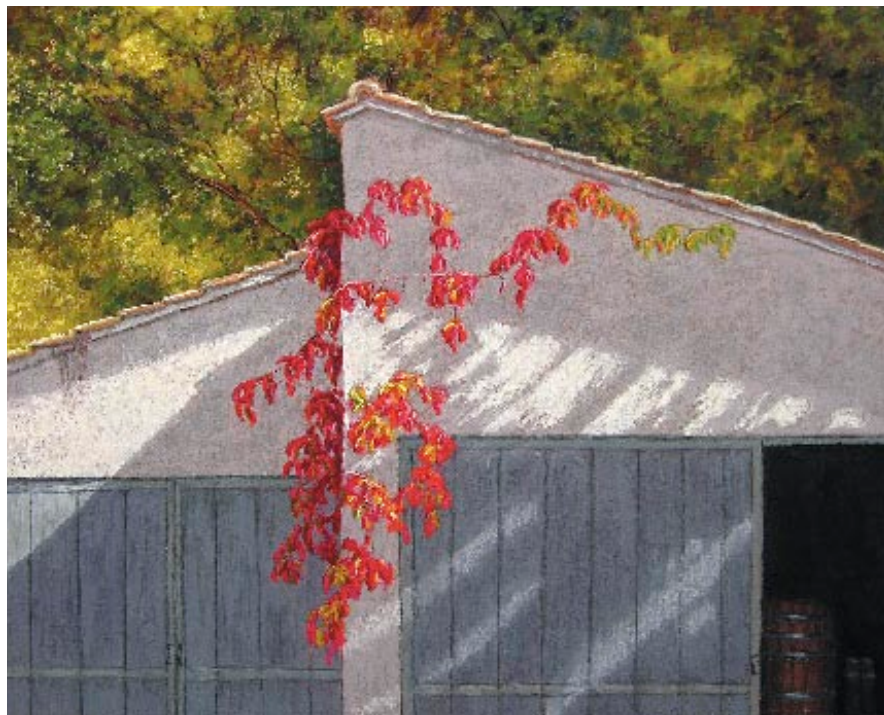


Support System

Select a pastel surface that best suits your working style.



The First Kiss of Fall (16x20) by Maggie Price was created on Richeson Premium Pastel Surface (terra cotta Gator Foam). Notice in the detail (above) how the texture of the surface adds to the quality of the stucco wall, and the terra cotta color of the surface gives the whole a warm glow.

Whether you're an experienced pastel artist or just getting started, choosing a surface for a painting has a lot to do with the final outcome. As the medium of pastel has continued to gain popularity over the last dozen or so years, the number of surfaces available to the artist has grown steadily. Here are some of the important factors to consider as you sort out the options.

Generally, pastel surfaces can be grouped into two broad categories: smooth and textured. Smoother surfaces may only allow two or three layers of pastel, but if you like to work quickly, that may be sufficient for your needs. The smooth surfaces also work well for highly detailed work or subjects requiring fine lines, which is why they've long been a favorite of portrait and still-life artists.

Textured surfaces encourage layering, and some of them work well for

those artists who like to begin with an underpainting. While fine lines and detail are by no means impossible on textured surfaces, some surfaces work better than others for those purposes.

Many surfaces come in a variety of colors, and the color you choose has a profound effect on the resulting painting. You can choose a color that will show throughout, creating harmony and balance, or you can select a contrasting color that will add excitement and energy. If you like to start your pastel painting with a preliminary underpainting, you'll probably want to start with white or a very light color.

Underpaintings give a new dimension to pastel paintings. Some surfaces will accept an underpainting in many media, ranging from watercolor to gouache to oil stains. Some artists like to lay down a layer of pastel and wash it with water, alcohol, mineral spirits,

acetone or Turpenoid. Bear in mind that certain surfaces are well-suited for those approaches, while others can't be touched with liquid or only with certain liquids.

The durability of the paper is another factor. If you tend to rub, scrub, erase and generally abuse the surface, you obviously want something tough enough to take it. If you have a light touch and a delicate approach, the heavy-duty stuff is probably wasted on you.

Trying a lot of different surfaces will lead you to those most suited to your working style, and the experimentation may push you in surprising directions as well. Even if you've already got a favorite or two, take a look at some of the exciting new surfaces recently released. If you ever find yourself blocked or uninspired, there's nothing like trying out a new product to revitalize your creative energies.

Smoother Surfaces

Canson Mi-Teintes Paper: Available in a range of 42 colors, this has long been a popular choice, especially for figure drawing and portraits. It has a vellum-like texture on one side and a flat surface on the reverse, and artists generally have a strong preference for one side or the other; the rougher side can take more layers of pastel but the pattern of the paper may show through. It's a heavy, 98-lb. sheet, 60 percent cotton. Unless you use fixative on this surface, the number of layers is quite limited. It's available in individual sheets that measure 19x25, and considered light-resistant and acid-free.

