



# A New Spin on the STUDIO PALETTE

Like the color wheel, my new studio palette design has no beginning and no end.

By Patricia Prescott Sueme

I've been an artist, designer and frequent tinkerer as far back as I can remember. When I discovered soft pastel, I was still running my design business, and pastel painting was a late-night guilty pleasure. I've tried just about every art material I can get my hands on, conventional and otherwise: different substrates, grounds, tools, framing supplies and so on. The most addicting part for me is collecting as many pastel brands and colors as I can rationalize.

A couple of years ago, I had an "aha" moment, in which I envisioned a new design for a studio palette. That moment quickly became a point of obsession and, later, during the pandemic lockdown, my obsession became the perfect distraction. Was it possible to create this palette? Would it be as efficient as I imagined? How would I even build it when I didn't

own the proper power tools? After a fair amount of trial and error, I posted my unique palette design on Instagram and was delighted by the curiosity and positive feedback I received. Now, I'm happy to share the "why and how" of that process with you.

### The Why

Within a few years of working in pastel, I ran into a champagne problem: How to efficiently view all the amazing pastels I'd collected yet still have space to work? I'm a little obsessive-compulsive about organizing my pastels and have tried countless ways to display them. Ultimately, like many pastellists, I grouped them by color on rectangular wooden trays with mesh bottoms that sifted the dust into foil trays below. While this was adequate, I did have my list of

annoyances with the system:

- When laid out for viewing, the trays spanned about 2x9 feet. That's a whole lot of studio real estate. The wooden trays are also cumbersome to move around.
- Most trays have equally spaced dividers. Within some color spaces, the sticks overlapped each other, obscuring my view of the available colors. Meanwhile, other sections were sparsely filled, wasting valuable space.
- I've always struggled with where to begin and end the rainbow. After trying several variations, I decided to place the cool violets at the beginning of my palette and the warm violets at the opposite end, with the rainbow falling in between.
- There's also the problem of how to best display the subtle white and black tints. On a long palette with dividers, there are awkward choices to make in placing pastels for easy comparison of minor temperature/tint variations. One has to decide, for instance, where a white with a yellow tint belongs, versus the best location for the lightest yellow.

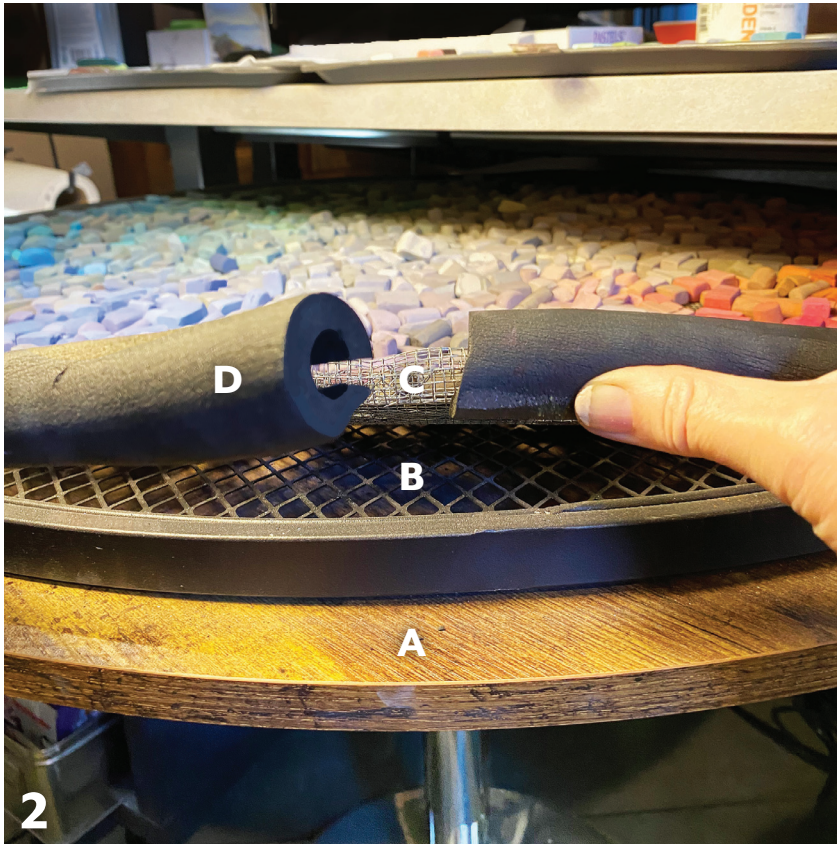
### The How

My inspiration was to create a practical round palette, which I guessed could be up to 36 inches in diameter. I quickly realized it would need to spin, to prevent an inconvenient reach to the far side. If it spun and was the proper height, then I could tuck it halfway under my tabletop, where the portion of the wheel I wanted to access could be spun into view as needed (as seen in photo 1, left). I searched, but this revolving palette design was nowhere to be found, so I started brainstorming ways to create it.

My solution began with some inexpensive online furniture options. I found a 34-inch diameter coffee table for \$95 that had a woodlike top and a hard, grated-metal shelf below (see photo 2a and 2b, page 14). Because it came ready to assemble, I could easily use the two main parts I needed.







When I set the round grate on top of the wood circle, I saw that the space in between would work perfectly for catching loose pastel particles so the sticks wouldn't have to sit in dust. I decided that adding a flimsy wire mesh (see photo 2c, left) would help keep the small pastel pieces from falling through the bottom of the grate. Using wire cutters and gloves, I cut and wrapped the mesh around the grate. The edges felt too sharp, so I fit foam tubing around the palette (see photo 2d, left), which made it comfortable to spin and kept the outer pastels contained.

Organizing my pastels in the new palette did take some time, but it was well worth it. I used a small photo of the color wheel as a guide while I tediously filled up the tray (see photo 3, bottom left).

### The Result

Although there were some troubleshooting detours along the way, after more than a year of using this palette, I can honestly say there isn't a thing I would change. I consider the \$240 investment to be money well spent. Plus, it kept me busy for a good week during the pandemic lockdown.

My new palette is always within reach, and I have a desktop area available for smaller palette trays that I customize for specific paintings. Placing the whites next to each other in the center of the wheel, while merging and fanning them out according to their underlying hue has been the perfect solution to my white-tint dilemma. The outer edge holds the darkest colors, making them easy to find and organize according to shaded hues.

This new palette, like a color wheel, has no beginning or end. It doesn't matter if you have more of a certain color range because there are no divisions; colors simply flow from one to the next. My pastels are now easier to find and a joy to put away. Like a child on a spinning stool, it's ridiculously satisfying. *PJ*

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