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Optical Screener Helps To Find That Perfect Paint Color

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See a color you love on a friend's wall, but she forgets the exact name? Or do you want to try to replicate the look in your favorite restaurant?

California Paints has a hand-held optical screener that helps you match the shade you're going for, even when you can't bring a sample to the store.

Called MatchMaker, this battery-powered device uses digital camera technology to identify the three California Paints colors that most closely match the color of the object you scan.

You place the MatchMaker on the magazine picture, fabric swatch or rug you're trying to match, and it displays the names of the three closest colors.

"It really does work," says Dan Gonzalez, manager of John Boyle Decorating Center in West Hartford, adding that it is more accurate and reliable than a similar product with older technology sold by another company. "People want to take it home and match fabric or a color they have there."

The hue you're trying to match has to be a solid color, but Gonzalez says it works on a variety of surfaces. If you shop at a store with staff who are skilled at matching color and you have a sample to bring to the store, the MatchMaker just speeds up the process, he says.

"If you came into the store and you had a candle [you were trying to match], I would first go to the chips and see what color is close," he says. "The machine is not as good as 20 or 30 years' experience. These are great tools to start a project with, to help you coordinate and find colors."

The device is especially handy when the color is on a house or a wall that you can't bring into the store.

"When people can't bring the color to us, this is the best alternative," says Jim Banfield, manager of United Paint & Wallpaper in Wethersfield.

After the MatchMaker gives the three colors closest to the one customers are trying to match, Gonzalez says, his staff works with the fan deck of paint chips to look at each shade.

But it's a tool, retailers say, not a substitute for experienced help. "It's good to have somebody behind the counter who knows how to adjust the colors and adjust them to what you want," Gonzalez says.

The MatchMaker is available through retailers that carry California Paints. Three paint stores in Connecticut have the MatchMaker, which they loan to customers at no charge, secured with credit card. They are John Boyle Decorating Center in West Hartford; United Paint & Wallpaper in Wethersfield, and Painters' Supply, formerly Pinnacle Paint, in Waterbury.

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