Rives BFK Printmaking Paper: This is a French mould-made paper (100 percent cotton rag, neutral pH) and is buffered. It has a smooth, vellum-like surface, and it's available in several colors. It can take a surprising number of pastel layers. Extremely soft pastels may fill the limited tooth rather quickly, however, so you may need to apply fixative to continue layering. It's a tough surface that can handle erasures, and it comes with natural deckles and tear deckles.

Somerset Velvet Paper: Similar to Rives in feel, the Somerset Velvet is a

mould-made paper (100 percent cotton, neutral pH) with a softly textured finish. The soft surface is very receptive to pastel and excellent for blending, but isn't at all like a velour paper. Like the Rives BFK, this surface's tooth can fill quickly, but an application of fixative will solve that. Somerset Velvet is available in 22x30 sheets, in four colors.

Aquarelle Watercolor Paper: Although this paper has a limited tooth, it's somewhat textural. It's a mould-made paper (acid-free, chlorine-free) and made of 100 percent

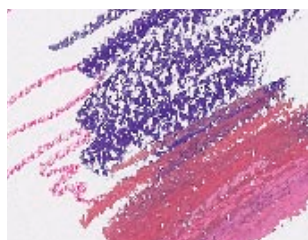
Smoother Surfaces



Canson Mi-Teintes, smooth side: A fine line made with a pastel pencil holds up well, while a single application of soft pastel nearly covers the surface.



Canson Mi-Teintes, textured side: A line made with a pastel pencil breaks up due to the texture, while the application of two layers of pastel has still not completely filled in the texture.



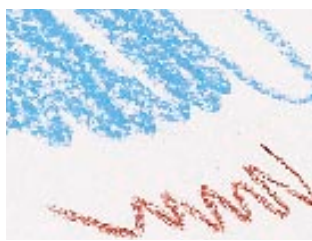
Somerset Velvet, white: This smooth surface holds a line quite well. A single layer of soft pastel (purple) doesn't fill the tooth; two additional layers (red and pink) cover well and still leave room for further layering.



Somerset Velvet, black: While the paper is the same, changing the color of a surface affects the pastel's appearance. The pastel pencil line, the single layer and multiple layers of color all "pop" from the background color.



Rives BFK Printmaking Paper: A thin line holds up well, and one layer of soft pastel covers the surface almost completely.



Aquarelle Watercolor Paper: Both a pastel pencil line and a swatch of color show the texture of the paper. Additional layers could still be applied without filling the tooth.



Multimedia Artboard: This surface isn't as smooth as it appears at first touch. Note the breaking-up of the pastel pencil line; a single layer of pastel doesn't fill the tooth. Even after additional color is layered on, there's still visible grain.



Hahnemühle Velour Paper: Note that even a fine line made with a pastel pencil "bleeds" out to a soft edge; a single pass of color laid on with a medium-soft pastel has fuzzy edges and a soft look.

Special Report

cotton fiber. Some artists give it a light sanding with a fine-grit sandpaper to rough up the finish. Others apply a mixture of pumice and gesso (or use the Art Spectrum Colourfix Primer, available in a range of colors, or clear) to give it a somewhat sanded feel. Without any preparation, it will take only a limited number of layers, but is a good choice if you like to begin with water-color for a mixed-media approach.

Multimedia Artboard: Available in black or white, for either oil or water-based media, this surface takes a surprising number of pastel layers, and the rigid board is easy to handle, especially for *plein air* work.

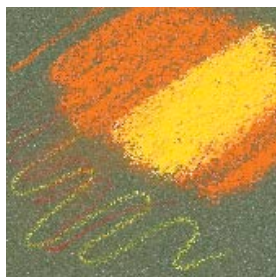
Hahnemühle Velour Paper: Available in several colors, this soft, velvety surface takes softer pastels well, but in limited layers (usually requiring some

fixative). Available in a range of colors in 19x27 sheets, it's acid-free and archival. The velour surface is produced by applying inert synthetic fibers onto a backing sheet. Velour holds pastel well and is very appropriate for soft edge work due to the nature of the longer fibered velour surface. Also available as boards, the velour paper is applied to an acid-free, 4-ply conservation board. It's well-suited for artists looking for a very soft effect without fine lines or hard edges.

