

Matt Emulsion vs Durable Matt vs Eggshell vs Satin vs Gloss vs Masonry Paint vs Primer and Undercoat

Paint is one of those categories where people often think they are just choosing a colour, when in reality they are also choosing durability, sheen level, washability, moisture resistance, ease of touch-up and how forgiving the finish will be on the actual surface underneath. A brilliant shade in the wrong finish can still be the wrong product. Dulux's current guidance makes the same broad point: different paint types are designed for different surfaces and uses, not just different colours.

For most domestic projects, the real comparison usually comes down to **matt emulsion, durable matt, eggshell, satin, gloss, masonry paint**, and the all-important **primer and undercoat** stage. Each has its place. Each can also be a complete nuisance if used in the wrong area. Paint has no problem looking innocent while causing extra coats, poor adhesion and regret.

What the products are generally used for?

Matt emulsion is generally used on **interior walls and ceilings**, especially in living rooms, bedrooms and ceilings where a low-sheen, soft finish is wanted. Dulux says matt emulsion gives a smooth, velvety appearance and helps hide imperfections, which is a big reason it remains the default wall finish in so many homes.

Durable matt is also used on **interior walls and ceilings**, but typically in **busier areas** such as hallways, kitchens, children's bedrooms and family spaces where the walls need to stand up better to cleaning and daily wear. Dulux Trade Diamond Matt is positioned as a tough, cleanable emulsion with stain-repellent properties and high scrub resistance.

Eggshell is generally used on **interior wood and metal**, and in some cases on walls where a slightly tougher, mid-sheen finish is wanted. Dulux Trade Eggshell is specifically sold as suitable for interior wood and metal surfaces and is described as a tough, durable mid-sheen finish.

Satin is commonly used on **woodwork and trim**, such as skirting boards, architraves, doors and sometimes cabinets. Satinwood sits between eggshell and gloss in appearance and is often chosen when people want a smarter, wipeable finish without the stronger shine of gloss. Dulux Trade Satinwood is marketed as a tough, hardwearing, dirt-resistant finish for interior wood and metal.

Gloss is generally used on **woodwork and metal** where a harder-wearing, shinier and more traditional finish is wanted. It is still common on trim, doors and some older-style decorative schemes, although many people now prefer satin or eggshell because gloss shows up surface imperfections more aggressively. That last point is an inference based on standard finish characteristics and Dulux's guidance on matt being more forgiving of imperfect surfaces.

Masonry paint is used on **external walls and other exterior masonry surfaces** such as concrete, render, brick and block. Sandtex Trade High Cover Smooth is marketed for exterior concrete, masonry, stone, brick, block and most exterior-grade building boards, which is exactly the territory masonry paint is designed for.



Primer and undercoat are generally used before the finishing coat on **new, bare, repaired or difficult surfaces**. They are not glamorous, but they are often what decides whether the topcoat actually performs properly. Dulux Trade Eggshell and Satinwood are both described as self-undercoating in standard situations, but their own technical guidance still notes that new or bare surfaces should be primed appropriately.

Why each one is used?

Matt emulsion is used because it gives a softer appearance and helps disguise minor surface defects. That makes it popular for ceilings and general wall areas where people want a clean, low-sheen finish without every bump and patch shouting for attention.

Durable matt is used because it gives a matt look with much better washability and scrub resistance than a standard matt. Dulux Trade Diamond Matt is marketed as highly scrubbable, stain repellent and tested to Class 1 ISO 11998 scrub resistance, which is why it is so often specified for busy interiors.

Eggshell is used because it gives a tougher, slightly soft-sheen finish that works well on joinery and trim. It is often chosen where a completely flat finish would be too vulnerable and full gloss would feel too shiny. Dulux Trade Eggshell also highlights resistance to condensation, which helps explain why it has long been used in some kitchens and bathrooms as well as on woodwork.

Satin is used because it gives a more contemporary, wipeable trim finish. It is popular on skirtings, doors and architraves because it offers durability and a cleaner-looking surface without the stronger reflectivity of gloss.

Gloss is used because it gives a hard, traditional finish with a higher sheen and a more pronounced decorative effect. It still earns its place where people want a classic trim look or stronger reflectivity, though it is less forgiving on poor preparation. That last point is an inference supported by the broader finish guidance on sheen and visibility of imperfections.

Masonry paint is used because exterior walls need a coating designed for weather exposure rather than an interior decorative finish. Sandtex positions its trade smooth masonry coating around durability, opacity and up to 15 years' protection, which shows the basic job description clearly enough.

Primer and undercoat are used because topcoats perform better when the surface is sealed, stabilised and given the right base. They are especially important on bare wood, new plaster, metals, patch repairs and strong colour changes. This is supported directly by Dulux technical guidance for trim paints and by Diamond Matt guidance on sealing new or bare surfaces.

Ease of use

Matt emulsion is usually one of the easiest finishes to apply and touch up, especially on walls and ceilings. It is forgiving in appearance and generally a safe choice for less-than-perfect surfaces.



Durable matt is also straightforward to apply, but because it is built to be tougher and more washable, preparation matters a bit more if you want the finish to look consistent. The payoff is that it copes much better with cleaning once installed.

Eggshell is usually manageable to apply on trim and woodwork, but sheen levels start to reveal more preparation flaws than a flat matt wall paint. It is a practical middle ground, but not magic. The paint cannot sand the wood for you, sadly.

Satin is also relatively easy to live with and keep clean, though like eggshell it rewards decent prep because the smoother finish highlights defects more than matt. It is popular partly because it balances finish quality and practicality well.

