



# Money

SECTION B

Monday, March 13, 2006



By Alan S. Welner for USA TODAY

Paint professional: Gretchen Schaffler, modeling a couple of her tropical-inspired creations, founded Devine Paints.

Executive suite

Every Monday

## Woman succeeds with love of color

Personal palette becomes \$10 million-a-year upscale paint business. 7B

## Mom turns own line of hues into \$10M operation

By Sue Kirchhoff  
USA TODAY

PORTLAND, Ore. — Gretchen Schaffler wants American women to embrace corsets.

Not the kind you're probably thinking of.

Schaffler, creator of the high-end Devine Color brand of interior house paints, plans to expand her \$10 million annual business by introducing a line of custom window coverings she calls corsets: valances that hug the top of window frames and transform into full-length draperies by zipping on skirts of different hues and textures.

Her approach to the product illustrates why Schaffler has transformed in a few years from stay-at-home suburban mom to a businesswoman whose products have national reach. To get a precise fit, she hired an apparel company to shape the window treatments — making the corset moniker more than just a marketing ploy.

"We decided to tailor the window with color," Schaffler says, predicting this corset will liberate women who tell her they have few good choices beyond lower-end, unlined window panels and fussy fabric-store treatments that don't convey the modern look they crave.

### Style developed in Puerto Rico

Schaffler is a different type of entrepreneur. Rather than developing a product or service from the ground up, she has prospered — and hopes to grow — through licensing deals with established companies. What she brings to the table is a color sense born of a childhood in Puerto Rico, a background in art and a craving for intense hues that comes from living in the rainy Northwest. She also has a savvy sense of how to appeal to women, who make most decorating decisions and who, Schaffler says, see their homes as sanctuaries from the pressures of daily life.

"This is what I believe in — color can make relationships between all things, making them appear perfect, no matter how new or old," Schaffler writes in a soon-to-be released book.

Since 2000, Schaffler, whose core firm consists of three people, has had an exclusive agreement with Portland, Ore.-based Miller Paint to produce her Devine Color paint. Miller technicians developed a product that meets consistency and color guidelines set by Schaffler. Schaffler owns the brand; Miller owns the product formulations and merchandising materials.

"(Devine) gave us a position at the very premium end of the market. It was a designer line, and we

launched at a price point 30% above our top-selling interior paint at that time," says Steve Dearborn, CEO of Miller Paint.

In June, Schaffler will become a published author, releasing *When Color Sings*, a book about how to think about color. (The book, published by Ink-water Press, is black and white text, with no illustrations, to get people to visualize color, rather than an illustrated how-to guide.)

She has hired a branding firm, Sandstrom Design, to work on possible deals for Devine hues and wants to design a line of custom carpets.

Schaffler, who already has 25 affiliated color consultants, is trying to ramp up that part of her business through three-day training workshops in Portland, offered for a \$595 fee. She is also trying to secure bricks-and-mortar locations in Manhattan and other select markets where Devine paint doesn't yet have a retail presence.

"I align myself with people with skills I don't have, who can execute what I have to give," Schaffler says.

She also says "no" to marketing options that don't convey the sophisticated sense she aims to project, such as branding a line of nail polish.

Schaffler, a petite 44-year-old, manages to remain crisp and professional even when using words like "yummy" and "sexy" to describe her products. She got into her current business more by accident than design.

After taking college courses in fashion, architecture and art, Schaffler graduated from Portland State University with a degree in graphic design. She worked as a sales rep for Bristol-Myers Squibb, quitting in the 1980s to stay at home with her daughters.

When her suburban friends began paying for expensive faux finishes that Schaffler thought looked like "badly bruised" walls, she began her own faux finishing and color consulting business, for residential and corporate clients.

She became frustrated wading through hundreds of commercial paint chips — only to pick a final color and have it look far different on the wall. She experimented with pigments and sought a paint company willing to take a chance on a new product. In 2000 she signed the 25-year licensing deal with Miller Paint, in which she provides color consulting and promotion services and it does the chemistry and manufacturing.

