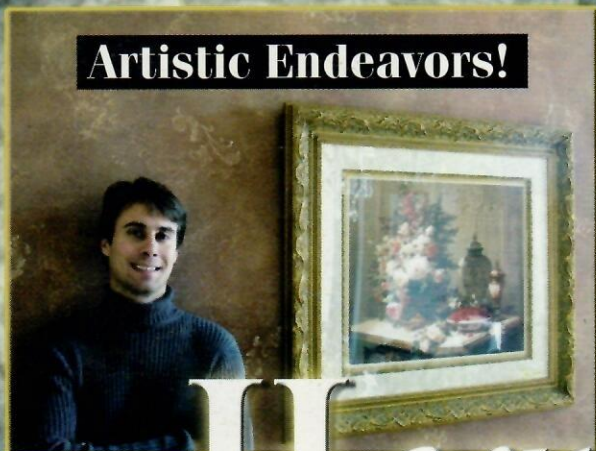


THE FAUX FINISHER

WINTER 2004
THE MAGAZINE FOR THE DECORATIVE FINISHING PROFESSIONAL

Artistic Endeavors!

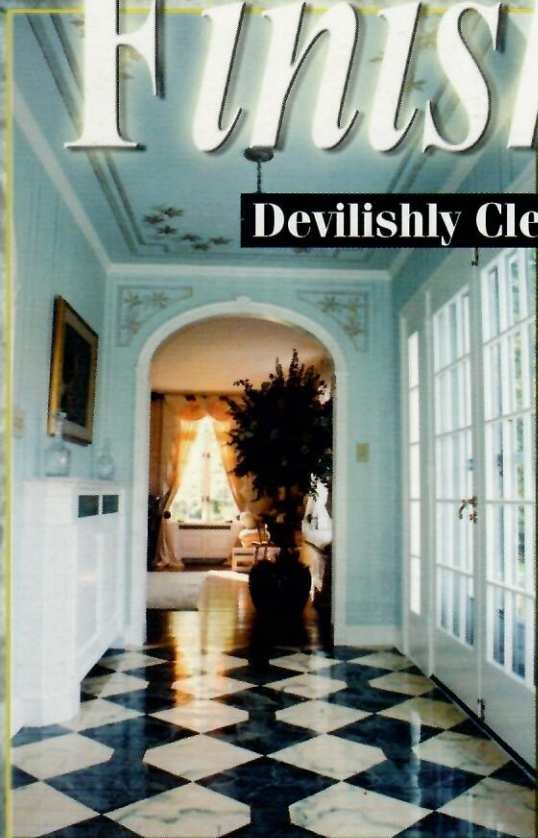


The Royal Treatment!



Heavenly Finishes

Devilishly Clever!



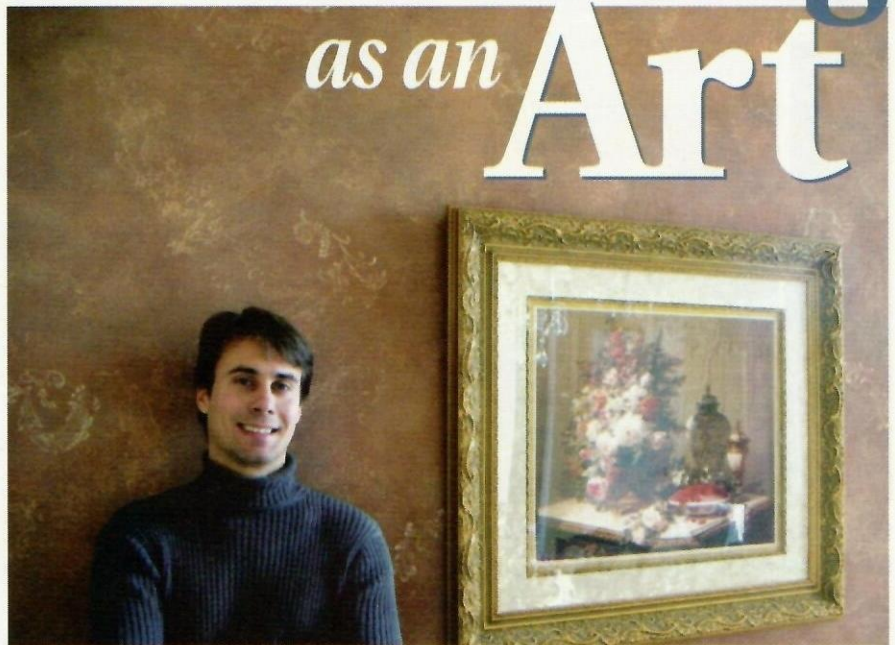
Also in this Issue:

