VANCOUVER PAINT CONTRACTORS

Surface Preparation

Surface prep for painting including scraping, sanding, patching, priming, pressure washing, and mould removal for Metro Vancouver projects

21 Expert Answers from Paint IQ

vancouverpaintcontractors.com/construction-brain

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Q1

How much extra does extensive surface preparation add to the cost of an exterior paint job in Metro Vancouver?

Extensive surface preparation can add 40-80% to the base cost of an exterior paint job in Metro Vancouver, potentially increasing a $8,000 project to $12,000-$15,000 depending on the scope of prep work required.

The reason prep work has such a dramatic cost impact is that **labour accounts for 60-70% of any painting project**, and extensive prep can double or triple the time required before any paint touches the surface. In Metro Vancouver's marine climate, thorough surface preparation isn't optional—it's the difference between a paint job lasting 3-5 years versus 12-15 years.

What constitutes "extensive" prep work includes scraping large areas of peeling or failing paint (common on south and west-facing walls exposed to UV), repairing rotted wood sections on fascia boards and window trim, filling and caulking numerous cracks in stucco, treating mould and mildew growth (especially on north-facing walls), and addressing lead paint safely on pre-1978 character homes. A typical Metro Vancouver exterior might need 8-12 hours of prep work, while a neglected character home or a house with significant peeling could require 30-50 hours of prep before painting begins.

Specific prep costs in Metro Vancouver break down as follows: pressure washing with mould treatment runs $300-$800 depending on house size and mould severity. Scraping peeling paint adds $2-$5 per square foot of affected area—if 30% of your exterior walls need scraping, that's $1,500-$3,000 extra on a typical home. Wood repair and replacement costs $15-$40 per linear foot for fascia boards and trim. Caulking and crack filling runs $200-$600 for an average home, but can reach $1,000+ on older stucco homes with settling cracks.

Lead paint remediation on character homes built before 1978 adds the most significant cost—safe containment, HEPA-filtered equipment, and proper disposal can add $3,000-$8,000 to a project. However, this investment protects your family's health and ensures compliance with WorkSafeBC regulations. Many contractors will recommend encapsulation (sealing intact lead paint with a bonding primer) rather than removal, which is safer and more cost-effective at $1,000-$2,500 extra.

Metro Vancouver's climate makes prep work non-negotiable. The constant wet-dry cycling from our 1,200mm+ annual rainfall means any existing paint defects—loose edges, cracks, or areas where moisture has penetrated—will rapidly worsen if not properly addressed. Painting over inadequately prepped surfaces in our humid climate virtually guarantees failure within 2-3 years, requiring a complete do-over that costs more than doing it right the first time.

The false economy of skipping prep is particularly costly in Metro Vancouver. A contractor might quote $6,000 for a "paint-only" job versus $10,000 for proper prep and paint, but the cheap job will fail quickly in our climate, requiring another $8,000-$12,000 in 3-4 years. The properly prepped job lasts 12-15 years, making it dramatically more cost-effective over time.

When evaluating quotes, be suspicious of estimates that seem unusually low—they likely skimp on prep work. Quality contractors will spend time assessing your home's condition and explaining what prep work is needed. Ask specifically what prep is included: pressure washing, scraping, wood repair, caulking, priming, and mould treatment should all be detailed in the estimate.

Professional prep work is almost always worth the investment for exterior projects in Metro Vancouver. The combination of our challenging climate, the complexity of proper surface preparation, and the safety requirements for lead paint and height work make this a clear case for hiring experienced professionals who understand how to prepare surfaces for our unique conditions.

Need help finding a painting contractor who understands proper surface preparation? Vancouver Paint Contractors can match you with experienced professionals who know Metro Vancouver's climate challenges.

Q2

How much does it cost to have a painter scrape and sand the exterior of my older Vancouver home before repainting?

