

# A CURE FOR PAINTER'S BLOCK

## Perk Up Your Walls With Stencils and Supergraphics

by Steve Dodds photo Shelly Kroeger illustrations Bill Evans



So you're getting bored with your white walls. They've begun to feel a little oppressive even. But covering every surface with art is a little bit out of your price range. Fortunately, there's one way to make a major improvement to your surroundings with relatively little scratch—a new paint job. (Bonus for renters: If you can't convince your landlord that indoor murals increase property value, a fresh coat is easily reversible.)

There's a shelf full of how-to books that go into detail on technique. In most cases, the projects they describe will leave your walls looking like a French pastry *shoppe* or the Jungle Room at Graceland. So we donned our coveralls for a few ideas that are more Ruscha than Rockwell.

### A FEW POINTERS TO GET YOU GOING:

#### PREPARATION

This is a primer. Read it only if you know very little about painting. Before you start, make sure your surface is clean. Paint doesn't stick to dirt and grease. If the surface is glossy, sand it lightly to take off the sheen. (This helps the new paint adhere, too.) Fill any holes with joint compound, let dry, and sand flat.

#### MATERIALS

For the projects shown here, flat or eggshell latex wall paint will work fine. Latex is easy to clean and not too fummy. Even so, keep your work area well ventilated. For larger areas, you'll need a roller, a roller cover (not too fuzzy), and a roller pan. High spots and ceilings will require an extension handle. Standard

broom handles with threaded ends work well. For smaller areas and trim, you'll need a sash brush, with bristles cut at an angle.

After painting, wash the brush and roller with soap and water, and rinse until the water runs clear. If the brush came with a cardboard cover, put it back on to protect the bristles. Don't let paint dry on the brush or roller. If you need to break for an hour or two, wrap them in a moist rag.

#### LAYOUT

First measure the surface you're painting. For most small jobs, a tape measure, pencil, and straight edge will do. A level helps to keep your guidelines plumb. For larger projects, use a strip of wood or chalk line. (A chalk line is a

long piece of string covered in blue chalk that is pulled taut and snapped against a surface, leaving a blue line.)

