

CONSUMER REPORTS



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Olympic Premium and Benjamin Moore Aura have lower VOC levels than other interior paints Consumer Reports tested and did a good job in tests.

Tests reveal surprises about paints

Green is hot for paint companies, according to the editors of Consumer Reports — and they're not talking about color. "Good for your family, better for our world," proclaims the Freshaire Choice label. "0 percent Toxic. 100 percent Smart," Mythic Paint says. "An ideal choice for rooms such as nurseries," Sherwin-Williams suggests. CR explains that allowable levels of VOCs, or volatile organic compounds, for paints and products such as aerosol air fresheners, carpets, and furniture have been toughened because VOCs contribute to ozone and smog formation and are linked to respiratory illnesses and memory impairment. And claims by many manufacturers have grown bolder as they market to an audience more familiar with and perhaps more receptive to buying green goods. So CR shook things up in its report on water-based interior paints by measuring the VOC content of finishes that makers maintain have no VOCs and several high scorers that are marketed with no special claims. Their tests detected VOCs in every paint, though none exceeded any applicable government limits, and some paints had lower levels than others. The top paints in CR's ratings had among the highest claimed VOC levels, including Behr Premium Plus Enamel (Home Depot) \$24 per gallon, low-luster, and \$22 flat; and Benjamin Moore Regal semigloss, \$45. Lowering VOC levels can affect performance. Still, some no- and low-VOC paints did well in CR's tests. The top low-VOC finishes were Benjamin Moore Aura, \$57, and True Value Easy Care, \$25, both low-luster; flat-finish Olympic Premium (Lowe's), \$17, a CR Best Buy; and in the semigloss category, Sears Best Easy Living Ultra, \$25, another CR Best Buy. Overall score primarily includes a paint's hiding performance, surface smoothness, and resistance to staining, scrubbing, gloss change, sticking, mildew, and fading. VOC level does not factor into CR's overall score.

Focus on VOCs

Federal VOC limits are now set at 250 grams per liter (g/l) for flat paints and 380 g/l for others. Some states and regions have lowered the VOC levels for paints that can be legally sold in their areas. California's standards are stringent: 150 g/l for nonflat finishes and 100 g/l for flat. Even tougher is the 50 g/l level for all finishes set by California's South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), around Los Angeles. The Environmental Protection Agency hopes to propose new federal VOC regulations in May, with a targeted effective date in 2011.

Turn to **Tests**/Page B7



Shoot yourself

To some, the Quik Pod is a nefarious device used for discouraging human interaction while traveling. To others, it's a stick to which you can attach your camera to take fairly steady and flattering self-portraits on the go. The basic Quik Pod — essentially a monopod with a handle — costs \$34.95 and includes a clip, wrist strap, carrying bag and a bubble level to ensure your shots have a flat horizon. A new, heavier, 4-foot digital single-lens reflex model for larger cameras is also available for \$49.99. Both can be found at quikpod.com. The standard model extends to 18 inches and closes to 7.5 inches. It weighs 3.5 ounces and attaches to any camera with a standard tripod adapter. The company's Web site suggests that the Quik Pod and its bigger cousin, the Quik Pod DSLR, are helpful for vacation photos and for taking snaps over crowds at a sporting event or concert. While there's nothing quite like asking a stranger to take your photo in front of a bubbling fountain in a distant, sun-dappled piazza, sometimes it's easier just to whip out a big stick and snap away while letting the natives enjoy their own afternoon reveries.

— New York Times

ENTERTAINMENT & LIFESTYLE

Demystifying the monster

Lifelong battle with epilepsy spurs Westminster woman to write children's book

By Elaine Thompson
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WESTMINSTER — Danielle M. Rocheford vividly remembers her first epileptic seizure at age 4 while playing by herself on a swingset outside the family's home on Long Island. The feeling was "weird," she said, one that she had never felt before.

"I remember telling my parents what it felt like," she said. "It was a very strong feeling of fear as if a monster was sneaking up behind me. It was a tingling, light feeling, but it went up and down my back, almost like when you get a chill." She was also rendered speechless.