Exterior scraping and sanding costs in Metro Vancouver typically range from $1.50 to $4.00 per square foot, depending on the condition of the existing paint and the size of your home. For a standard two-storey Vancouver Special, you might expect to pay between $3,000 and $7,000 for thorough surface preparation alone. Homes with multiple layers of peeling or alligatored paint will be at the higher end, as the labour involved is significantly more intensive. Vancouver's wet climate accelerates paint failure, so many older homes in neighbourhoods like East Van, Kitsilano, and the North Shore have substantial peeling that requires careful hand scraping and power sanding before any new coating will adhere properly. A professional painter will typically use a combination of carbide scrapers for large peeling sections and orbital sanders for feathering edges smooth. They should also inspect for rot in the wood substrate underneath, which is extremely common given our rain exposure. Any soft or punky wood needs to be repaired or replaced before priming, or the new paint job will fail prematurely. Make sure your painter includes a coat of high-quality exterior primer on all bare wood as part of the prep scope. Ask your contractor for an itemized quote that separates prep work from painting so you can clearly see what you are paying for.

Q3

My bathroom ceiling in Burnaby has black mould spots showing through the paint. What's the right way to deal with this before repainting?

Mould on bathroom ceilings is one of the most common issues painters encounter across Metro Vancouver, thanks to our high humidity levels and frequent rain. Before any paint goes on, the mould must be properly killed and removed, not just painted over. Start by ventilating the room and wearing a respirator rated for mould spores. Apply a dedicated mould-killing solution or a mixture of one part bleach to three parts water directly to the affected areas, let it sit for at least fifteen minutes, then scrub with a stiff brush and rinse. Allow the ceiling to dry completely, which may take twenty-four to forty-eight hours in our damp climate. Once dry, inspect the surface for any staining that remains and apply a stain-blocking primer specifically rated for mould resistance. Products formulated with mould inhibitors are essential in Vancouver bathrooms where moisture is constant. If the mould has penetrated the drywall deeply or the surface feels soft and crumbly, that section of drywall should be cut out and replaced before priming and painting. After painting, address the root cause by ensuring your bathroom exhaust fan is properly sized and vented to the exterior, not just into the attic. Running the fan for at least twenty minutes after every shower will dramatically reduce mould recurrence. Consider having a painter recommend a mould-resistant bathroom paint for the finish coat.

Q4

We just had some drywall patches done after a plumbing repair in our Coquitlam townhouse. How should the patches be prepped before painting?

Proper preparation of drywall patches is essential for an invisible repair, and skipping steps is the most common reason patch marks show through the final paint. After the drywall mud has been applied and has fully cured, the patches need to be sanded smooth and flush with the surrounding wall surface. Use fine-grit sandpaper, typically 120 to 150 grit, and a sanding block or pole sander to feather the edges so there is no visible ridge where the patch meets the original wall. Wipe down the sanded area with a damp cloth to remove all dust. The critical step that many homeowners miss is priming the patched areas before applying the finish coat. Fresh drywall compound is far more porous than the surrounding painted surface, so if you paint directly over it, those spots will absorb the paint differently and show up as dull, flat areas called flashing. Apply a coat of drywall primer or PVA primer to all patched areas and let it dry thoroughly. In Vancouver's cooler months, allow extra drying time since indoor humidity can slow the curing process. Once primed, lightly sand the primed patches with 220-grit sandpaper for a perfectly smooth base. For the best colour match, plan to repaint the entire wall from corner to corner rather than just touching up the patched spots, as sheen and colour differences are almost impossible to blend mid-wall. Ask your painter whether a full wall repaint is included in the repair scope.

Q5

Our 1960s home in North Vancouver might have lead paint. What special prep is needed before we can repaint?