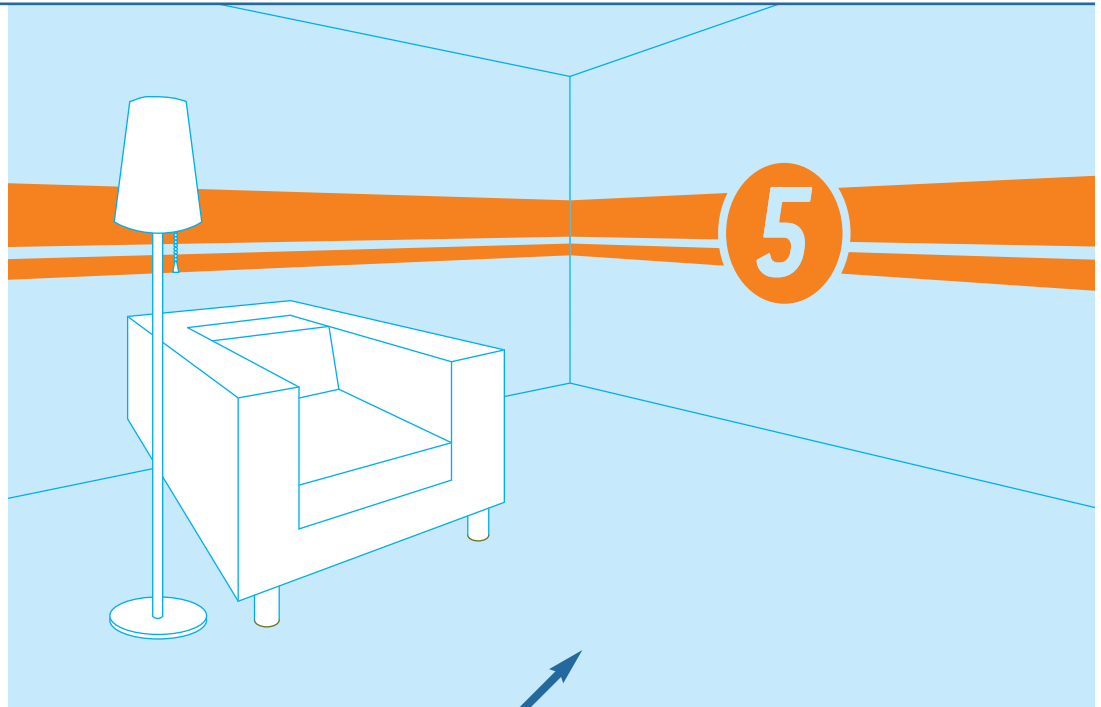
#### MASKING

Masking separates the things you don't want to get paint on from the things you do. Most of the projects included here use tape to define the edges of the painted areas. Keep in mind that all tape is not created equal. Use masking tape from a paint store. Always burnish the edges to keep paint from bleeding underneath.

To mask small, detailed things, use sticker paper or frisket—adhesive sheets that can be cut with an X-acto knife and peeled away. And one more thing: Never underestimate the importance of a drop cloth.

