



Modern Masters' Platinum and Shizen Lines Product Review for the Professional

by Katie Fitzgerald

Much like driving an electric or hybrid car, using low VOC decorative art products accomplishes the same end as "standard" options, but is healthier for you, your clients, and the environment. Even though I am a green practices advocate, I don't necessarily believe in sacrificing quality. With many new environmentally-friendly products, you don't have to sacrifice anything except smell and VOCs.

[Modern Masters](#)®, a popular manufacturer of decorative art products, has taken a leap forward in providing decorative artists with a new line of environmentally-friendly products under the umbrella "[Platinum Series](#)" name. There are two additional lines within Platinum called "Shizen" and "Bellezza" (Bellezza's anticipated release is March, 2009). These products are, or will be, approved by the [LEED](#) Green Building Rating System™.

These products are not generally available to the public; they are only sold through the Platinum Training Centers, which means you must complete certification training before you can use most of them.

I attended the first Shizen series of classes available to the average decorative artist at *Artistic Living Studios* in Rancho Cordova, CA, where I completed my certification. I underwent this training because I am a green advocate and want to add this line to my repertoire. Some of the plasters are also very



unique, and that attracted me as well. This review contains my impressions of most of the Platinum and Shizen products.

Go to the [EPA](#) and [Green Seal](#) sites for information on low VOC standards.

Platinum Series Products

Zero VOC Basecoat

- VOCs: **0** VOCs
- Colors: 190. Color matching to other manufacturers. Custom Color Matching as well. Available in a tintable pastel and dark base.
- Properties: Both a primer and a paint. Low sheen. Excellent coverage.
- Recommend? Yes.

The "basecoat" name is somewhat of a misnomer. This is *primer* and *paint* all in one, and it's good stuff. Zero VOC Basecoat (ZVB) sticks to practically any surface (except silicone) much like Zinsser 1-2-3 primer. Check the can for specifics.

This product also has good coverage. In my class, we used ZVB to base-coat some sample boards. One dip of a mini mini-roller was sufficient to completely cover an 18" x 24" board to opacity. One student chose a different color (a Behr paint) and used much more paint over several coats to achieve the same opacity.

As a primer and paint, ZVB has two particular advantages. First, you only need the one product and you don't need much of it. Ever have a nasty color you need to cover with primer before base-coating? That's two products and perhaps four coats. With ZVB, you might need two coats of one product to achieve the same results. While ZVB is a little more expensive, you will use so much less of it, you'll still save money. And of course there is the time savings of applying fewer coats.

Secondly, there's the environmental factor. Instead of applying four coats of a VOC emitting product, you're applying one or two coats of a zero VOC product. That feels good.

Wall Glazing Cream

- VOCs: 833 grams per liter.
- Colors: Comes clear. Tintable with Wall Glazing Colorants and universal tints.
- Properties: Long open time. No burns.
- Recommend? Yes, with qualifications.



Platinum Wall Glazing Cream

Wall Glazing Cream (glaze) must be applied over ZVB or it won't work, but it's still good stuff. There's no need to worry about holes or "burns" with this product. I played with one board for over 30 minutes. I was

repeatedly able to go back into an area and rework it. The glaze remained as smooth and creamy when I finished as it was when I started. Only after I finished did I realize I hadn't hurried because I hadn't felt the glaze tacking up.

The primary difference in manipulating this glaze is that you need to use either dry cheesecloth or plastic. If you use a standard damp cheesecloth, it pulls the product off the surface. Because this product remains open so long, I expected it to be sticky the next morning. During drier conditions, the glaze dries overnight with no problem.

In the cold and damp of a February project, the glaze took three days to dry, and I would call that a tenuous cure. On the second day, I arrived at my job site to find that the glaze had "sagged" in certain places—not a full drip, but it was very evident where the glaze slid.



Platinum Wall Glazing Cream
Drips in Damp Weather

I stippled out some of the sag marks with a dry chip brush, but this did remove glaze and create small burns. Fortunately, this was a very dynamic finish so a little variation was not noticeable. After that, we brought in box fans and left them on every day when we left. This was a commercial setting, so there were no homeowners to annoy with the after-hour noise. We had no further trouble with sagging, and drying time decreased as well.

I contacted my Platinum training center for their recommendations. They seconded increasing air flow and heat. They also

suggested adding a little Dead Flat varnish to the glaze to decrease drying time, although I have not experimented with that yet. Overall, I still like the Platinum Wall Glazing Cream for the low VOCs and open time. However, if I had a client interested in a low VOC finish, I would make sure to schedule the job for a dry season. If timing was more important than VOC for the client, I would simply use a different product.