Any home in Metro Vancouver built before 1978 has a reasonable chance of containing lead-based paint, and homes from the 1960s are particularly likely to have it on trim, doors, windows, and exterior siding. Before any sanding, scraping, or disturbance of painted surfaces, you should have a lead paint test done. Professional lead testing in the Vancouver area typically costs between $300 and $600 for a standard home inspection covering multiple surfaces. If lead is confirmed, BC's WorkSafeBC regulations require specific safe work procedures to protect both workers and your family. Dry sanding and open-flame burning of lead paint are prohibited. Instead, contractors must use wet scraping methods, HEPA-filtered vacuum sanders, and chemical strippers to minimize dust. The work area must be contained with plastic sheeting to prevent lead dust from spreading through your home, and workers must wear appropriate personal protective equipment including respirators with P100 filters. All debris must be disposed of as hazardous waste according to BC environmental regulations. If the existing lead paint is in good condition and not peeling or flaking, the safest and most cost-effective approach is encapsulation, which means applying a high-quality primer and paint system directly over the stable lead paint to seal it in place.

This avoids the disturbance entirely while still giving you a fresh, safe finish. Hire a painting contractor who has specific experience with lead paint abatement and can show you their WorkSafeBC compliance documentation.

Q6

Is pressure washing my wood siding in Vancouver necessary before repainting, or can the painter just go over it?

Pressure washing is almost always necessary for exterior repainting in Metro Vancouver, and our climate makes it even more important than in drier regions. Vancouver homes accumulate a significant layer of dirt, algae, moss, and mildew on their siding due to our prolonged rainy season and high humidity. Painting over these contaminants means the new paint is bonding to the grime rather than the actual wood surface, which leads to premature peeling and adhesion failure within just a few years. A professional painter will use a pressure washer set to an appropriate PSI for your siding type, typically between 1,500 and 2,500 PSI for wood. Cedar siding, which is extremely common on Vancouver homes, requires a gentler setting to avoid gouging the soft wood grain. Many painters also apply a mildewcide cleaning solution before or during the wash to kill any biological growth at the root. After washing, the siding must dry completely before any primer or paint is applied, usually requiring three to five dry days, which can be tricky to schedule during our wet months. This is why most experienced Vancouver painters schedule exterior work between May and September for best results. If your painter suggests skipping the pressure wash to save time or money, that is a red flag. The prep work is what makes an exterior paint job last eight to twelve years instead of three to five. Ask your painter to include the pressure washing and drying time in the project schedule upfront.

Q7

What does skim coating cost in Vancouver, and is it worth doing before painting my living room walls?

Skim coating in Metro Vancouver generally costs between $2.50 and $5.00 per square foot, depending on the condition of your walls and the level of finish required. For a typical living room of around 200 square feet of wall area, expect to pay between $500 and $1,000 for professional skim coating before paint. It involves applying a thin layer of drywall compound across the entire wall surface to create a perfectly smooth, uniform base. It is absolutely worth it if your walls have a rough or orange peel texture you want to eliminate, if there are numerous small imperfections from years of nail holes and minor damage, or if you are transitioning from a heavily textured finish to a modern smooth look. In older Vancouver homes, particularly those built in the 1970s and 1980s, textured walls and ceilings were standard, and skim coating is the most effective way to update them without the mess and cost of full drywall replacement. The process typically requires two to three coats of compound, with sanding between each coat, so it does add several days to your project timeline. In Vancouver's cooler and more humid conditions, drying times between coats can be longer than expected, especially during the fall and winter months. After skim coating, a coat of drywall primer is essential before the finish paint to seal the fresh compound and ensure even sheen. Talk to your painter about whether a Level 4 or Level 5 finish makes sense for your particular walls and lighting conditions.

Q8

How do professional painters in Vancouver remove old wallpaper before repainting, and should I try doing it myself?