- A Dream Studio!
- Gatherings in Florida!
- Faux Schools at a Glance!
- Resource Guide!
- *and Much, Much More!*

Faux Finishing

as an Art

Rick Fischer's career is built on the concept of artistic expression



Rick Fischer stands before a Tuscan Stone wash effect with an embossed Florentine scroll design in the dining room of a client.

As the proprietor of Deco Illusions, based in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Rick Fischer has done his part to preserve a little piece of European history.

Rick came to the decorative painting profession in 1991 after gaining experience in automotive custom finishes, restoration and collision rebuilding. Over a four-year period, he transitioned from the automotive field into the decorative arts. He had always had a great admiration for historical European architecture and was very interested in its preservation. He wanted to find a way to contribute to keeping this craftsmanship alive in today's houses and buildings.

With the skills that he already possessed from his automotive background and a strong desire to learn, Rick discovered a way to recreate these historical finishes. He eventually gained more and more clients until he was doing decorative painting full-time.

Initially self-taught, Rick was eager to expand his skills by taking classes. In 1995, his career accelerated when he signed up for classes

from two of the best decorative finishers—John Catalanotto and Greg Frohnapfel of Pro Faux. He also had the opportunity to work with them. "I became something of an apprentice for them," Rick reports. "And as a result, we became great friends."

Rick participated in a variety of projects with Pro Faux, including the transformation of the PDRA headquarters office (home of *The Faux Finisher* magazine). His relationship with Pro Faux also served as an invitation into the broader decorative



Rick did a distressed alligator hide for this mantel.

by DIANE CAPUANO, executive editor



Rick created this three-color tone-on-tone color wash for a foyer/great room, shown above and at right.

painting community. Over the next several years, Rick was able to meet and interact with artists from all over the country and absorb a tremendous amount of information. "I was networking with people and honing my craft," Rick states. "Being involved in the artisan community opened doors to a variety of talent and has given me the opportunity to exchange information and techniques with my professional peers."

At the same time, Rick was establishing himself as a decorative painter in Fort Wayne and surrounding cities. He participated in several showcase home projects. He gained a number of jobs through this involvement, and soon word of mouth helped propel his career. "Most of my work over the last four or five years has been through referrals," Rick reports.

About 70 percent of Rick's projects are residential, but he also does light commercial projects ranging from retail stores to restaurants to nightclubs. "I enjoy residential most of all," he says. "It's more rewarding working one-on-one with homeowners and helping make their ideas a reality."

Rick's portfolio of work covers everything from simple color wash-

es to complex, multi-layered textural finishes. He does European Old World plaster and stucco finishes, woodgraining, marbling, trompe l'oeil, gold leafing, metallic effects and distressed finishes on walls and furniture. The list of finishes is endless. He works with a variety of products—the ProFaux line as well as several other brands. He's always open to new ideas and exploration. In fact, he even uses automotive paints—a throwback to his former profession—to create finishes for doors, cabinets and furniture. "An automotive finish on an entry door is stunning," Rick reports. "Using these finishes creates a look unlike any other."