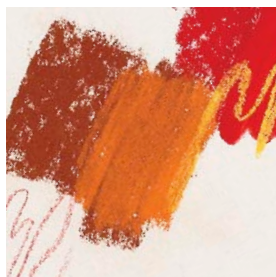
Textured Surfaces



Townsend Pastel Paper: More textural than it first appears, this surface holds a fairly good line made with a pastel pencil. A single layer of color doesn't fill the tooth, nor do two subsequent layers.



Schmincke Sansfix: Fine lines remain crisp without breaking up; the surface is well-covered by the soft pastel, but allows for additional layering.



Wallis Sanded Pastel Paper: Fine lines and hard edges are fairly easy to achieve, and the paper will take many layers of pastel. At right, the red pastel has been washed with Turpeneoid; the yellow scribble was applied after the surface was dry to show the remaining tooth.



Sennelier La Carte: The textured surface still holds a line, and multiple layers of pastel cover well, but there's still room to add more before filling the tooth.



Art Spectrum Colourfix: Smoothly sanded and textural, the surface holds a line nicely and allows numerous layers of pastel.



Ampersand Pastelbord: The textured surface allows fine lines, layering and underpainting techniques. The pastel on the right has been washed with Turpeneoid, dried and a streak of yellow across it reveals the tooth remaining.

Sample surfaces provided by Dakota Pastels (www.dakotapastels.com)

Textured Surfaces

Townsend Pastel Paper: This surface is produced by applying a coating to Rives BFK 100 percent cotton, 280-gram paper. A mixture of two grades of silica, methyl cellulose, liquid adhesive, chalk, whiting and water is hand-brushed onto the paper. Several passes are made to achieve a smooth, even surface, much like very fine sandpaper. The coating is clear, with coloration coming from the BFK sheet colors. The Townsend paper is archival and will handle light water-based washes as well as solvent-based washes.

Sennelier La Carte Pastel Card: Often referred to simply as "pastel card," this surface comes in a range of colors. Its somewhat toothy surface is made of a pH-neutral vegetable fiber, affixed to a firm support and allows numerous layers of pastel. The binder used to produce the surface is susceptible to liquid; even a spot of water will cause the fiber surface to come off, so it's not a good choice if you like to begin with an underpainting. Blending and rubbing work well, and fine lines are easy to achieve. The surface is available in 14 colors, in 19½ x25½ sheets.

Schmincke Sansfix: With a texture similar to sanded paper, this surface comes in a range of colors. It allows generous layering and can take a sharp line. Though alcohol washes may cause the surface to become sticky,



Pecos in Winter (18x26), by Fred Miller, was painted on Art Spectrum Colourfix—a sanded paper.

it's a water-resistant surface. The archival paper is available in six colors, in 19½x25½ sheets.

Art Spectrum Colourfix Sanded Paper: The prepared sheets come in a range of colors; the colored texture is applied to a paper leaving a thin white edge all around. This surface takes many layers and will accept wet media underpaintings. This company also sells a textured pigment in jars for application to your own surfaces; it comes in a range of colors, as well as clear.

Wallis Sanded Pastel Paper: Available in white or a neutral gray, this smooth-textured sanded surface has an even grain and will accept many, many layers of pastel. If your painting doesn't work out, the pastel can be washed off and the paper re-used. It can be underpainted with wet media, from oil washes to watercolor, or pastel (applied and washed with various liquids). Because its base is watercolor paper, it's archival and pH neutral. The paper comes in 9x12 or 12x18 pads, and in sheets and rolls in two grades. While both are fully archival, the professional grade

is based on a lighter weight of watercolor paper than the museum grade.

Ampersand Pastelbord: A thin sheet of material similar to Masonite is the backing for this textured board (available in a number of colors). Pastels

seem particularly brilliant when applied to this surface, which allows layering and wet media underpaintings. The rigid board is an advantage in framing, since it doesn't have to be matted, and it comes in a nice range of standard sizes.

Glossary of Terms

Tooth refers to the texture of the paper. For pastel artists, the more tooth a surface has, the more layers of pastel it will hold. Once the tooth is filled, no more pastel can be applied (without applying fixative).

Surface usually means the type of paper or board the artist is using. Surfaces include papers, boards, panels, etc. Sometimes, surface may refer to a coating applied to a paper or a board, but the whole is then also referred to as a surface.

Board generally means a rigid surface, rather than a paper surface. In

some cases, paper may be mounted to a board.

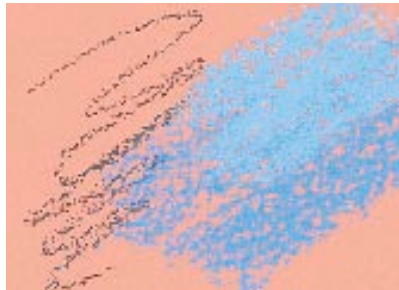
Archival, acid-free and **pH neutral** all refer to the relative acid content of a surface. Generally, if a manufacturer says a paper is archival, it means the paper is acid-free and will last longer than a paper that isn't acid-free. The pH term refers to the relative acid or alkaline content; a pH factor of 7 or higher is considered acid-free. Newsprint, for example, is highly acidic and yellows or deteriorates quickly. You want your paintings to last, so look for the words *acid-free*, *pH neutral* and *archival*.