Professional wallpaper removal in Metro Vancouver follows a systematic process that gives much better results than most DIY attempts. Painters typically start by scoring the wallpaper surface with a perforating tool to allow moisture to penetrate the adhesive layer behind it. They then apply a wallpaper removal solution mixed with hot water, either by spraying or rolling it on, and let it soak for fifteen to thirty minutes. A steamer may also be used for stubborn papers, particularly vinyl-coated wallpapers that resist moisture penetration. Once the adhesive has softened, the paper is carefully scraped off using broad drywall knives, working methodically to avoid gouging the drywall underneath. After removal, residual adhesive is washed off with a solution and scraped smooth. This step is critical because any remaining paste will cause the new paint to bubble and peel. The drywall beneath old wallpaper often has damage including torn paper facing, skim coat failure, and gouges from previous installation or removal attempts. A professional will repair these areas with joint compound, sand smooth, and apply an oil-based or shellac primer to seal the surface before painting. While DIY wallpaper removal is possible, the risk of damaging

your drywall is high, especially if the wallpaper was installed directly onto unprimed drywall, which was common practice in many Vancouver homes built before the 1990s. In that scenario, removal almost always pulls off the paper facing of the drywall, requiring extensive repair. Get a quote from a professional painter who includes both removal and wall repair in their price.

Q9

What kind of primer should I use on the exterior cedar siding of my West Vancouver home before staining?

Cedar siding is the most popular exterior cladding across Metro Vancouver, and choosing the right primer is crucial for a long-lasting finish, especially given our heavy rain exposure. If you are applying a solid-colour stain or paint over bare or previously stained cedar, an oil-based or alkyd primer is generally the best choice. Oil-based primers penetrate deeply into cedar's porous grain, seal natural tannins that can bleed through and cause brown staining, and provide excellent adhesion for the topcoat. Cedar is notorious for tannin bleed, particularly western red cedar, which is the species used on the vast majority of Vancouver-area homes. If tannin bleeding has been a problem on your home previously, look for a primer specifically labelled as a tannin-blocking formula. For cedar that has weathered and turned grey from Vancouver's moisture and UV exposure, the surface must be cleaned and brightened with a wood cleaning solution before priming. This removes the grey oxidized wood fibres and opens the grain for better primer penetration. If you are applying a semi-transparent stain rather than a solid stain or paint, you typically skip the primer entirely, as semi-transparent products are designed to penetrate the bare wood directly. However, you still need to clean and prepare the surface thoroughly. Regardless of product choice, avoid painting or staining cedar siding when rain is expected within twenty-four hours or when temperatures drop below ten degrees Celsius, both of which are common concerns during Vancouver's shoulder seasons. Consult with your painter about the best product system for your specific siding condition and desired look.

Q10

There are a bunch of cracks and nail pops in our ceiling that keep coming back. What's the best way to fix them before painting in our Surrey home?

Recurring ceiling cracks and nail pops are a frustrating problem in many Surrey and Metro Vancouver homes, and simply filling them with spackle and painting over them is a temporary fix at best. Nail pops happen when the original drywall nails lose their grip in the framing lumber, often due to wood shrinkage as the house settles over time. The proper repair involves driving a new drywall screw about two inches away from each popped nail to re-secure the drywall panel firmly to the joist, then removing or setting the old nail below the surface. The screw head and old nail hole are then covered with two to three thin coats of drywall compound, sanding smooth between each coat. For recurring cracks, the approach depends on the cause. Hairline cracks along drywall seams usually mean the original tape has failed. The fix is to cut out the old tape, apply fresh paper or fibreglass mesh tape with new compound, and build up the joint with two or three coats. For stress cracks near corners or where walls meet ceilings, flexible caulking may be more appropriate than rigid compound, as these areas continue to move slightly with seasonal temperature and humidity changes. In newer Surrey developments where homes are still settling, some movement cracks may continue to reappear for the first few years regardless of the repair method. Once all repairs are dry and sanded, prime the patched areas with a PVA primer before applying your ceiling paint. Consider asking your painter whether applying the topcoat by roller or spray will give you the smoothest ceiling finish for your particular space.

Q11

How long does it take for primed walls to dry before painting in Vancouver during the winter months?

