

Q&A with Mark Gardner, creator of Little Knights paint.

How did Little Knights start?

I simply wanted to create the safest paint in the marketplace. We know people can get headaches or have sinus issues related to paint, and this can be even worse for young children whose immune system is still developing.

There are paints on the marketplace that sound safe because of their claim that the ingredients are '100% natural', but they use things like casein, a milk produce which contains protein and bacteria. This can become a potential breeding ground for bacteria and mould, which can lead to chest-related illnesses and other problems.

Other products are marketed as "low-VOC" to make people think they are buying a safe paint, but research has linked these to breathing problems and allergies in children.

I felt there was no paint on the marketplace that was truly as safe as it could be, and so I designed Little Knights, a completely solvent-free and antibacterial solution. I have worked in the coatings industry for 35 years and have made specialist products for all manner of applications, including anti-bacterial products for the NHS, schools and restaurants, and so have a unique insight into what is possible.

How did you set about making Little Knights the safest paint on the market?

Recent research has shown that even low-VOC water-based paint can be harmful for children, so I created and tested a formulation where we know that every single pigment and resin we are using is completely harmless and VOC-free. The active additive is all FDA, EPA, HAC-approved and have non-hazardous certification.

Early in the development stage, one of the biggest chemical companies in the world introduced a brand-new resin that we are one of the first paint manufacturers to use. Not only did it help us to make Little Knights even safer, it contains a unique additive that absorbs formaldehyde from the air and chemically alters it to render it harmless.

This was great, because it ties in perfectly with the ethos of what we are aiming to achieve. There is real and growing concern that indoor air is becoming increasingly polluted by chemicals such as formaldehyde, which is widely used in the manufacture of MDF furniture, carpets and curtains - often found in a newly decorated nursery.

What makes you convinced it is the safest paint on the market?

I have created many products over the last 35 years, but, from a health perspective, Little Knights is something I think can be a game-changer. It could help children, people with health issues, the environment and it could even save lives. I believe it is the safest paint out there – I have not seen anything that compares.

There are simple points, such as the fact that the antibacterial additive is part of the structure of the paint, so it works for as long as there is paint on the walls. Other antibacterial paints use silver technology, which simply drifts out of the paint after a while, meaning the paint loses its protection.

Once Little Knights paint hits the watercourse system – and this is unique – it breaks down. I am very proud of that. People don't realise they are polluting the rivers when they wash their brushes in the sink after using normal paint. They wouldn't pour a tin of anti-freeze down the sink, but the glycols used in normal water-based paint are the same as those used in anti-freeze. They poison the watercourse system.

What is your view on current paints in the marketplace?

Because I work with paints all the time, I know there are problems with water-based paint. People think water-based paints are fantastically safe, but they can be as dangerous as a spirit-based paint. This is simply because your body is largely made of a water. The glycols they use in normal emulsions don't know the difference between paint and your skin so it goes into your skin and your body absorbs it. This can be quite dangerous. However, there is NOTHING dangerous in Little Knights paint so this is not an issue.

And what about the quality of Little Knight?

I firmly believe that this product cannot be beaten on its opacity nor its technical ability. The quality is second-to-none. We have tested it against the top brands – and it beats every brand for opacity.

I will never cut corners on quality and safety – we want to be the best, the safest and the most environmentally-friendly paint company in the whole world.

How did you decide on the price?

This paint is so good we could justify charging a huge premium for it, but that's not what we want. I do not want this paint to be just for people with deep pockets. You might have a mother who doesn't have that many pennies in the pocket who still wants to protect her child, and she has the option to do that with Little Knights. I feel it is only fair to give as many people as possible the ability to buy it.

How did you decide upon the beautiful range of colours?

The colours were chosen by designer Louise Hampshire. She has extensive experience in the world of custom textile design and her work can be found in some of the most celebrated period homes in the UK.

Although Little Knights was primarily intended to be a nursery paint, to protect young children and babies, we felt it was important to introduce colours suitable for all the family and for every room.

Rather than present customers with a dizzying array of similar colours, we carefully chose the perfect example of each colour, removing the guess work. I am a fully qualified colour matcher with 35 years' experience matching by eye. Every batch of paint is individually made and physically checked by eye.

Tell us your thinking behind the sample cards?

Simple - we wanted to create something that was easy to use, can be moved around the room and doesn't leave unsightly splodges of paint all over the wall. Feedback has been great, people love them.

The sample cards and paint tin labels were painstakingly printed to be a perfect match for the actual paint that goes up on the wall.

And your packaging is a little different too?

The boxes are eco-friendly. They are made from 100% recyclable card and are thicker than any other transport paint box, which means they should always arrive safely at a customer's door. This aspect alone took me over a year to get right.

We use triple-lock tins so you can reseal the tin and the lid locks back on itself. There should be no mess or spills with Little Knights!

What else do you specialise in?

I started in this industry 35 years ago colour matching. I then went on to become the youngest works manager of a UK chemical plant.

I was taught by a gentleman called Jack Butler, who used to write the Open University courses. He was my director and mentor for 19 years. He was very conscious about bad chemicals and I think that influenced me.

Our main company, Tetramass, does a great deal of research and development in the field of additives and coatings, and we make products for the NHS, schools and restaurants. I like to think that around 90% of the adult population in this country has been within a few inches of one of my coatings!

Press contacts

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