



Pastel Pencil Techniques

Have you seen pastel pencils at the art store and wondered exactly how to use them? Let's explore this favorite medium of mine and see how to create something really beautiful with them.

What are they?

Pastel pencils are hard pastels that are in pencil form. Hard pastels are chalky, like soft pastel, but with a firmer consistency. (*NuPastel* sticks from *Prismacolor* and *Conte Crayons* are examples hard pastels.) They are a bit neater than soft pastels, but do not layer quite as nicely. Having them in pencil form is a great advantage for doing neat, precise work. They can be sharpened and the colors can be blended with a blending stump.

Recommended Brands:

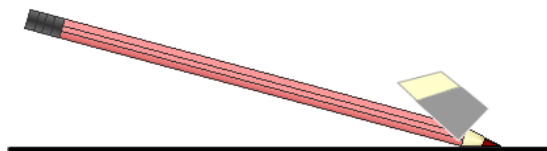
- Hands down best pastel pencils: **Conte Pastel Pencils**
- Other good brands: **Giaconda** and **Cretacolor**

What paper should be used with them?

Using colored ground is preferable to white paper. Good quality colored pastel paper, like Canson Mi-Tientes is my favorite. White drawing paper is a poor choice because it doesn't have enough "tooth" to hold the pastel powder in place, and the white background will show through too much.

How do I sharpen pastel pencils?

This can be tricky. Some brands are softer than others and will crumble when sharpened in a sharpener. Certain brands can handle a regular pencil sharpener. The best bet is to use a razor blade. Hold the pencil's diagonal edge flat against a surface and gently carve away with a razor blade. See picture. Always carve away from your body, not toward it.



How do I begin a pastel pencil project?

Like all other drawings, have a great photo or live reference available. I chose a photo of Portofino, Italy, the site of my parents' honeymoon vacation. I completed a very lightly drawn pencil sketch on the pastel paper first, using a grid to help with proportions. I outlined all shadows and highlights before adding the pastel pencil.

Things to remember as you render:

Pastel Pencils do not layer light on dark as well as soft pastels do.

You must plan your light areas and highlights carefully if you want them to be really bright. In my drawing above, I filled in the building facades with the lightest color that I would need for the sunlit areas. I layered a darker color over it for the areas not hit directly by the sunlight to create the shadows.

Keep your pressure light to begin:

You can always add more and build up the pastels, but it is more difficult to take it away if it's too much. You can lift off some if needed with a kneaded eraser, but you risk smudging things up a bit.