Drying times for primer in Vancouver during winter months are significantly longer than what you will see listed on the product label, which typically assumes ideal conditions of around twenty-one degrees Celsius and fifty percent relative humidity. In a typical Vancouver home during November through February, indoor temperatures may sit around sixteen to nineteen degrees and relative humidity can easily reach sixty to seventy percent or higher, especially in older homes without modern ventilation systems. Under these conditions, a latex primer that claims a one-hour recoat time may actually need three to four hours before it is truly ready for the topcoat. Oil-based primers take even longer in cool, humid conditions, sometimes requiring overnight drying. Applying paint over primer that has not fully cured leads to a range of problems including poor adhesion, bubbling, extended tackiness, and a finish that never fully hardens to its intended durability. Professional painters working in Vancouver during the wet season will often use portable heaters and dehumidifiers to bring the room closer to ideal conditions and speed up drying.

Opening windows for ventilation during dry spells helps, but avoid doing so during rain when outdoor humidity is at or near one hundred percent. If you are doing the work yourself, invest in an inexpensive hygrometer to monitor the room humidity and do not rush the process. A properly dried primer coat is the foundation for a paint job that will look good and last for years. Ask your painter what steps they take to manage drying conditions during Vancouver's wet season to ensure the best possible result.

Q12

We have water stains on our bedroom ceiling from a roof leak that's now fixed. Do we need to do anything special before repainting or can we just roll over it?

You absolutely need to treat water stains before repainting, otherwise they will bleed right through your new paint within days. Simply rolling latex paint over a water stain is one of the most common mistakes homeowners make.

First, ensure the source of the leak is truly resolved. In Metro Vancouver's climate, with our heavy rainfall from October through April, what seems fixed can reappear during the next big storm. Wait through at least one significant rain event before proceeding.

Once you're confident the area is dry, check for mould. Vancouver's humidity means moisture damage often leads to mould growth behind or within the drywall. If the drywall feels soft, spongy, or shows dark spotting, that section needs to be cut out and replaced rather than just painted over.

For stains on solid drywall, the process is: sand the area lightly, apply a shellac-based stain-blocking primer like Zinsser BIN, let it cure fully, then topcoat with your ceiling paint. Oil-based primers also work but shellac is the gold standard for water stain blocking. Latex primers, even those labelled as stain-blocking, often fail on serious water marks.

For a single room ceiling with moderate staining, expect to pay a professional painter $300 to $600 for the prep and repaint, or $800 to $1,200 if drywall patching is involved.

A good next step would be to have a painter assess whether the drywall integrity is still sound before committing to a repaint approach.

Q13

There's white powdery stuff forming on our concrete foundation walls in the basement. We want to paint the basement but is this something we need to deal with first?

That white powdery substance is called efflorescence, and it's extremely common on concrete foundation walls in Metro Vancouver due to our high water table and persistent moisture. It forms when water moves through the concrete and deposits mineral salts on the surface as it evaporates.

You must remove efflorescence completely before painting, as paint will not adhere to those salt deposits and will peel off within months. Start by dry brushing the surface with a stiff nylon or wire brush to remove loose deposits. For stubborn efflorescence, use a diluted muriatic acid solution (one part acid to ten parts water) or a commercial efflorescence remover. Always wear proper respiratory protection, gloves, and eye protection when using acid-based cleaners.

However, removing the surface deposits only treats the symptom. The underlying issue is moisture migrating through the concrete. Before painting, you need to address the moisture source. This might mean improving exterior drainage, ensuring downspouts direct water well away from the foundation, or applying a waterproofing membrane to the exterior wall.

For the interior, use a masonry-specific waterproofing primer designed to block moisture vapour transmission. Products like Drylok or Xypex are formulated specifically for this purpose. Regular interior latex primer will fail on damp concrete.

Professional basement wall prep and painting in Vancouver typically runs $3 to $5 per square foot, including efflorescence treatment and waterproofing primer.

Consider having a foundation specialist evaluate your moisture intrusion before investing in paint, as recurring efflorescence signals an ongoing water management issue that painting alone won't solve.

Q14

Our 1970s Vancouver home has cedar siding and every time we repaint, reddish-brown stains bleed through within a year. What are we doing wrong?

