find the perfect product that leads to an upswing in retail paint/décor sales or reduces a large portion of that cloud of uncertainty that hovers over the sales floor today. Surely, just like there are "alligators in our city sewers," the reality of a "perfect product" is also an urban myth—yes?

NO, not a myth. We found one.

Architexture has successfully brought several innovative products to the North American market in the last two years. These products are aimed specifically at the trained installer and design professional; at the same time, we went looking for a product that was entirely in the opposite direction. We discovered Appliqués, and our hunt came to an immediate halt—not because they exceeded our every expectation but because of the reason behind "why" they were invented. We decided then and there that we must import this product into the arms of the North American consumer.

A number of years ago, paint contracting houses and retail stores in Italy expressed a very serious mutual need for something new to help sell paint. The answer to that need became Appliqués, a product that would prove itself to be timeless. The Appliqué product, after all its years on the market and several million manufactured, still holds a considerable position in the eye of the end consumer. In Europe, this product is viewed as a higher-end look and only obtainable through design houses, specialty paint stores or is private-labeled. Appliqués are now available in the United States and Canada.

Appliqués offer a dimensional look to a surface. Shown: Frise Art Deco.

2011 is a year that poses unusual and difficult challenges for everyone. The "look" for 2011 is not based on color or texture or style or even price, but the consequence of less consumer dollars to spend and the growing consumer emotional desire for the new, the now, the instant personal gratification. Kick-starting this market requires products that can light a fire under the thrifty, design-conscious customer who wants to experience a "wow" reaction—for emotions have become the new trigger for any successful marketing message.

In order to start any new dialogue with existing customers, you need a valid reason to pick up the phone and call. To entice new customers, store-owners need a reason to make them hop in their car and drive to your store. A professional installer needs a reason for the customer to "just" do one wall but still satisfy their emotional need for a unique design element without breaking the bank, and designers would surely welcome a product that is cost-effective, fast and suitable for any décor, any budget.

Appliqués will excel in the current market conditions. They are the coin needed to make that call—to announce you have, without a doubt, one of the hottest new products anyone has seen for a very long time.

But what is an Appliqué?

Appliqués are a proprietory-engineered material that is laser-cut into various shapes producing a solid one-piece form for every unique Appliqué design. All of the designs create a subtle relief on a surface (approximately

Appliqués can create a dramatic feature wall. Shown: Gran Décor Klimt.

0.03 inch) offering a dimensional look. Their self-adhesive backing adheres to a wall surface either previously painted or in many cases over a faux finish, such as Venetian plaster. They come in nine elegant designs, suitably sized in width and height for both vertical and horizontal applications including repeat patterns in either direction, when multiple Appliqués are applied.

All Appliqués designs began with the look of elegance. Add crisp, clear lines to the mix, and the result is a timeless version of definitive style. Multiple surface choices include walls, fireplaces, doors, headboards or panels. In many instances, their physical flexibility adds niches, columns and curves to the surface menu. They are suitable for any room, any setting—from Classic to Modern, from calm elegance to feature walls, focal points or drama.

Every Appliqué must be painted, so whether the client purchases paint for the Appliqué only, for the feature wall where the Appliqué is to be applied, or a revamp of the entire room, color selection is unlimited. Simply painted, they are stunning. Even white-on-white is such an exceptional look that we have included it in the photos featured in our brochure. For your signature look, consider the possibilities of glaze or a touch of metallic foil on the Appliqué.

What's more, they are so simple that they can be described as 1-2-3—so simple that our videos do not have voice-over. If you take longer than an hour to install one, you went for coffee—unless you were just waiting for the paint to dry. Appliqués can be removed from a wall in the same manner and with the same result as quality wallpaper with a steamer and water. At store level, full-color, 12-page, 8 ½-by-11-inch brochures show every design in a room setting, offering full-size visual aids to the consumer and your sales staff. The brochures also include a "how-to" pictorial, and all designs are packaged with step-by-step instructions in English, French and Spanish. There is also a catalogue on our website along with videos for the "ON" and the "OFF" application. For efficient inventory control at store level, every individual Appliqué is clearly marked with the appropriate design name on the exterior packaging, and if an Appliqué requires shipping by courier, they are ready to go.

An Appliqué shown on a faux background featuring Ottocento.

Appliqués are so simple to sell that if you display a well-lit fully painted Appliqué on a complementary wall you will probably spend more time on the customer's crucial decision, "what color of paint to buy?" than anything else.

Where do Appliqués fit in a market category? They are not stencils, a decal, nor wallpaper or a finished décor item. The closest match would be under the definition of a "marketing tool," for Appliqués offer a new and refreshing sales strategy for everyone in this industry—the reason to call existing customers, reach out to new ones and start a mutually rewarding conversation. ■

Gaia Calcaterra is the owner of Architexture, LLC, a company that specializes in surface solutions for the design and decorative industry. Trained in Fine Arts in Florence, Italy, and involved in numerous operations around the world, she understands firsthand all aspects of the decorative industry. Her experience includes: Eleven years in South Africa as owner of a large faux and application company that specialized in large commercial projects including restaurants, hotels, casinos and high-end residential projects, two years of project management for a paint and coatings manufacturer in Shanghai, China, and two years in Melbourne, Australia, where she opened a textured wall coating business, which is still in existence today. Architexture's mandate is to expand the product base available to the design and decor market in North America by focusing on elements and processes that were new or not currently available in the United States or Canada. The company brought "Tattoowall," a product geared to the design professional and trained installer, to the market two years ago. 2011 marks the introduction of Architexture's first product for the opposite end of the spectrum, Appliqués. For more information, visit www.myarchitexture.com.