During her early years when she felt this sensation, which she later learned was an aura, or a symptom that a more serious seizure could occur, she would tell her mother that she felt funny.

Mrs. Rocheford, now married and the mother of a 7-year-old son, recently wrote a children's book that explains her experiences with epilepsy. The book, "Mommy, I Feel Funny," hit the bookstores this month.

Mrs. Rocheford said she wrote the book because there were no books about epilepsy that were written at a child's level when she was growing up.

"Although I understood it, my classmates and their parents didn't. It wasn't really a topic spoken about because it was kind of unknown. Even today, this is something that so many people still don't understand," she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that about 2.5 million people in the U.S. have epilepsy. About 150,000 people, mostly children and older adults, develop the neurological

Turn to **Children's book** /Page B7



Danielle M. Rocheford holds "Mommy, I Feel Funny," a children's book she wrote that explains her experiences with epilepsy.

T&G Staff/RICK CINCLAIR

RECIPE of the day

Roasted asparagus with spring onions and sun-dried tomatoes

- 1 1/2 pounds asparagus, bottoms trimmed
- 2 bunches scallions, ends trimmed
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, plus 1 tablespoon of oil from the jar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Start to finish: 25 minutes (10 minutes active); servings: 4. Heat the oven to 450 degrees. In a large bowl, toss the asparagus and scallions with the oil from the sun-dried tomatoes. Transfer to a baking sheet and arrange in an even layer. Season with salt and pepper. Roast for 7 minutes. Stir the vegetables and roast until tender and slightly browned, about another 5 minutes. Sprinkle with chopped sun-dried tomatoes and toss to combine. Serve immediately or at room temperature. Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 94 calories; 36 calories from fat; 4 grams fat (1 gram saturated; 0 grams trans fats); 0 milligrams cholesterol; 11 grams carbohydrate; 5 grams protein; 5 grams fiber; 161 milligrams sodium.

— The Associated Press



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Asparagus not only is a pleasant and affordable harbinger of spring, it does great things for a healthy diet.

'Savage' curiously lacking in energy

By Paul Kolas
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE REVIEWER

SOUTHBRIDGE — Gateway Players' lackadaisical production of John Patrick's "The Curious Savage" saved the best for last Friday night.

Until then we waded through a semi-engaging "comedy" about quaintly eccentric characters at a 1950s sanatorium, whose lives are animated by the arrival of one Ethel P. Savage (Rebecca Robinson). She's a very rich widow who's spent her leisure time tossing the family fortune into the winds of charity, rather than bequeathing it to her pampered, greedy stepchildren.

Thinking their stepmother crazy and determined to get their hands on \$10 million in negotiable bonds she's hidden from them, they've committed her to The Cloisters, where she finds herself surrounded by a strange lot with issues of their own.

Hannibal (Ray Petrelli) thinks he's a master violinist. He's not. Florence (Sue Adams) substitutes a Raggedy Ann doll for her dead son, John Thomas. Mrs. Paddy (Linda Bouthillier) is a seascape painter who intermittently bursts out with a vituperative litany of everything she hates. Jeffrey (Scott Metras) is a WWII veteran ravaged by emotional scars of guilt that have manifested themselves into imaginary facial scars he covers with his right hand. Fairy May (Gina Rondeau) masks her painful insecurity with a childlike, developmentally arrested view of the world.

As for the internecine war

over the proceeds of the family will, Mrs. Savage's two stepsons and stepdaughter are your standard issue stereotypes. Titus (Luke Robinson) is a fatuous senator more concerned about his public image than his mother's welfare. Samuel (Billy Bolster) is an incompetent judge who has no right to put on pompous airs considering how many of his rulings have been overturned. Then there is high-maintenance Lily Belle (Joni Metras), a jet-setting socialite who has eight husbands on her marital resumé.

This may sound like a riot on the written page, but it plays out with whimsical fatigue on the intimate Gateway stage.

Patrick's play can't decide if it wants to be a comedy or a lightweight drama, and under Mary Gahagan's cautious direction, it ends up being too little of either.