You're dealing with tannin bleed, which is one of the most persistent paint problems on Vancouver's many cedar-clad homes. Western red cedar is prized for its beauty and rot resistance, but it contains natural tannins that

dissolve in water and migrate through paint films, causing those reddish-brown discolourations.

The problem is almost certainly inadequate priming. Standard latex primers cannot block cedar tannins. You need a dedicated tannin-blocking primer, and there are two reliable options. Shellac-based primers like Zinsser BIN are the most effective tannin blockers available. Oil-based alkyd primers are the second-best option and are easier to apply on large exterior surfaces. Some newer high-quality acrylic stain-blocking primers also perform well, but check that the product specifically mentions tannin blocking on cedar.

The prep sequence matters too. Power wash the siding to remove chalked old paint, dirt, and surface tannin deposits. Let it dry thoroughly, which in Vancouver's climate means waiting for a stretch of dry weather, ideally in July or August. Sand any rough areas. Apply one full coat of tannin-blocking primer to bare wood and any stained areas. Then apply two coats of quality exterior acrylic latex paint.

Another factor is your siding's exposure to rain splash and moisture. Cedar siding on north-facing walls or near ground level gets far more tannin bleed because moisture drives the tannins outward. Ensure your landscaping and grading direct water away from the siding.

As a next step, schedule your exterior repaint during Vancouver's dry summer window and insist that your painter uses a shellac-based primer on all bare wood and previously stained areas.

Q15

We want to remove the popcorn ceiling in our 1985 Burnaby condo before repainting. Should we be worried about asbestos?

Yes, you should be concerned. Asbestos was commonly used in popcorn ceiling texture in BC up until the late 1980s, and a 1985 application date puts your condo right in the transition period. Some suppliers were still using asbestos-containing texture products into 1986 and even later in some cases, as existing stock was used up.

Under WorkSafeBC regulations, you are required to have suspect materials tested by an accredited laboratory before any disturbance or removal. This is not optional. Scraping asbestos-containing texture without proper containment releases microscopic fibres that pose serious long-term health risks.

The testing process involves collecting small samples from multiple locations on the ceiling and sending them to a certified lab. Sampling costs around $30 to $50 per sample, and you should test at least two to three areas since different rooms may have been textured at different times or with different products. Results typically come back within three to five business days.

If the test comes back positive for asbestos, removal must be done by a WorkSafeBC-registered asbestos abatement contractor following proper containment, wetting, HEPA filtration, and disposal procedures. Professional asbestos popcorn ceiling removal in Metro Vancouver typically costs $4 to $8 per square foot, so a typical 800-square-foot condo might run $3,200 to $6,400.

If the test is negative, you can proceed with DIY or hire a painter. The standard method involves spraying the ceiling with water, scraping with a wide drywall knife, skim-coating imperfections, priming, and painting.

Start by contacting an environmental testing company to arrange sampling before making any plans for removal.

Q16

How important is caulking before we get the exterior of our house painted? Our painter mentioned it but it seems like an unnecessary extra cost?

Caulking before exterior painting is not an upsell or unnecessary extra. It is arguably the most critical prep step for protecting your home, especially in Metro Vancouver where we receive over 1,100 millimetres of rainfall annually. Skipping caulking is a false economy that leads to far more expensive repairs down the road.

Every gap around window and door frames, where siding meets trim, at corner boards, where different materials join, and around penetrations like light fixtures and hose bibs is a potential entry point for water. In Vancouver's driving rain conditions, water does not just fall vertically. Wind-driven rain pushes water sideways and even upward into gaps that might seem insignificant.

When water gets behind your siding or into wall cavities, it leads to rot, mould growth, and structural damage. Repairing rotted framing or sheathing costs thousands of dollars compared to the relatively modest investment in proper caulking.

A quality exterior caulking job uses paintable, flexible sealant rated for outdoor use and temperature movement. Silicone-modified polyurethane or high-quality acrylic latex sealants with at least a 25-year rating are standard. Your painter should remove any old, cracked, or separated caulking and apply fresh beads to all joints and transitions.

