

JANIE LOWE & VIRGINIA YOUNG

YOLO COLORHOUSE

In the paints these color gurus create, air-pollutant VOCs are MIA

THEIR FORMER LIVES Before developing YOLO Colorhouse, a line of eco-friendly paints, self-professed “color nerds” Janie Lowe and Virginia Young joined forces in Portland, Oregon, in 1996 to start a custom paint and plaster finish company. Tapping into their backgrounds in fine arts, “We worked with interior designers, architects, and homeowners mixing custom color, and we were always focused on how to use it to create the environment our customers wanted,” Virginia says.

THE TURNING POINT “We were looking for alternatives to conventional latex paints that were loaded with solvents and affecting our health,” says Janie. “We learned how to use elements of nature to make paint at the Canelo Project [a nonprofit organization that teaches eco-

logical building techniques] in southern Arizona.” Virginia adds, “As artists, it was a powerful experience that inspired us to collect clay for paintmaking from Oregon’s Painted Hills.” After months of testing old-fashioned color recipes, researching natural ingredients, and tweaking the product, they developed an interior latex paint that contains no VOCs (volatile organic compounds—stinky solvents that are bad for the environment), and the marketplace beckoned. “We knew there was a niche,” says Virginia. “No one else was making eco-friendly paint in a designer palette.”

TRADE SECRET “The trick lies in how we developed a harmonious set of colors. That, in a sense, is guarded intelligence! But our business advice is simple: Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you,” Virginia says.

WHAT’S HOT It’s no surprise that the top sellers from this “green” line are in shades of green—Janie says paints from YOLO’s Leaf color family are the most popular. The company’s other nature-inspired collections include Air, Grain, Water, Stone, Clay, and Petal.

WHERE TO BUY Visit yolocolorhouse.com to find a local retailer, request a 23- by 27-inch paint swatch (\$5.99 each), or place an order. ■



JANIE (LEFT) AND VIRGINIA use the walls of their Portland studio to showcase YOLO’s poster-size paint swatches, good for eyeing a color without the expense or mess of a sample quart.

