

PREPARING PAPER FOR RED CHALK

HISTORY OF THE MEDIUM

As evidenced by the magnificent Paleolithic artwork that adorns the walls of the caves of Lascaux, mankind has been using mineral pigments to produce artwork for over 16,000 years. Our artist ancestors discovered that, in addition to being a joy to use in drawing and painting, these materials were much more permanent than dye-based pigments.



A 16,000-year-old cave painting, Lascaux, France

Red chalk is a naturally occurring mineral made up of hematite (iron oxide) suspended in clay. Although red chalk has been used since the dawn of humanity, it wasn't until the Renaissance that it became popular to draw with red chalk on paper.



Natural Red Chalk

Leonardo da Vinci was the first to demonstrate the amazing potential of this humble mineral. He produced a large number of magnificent drawings with red chalk. Michelangelo, Raphael, Rubens, and many others followed Leonardo's lead. In this chapter, we will follow in the footsteps of the old masters and learn to draw with the modern-day equivalents of red chalk.



Horse Study by Leonardo da Vinci (Red Chalk on Paper)

MATERIALS

It's difficult to find a piece of natural red chalk with just the right mix of friability and hardness, so today, instead of using a hunk of rock dug out of the ground, we use red chalk's modern equivalents - conté crayon and colored pencil. When working in a larger scale, I use conté crayon or pastel pencils on print making paper like those made by Arches or Rives. But for producing smaller, finer drawings, I prefer to use hard colored pencils (Sanford Verithin pencils) on toned paper. The paper that I prefer is Twinrocker Calligraphy Cream or Yale hand-laid paper toned with dilute watercolor and sized with dilute amber shellac.



Toning and Sizing Materials

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PAPER, TONING, AND SIZING MATERIALS

- Twinrocker Yale or Calligraphy Cream Hand-laid Paper
- Yellow Ochre or Raw Sienna watercolor (used to tone the paper)
- Bulls Eye Shellac - Amber (used as a sizing)
- Denatured Alcohol (used to dilute the shellac)
- An 8-oz glass jar (an empty salsa jar works well)
- 1½" Flat Watercolor Brush
- A Small Plastic Scoop



Drawing, Blending, and Highlighting Tools

DRAWING MATERIALS

- 5 Sanford Verithin Colored Pencils – Terra Cotta – most of the drawing will be done with these pencils
- 1 Prismacolor Colored Pencil – Terra Cotta (used only for dark accents)
- 1 General's White Charcoal Pencil (used for highlights)
- Kneaded Eraser
- Ink Eraser – Faber Castell makes a good one
- Winsor & Newton Rathbone Filbert Bristle Brush #1 (for softening lines and shadows)
- A piece of masonite the same size or slightly larger than our piece of paper. This will be our drawing board.

PREPARATION

TONING THE PAPER

I have found it useful to tone the paper using dilute watercolor. In addition to

giving the paper some warmth and character, it also gives us a mid-value background from which to work. It's easier to establish shadows from a mid-tone than from a white background. It also makes highlights stand out.

Tone the paper using dilute watercolor – raw sienna or yellow ochre works well. Try to achieve a light to mid-value wash. It helps if the paper is attached to a board of some kind and tilted at a shallow angle (10-15 degrees). Using the 1½ flat watercolor brush, begin at the top by applying the watercolor in horizontal strokes and working your way down the page, never leaving a dry line behind. Don't be overly fussy, though. The goal is to make the paper look old. Variations in color and value are positive attributes, since they will make the drawing more visually interesting. Allow the paper to dry thoroughly before continuing.



Toning Paper with Dilute Watercolor

APPLYING SIZING

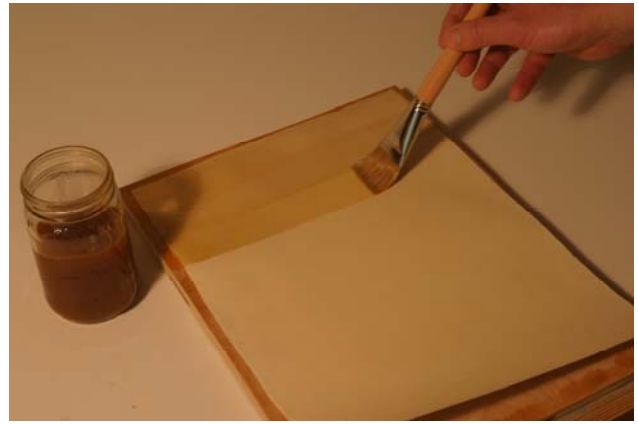
In order to get hard, waxy colored pencil to behave more like red chalk, we must change the properties of the paper's surface slightly. We need to make it more receptive to the pencil so that the particles of pigment disperse and float on the surface rather than sticking onto the paper. We can accomplish this by applying a coating of dilute amber shellac.

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Shellac is made by dissolving a resin secreted by an insect (the lac beetle) in alcohol. Fortunately, all you need to do is buy a quart can of amber shellac and solvent at your local home improvement store.

DILUTING THE SHELLAC

Since we don't want the coating of shellac to be too heavy, we need to dilute it considerably with alcohol. Denatured is typical used but quite poisonous. **I prefer isopropyl or pure grain alcohol.** In a well ventilated place, combine one part amber shellac with five or six parts denatured alcohol. A small plastic scoop works well for this purpose. Denatured alcohol is a potentially hazardous material, so please heed the warning printed on its container.



Applying diluted shellac



Mixing dilute shellac

Using the same technique you used to apply the watercolor wash, apply the diluted shellac to the paper. Clean the brush with denatured alcohol. Again, allow the paper to dry thoroughly.