The caulking also gives your paint job a much more polished, professional finish. Gaps and cracks left uncaulked create shadow lines and uneven paint coverage that make even expensive paint look cheap.

Ask your painter to walk you around the house and point out every area they plan to caulk, so you understand exactly where your home is vulnerable and what protection you're getting.

Q17

What level of drywall finish do I need if I'm repainting my living room? The contractor mentioned Level 4 versus Level 5 and I have no idea what that means?

Drywall finish levels range from Level 0 through Level 5, and they describe how smooth and ready the surface is for its final coating. For most residential repaints in Vancouver, you're looking at Level 4 or Level 5, and the difference matters more than you might think.

Level 4 is the standard residential finish. All joints have been taped with three coats of compound, fastener heads are covered, and the surface is sanded smooth. This is perfectly adequate for walls that will receive a textured finish or will be painted with flat or matte paint, as these sheens are forgiving and hide minor imperfections.

Level 5 adds a thin skim coat of joint compound over the entire surface, not just the joints and patches. This creates a perfectly uniform surface with no variation in texture or porosity. You need Level 5 when using semi-gloss or gloss paint, when the wall receives strong natural or artificial light at a raking angle, or when you want a flawless result on feature walls.

The reason this matters is that joints, patches, and bare drywall paper all absorb paint differently. Even with primer, these differences can show through as visible banding or flashing under certain lighting conditions. This is particularly noticeable in Vancouver homes with large windows that let in strong directional light.

Upgrading patches from Level 4 to Level 5 adds roughly $1.50 to $2.50 per square foot for the skim coating and additional sanding. For a typical living room, that might add $400 to $700.

Discuss with your painter what sheen you plan to use and where your strongest light sources hit the walls, as this will determine whether Level 5 is worth the investment for your specific situation.

Q18

Our stucco exterior has cracks and some areas feel damp to the touch. Can we just paint over it or does the stucco need repair first?

Do not paint over cracked or damp stucco. Painting over moisture problems traps water inside the wall assembly, which accelerates rot and mould growth behind the stucco. This is an especially serious concern in Metro Vancouver, where the leaky condo crisis of the 1990s and 2000s demonstrated exactly how devastating trapped moisture in wall assemblies can be.

Cracks in stucco are active water entry points. Even hairline cracks allow wind-driven rain to penetrate, and once water gets behind the stucco, it often cannot dry out quickly enough in our damp climate. The fact that areas feel damp to the touch suggests moisture is already accumulating within the wall.

Before any painting, you need a proper assessment. Small surface cracks under 3 millimetres can typically be filled with an elastomeric patching compound designed for stucco. Larger cracks or areas with delaminating stucco may need sections cut out and re-applied. If the moisture has reached the sheathing or framing behind, you may be looking at a more significant remediation.

Once repairs are complete and the stucco is sound and dry, the painting process should use an elastomeric coating rather than standard exterior paint. Elastomeric coatings are thick, flexible, and bridge hairline cracks that develop over time. They are the standard recommendation for stucco exteriors in rainy climates and provide a waterproof membrane while still allowing some vapour transmission.

Have a stucco repair specialist or building envelope consultant assess the extent of moisture intrusion before engaging a painter. Addressing the root cause now prevents far costlier envelope remediation later.

Q19

I'm renovating a 1960s house in East Van and there are about 15 layers of paint on the trim and baseboards. What's the best way to deal with this before repainting?

Fifteen layers of built-up paint on trim is very common in East Vancouver's older character homes, and it creates a real problem. The profiles and details in the original millwork get completely buried, edges become rounded and blobby, and new paint over that thick buildup tends to chip and peel because the underlying layers are often unstable.

You have three main approaches. Chemical stripping uses paste-type removers that soften multiple layers for scraping. This preserves the wood profiles beautifully and is the best method for detailed trim with ornate moulding. Modern citrus-based strippers are low-odour and much safer than the methylene chloride products of the past. However, chemical stripping is labour-intensive and messy.