Gloss tends to be the least forgiving of poor surface preparation because its higher sheen reflects more light and therefore highlights more defects. That is an inference based on the way lower-sheen matt finishes are described as better at hiding imperfections.

Masonry paint is straightforward on the right surface, but exterior coating jobs rise or fall on preparation, weather conditions and substrate soundness. Sandtex's own technical sheet references application in accordance with BS 6150 and states it is intended for external masonry-type surfaces.

Technical characteristics that matter

For **matt and durable matt**, the biggest technical differences are usually **sheen level, washability and scrub resistance**. Dulux Trade Diamond Matt is marketed as highly scrubbable, stain repellent and tested to **10,000 scrubs**, with **Class 1 ISO 11998** and **Type C BS 7719** scrub ratings. Standard matt emulsions are generally chosen more for appearance than for heavy cleaning performance.

For **eggshell and satin**, the technical conversation is usually about **durability, sheen and use on trim surfaces**. Dulux Trade Eggshell is described as a **tough, durable mid-sheen finish** and resistant to condensation, while Dulux Trade Satinwood is described as **tough, hardwearing and dirt resistant**. Both products list practical coverage at around **17 m² per litre**.

For **durable matt**, practical coverage is listed at around **16 m² per litre** on the Diamond Matt technical sheet, which is broadly in line with premium trade wall paints rather than a dramatic outlier. Coverage still depends heavily on substrate condition and colour change, so no one should treat tin claims as a legally binding blood oath.

For **masonry paint**, the key technical factors are **weather resistance, substrate suitability, drying time and long-term durability**. Sandtex Trade High Cover Smooth is listed for exterior masonry-type substrates, with touch dry at around **1–2 hours**, recoat at **3–5 hours**, and marketing claims of **up to 15 years' protection**.

For **primer and undercoat**, the important technical role is adhesion and surface preparation. Dulux's trim paint guidance makes clear that bare surfaces should be primed appropriately even where a finish coat is promoted as self-undercoating in many normal situations.



Approximate costs of the product

At a broad UK planning level, **standard matt emulsion** is usually the budget-friendly choice for general interior walls and ceilings. **Durable matt** generally costs more because it brings higher washability and scrub performance. **Eggshell, satin and gloss** typically sit in the trim-paint bracket and are usually bought in smaller volumes, so the total spend is often more about the quantity of woodwork than the price per litre. This cost positioning is an inference from current UK trade/retail product segmentation and the way these products are marketed.

Masonry paint usually sits above basic interior wall paint in project cost terms because exterior coatings are built for weather durability and often bought in larger packs for large elevations. **Primer and undercoat** add cost on paper, but skipping them where they are needed is often a false economy. That is an inference, but a painfully common one in real decorating jobs.

How they tend to be sold and availability

Matt and durable matt are widely available through DIY chains, decorators' merchants, trade counters and online suppliers. Dulux Trade, Crown and Johnstone's all operate heavily in this space, and the broad market availability is strong. The sources here specifically confirm wide current UK availability for Dulux Trade products through Decorator Centre and trade product sites.

Eggshell, satin and gloss are commonly sold as trim paints for interior wood and metal and are widely stocked through decorators' merchants and specialist paint retailers. They are usually sold in smaller pack sizes than wall emulsion as well as larger trade formats. That availability is supported by current product listings for Dulux Trade Eggshell and Satinwood.

Masonry paints are widely available through trade paint suppliers and builders' merchants, usually in larger pack sizes and with both smooth and textured options depending on the brand. Sandtex's current trade listings reflect that standard market approach.

Primer and undercoat are sold by substrate type and application, so the buying decision is less about colour and more about whether you are painting bare plaster, timber, metal, stained surfaces or exterior masonry. This is supported by Dulux's current "which paints go where" guidance and product technical notes.

Other points a customer should know before choosing

If the surface is **a ceiling or imperfect wall**, **standard matt emulsion** is usually the safest visual choice because it hides defects better than shinier finishes.

If the room is **busy, wipeable and prone to marks**, **durable matt** usually earns its extra cost because it is built to cope better with cleaning and everyday impact.

If you are painting **woodwork**, the real choice is often between **eggshell, satin and gloss** rather than between wall paints. Eggshell gives a softer mid-sheen look, satin gives a smarter wipeable finish, and gloss gives the shinier traditional option.



If you are painting **outside masonry**, use a proper **masonry paint**, not an interior emulsion with delusions of grandeur. Exterior walls need weather-specific coating performance.

If the surface is **new, bare, repaired or problematic**, **primer and undercoat** should not be treated as optional admin. Good prep usually decides whether the finish coat performs properly.

Conclusion

If you want the blunt version: **matt emulsion** is the forgiving all-round wall and ceiling finish; **durable matt** is the tougher upgrade for busier interiors; **eggshell** is the softer trim finish; **satin** is the modern wipeable woodwork option; **gloss** is the shinier traditional trim finish; **masonry paint** is the correct product for exterior walls; and **primer and undercoat** are the unglamorous but important parts that make the rest work.

There is no universal winner because the right paint depends on the room, the surface and how much abuse it will take. For ordinary ceilings and low-traffic walls, matt is usually enough. For family homes and high-use areas, durable matt makes more sense. For trim, the choice is mostly between eggshell, satin and gloss depending on the look and durability you want.

For exterior walls, masonry paint is non-negotiable. The smart move is not choosing the paint with the nicest label. It is choosing the one that actually matches the surface, the wear level and the finish you want to live with.

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