

Master of disguises

Hélios Nadal turns plain walls and ceilings into works of art using paint, plaster and wild helping of imagination.

BY KAREN TURNER

Hélios Nadal is a master of disguises. With the gifted hands of a sculptor, keen eye of a fine painter and Technicolor imagination, the decorative artist turns blank walls and plain ceilings into stunning slabs of textured stone, heavily-veined marble and traditional frescos or fanciful murals in muted shades of blue, gold and rust.

Painting since he was 14 in his native France, the 57-year-old wields his trowel and paintbrush like a wizard's wand, coating walls in thin skins of stucco plaster and streaking them with lime-based paint to achieve an aged patina reminiscent of a mid-century castle.

Using pots of custom colours he mixes himself, the talented artisan turns back the hands of time, washing chalky-white mouldings in layers of rich ochre, terra-cotta and olive green and brushing on wafer-thin metallic foil to add a glimmer of shine to the distressed finish.

From scaffolding high above a home's front entrance, he carefully freehands swirls and curlicues across a vaulted ceiling in captivating detail or faux finishes towering columns flanking a doorway to look like gleaming polished marble.

"I can do anything," says the scruffy-bearded owner of Deco.pf, which specializes in ornamental plaster and faux finishes, as well as historical restorations and restaurant and nightclub makeovers.

The many sample boards that lined the walls in his showroom off Colonnade Road -- he closed the shop last month and has transferred his business to his home studio in Mont Cascades -- are proof of his artistic prowess, a talent he inherited from his Spanish father and has spent more than 30 years perfecting.

A graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, France, he spent several years apprenticing with professional decorative painters in France and Italy, travelling across Europe honing his skills and developing a clear understanding and appreciation for colour.

"I have a good eye for that," says

the confident colourist, a stocky man with round, black-rimmed glasses and slicked-back wavy hair, who knows which shades will work well together before the paintbrush even touches the wall.

Nadal emigrated to Canada in 1990, unable to speak a word of English. He settled in Toronto and wasted little time finding work as a painter.

Ottawa has been his home and work base for the past 15 years, but he still travels to the United States and Europe when clients call for his painting expertise.

"I go where the job is," says Nadal, who has worked on residential and commercial projects in New York, Florida and North Carolina, as well as in Monaco, Italy and Belgium.

Deco.pf is the Ottawa distributor for Iconoplast Designs, a third-generation custom moulding company based in Toronto. Nadal has also partnered with Texturline Inc. in Mississauga to launch a new line of eco-friendly lime paints, glazes and plasters.

Nadal says the beauty of lime-based products is they're non-toxic and durable and retain their colour and vibrancy. Unlike cement, he says lime is more flexible to work with and the natural properties of the lime prevent mould growth.

"Lime gives interesting effects -- it can be soft or more dramatic," says Nadal, adding the finished look can be traditional or contemporary, depending on a home's decorating style, furniture and artwork.

Although he enjoys the challenge of detailed frescos and intricate murals, the hardworking father of two admits he favours the simplicity of an imitation stone wall as a rich backdrop for hanging art or wall sculpture.

In Ben and Sandra Colasanti's custom home in Greely, Nadal applied stucco plaster washed in soothing earthtones to the walls and ceiling in the Tuscan-style living room. A wide moulding finished in an aged patina runs the perimeter of the room with an ornate medallion rimming a suspended antique fixture in the centre of the ceiling.

In the foyer, the vaulted plaster



Decorative painter Hélios Nadal hand-mixes paint to blend with plaster to create stunning faux finishes

ceiling was handpainted with copper swirls, curlicues and multiple arrowheads in various sizes. It's the perfect crowning touch for the stunning glass and iron pendant light casting a moody glow on the sandy and green walls.

"He is amazing," says Sandra Colasanti, co-owner of Euro Ceramics on Belfast Road. "Hélios can do anything with paint and finishes. He worked on the iron on the staircase and gave it a whole, new texture and feel." When asked if he considers himself an artist, Nadal pauses momentarily then humbly replies: "I'm

an artisan. I'm a decorative painter. It's too pretentious for me to call myself an artist."

A master of disguises to the core.

With files from Sheila Brady.

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SOURCES

Hélios Nadal of Deco.pf at 613-725-7806 or decopf.com
Texturline Inc. at 416-410-3244 or texturline.com
Iconoplast Designs at 416-534-1844 or iconoplast.com