Heat stripping uses an infrared paint remover or heat gun to soften paint for scraping. This is faster than chemical methods but requires care to avoid scorching the wood. An infrared stripper is preferred over a heat gun because it heats more evenly and at a lower temperature.

However, with a 1960s home, you must test for lead paint before using any method that creates dust or fumes. Paint manufactured before 1978 commonly contained lead. Dry sanding lead paint is extremely hazardous. Send a sample to a lab or use a certified lead test kit. If lead is present, WorkSafeBC guidelines apply to any contractor performing the work, requiring containment, HEPA vacuuming, and proper disposal.

For trim that is not historically significant, the most cost-effective approach may be to remove the existing trim entirely and install new clear-grade finger-joint pine or MDF trim that can be primed and painted fresh.

Start with a lead test, then decide your approach based on whether the existing trim has architectural details worth preserving.

Q20

We just had some drywall repairs done in our bathroom and the patches look different from the rest of the wall. How do we make them invisible before painting?

Visible drywall patches are one of the most common complaints after repairs, and the problem almost always comes down to texture and porosity differences between the patched areas and the existing wall. Getting patches to disappear takes proper technique, and it starts well before you open a paint can.

First, check the quality of the patching work itself. Run your hand over the patches and compare to the surrounding wall. The compound should be feathered out smoothly with no ridges, bumps, or edges you can feel. If you can detect the patch boundary by touch, it needs more sanding or an additional skim coat. In a bathroom with typical overhead lighting, even slight imperfections become visible.

Next, address the texture match. Most Vancouver homes built after the 1980s have a light orange peel or knockdown texture. If your patches were finished smooth but the surrounding wall has texture, you need to replicate that texture on the patches before priming. Spray-can texture products work for small areas but can be tricky to match. For larger patches, a hopper gun or roller-applied texture gives better results.

The critical step is priming. Bare joint compound is far more porous than the surrounding painted wall. If you apply your topcoat directly, the patched areas will absorb paint differently and show as dull flat spots against the existing surface. This flashing effect is especially obvious with any sheen above flat.

Apply a quality PVA drywall primer or a high-build primer to the patched areas. Some painters prime the entire wall for the most uniform result. Let the primer cure fully before topcoating.

Have your painter apply the topcoat in full wall sections, corner to corner, to avoid lap marks that draw attention to the repaired areas.

Q21

What kind of prep is needed for painting the exterior of a house that's been sitting with peeling paint for a couple of years here in Vancouver?

An exterior that has been peeling for a couple of years in Vancouver's wet climate likely has more going on than just flaking paint. Extended moisture exposure through compromised paint film often leads to wood damage underneath, so a thorough inspection is the first order of business.

Start with a comprehensive walk-around to assess every elevation. Probe any suspect areas with an awl or screwdriver to check for soft, punky, or rotted wood. Pay special attention to horizontal surfaces like window sills, the tops of trim boards, and any areas where water can pool. South and west-facing walls in Vancouver often fare better due to sun exposure, while north-facing walls tend to have the worst moisture damage and even mould or

algae growth.

The prep sequence for a neglected exterior is extensive. First, scrape all loose and peeling paint down to a sound edge using rigid scrapers and pull scrapers. Do not try to remove all paint down to bare wood everywhere, just get to where the remaining paint is firmly adhered. Power washing comes next to remove dirt, mildew, chalking old paint, and debris. Use a cleaning solution that kills mould spores, as simple water pressure alone does not eliminate mould.

Allow thorough drying time. In Vancouver, this means choosing a dry stretch in summer, as the wood needs to reach below 15 percent moisture content. A moisture metre is an essential tool here, not guesswork.

Replace any rotted wood, fill minor imperfections with exterior wood filler, sand feathered paint edges smooth, caulk all joints, and prime bare wood with a quality exterior primer before applying two coats of acrylic latex paint.

Get at least two professional quotes, as the extent of wood repair will significantly affect the price, and any reputable painter will want to inspect before committing to a number.
