

MERCURY PAINT: Last Can Standing



(L-R) Fred Tichner, Vice President; Jeff Berman, President; Daniel Berman, Co-founder; and Wyatt Tichner

Photograph by Jill Lotenberg

By Debra Hazel

“We’re a part of a lot of people’s homes—and they don’t even know it,” says Freddy Tichner, vice president of Brooklyn-based Mercury Paint Corp., which literally has covered the walls of tens of millions of square feet of New York’s largest residential, commercial and municipal facilities, not to mention a few landmarks and the Blue Line used for the runners in the New York City Marathon.

Founded in 1947 by Tichner’s wife’s grandfather, Joseph Berman along with sons Ben and Daniel, Mercury Paint has survived a massive industry-wide consolidation and is now New York’s largest independent paint manufacturer, providing paints and specialized coatings to both the public and private sector. Their paints have been used by some of the most high-profile commercial and residential buildings, educational institutions, hospitals, hotels, and most of the bridges and transit infrastructure in New York City.

The company manufactures a full range of products from

heavy-duty industrial maintenance coatings to the finest quality architectural finishes. Mercury’s specialized coatings can be found on scaffolds, parking lots, the Cyclone rollercoaster and Wonder Wheel at Coney Island, Citi Field and Yankee Stadium, as well as every traffic signal device in the five boroughs.

“What we do, no one else does,” Tichner says. “We take paint to a whole new level. We custom-design, formulate and manufacture coatings for virtually every application imaginable, including paint that can withstand temperatures of over 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit and even photoluminescent paint which will glow in the dark.”

Tichner was recruited 30 years ago by his father-in-law, along with company President Jeff Berman. Both Berman and Tichner have seen the industry transition from more than 60 independent New York City paint manufacturers to just one—Mercury.

“We are the last man standing, so to speak,” Tichner says.

“Some were bought by larger companies, some could not remain environmentally compliant, while others sold their facilities because their New York City real estate became so valuable.”

Mercury continues to manufacture 1.5 million gallons of paint in its East Flatbush facility, and distributes them through its various locations in Brooklyn, Bronx and Yonkers, as well as a host of independent retailers throughout the city.

“The changing times have required us to adapt and rethink our business model,” Berman says. “Previously our primary growth was through acquisition, having purchased Brooklyn-based Pyramid Paint Products, Bronx-based Amsterdam Color Works, and Yonkers’ Sapolin Paints in the last several years. Now with the industry consolidation, we have to distinguish ourselves from the dominant large national brands by providing quick turnaround times and products that consistently provide long-term durability and performance.”

Tichner attributes the firm’s ongoing success to dedicated customer service, and Mercury’s ability to manufacture special orders quickly. The larger national companies such as Sherwin-Williams

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and Benjamin Moore produce enormous large-batch inventory items very well, he notes, but fail when it comes to specialized small-batch products.

“That’s our niche,” says Berman. “While we can produce more than 7,500 gallons a day, we find ourselves making smaller sized specialty paints and colors for our customers. With quick turnaround times and ‘next-day delivery,’ we have captured additional market share among municipal and private sector contractor Customers.”

The company’s list of municipal clients include New York City’s Housing Authority, New York City Transit Authority, the city Department of Parks & Recreation, School Construction Authority, Department of Correction, Police Department and Department of Sanitation. Mercury also serves a tremendous number of property management firms and has been a part of such large residential complexes as Coop City in the Bronx, Starrrett City in Brooklyn and Rochdale Village in Queens. Both Tichner and Berman expect even more thanks to a recent partnership.

“Having signed a long-term exclusive manufacturing and distribution agreement with PPG Paints, the world’s largest coatings manufacturer, we are extremely excited about our future growth potential in the New York City marketplace. Although we are a recognized local manufacturer, known for our high-quality product and competitive pricing, we have found it difficult to be specified by the internationally recognized architects who automatically default to national brand manufacturers such as PPG,” Berman adds. “Our

new relationship with PPG puts us on every new construction project in NYC as well as other high-profile projects which we previously would never have been considered for.”

Other significant benefits to working with a local manufacturer such as Mercury Paint include preserving the environment. Thanks to Mercury’s Go Green program, a companywide commitment to reducing the impact of their products on the environment, there is a shared ongoing vision of being a recognized leader in the development and manufacture of sustainable products that preserve and protect the environment, Berman observes.

“The GO Green NY designation is Mercury Paint’s assurance that its environmentally friendly coatings meet and exceed the strictest industrial standards while reducing our carbon footprint,” Berman adds. “Additionally, our local manufacturing and distribution facilities reduce transportation-related emissions, conserves natural resources, and supports our local New York community.”

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“Mercury paint covers,” he says. “You pay a little more but you save time and labor, the true costs associated with any painting project.”

Today, the Mercury brand is predominantly used for government specification projects and management company maintenance work, while new construction projects utilize the highly recognized PPG brand. This combination allows the company to weather the ups and downs of the real estate cycle: When new construction slows, maintenance and municipal work remain steady, Berman says.

The company had 30 employees and two locations when Tichner and Berman signed on. Today, the company operates five distribution facilities and employs 95, including Tichner’s son, making him the fourth generation at Mercury Paint. The company has made a priority of hiring locally, and has worked with the Doe Fund, a New York nonprofit organization helping formerly homeless men and women return to independence.

“If you don’t give back to the community that has supported your success, you’re doing something wrong,” Berman says. “We are proud to be a New York City-based company, employing New Yorkers and never forgetting our roots.”

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