

Reviving Radiators

BY NOELLE LORD CASTLE

OLD RADIATORS ARE one of the most charming characters inside older homes. Unfortunately, when buried under decades of paint and years of rusty build up, these period ornaments become eye sores. Sand blasting and chemically stripping radiators are available options that are best left to professionals and definitely need to be done off-site in an appropriate work area. If you have a lot of lost detail in the radiator from too much paint build-up, you may want to pursue these more aggressive options.

However, you can revive one in place using good old fashioned elbow grease. You will need to remove any loose paint, abrade the sound paint areas for good adhesion of new paint, and apply appropriate metal primer and paint. This is a definite homeowner do-it-yourself solution. Always take lead paint precautions when working on older painted surfaces.

It is ideal if you can detached the plumbing and pull the radiator away from the wall. Regardless, slide plastic under the radiator by

gently lifting one leg at a time and working the plastic beneath. Use plastic and drop cloths to protect the area from water and overspray. Essentially encase the radiator in plastic, and cover the materials around it.

All loose paint needs to be scraped off using scrapers and stiff wire brushes. Wire brushes are available at hardware and better paint stores and come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Scrape off all visible loose paint and work edges into sound paint to feather in highly visible areas. Abrade all sound paint too so that it will have "tooth" for the new paint to adhere to. If there are rusting areas, scrape and brush off any loose scaling. Vacuum the radiator and surrounding area well.

Place block sponges around the base of the radiator to capture water, and check the plastic protection. Using a pump sprayer (use a hand sprayer if you don't have a pump) and sponges, wash the radiator completely with a TSP (tri-sodium phosphate) and hot water solution. Rinse with clean water. Dry with towels immediately to prevent further rusting.

When the radiator is completely dry, prime it using an oil-based, rust-preventative metal primer.

A spray-on primer works best. Allow the primer to set up for one day.

Paint can be brushed on or sprayed on. Usually 1 – 2 coats are necessary for brushed on, 2 – 3 lighter coats of sprayed on paint. Acrylic paint can be used, but a spray-on metal paint is very dependable. Metal paints are designed for coating cast iron and are heat and chip resistant. Many metal paints now come in a variety of colors and metallics to achieve the period look desired. Many paint stores also carry throw-away CO2 canisters to make your own spray paint.

Do not resume heating with the radiator for several weeks to allow the paint to fully cure. If operated too soon the paint is likely to discolor. ■

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