

# Setting up a Usable Palette©

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A usable palette is setup in a manner that allows you to move quickly from water to palette to paper so you do not lose valuable painting time searching for a color on your palette. You want the colors arranged following the color wheel, with the name of each pigment visible so you can quickly identify its characteristics.

The best time to setup a new palette is when you are exploring a new set of watercolors. You are excited to try each color when it is freshly purchased so why not have a palette for each brand of paint you explore? I will be setting up the Aqua-Pro watercolor palette with 32 wells by Masterson with SOHO watercolors.

## Creating a Painting of the Palette

Whenever I setup a new palette, I like to create a *painting of my palette* so I can see characteristics such as transparency, brilliancy and how well it is ground. I use this as a reference when I select colors for a painting. It also helps me decide which colors I want to place next to each other in my new palette.

Using a piece of watercolor paper that is the same shape as my palette but 2" to 4" larger than the palette, I created approximate space for each well. This palette has 10 wells on the long side and 6 wells on the short side, as shown in **Example A**.

Next, I like to organize the paint tubes from light to dark and by their names into groups of yellow, orange, red, brown, purple, blue and green.

## Testing Colors Before Painting the Palette

Before I put the paint in the wells of my new palette, I need to see the true colors of each tube of paint. I use a 4" white ceramic tile as a small palette. Before I create the painting of the palette or squirt paint in the palette, using the ceramic tile allows me to see the true color of each watercolor so that I can decide which paint is lighter and which paint is darker. To test each color, I will squirt 1/8" of pigment of four of the yellow paints on the tile, leaving enough room to add a little water to each color and drag them out so I can see their pure color.

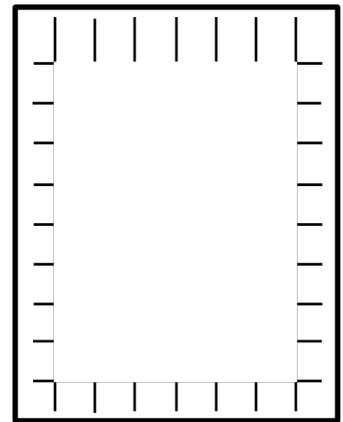
## Painting the Palette

When I know which one is the lightest, I will paint an inch swatch of heavy paint at the edge of my paper in one of the spaces that represent a well. Then I will clean my brush and wet an area about 1/8" away from the swatch of paint. Using a clean brush, I will touch the edge of the paint and have it seep into the water placed near the paint. Once it seeps into the water, I use gravity to move the water into the paint and back into the water along one side of the swatch. When I place the paper back on the table, the paint slowly seeps into the rest of the water, allowing me to see the characteristics of the paint. Is it transparent or opaque? Is it grainy?

Once the swatch is dry, I mark the name of the color with a pencil on or near the swatch. This painting of a palette is valuable as a quick reference. Each name is written so that I can read it from left to right, top to bottom as shown in **Example B**.

### Example A

Setting up the paper to paint the reference palette



### Example B

Painting of the Palette



## Setting Up a Usable Palette

Once I am satisfied with my painting of my palette, I use it as a guide to set up my palette. I will write the names of each color in the INSIDE of the palette with an ultra-fine Sharpie. I know many of you write the names outside the palette. That method prevents you from learning the names of the color. You also can waste time searching for a color, which means your water on your painting is likely to dry too quickly.

I like to write the names close to each well using an Ultra-fine Sharpie. I like to mark them so I can read them quickly, as if they were a written page. That means they are written from right to left, top to bottom, as shown in **Example C or D**. You may wonder if the mixing of paint will cover the names so you cannot read them. Yes, but by then you will have a good idea what the name is of the paint in the well. You can always wipe color off the name if you cannot read it because the ink from the Sharpie will not be easily removed. If you make a mistake when naming your colors or want to remove the name to add another color at a later date, use nail polish remover and it will take the name off.

Since I am left-handed, it is easier for me to quickly point my brush to the upper- left section of my palette for the color I use the most. For me, it is the yellow pigments. If you are right-handed, I suggest you set up these colors opposite of what I am going to explain. As you can see in Example C, I like to place the yellow pigments on the upper-right side of the palette, then the bright colors on each side of the yellows. My greens are on the short top part of the palette; my yellows are in the upper-right and my oranges in the lower-right. In this palette, I purchased a lot of red so the bottom on the short top of my palette will hold the red colors. I put the orange-reds in the lower-right corner and the blue-reds in the lower-left corner. My violets are next to the blue-reds on the lower- left of the palette and the blues are on the upper-left.

**It would be easier for a right-handed person to arrange their colors in a manner that is opposite of what I have done, as shown here in Examples C and D.**



After writing each name of each color and labeling the palette, "SOHO 2012", I will squirt paint in each well. I like to fill the well with as much paint as possible. When squirting the paint in a well, I start in one corner and fill it slowly so it seeps to the other corner, then I will slowly move the tube toward the edge of the well, toward middle of the palette. I want the paint to be smooth and even in the well, without any jags, points or crevices.

I find that when the paint dries and has cracks or is jagged, I tend to damage my brush tip when wetting the paint in the well. Have you ever noticed you have split ends on your brush tip? Running your brush head on jags, points or cracks of dry paint will do that! When I cannot get the paint smooth in the well, I will use a flat T35 palette knife by Creative Mark to flatten the paint in the well. Filling the well with paint in the corners will help keep the paint in the well so that it doesn't pop out and get lost. I let my paints dry for a few days before I use them so that I do not put "holes" in the middle of the paint in a well.

## **Evaluation of SOHO Watercolors**

I quickly learned the characteristics of the new SOHO paints that I have purchased. I found that most have beautiful color but was very disappointed when they dried in the palette. Most of them cracked and would not stay inside the well, even when I had the well filled so all corners locked the hardened paint into it. Also, when the paint dried in the mixing area, it flaked. This was a real big problem because the small flakes would land in the other wells of filled paint and contaminate the color. I am sad to say that this paint does not adhere well to a palette and must be used straight from the tube, then cleaned out of the palette immediately.

*For more information about Valerie Toliver's classes, workshops and demonstrations, see [www.valerietoliver.com](http://www.valerietoliver.com)*