

How To Paint Leather Shoes

By Cheryl Kilbourne-Kimpton, www.wardrobesupplies.com

Among the most frequent topics our customers ask about is how to paint leather shoes. Some want to take their "kicks" from dull to "daaaaymn!" or, maybe, they are faced with turning a hundred pairs of neutral character shoes into custom creations.

The design is limited only by your imagination, but I can help you with the nuts and bolts. Anthony Hoffman, a professional shoe painter, is who I turned to as our guide. His painted creations have appeared on numerous Broadway shows including the Tony award winning productions Shrek, Hairspray and Wicked. He has also been tapped to create special displays heralding the opening of a major Japanese Department Store's new shoe department.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- 99% Alcohol
- Angelus Professional Leather Paint
- Paint Brushes
- Meltonian Shoe Cream
- Terry cloth rag or old washcloth
- Heavy Duty Protective gloves
- Protective Mask
- Air tight jars
- Masking Tape
- Hair Dryer
- Optional-Angelus Finishes
- Polishing rag or old pantyhose



WICKED Designed by Susan Hilferty

The first term everyone learns in a professional kitchen is "mis-en-place" which translates "have all your stuff together". Well, that principle is essential in this process as well. You must have all your ingredients in place in a well ventilated, properly lit area. If possible take your work outside. Your work table should be well covered as well.

Step One: Prep



Remember the quality of your prep has everything to do with the quality of your paint job.

Most instructions start by removing the waxy finish, dirt and oils with deglazer or preparer or if your are seriously changing color, using acetone to strip the color away. The only problem with this method is that these products are flammable and quite volatile with toxic fumes. This intense "stripping" also changes the basic character of the leather, raising the "tooth" on a smooth leather making it feel almost like suede." It destroys the integrity of the

HAIRSPRAY Designed by William Ivey Long

leather," Anthony believes, so he likes to take a much gentler approach.

He uses 99% Isopropyl Alcohol to strip the shoes before painting. He only "breaks" through the top layer of the finish on a new shoe meaning that he does not find it necessary to completely remove all of the color from a shoe that he is painting. He prefers using an old washcloth or a terry cloth rag instead of a smooth rag as its' slight abrasiveness assists in removing the finish.

Remember Alcohol is highly flammable as well, but the fumes are far less toxic. You still must work in a well-ventilated area and stay away from open heat sources. While some professionals don't wear masks, it is recommended and essential for anyone with a respiratory problem. All the pros, do, however, wear gloves, between the danger of burns from the alcohol and the staining of the paint on your hands it's just foolish not to.

After the alcohol evaporates (approx. 5 to 10 minutes) you are now ready to move on.

Step Two: Paint

Painting can be a time consuming process. Your choices are patience or frustration from cracked and flaking shoes. Use masking tape to mask off any areas that you do not want to paint, Anthony uses Angelus Leather Paint, but instead of using it as it comes out of the bottle he thins it down with water until, he says, "it is the consistency of 'Bisquick' [or pancake batter]."

Anthony likes to paint 3 thin coats. Several thin coats wear better than a couple of thick ones and offer more control over flaking and cracking, Apply paint with short even strokes being careful to smooth out the edges to avoid getting ridges. Anthony uses angled brushes to facilitate that.

After he finishes painting his first coat Anthony uses a hair dryer to assist in the drying process. A dryer does two things. First it "shrink wraps" the paint to the shoe and second, it smooths out any unwanted brush strokes by melting the paint right into the prepared leather.

When applying the next coat Anthony suggests that to achieve better coverage you should brush on the paint in the opposite direction from the first coat, i.e. if you paint the first coat heel to toe, you should apply the second coat perpendicularly across the uppers of the shoe. Dry this coat with a hair dryer as you did the first.

Apply the final coat, once again alternating direction from the second. After you dry this coating with the hairdryer you are ready for the next step.

Step Three: Protect

Finishes serve two purposes. They add protection that preserves your paint job, and they can also give your shoes a matte or glossy surface. Although Angelus makes several finishes from which to choose, Anthony prefers to finish his shoes with Meltonian shoe cream.

After application Anthony's preference is to buff the shoes with pantyhose, but you can use a soft cloth or old tee-shirt – the more you buff, the higher the gloss. If you want to ramp up the color or shine of the finished product, let's get creative.



HAIRSPRAY Designed by William Ivey Long



Seibu Department Store Sapporo Japan

Getting Creative:

If you like the color that you have painted you can use a neutral Meltonian polish as a finisher. If you want to "kick it up a notch" and enhance your color you can use the same color or slightly different color Meltonian shoe cream (they have a broad and complementary color palate) to finish your shoe. This is where the fun and challenge begins. It takes trial and error to get the look you want and probably some knowledge of color theory. Please, don't come this far only to ruin your product – be judicious as you customize the finish. You can always go back and repeat the process with a touch more color.

If you want your shoes to have a really high sheen you can mix your base color into metallic paint such as silver or gold. You need to judge the proportions by eye until you achieve the desired shade, once again be prudent with your metallic additions.

OTHER TIPS

If you are painting delicate, soft or worn shoes, stuff the toes with newspaper or plastic bags to create a smooth surface.

If you were painting a light color over a dark wall at home you would have to prime the wall first, it is the same with shoes. If you are lightening up a black or other dark shoe "prime" it with a first coat of white or, at least, neutral. This is particularly important if you are painting with a metallic or neon paint.

If you are painting with metallic colors, use a "base coat" in a similar, yet non-metallic shade. This will provide a more even surface for the metallic coat.

If painting shoes in multiple colors, start with the lightest color first, then progress to the darker color. If you make a mistake, it's easier to hide it by painting dark over light rather than vice versa.

Use good quality brushes not wool daubers for painting. Daubers are meant for applying dye or polish, not paint and the angled brushes minimize stroke marks. The brushes do not have to be natural, synthetic is fine.

When creating custom colors, mix them up before painting, store in airtight containers and be sure to write the formula down.

Anthony has a final suggestion which harkens back to the famous journalist Don Hewitt and an acronym he drilled into his correspondents, "KISS" = Keep It Simple, Stupid! With no offense meant, that should be the watch phrase for this project.