### Treating the home holistically

"The philosophy of treating the home holistically is what has made the business so successful," Schaffler says. "Everything I did was still back at (the perspective of) this suburban neighborhood, thinking, 'What are all these women looking for?'"

Dearborn says Miller is now selling about

300,000 gallons of Devine Color a year. The paint is sold at 430 dealers throughout most of the USA and Canada, and another 45 to 50 in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Paint can also be ordered online. The line represents about 5% of overall Miller business, and 12% to 15% of its interior paint sales.

(article continues on back page)



For USA TODAY

### About Gretchen Schaffler

Born: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Age: 44

Education: Graphic design, Portland State University

### About Devine Color

Headquarters: Lake Oswego, Ore.

Annual sales: \$10 million

Description: Produces high-end brand of paints and does color consulting. Branching out into new home-decorating products and services.

Source: Devine Color





Paint professional: Gretchen Schaffler, modeling a couple of her tropical-inspired creations, founded Devine Paints.

USA TODAY, continued

"We're about where we anticipated being at this point; we're higher in the Northwest," Dearborn says. "On the paint side, it's really about getting in-home color consultations done, and (Schaffler's) in the process of certifying in-house color consultants."

Devine is priced around \$37 a gallon, compared with \$25 for many other paints. It carries a smaller palette of colors than most other lines. However, Schaffler plans to introduce revolving color lines featured for 18 months at a time. The first "Pieces of Paradise" will be tropical colors, influenced by her native Puerto Rico.

### Mini-paint pouches for sampling

Devine is probably best known for one of Schaffler's earliest marketing moves: a mini-paint pouch containing a sample large enough to cover an 18-square-inch area. Consumers can get four pouches for \$16, rather than buying an entire quart to try an individual color. Schaffler calls the mini-pouch's success tactile as well as practical.

"There's nothing yummier than playing with a liquid bag of paint that may burst," she says. "Had we not had the (quality of the) paint to back it up this would have been nothing."

Further, rather than preprinted paint chips, Devine produces a sample book made up of daubs of paint so customers can see how a color looks. (The portfolio sells for \$23 — it's a break-even product.) Devine is displayed in paint, home decorating and other specialty stores in a case that looks like a piece of cherry wood furniture.

Karlyn Gedrose, a partner in Griffin and Gedrose Interior Design in Portland, specs Devine paint for many of her clients. "(Schaffler's) picked out paints that go together well and really work with the lack of sunshine here in the Northwest," Gedrose says.

But Gedrose adds that the limited palate means she doesn't use the line exclusively, saying she doesn't think Devine has enough whites or off-whites and, like other paint firms, not enough reds. She has heard Schaffler speak and seen the results of some of her color consulting jobs.

"She's probably a little more bold than I would be. I wouldn't say that's good or bad, it's just a difference in design," Gedrose says.

Linda Weston, president and executive director of the Oregon Entrepreneurs Forum, says another of Schaffler's key moves was to work with a firm, Miller Paint, with a good reputation in the Northwest.

Still, Devine doesn't have a retail presence in some top markets. That reflects both Schaffler's decision not to sell in big-box stores and the fact that many smaller paint stores see the product as competition. While Schaffler hopes to expand her color-consulting business, only three of the 13 students in her first color-consulting class received approval.

Devine does limited production, making only paint pouches and the paint sample book in-house at a warehouse space (painted a custom lime green that looks cheerful in rainy Oregon).

Asked the key to her success, Schaffler pauses for a minute, then says: "To not take 'no' for an answer. To just get out of bed, and say that I'm right. To always see myself as the person who wants this for themselves."



**"This is what I believe in — color can make relationships between all things, making them appear perfect, no matter how new or old."**

— Schaffler in soon-to be released book *When Color Sings*