Few of the characters are genuinely interesting. Fairy May is an exception, thanks to Rondeau's singularly offbeat performance. She makes us want to know more about Fairy — why she is the way she is. We do know that Fairy is supposed to be physically plain, but there's a glow in Rondeau's giddy personality that negates that notion. She swats away Fairy's insecurities with the wand of jocund optimism.

And even though Rebecca Robinson is far too young to play the role of the elderly Mrs. Savage, she gives a surprisingly assured and polished portrait of a matriarch determined to have her way, mollifying our skepticism with a mature composure, sense of humor and dignity that,

THE CURIOUS SAVAGE

★★
Written by John Patrick, directed by Mary Gahagan, presented by Gateway Players Theatre Inc. at the Gateway Arts Barn, 111 Main St., Southbridge. Performances Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. Tickets: \$12 adults, \$10 seniors & children 17 and younger. Call (508) 764-4531 or visit www.gatewayplayers.org. With Rebecca Robinson, Gina Rondeau, Joni Metras, Luke Robinson, Billy Bolster, Sue Adams, Ray Petrelli, Linda Bouthillier, Scott Metras, Kristin Bergman, Frank Franconeri and Alison Didonato.

over the course of the play, seems to gain a quietly steady momentum.

Of the three spoiled siblings, Luke Robinson registers most strongly as Titus. Frank Franconeri invests the part of Dr. Emmett, the Cloisters' attending physician, with a casual believability lacking in Kristin Bergman's generally nondescript and stiff performance as the nurse, Miss Wilhelmina.

The likable Petrelli is almost too laid back as Hannibal, seemingly at home with the production's languid pace.

One can only wonder at the cause of Mrs. Paddy's misanthropic attitude toward the world, but Bouthillier's periodic jeremiads do amuse, and she has the single most poignant line in the show. Scott Metras generates some empathy for Samuel's psychic wounds, but Adams seems adrift as to what to do with her character. We don't really know what to feel for her Florence until the final, revelatory, perfect world tableau. It's too bad we have to wait more than two hours for that lovely payoff.

Bernstein's heirs donate studio items to Indiana U.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — The family of Leonard Bernstein has donated items from the late composer's Connecticut studio — including a conducting stool from the Vienna Philharmonic believed to have been used by Johannes Brahms — to Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

The donation, announced by the school yesterday, also includes the conductor-composer's rocking chair, 39 Grammy nomination plaques, batons, a pencil and ruler and blank manuscript paper.

"There is nothing like standing in front of Leonard Bernstein's standup composing desk with blank paper, visualizing how he might have composed," said Phil Ponella, who directs the school's music library.

The collection also includes a signed piece of the Berlin Wall that Bernstein received while in the German city leading an international orchestra during its collapse, said Melissa Korzec, a spokeswoman for the school.

"These gifts are priceless," she said.

Bernstein, who died in 1990 at age 72, was the composer of works including "West Side Story," the film score for "On the Waterfront" and the music for the ballet "Fancy Free."

The Jacobs school plans to recreate Bernstein's studio and use it as a teaching studio for



The late Leonard Bernstein at work on sheet music in this file photo.

guest artists. Some items from the collection also will go on display this spring.

The Fairfield, Conn., studio, along with one in New York City, was where Bernstein wrote during the last 30 years of his life, composing works such as his "Mass," his third symphony "Kaddish," the ballet "Dybbuk" and the opera "A

Quiet Place." Bernstein had a long-standing relationship with the Jacobs School of Music that began in the early 1970s. He spent time on campus with students and faculty and in 1987 established a scholarship in his name at the school.

Children's book demystifies epilepsy

Children's book / From Page B6

condition each year.

Mrs. Rocheford had her first convulsion when she was 7 months old. She had a fever of 105 degrees, and doctors were unable to bring it down for close to five days. The high fever triggered the convulsion. The first epileptic seizure followed at age 2, though she doesn't remember it.

The frequency of seizures she had throughout her youth varied, depending on the amount of stress or excitement in her life. When she hit puberty, the seizures would cluster around her menstrual cycle. Ninth grade, she said, was the absolute worst time of her life.