Colorants

The colorants are somewhat confusing, as there are three different types: Wall Glazing Colorants, Premixed Pigment Dispersions, and SS (ShimmerStone) Transparent Colorants. The Premixed Pigment Dispersions and SS Transparent Colorants are pretty standard, and as such not separately reviewed.

Wall Glazing Colorants

- VOCs: 44 grams per liter.
- Colors: 44 colors for "as is" or mixing. Maintains color integrity so doesn't muddy up or streak.
- Properties: Contains binders so can be used on its own.
- Recommend? Yes, if you use Wall Glazing Cream. Otherwise, neutral.

Unfortunately, there is no information available on the VOC content of the colorants. The Wall Glazing Colorants (WGC) are designed to be mixed in Wall Glazing Cream, and they work well for this purpose. There are 44 individual colors that can be used as-is or mixed together. The WGC colorants also contain binders, so they can be used by themselves as paints or added to a finish for accent colors. It's nice to have the variety of colors if you don't like mixing, but keeping them all on-hand, even in the 4 oz sample bottles, is expensive.

Metallic Plaster

- VOCs: 50 grams per liter.
- Colors: 7 base colors, plus additional 44; Custom Color Matching available.
- Properties: Fine mica. Runny.
- Recommend: Yes.



Metallic Plasters.
Bronze (top); Layered Bronze
& Statuary Bronze (bottom).

Unfortunately, there is no information available on the VOC content of the Metallic Plaster. The seven base colors are beautiful and have a high sheen, but as a color palette seem somewhat limited. The benefit of using the base colors is that the mica is the same color as the plaster; as such, the mica shimmer is the same color as the base color (instead of flashing white or silver). The additional 44 colors come straight off the Faux Effects @ [LusterStone](#) color deck, but the mica, and therefore the shimmer, is not the color of the plaster. Custom Color Matching is available, but you must order a minimum of three gallons.

Overall performance is okay, but not optimal. The plaster is a little runny, so it easily slips off the trowel. Because the product is so thin, definitely base-coat with a color close to your

plaster; the undercoat will show through. With a second and third layer of plaster, the opacity increases to an acceptable level. If the low VOC status of this plaster could be confirmed, I would recommend it. Otherwise, I would use a less runny, high-luster plaster.

Shizen: Japanese "Natural Beauty" Plasters

As we were told in class, the Shizen products were originally developed in Japan where population density is high. With previous high VOC products, repainting someplace like a school resulted in a significant percentage of the school out ill from fumes; this meant keeping a parent home from work to stay with the child, which had a large impact on the economy. Shizen products were developed to substantially reduce impact to health. Modern Masters has brought these products to the US and updated them for decorative art applications.

The Shizen plasters include: Kai, Koruku, Pataan, and Kyoto. The downside to these plasters is that they require specialized trowels. I suspect you could get away with applying Pataan and Kyoto with a standard pavan trowel, but not the Kai or Koruku. However, the plasters do remain moist, so they don't need to be bagged and covered like some other products.

All of these plasters, except Kai, can have an optional Warasusa rice stalk fiber added for additional visual texture. The rice straw is reclaimed from the rice industry, making it a recycled product. In my opinion, the Warasusa looks best in the Koruku cork plaster. In the other plasters, the Warasusa look just makes me want walk up to the wall and pick it out.

Kai Recycled Shell Plaster

- VOCs: 25 grams per liter.
- Colors: untinted white; pastel to mid-tone base available; color deck not available. Can use Custom Color Matching. Tintable with Wall Glazing Colorants or SS Transparent Colorants.
- Properties: Thick, heavy, strong. Shell fleck provides glitter. Mold and mildew resistant. Neutralizes other VOCs.
- Recommend: Yes.



**Kai shell plasters.
Traditional (top);
Artistic (bottom).**

Of the Platinum and Shizen products released so far, Kai is the most exciting. Kai means "shell" in Japanese and is a plaster made from ground shellfish shells reclaimed from the seafood industry and recycled into this plaster. Small flecks of shell make the plaster an interesting combination of earthiness and highly reflective specs.

This product is very low in VOCs, but it gets better. Modern Masters had a "Formaldehyde Absorption Test" performed comparing Kai to a conventional emulsion paint. The results state: "Conventional paint showed only little absorption of formaldehyde gas. On the other hand SHIZEN KAI completely absorbed

formaldehyde gas in 60 minutes after the commencement." In other words, Kai absorbs and neutralizes other VOCs in the environment. I have a copy of the results. Unfortunately, the report doesn't seem to be available on the internet.