Special Report

New or Improved



UART: Ersta paper fans will feel at home on this updated surface, which allows delicate lines, layering and underpainting. The swatch on the right was washed with Turpenoid, creating a smooth fill of the surface without destroying the tooth.



Sabretooth: The textured surface breaks up a pastel pencil line, but allows multiple layers of pastel to build without filling the tooth.

New or Improved

UART: This is the “new generation” of Ersta sanded paper, long a favorite of pastel artists for its smooth, sanded surface. While the “old” Ersta wasn’t pH neutral, the UART paper is. It’s available in four grits, from P400 to P800, in sheets from 9x12 to 27x40, and in rolls 56 inches wide and up to 50 yards long. It’s a little lighter in color than the old Ersta, but will take layers and layers of pastel, as well as underpaintings washed with Turpenoid or other solvents.

Saint-Armand Sabretooth pastel paper: Sabretooth has been around for some time, but this surface has been revised recently. It’s a rag-based paper made in Canada—archival, acid-free, lightly textured and internally sized.



Lavender No. 4, France (12x16) by Urania Christy Tarbet was painted on Ampersand Pastelbord, a textured surface rigid enough to frame without matting.




Rug Sale, Marbella (11x14), by Maggie Price, was created on Rtistx pastel board.

The acrylic-based sand coating is applied with a roller to achieve an even textured surface. The coating will take both water and solvent-based washes, and can withstand vigorous scrubbing and reworking. It's available in nine colors in sheets of 22x30 or packs of four 15x20 sheets of a single color.

Colourfix Supertooth: Art Spectrum's Colourfix Supertooth painting boards have a more aggressively toothy surface than the standard Art Spectrum Colourfix papers. Supertooth is made by coating 500-gram, acid-free, archival watercolor boards with a specially formulated clear acrylic primer mixed with silica particles. The clear coating allows the natural warm white color of the board to show through, and the rigidity of the heavy-weight board provides a stout working surface. The surface of this paper can hold many layers of pastel, and can be underpainted with any medium.

Richeson Premium Pastel Surface: This new pastel surface is produced on three different substrates: 140 lb. paper, 1/8-inch hardboard and 3/16-inch Gatorfoam board. It's an aggressively toothy surface, and will hold many layers of pastel. It accepts liquids for

underpainting in most any medium, or any kind of liquid wash over pastel. After applying an underpainting—and using very soft pastels—you can still get quite a few layers on the surface without filling the tooth. The surfaces are available in seven colors and in a range of sizes. The Gatorfoam board and the Hardboard can easily be framed without mats, and their rigid surfaces make them ideal for *plein air* work.

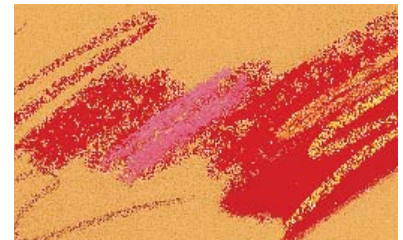
Rtistx Pastel Board: This new pastel surface is fused to a lightweight, rigid polyvinyl board. It comes in two grades: 240 (heavier grit, in taupe) and 280 (not as coarse, in white, and often used for oils as well as pastels). The surface is acid-free with a pH-neutral coating. Sizes range from 8x10 to 18x24. The manufacturer recommends not using alcohol or acetone with underpaintings, though Turpenoid or water work well. Like other board surfaces, you can frame without mats. 

Maggie Price (www.maggiepriceart.com) is a contributing writer for *The Pastel Journal*, a pastel artist and teacher, and the co-founding editor of *The Pastel Journal*. Her book, *Painting With Pastels*, was released last year from North Light Books.

The Newest Surfaces



Colourfix Supertooth: Lines and layering reveal the heavy tooth of this paper. The red swatch on the right was washed with Turpenoid prior to applying the yellow stroke.



Richeson Premium Pastel Surface: Fine lines with a pastel pencil break up a little, while strokes with soft pastel show the texture. Layers upon layers can be applied to this surface. The red swatch on the right was washed with Turpenoid for a smooth covering of the surface without filling the tooth.



Rtistx Pastel Board: The textured surface can handle numerous layers of pastel, though the color covers quickly and easily. The swatch of red on the right was washed with Turpenoid and dried before the pink stroke was applied.