paints, "maintenance" means adding another coat of paint, which reduces vapor permeability and increases the chance of rot and paint failure. The cycle continues until there is no choice but to scrape or strip off all the layers of paint and start over.

Unlike with alkyd or acrylic paints, a linseed-oil-painted surface is truly maintainable. As the oils in the paint dry over the years, the pigment will take on a matte, sometimes chalky appearance, signaling it's time for maintenance. Typically, this happens after about five years, possibly less, depending on exposure and conditions.

It's worth noting that the maintenance at this point is mostly cosmetic, because even when linseed paint starts to go matte, the wood is still protected by the oil in its pores. At this point, the original linseed paint can be renewed by wiping or brushing a thin coat of boiled linseed oil onto the surface. Although not typically necessary, you could also add a fresh coat of linseed paint. One exception is noted in the Linolie & Pigment brand linseed paint literature. It reads: "White [linseed paint is] usually not oiled, but painted more often, as the color may become smokier because the oil is yellow."

Whether maintaining by adding a coat of oil or a fresh coat of paint, here's the best part: At no point in the life of linseed paint will the surface loosen or peel. And you'll never have to scrape it off to start again.

Change is uncomfortable

I don't think linseed paint will be right for everybody. It demands a conversation with clients to see if it's a good fit for the project, and sometimes it just isn't. At this point in time, it's not an off-the-shelf purchase in most areas of the country, it has a limited color palette compared to the countless options from acrylic paint companies, and there are limited options for a finished sheen that will all fade to matte over the years. For professional painters, it will be an unknown product that requires a change in application techniques. Because linseed paint seeps into wood more than acrylic paint, it can't be relied on to fill and hide surface imperfections. It can't be easily sprayed, if at all; it has a slow dry time; and there is a more frequent maintenance cycle. In short, expectations will need to be set.

But for anybody willing to make those sacrifices, the reward is the peace of mind that comes with a zero-VOC formulation that won't be an environmental hazard. You will have painted surfaces with a deep, penetrating level of protection that are maintainable and will never peel, chip, or need to be scraped away to start over. To me, the pros more than outweigh the cons. □

Justin Fink is owner of Fink & Son Historic Restoration in Connecticut. Photos by Brian Pontolilo and Rodney Diaz.

SOURCING LINSEED OIL PAINT

As linseed paint gains popularity in the U.S., the number of available options is growing, but sourcing is very skewed toward internet retailers over brick-and-mortar paint stores. Some brands offer a wide variety of colors; others offer a more limited selection and provide guidance on combining them to yield custom colors.

The price per can may be a shock, but keep in mind that the contents aren't an apples–to-apples comparison to alkyd or acrylic paints due to the amount of solids in the can. Linseed oil paint, depending on the color, can cover twice as many square feet as conventional paint. So when compared to the coverage of alkyd or acrylic paint, linseed paint is cost competitive—and may even come at a savings.

ALLBÄCK *1 liter, $75 (200-ml zinc oxide mildewcide additive, $26)*
Although the Allbäck brand is one of the most widely available linseed oil paint options here in the United States, there is a drawback to Allbäck linseed paint that is worth noting: The paint does not include any mildewcide as part of its standard formulation. For humid or wet climates where mold is a risk, Allbäck does offer a zinc oxide additive that can be mixed in with any Allbäck paint.

BROUNS & CO.
1 liter, about $70
Based in the United Kingdom, Brouns prides itself on making high-quality linseed oil paints and backing them up with direct access for questions or concerns, with premium pricing to match. Their catalog of 38 colors is directly based on historical color formulations, making their paints a good choice for historic preservation work. (Custom colors are also available, but only in larger quantities.) They also offer a premixed primer consisting of paint, raw linseed oil, and balsam turpentine.

HERON *1 quart, $55*
Heron Linseed Oil Paint is a relative newcomer to the market, but also the only U.S.-based maker. If you want to know everything that's in your linseed paint, Heron is your go-to. In addition to offering some bold colors alongside the more historical choices, Heron is big on transparency. Their SDS voluntarily lists ingredients that are in such small proportions that they aren't required by law to be disclosed.

OTTOSSON FÄRGMAKERI
1 liter, about $65
With a track record that dates back to the 1980s, Ottosson has had some time to work the kinks out of their processes, deal with customer feedback, and adapt their paint to a variety of markets. In my experience, the lower price point doesn't come with any noticeable trade-offs in consistency of performance. Plus, they have 44 colors to choose from, which is more than any other brand in this list.

VIKING *1 quart, $52*
This Swedish brand limits its offerings to just six colors, which are sold along with instructions on how to mix the colors to create custom shades.