The plaster is very heavy, much like you would expect from a bucket of ground seashells. Modern Masters recommends base-coating with the Zero VOC Textured Basecoat, which makes the surface nubby and thus helps grab the plaster. Due to the heaviness and low VOC content (which means little standard binders), this stuff cannot be applied to a surface with standard techniques and requires specialized trowels. If you attempt to apply it like a standard plaster, you'll end up with a shoe full of plaster when it falls off your trowel and the wall. After you get the hang of the special technique, it's not that big of a deal. But you definitely want to make sure you've got good protection on the floor for the inevitable "oops." After the product sets up for 30 minutes or so, you have to go back and press it down.

The traditional application of this plaster is two coats, which lends itself to the best neutralization of other VOCs. For uniqueness and VOC issues, I recommend this product. However, I would be happier if Modern Masters found a way to make the plaster a little easier to work with.

Koruku (Cork) Plaster

- VOCs: Less than 25 grams per liter.
- Colors: 5
- Properties: Thick upon application. Spongy when dry. Sound dampening qualities.
- Recommend? Yes.



Koruku cork plaster with rice stalk fiber. Background "Cork" color. Stenciled with "Black" Koruku.

Koruku is the other very interesting and unique new product in the Shizen line. Again, I've never seen anything else like this. Koruku defies categorization as a "plaster;" it's more like gel foam. The product is made from the bark of a cork tree. After the bark is harvested, the cork tree regrows its bark, thus making this a sustainable product.

The cork comes in a separate bag, which then needs to be mixed on-site with the gel base. The cork comes in five colors, but none of the colors have names, except for "black," and are only identified by their order number. For my own sanity and for discussion purposes with my clients, I refer to them as: Black, Cork, Salt & Pepper, Sand, and White Sand. Special base-coat colors are available for the different light and dark plaster colors. Like Kai, Koruku must be applied with a special technique and trowel because the plaster tends to fall. Again, make sure the floor is properly protected. After a set time, this product also needs to be re-pressed.

Koruku provides a very unique look; if you're after unique or a low VOC product, I recommend it. However, I would be happier if

Modern Masters found a way to make the plaster a little easier to work with.

Pataan (Pattern) Plaster

- VOCs: Less than 27 grams per liter
- Colors: Untinted white; 160 of the 190 Zero VOC Basecoat Color deck. Can be tinted with Wall Glazing Colorants and SS Colorants.
- Properties: Buttery. Easy to spread. Holds pattern well. Good working time.
- Recommend? Yes

Pataan is a plaster that is made from [diatomaceous earth](#), which is a natural, chalky rock made from fossilized algae; among its properties are the ability to help regulate humidity and odor. This plaster comes in a white base that can be tinted before application, or painted or glazed afterwards. The plaster contains titanium, so it won't go really dark, which is why you can order it in only 160 of 190 color deck choices.

Pataan means "pattern;" the plaster is named such because it holds pattern well and lends itself to applications such as basket weave, tapping, fan patterning, and so on. If you pull it with a trowel, it also works well for faux grout in a faux stone wall. The working time is good. The texture is very buttery, which made it easy to apply. I had no fears of excessive wear-and-tear on my wrists. I suspect Pataan will become one of my first-line choices for a low VOC plaster.

Kyoto Plaster

- VOCs: Less than 50 grams per liter.
- Colors: Untinted white; 160 of 190 Zero VOC Basecoat Color deck. Can be tinted with Wall Glazing Colorants and SS Colorants.
- Properties: Easy to spread. Good working time. Contains extra fiber.
- Recommend? Neutral.

This plaster was named for Kyoto Japan, which was formerly the imperial capital. This plaster is basically the same as Pataan, but it contains a fiber which is reclaimed from the construction industry. I have not been able to verify what this fiber actually is. The fiber does add additional visual texture and makes it very strong. To make the fibers "pop up" for that additional visual texture, you need to make a horizontal stroke with your trowel as a last step.

I definitely recommend removing any tape while the plaster is still wet. If you remove the tape after the plaster has dried, the fiber causes the tape to tear, which means that you then have to use a razor to cut through it. If you do any additional glazing or painting, you'll have to retape, but this will take less time than razoring through the stuff. Kyoto is perfectly serviceable, but unless I specifically want that fiber-look, I wouldn't use it.

Wrap-Up

Overall, I like the new Platinum and Shizen lines. I hope Bellezza proves as interesting. My strongest suggestion for Modern Masters is to make sure all of the products contain VOC information in their Material Safety Data Sheets and the can.

*Do you have a Green product you would like
Katie to review? Contact her at:*

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*Katie Fitzgerald has been involved with
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