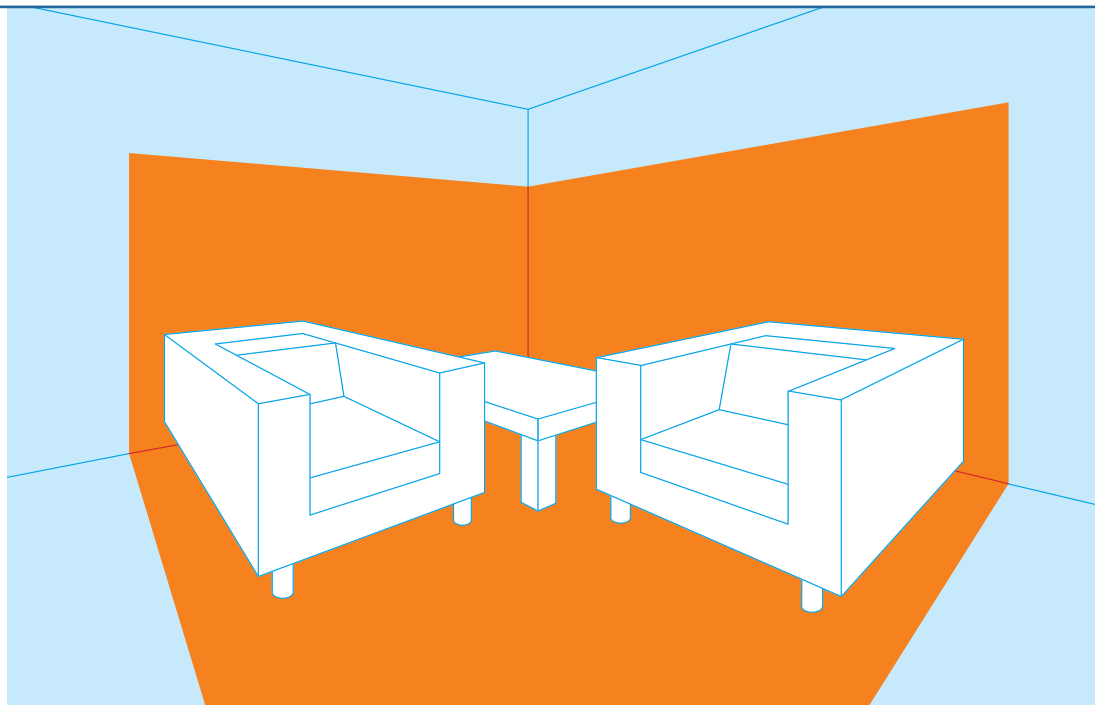
## GO FASTER STRIPES

We can't all have a cherry '69 Camaro parked in the driveway. But paint some high-octane racing stripes on the wall and vroom vroom! Try it at a small scale on a door or on your refrigerator, or leave tracks all the way around a room. Use a straight edge or a chalk line to mark where you want the stripes to go, or simply paint a long rectangle over a strip of masking tape and then peel it away. If you don't want to go through the trouble of painting, J. C. Whitney sells vinyl stick-on stripes at [www.jcwhitney.com](http://www.jcwhitney.com). (A 20' roll costs \$20.)



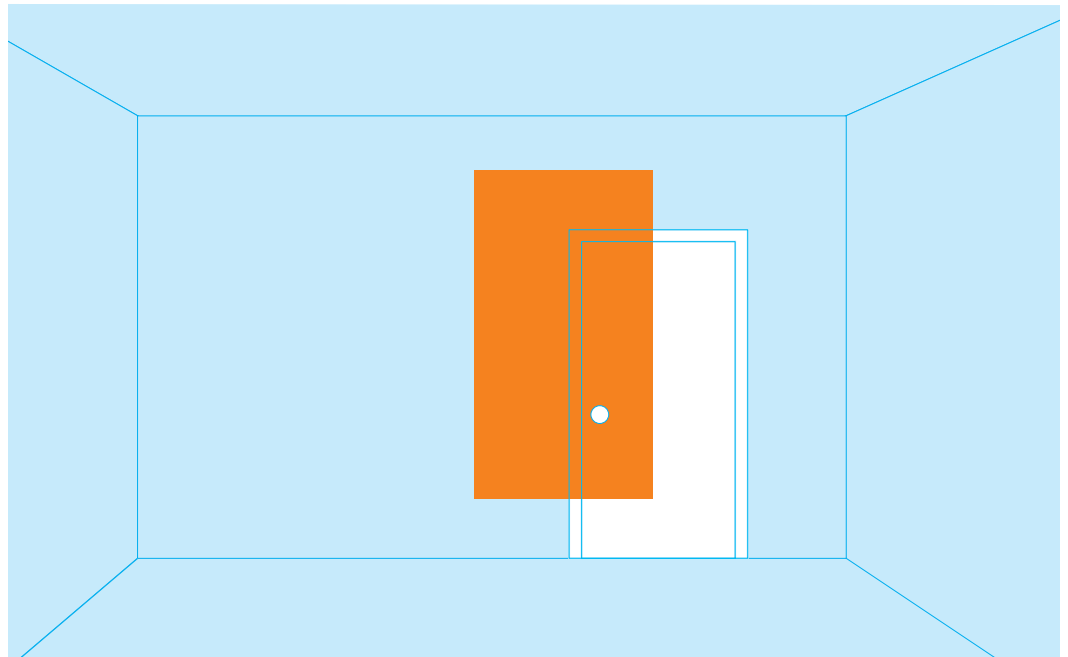
## THE FOURTH WALL

You can use paint to transform an unremarkable area within a larger room. Use it to set off a small piece of furniture or, combined with cheap remnant carpet, to define a miniature reading room. If you use the carpet piece, align the edges of the painted area with the rug for that satisfyingly boxy effect.



## SKEWED ENTRY

Pretend you're painting the door, but miss. Use masking tape to mark off a rectangle the size of the door. Mask the door, jamb, wall, and any hardware you can't remove. Because of the size of the area you'll be painting, you may as well do the whole job with a brush. If off-centeredness makes you anxious or queasy, simply painting one or more of your doors a rich, vibrant color can make a huge difference. (The doors in my home are a deep ruby red.)



## SCAN ART

We appreciate the bar code's unassuming size, but we consider it more representative of the age we live in to make it really, really big. Run strips of masking tape of varying widths up the wall. To ensure your lines are straight, lay the strips edge to edge, then peel the tape away where you want the black lines to be. Burnish the remaining strips so paint doesn't seep underneath. Use stick-on vinyl or paint stencils for the numbers across the top or bottom.