She transferred from a private school to a public school, where she had less close daily communication with teachers. She spent all but eight weeks of that year in the hospital after the medicine she was taking lost its therapeutic affect. Doctors eventually found a combination of medicines that helped lessen the frequency of her seizures. Only three were grand mal seizures, a more severe type that renders the person unable to control what their body is doing. A popular myth is that people having a grand mal seizure can swallow their tongue.

"It's not true," said Mrs. Rocheford. "You're not supposed to put anything in their

Even today, this is something that so many people still don't understand.

DANIELLE M. ROCHEFORD
SPEAKING OF EPILEPSY

mouth. The clenching of the person's teeth can tighten so hard, they could bite something off and it can go down their throat." Mrs. Rocheford graduated from Regis College in Weston in 1991 with a BA in communications, and got married two years later. Her new doctor at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston suggested a new medication and that she begin thinking about possibly having brain surgery to stop the seizures.

She said she felt stripped of her independence when she was not permitted to drive for six years because of her epilepsy.

On Aug. 19, 1996, she had a 10-hour operation to remove a golf ball-sized part of her left temporal lobe. Ever since the operation, she has had no seizures. One year after the surgery, she stopped taking medication and consequently was permitted to drive.

"My goal then was to regain my independence and be able to have the opportunity to have a family. I didn't want to have to depend on somebody else watch

me give my child a bath, or take me to my child's doctors appointments."

In 2001, a son, Cameron, was born to Mrs. Rocheford, and her husband, David, a lawyer in Leominster.

"I wanted to take care of myself first," Mrs. Rocheford said, explaining why she waited so long after her surgery to have her son. She said that after reading her book, her son said he couldn't believe that she had gone through such rough times. "He's also very proud, and he wants me to read it to his second-grade class at Westminster Elementary School," she said.

Her main goal now is to get the book into the hands of doctors, hospitals, school nurses, libraries and foundations and organizations that focus on epilepsy.

The book costs \$12.95 and is available on the Amazon and Barnes & Noble Web sites, as well as Mrs. Rocheford's Web site: www.mommyifeelfunny.com. She said a portion of the proceeds will be distributed to charities that focus on children with epilepsy. She has started a program on her Web site, Awakened Voices, which invites people, particularly children with epilepsy, to submit short stories, poems or drawings to express their feelings about epilepsy. She hopes to publish the collection and use all the proceeds for epilepsy-related foundations to try to help find a cure.

Tests reveal surprises about interior paints

Tests/From Page B6

From a health perspective, the difference between paints with, say, a VOC level of 35 g/l and those with two or three times that amount is hard to quantify. But experts CR spoke with agree that using paints with lower VOC levels is a prudent choice.

Film fest teams up with Museum of Modern Art

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEWPORT, R.I. — The New-

is partnering with the Museum of Modern Art in New York to protect old films.

The festival announced at a fundraiser Saturday it would give \$10,000 to the museum for its preservation program.

MoMA produces an annual exhibition that presents films it has helped rescue from cinematic oblivion.

This year's film fest in June will feature a series based on the past six years of MoMA's work to archive and protect older movies.

How to Choose

● Consider one-coat ability. Paints that cover well with a single coat can save money and time, so CR's Ratings stress one coat hiding.

● Use the right type. Low-luster paints provide a durable, easy-to-clean finish for most surfaces. High-sheen semigloss finishes work best on windows, doors, and trim. Flat paints are ideal for low-traffic areas because they stain more easily. Also note that most paints are subpar in at least one characteristic, such as fading. For a sunny area, choose the Benjamin Moore Regal flat, \$24, over

the Sherwin-Williams Harmony low-luster, \$39.

● Plan the project. In a survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, 31 percent of respondents said they were very aggravated in part by changes in plans and by not having the right tools. To find the perfect hue, buy sample jars of the paints under consideration and apply them to a wall to see how they look. And gather all the items needed to do the job before starting the work.

Visit the Consumer Reports Web site at www.consumerreports.org.

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