

## CASE STUDY: THE MANNEQUIN GALLERY, PACOIMA, CA



Some of The Mannequin Gallery's most popular high-end mannequins are created exclusively for top-name boutiques, part of custom-designed lines in either white or other solid colors with a high-gloss finish.

**Walt Wilkey had no idea he'd one day turn his art education into owning a gallery that caters to the needs of Hollywood's elite and the upper crust fashion retailers on Rodeo Drive and just about everywhere else. But that's exactly what happened.**

Actually, the husband and wife team of Wilkey (Artist-in-Residence and President) and Shelley Freeman (Vice President) who own and run The Mannequin Gallery in California, occupy a unique niche where art and commerce meet. They create, sell and rent mannequins, all kinds of mannequins, with an emphasis on some of the higher-end, custom types you're likely to find in today's tonier fashion boutiques, and even in movies and on TV.

Although they started from scratch concentrating on the retail market almost 20 years ago, fate intervened. Someone from Warner Brothers left a note on their door, inquiring about renting a few mannequins for a movie shoot. The rest is history. While they've continued to grow their retail business working for some of the best-known, high-end department stores and boutiques including Barney's, Ralph Lauren, Marc Jacobs and others around the world, some of their biggest customers are in the entertainment industry that literally surrounds them. Hollywood movie studios, TV production houses and advertising agencies account for a major portion of their business, with appearances in "Confessions of a Shopaholic," "Hotel for Dogs" and countless others. As Walt pointed out, "We do a lot of custom work for them, some of it highly stylized. It lets filmmakers avoid legal issues with rights and licensing, or populate the background of a scene with 'people' who really aren't. We even designed a retro series to simulate the look of nuclear-test-site mannequins left over from the '50s for "The Hills Have Eyes." Those almost creeped us out. You name it, we can create it."

Among his most popular high-end mannequins are custom-designed lines, highly stylized and often abstract—some of them created exclusively for top-name boutiques—with a high-gloss finish either in white or other solid colors, a look upscale retailers tend to prefer.

**The Mannequin Gallery also happens to be located in California's South Coast Air Quality Management District, home to some of the most stringent air quality rules on the planet.**

According to Walt, "We mostly use water-based latex paints for our various lines of stock mannequins. We used an oil-based for the custom high-gloss finish prized in our high-end custom lines. But when the most recent round of air quality rules were imposed—with even tighter VOC limits—that was no longer a viable choice. It was outlawed. We had to do something."

Enter Greg Saunders, representative of Annex Automotive Paint in Reseda, CA, an Axalta distributor and a key supplier for The Mannequin Gallery. "Walt told me he needed a high-quality, high-gloss paint that would meet the tough new ultra-low VOC content standards or his business could take a hit. The paint also had to be top quality with a hard, durable finish, able to withstand the handling mannequins experience. I told him we had something new that could work really well—Axalta™ Imron® Industrial Strength Ultra Low VOC Polyurethanes."

Although identified as an industrial coating, Axalta™ Imron® Industrial Strength is finding a broad range of new applications in industrial settings and beyond. At an ultra-low 0.3 lbs. per gallon, it could meet the district's tough low VOC limits with ease. But it also had performance and ease-of-use advantages that Walt's previous paint couldn't match.

"We decided to test Imron® IS to see how it would work before we committed to it," explained Walt. "It almost sounded too good to be true. The ultra low VOC was compelling, but it wasn't all we needed."



Thus began a six-month trial. From the beginning, The Mannequin Gallery found Imron® IS offered significant

benefits. "It was far easier to use than the polyurethane we had been working with," Walt explained. "For one thing, it was quick-dry—one coat and done—not three coats and a three-day wait for drying. That's important, not just in reducing production man-hours, but in meeting tight deadlines we get from the movie people. When they want something 'now,' they mean 'now.' With Imron® IS we get color and high-gloss in a single coat instead of base coat, color coat followed by clear coat. Talk about ease of use, that was a huge improvement. And, unlike our previous experience with clear coat, Imron® IS doesn't yellow over time. It's a deep, rich, solid color through and through with a high-gloss finish."



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What about durability? What about those hard knocks mannequins must silently endure in shipping, assembling, disassembling and shipping back again? Rapping his knuckles on a glossy, almost mirror-finished male mannequin standing nearby, Walt said, "This finish wears like iron. Like 'Ironman'. You can see why they call it Industrial Strength."

After more than two years of steady use, The Mannequin Gallery is a loyal Imron® IS user and a believer. Says Greg, "Imron® IS is that ultra low VOC product more and more people are looking for. It's a no-brainer."

As for Walt, he's convinced. "Imron® has exceptional quality, color purity and rich gloss that help differentiate our custom mannequins from everything else out there. That's a major competitive advantage in a market where great looks and style are absolutely critical."

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