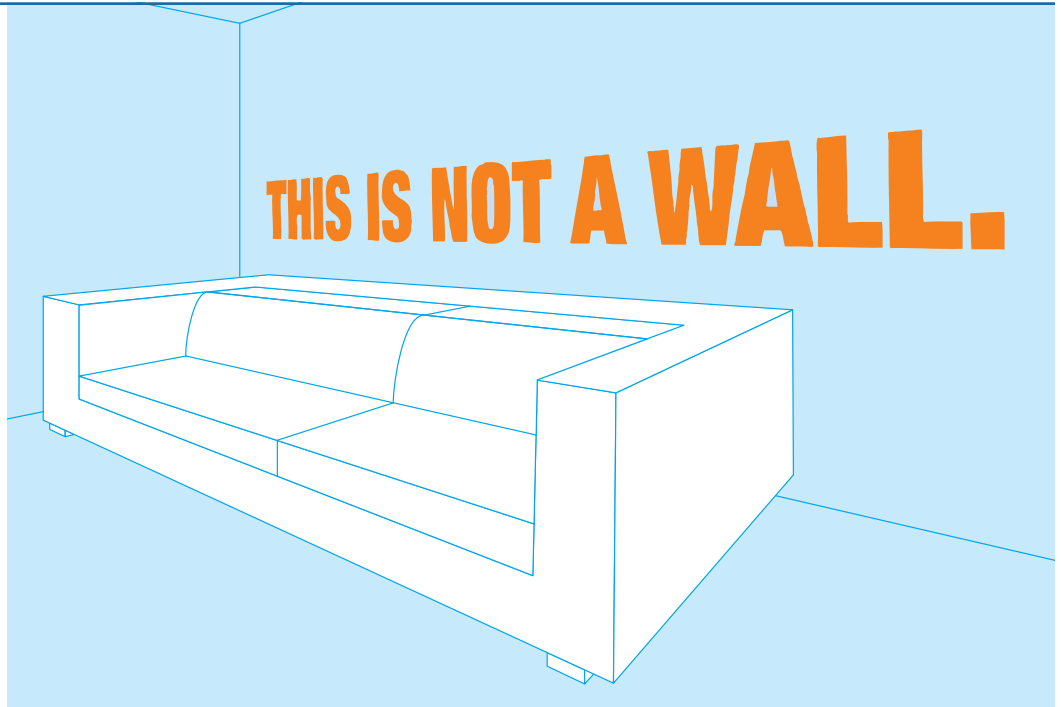


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## WALL TEXT

You know those perfectly painted info blurbs on museum walls that accompany the art? That's wall text. Use the same method to display quotes, lyrics, or some of your own blather. If the quote is small, print or Xerox it onto sticker paper (make sure you get the printer-friendly stuff!). Use a chalk line or narrow strip of wood as a guide.

You can also use sticker paper to mask an area to be painted. Print the letters on the sticker paper and attach the sheet to the wall. Cut the letters out, then burnish what's left. Spray paint the letters, let dry, and then peel off the remainder. Use a stencil for large lettering. Paint the letters in with a stencil brush or trace the letters in pencil, remove the guide, and fill them in freehand with a paint pen or brush.



## CANOPY

The canopy effect, usually achieved with wood veneer or fabric, can be easily reproduced with paint. A band of color as wide as the mattress runs up the wall behind the bed, across the ceiling and down the opposite wall, and bottoms out at a shelf painted to match. Use a chalk line to mark the edges of the band. Next, mask off the adjacent areas and roller away. The shelf is optional, but it adds a fearful symmetry. It can be simple but should have some heft to it. Try screwing together two or three layers of MDF shelf stock and mounting it to the wall with two or three angle brackets.