Rick enjoys being able to offer something unique and different in his projects. It's a way to ensure the customer's ultimate satisfaction with the results. As he explains, "I try not to limit myself or the customer. If I'm asked to do something I've never done before, I take the time to research it and try it."

Rick's clients know that they are getting a finish that has been custom-tailored to their own style. Rick feels that it is extremely important to listen to the clients and designers and allow their ideas to flow in an open forum. "I then take this information and combine it with my ideas for what is suitable for the space and create a finish that the clients love," he says.

Rick also likes to give the client the history of the finish so it becomes more than just wall decoration to them. "The ultimate reward is when the clients give me the free-



dom to create a unique finish for them and then to see the look on their faces when they can finally see what they could only imagine take shape in their home," he says."

On many of his projects, Rick works in collaboration with interior designers. "Many of the interior designers I work with enjoy my input into a project," Rick says. "The three of us—the homeowner, the designer and I—can all give our points of view. The homeowner gets the input of more than one professional. They get better results and a higher satisfaction level, which ultimately leads to more referrals."

Rick feels it's important that faux finishers be treated with the same level of respect that interior designers receive. "Since this art is a custom craft, our input is necessary," he



This high-polish Venetian plaster was used in a master bedroom. The angle at right shows the high polish.

says. “And I feel it’s important that we be treated as a part of the creative process. We should be respected for our craft. It’s important to gain the confidence of the designer, so you can work in collaboration and achieve the same goal.”

Rick also has done a number of projects for homeowners who have not taken the step of hiring an interior designer. In those cases, Rick might find himself helping the homeowner make decisions that go beyond his finishes. “Even though I’m not a designer, a lot of times I assume that role,” he says. “I’ll start out talking with the homeowner about the finish, then we also talk about the furniture fabrics, fixtures and the lighting.”

Lighting, in particular, is an important consideration. Rick says that correct lighting “changes the appearance of the walls and the ceiling, creates a space’s atmosphere and mood and, most importantly, enhances the presentation of your wall finishes.” While Rick will work with existing lighting fixtures, he also has worked with electricians when warranted to update the lighting configuration.

In many instances, clients will start with one project but they like Rick’s vision so well that they’ll ask him to develop a coordinated look for the entire home. “It’s all about gaining their confidence and trust,” Rick reports. “I give them a sense of direction, then we talk about where we’re going to start and where we’re going to finish. With some clients, I’ll spend four or five years completing the house room by room, stage by stage. That’s why it’s so important to talk about the client’s short and long-term goals for the entire home upfront. Then each component of the home looks like it’s part of an overall plan.”

Due to increasing demand for his work, Rick no longer is able to work alone. To make the most efficient use of his time, Rick has hired a couple of full-time assistants. “They work full-time doing prep work, assistance with the finish, tear-down and cleanup,” Rick says. “With their help, I am able to devote my time to the actual finish.”

Even with such a full workload, Rick still believes it is necessary to use innovative strategies to market his services. The best testaments to his talents are his past projects, and many homeowners are willing to let Rick bring potential customers by to see what he can accomplish. He also has a Web site in development, www.decoillusions.com, which will have a slide show that illustrates the scope of his work. For the future, Rick is exploring and creating a CD-ROM business card that will feature a virtual tour of his work.



Rick also is giving some thought to opening a teaching studio, but that would be a few years down the road. He has already taught at the SALI convention in 2003 and will do so again in 2004. He offered product instruction and demos at the 2002 SALI convention in the Pro Faux booth and at the recent The Faux Event, co-sponsored by Pro Faux. However, Rick will continue to stay focused on bringing his artwork to homes and businesses in Fort Wayne and the surrounding area. “Right now, my ambition is more in application,” he says, “but I enjoy teaching.”

As Rick moves forward, he anticipates that his philosophy will allow him to take his decorative painting career to new levels and continue to keep Old World European finishes alive and true. **TFF**