The Beginner's Guide to Paint Sheens

(Without the Panic at the Paint Counter)

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👋 Hey Girl, Let’s Talk Paint!

So you finally picked the perfect color for your walls. Woohoo! But just when you're feeling confident enough to strut into the paint store like Joanna Gaines’ understudy, the paint guy hits you with:

“What finish would you like that in?”

And just like that, you’re mentally transported back to 7th-grade history class, sweating through your hoodie trying to remember who the 21st president was (It’s Chester A. Arthur, by the way. You're welcome.)

Don’t worry—I’ve been there, too. Which is exactly why I put together this cheat sheet to break down the most common paint finishes—without making your eyes glaze over.

🖌️ Paint Sheen 101: What Even Is a Sheen?

“Sheen” and “finish” mean the same thing—and they’re basically just how shiny your paint looks when it dries.

Each sheen has its own superpowers and flaws (kind of like all of us), and picking the right one can make or break your project.

Whether you're painting the walls, baseboards, or that one piece of thrifted furniture you've been meaning to "flip," this chart’s got you covered.

The Paint Sheen Chart

Finish	Sheen	Traffic Area	Ease of Application	Durability	Clean-ability	Where to Use	Best Suited For	Apply With
Flat/Matte	None	Low	Easy	Low	Difficult	Ceilings	Adult Bedroom	High-quality paint roller with a thick nap (3/8 to 1/2 inch), Paint brush
Eggshell	None	Low	Easy	Low/Medium	Semi-difficult	Ceilings, Walls	Dining Room, Sitting Room, Hallways	Paint roller with a medium nap (1/4 to 3/8 inch), Paint brush
Satin	Slight	Moderate	Moderate	Medium	Moderate	Baseboards, Trim, Doors	Family Room, Foyers, Hallways, Kids' Rooms, Laundry Room, Playroom	Paint roller with a medium nap (1/4 to 3/8 inch), Paint brush
Semi-Gloss	Slight	High	Moderate/Difficult	High	Easy	Cabinets, Tables, Trim, Chair Rails, Interior Mouldings and Casings	Kitchen, Bathroom, Laundry Room, Utility room	Short-nap roller (1/8 to 1/4 inch), Fine bristle paint brush
Gloss	Shiny	High	Difficult	High	Very Easy	Cabinets, Trim, Furniture, Interior Mouldings and Casings	Kitchen	Short-nap roller (1/8 to 1/4 inch), Fine bristle paint brush
High Gloss	Very Shiny	High	Difficult	Very High	Veary Easy	Most used doors, Cabinets, Furniture	Kitchen, Outdoor Applications	High-quality synthetic paintbrush with fine bristles

🔍 Sheen Breakdown (In Real Mom Terms)

1. Flat or Matte

Finish Vibe: Soft, smooth, no shine
Great For: Hiding imperfections like patched holes, uneven textures, and toddler-wall-art coverups.
But Be Warned: It's not scrub-friendly. So unless you're okay with repainting after your kid uses ketchup as finger paint... maybe not for the playroom.
👉 **Use in: Ceilings, adult bedrooms, guest rooms.**

2. Eggshell

Finish Vibe: Just a whisper of sheen
Great For: A good balance between "pretty" and "practical." A mom-favorite for spaces that get touched but not trashed.
But Be Warned: It can still scuff if your toddler decides to reenact American Ninja Warrior.
👉 **Use in:** Dining rooms, hallways, living rooms.

3. Satin

Finish Vibe: A soft glow-up
Great For: This is your go-to for kid zones, steamy rooms, or any place where messes magically appear.
But Be Warned: It’ll show brush strokes if you’re not careful, so prep matters!
👉 **Use in:** Bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, kids' rooms, baseboards, and trims.

4. Semi-Gloss

Finish Vibe: Shiny but classy (like dry shampoo on day 3)
Great For: Areas that need frequent cleaning and that benefit from a little “pop.”
But Be Warned: It highlights every bump and ding, so wall prep is everything.
👉 **Use in:** Cabinets, trims, doors, kitchen backsplashes.

5. High-Gloss

Finish Vibe: The diva of the paint world
Great For: Serious durability + wipe-ability. Great for glam finishes or modern designs.
But Be Warned: It’s tricky to apply and unforgiving on rough surfaces. Proceed with caution—or a glass of wine.
👉 **Use in:** Furniture, accent doors, high-end trim.

🛠️ Pro Tips From One DIY Mama to Another

- **Flat =** Forgiving on walls but not when kids get involved.
- **Higher gloss =** more durable, but also more prep work.
- **Trim + baseboards =** satin or semi-gloss. You'll thank me when crayon marks wipe right off.
- **Bathrooms & kitchens =** satin or semi-gloss. Think steamy showers and spaghetti sauce splatter.
- **Cabinets =** semi-gloss or high-gloss. Because grease is sneaky and toddlers are messy.

💡 Choosing Your Sheen: Cheat Sheet Questions

Ask yourself:

✔️ Is this a high-traffic space?
✔️ Will kids or pets touch this daily?
✔️ Do I need to wipe it often?
✔️ Is the wall texture smooth or imperfect?

🧽 Cleaning + Maintenance by Sheen

SHEEN	CLEANABILITY	TOUCH-UP FRIENDLY
Flatt/Matte	Hard to clean	Super easy
Eggshell	Wipe with caution	Easy
Satin	Easy to clean	Moderate effort
Semi-Gloss	Very easy	Can be tricky
High Gloss	Wipes like magic	Touch-ups are obvious

🌟 BONUS: Take the Guesswork Out of Your Next Project

Picking paint is only one part of the process—figuring out how it will actually look with your furniture and decor is the real challenge.

That's why I made a **FREE Mood Board Template** you can grab right now. Just drag and drop your furniture, decor and colors into the template, and voilà—you'll see your vision come together before you even buy the paint!

👉 **Snag it here:** Mood Board Template

🛠️ Ready to Get Serious? Track Your Renovations Like a Pro

Choosing the right paint sheen is a huge part of getting your space just right — but if you're in the middle of a renovation, you already know: paint is just one decision in a sea of many.

That's why I created the, **soon-to-launch, Renovation Planner & Tracker**— a comprehensive, easy-to-use system that helps you organize every phase of your renovation or room refresh, from the first spark of inspiration to the final styling touch.

Whether you're managing a full gut renovation or slowly updating your home one project at a time, **this digital tracker was designed to take the stress out of the process and keep you focused on what matters most: creating a space you love.**

With the Renovation Tracker, you can:

- **Integrate with your mood board template** to turn ideas into actionable plans
- **Organize and track product selections during the sourcing phase** — no more losing links or forgetting what you liked
- **Compare estimates vs. actual budget totals** and stay on top of spending
- **Manage quotes, timelines, and contractor info** in one central hub
- **Use the task manager to track every to-do**, from demo day to delivery dates
- **View your project in a real-time timeline** so you always know what's next
- **Keep a detailed record of all your finishes** — like paint colors, sheens, tile, grout, and hardware — so you always know what you used and where, making touch-ups or future changes a breeze
- **Keep all notes, measurements, links, and visual inspo together** for easy access

Whether you're DIY-ing it or working with a team, the **Renovation Planner & Tracker helps you make smarter decisions, save time, and actually enjoy the process along the way.**

👉 Make sure you’re on my email list now to be first in line when it launches—and score a special early-bird price!