

**ANDREA HUELIN**  
**[www.andreahuelin.com](http://www.andreahuelin.com)**  
**@andreahuelinartist**

## My colour palette and other materials for still life painting

*Over many years of experimenting with paint, brushes, medium, surfaces and palettes, I have developed a list of colours and studio materials that work well for me. I hope that some of these suggestions might be useful to you too as you refine your painting practice and workspace. I hope to see you at one of my workshops or exhibitions in the near future!*

- Andrea

By the way, I have no affiliation with any of these brands or outlets. ☺

### Oil paint colours:

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I use a cool and warm version of each of the primary colours – yellow, red and blue. A red ochre, yellow ochre and dark grey are handy too. It doesn't really matter what brand of oil paint you use, as long as they are artist quality (as opposed to student quality).

My brand preference is paint that is made in Australia, such as **Art Spectrum** or **Langridge**. You will notice that there are differing prices according to the 'series' (series 1 – 5). This reflects the fact that some pigments are more expensive than others, so the paints cost more to make. You can usually find cheaper alternatives to these colours with names like 'Alizarin Crimson **hue**' (meaning they've used a similar coloured pigment). These are the colours that I use every time I paint:

Titanium white  
Lemon yellow  
Cadmium yellow medium  
Yellow ochre  
Cad red medium  
Alizarin Crimson  
Red Ochre (sometimes called light red)  
Ultramarine Blue  
Pthalo blue  
Raw Umber  
Dioxazine purple  
Paynes Grey



Other colours I have become very fond of:

**Perylene red**  
**Indian Yellow**  
**Sap Green**  
**Transparent Maroon**  
**Transparent yellow and red ochres**



## Brushes

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I use long flat firm synthetic brushes are best. I use **Neef 95 Flat Stiff Synthetic**, or **Rosemary & Co Ivory Synthetic long flats** (which work out cheaper than Neef, even though they come from England). I have tried to find good, cheap brushes over the years, but I have found that there is no substitute for good brushes. They last a long time if you wash them well.



I use a series of the Rosemary flat brushes, ranging in size from a 2 to a 14, but if you only want to invest in a couple of brushes, I recommend the 6 and the 10 (about 8mm and 1.5mm across the top of the brush respectively). The filbert brush can be a cheapy, but I recommend a bristle or bristle blend, not a nylon on taklon (too soft and floppy).

## Oil painting medium

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For my mediums, I use the **Australian-made 'Archival' range by Chroma**, which are odourless. I mostly use the **lean and classic medium**. Another option is to use a mixture of linseed or other artist's oil diluted with solvent.

Important tip: The medium is supposed to be slightly viscous, and an amber colour, but if it's very dark and thick like treacle, it's **too old** and shouldn't be used. Sometimes the shops have it on their shelves for too long and then try to flog it, so always look for the one that has the lightest amber colour. When you buy yours, if you're not going to use it all quickly, decant it into smaller containers with no air 'gap' at the top, and that will stop it getting thick and gluggy.

(For example, I wouldn't buy the one in this picture here)



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## Solvent

**Odourless solvent** for clean-up and diluting paints and mediums. When you have finished using your solvent for the day, use a funnel to put it back into an old solvent container, and after a couple of days all the gunk will sink to the bottom, and you can use the clear solvent at the top again.

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## Painting surfaces

Artist quality canvas or board will yield the best results. I use home-made mdf panels primed with sealer, undercoat then gesso, or store-bought **Ampersand** brand pre-primed boards (or similar brand). I have recently enjoyed painting on a **12 Ounce Triple Primed Cotton Duck Canvas from the Sydney Canvas Company**, but I usually mount in on board temporarily because I don't like the 'trampoline' effect of stretched canvas as I'm painting. When the painting is dry, I stretch it frames made from pre-cut stretcher bars, available from art shops.

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## Palettes

Clear or white Perspex, melamine or glass, about A3 size to use as a palette, or an A3 sized disposable palette. A good semi-disposable option is a laminated piece of A3 paper. If it's slipping around on your table, use some masking tape to hold it down, or cut up some of that sticky material that stops carpet from sliding around.

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## Other handy materials

- White Acrylic gesso for priming your boards and canvas
- Cheap brushes or foam rollers for applying gesso
- Soft cotton rags - at least 2 per day of painting
- Apron or daggy clothes
- Masking tape, at least 1 inch wide for sticking your palette down, or taping your board or

canvas to your drawing board on the easel  
Cheap box of tissues  
2 jam sized glass jars with lids  
Small shallow tin (like a cat food tin) for your medium  
A bottle of baby oil is good for cleaning your hands  
Paper towels  
Disposable gloves  
Extra rags or chux wipes  
Baby wipes for cleaning your palette  
A heavy-duty tube wringer like this one from the Sydney Art Store can help you get all the expensive paint out of those wrinkly ol' tubes.



## **Brush cleaning**

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Cleaning your brushes thoroughly in solvent, then leaving them to dry flat should be enough to clean your brushes, but if you feel it's not enough or your brushes have become a bit stiff, use **Chroma incredible brush cleaner**, or **Sunlight/velvet soap** with warm water.

## **Lighting and easels**

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Set up an LED light with the same temperature as daylight (considered a 'cool' light = **5000 Kelvin** or thereabouts) so that the light hits your easel at 45 degrees. If you're using natural light through a window, turn **side on** to it so that the light does not create too much shine and reflection on your painting surface.

I use a **Mabef M04 easel** that has a crank for changing the height of your painting, which I wouldn't be without.



## **Your subjects**

For still life paintings, try to choose things that are different tones, eg. one light coloured, one middle and one dark. Ideas include fruit, cups and jars, utensils, containers, flasks, flowers. Look for items that have a bit of shine or a nice form - it doesn't really matter if they go together or not.

## **Two cardboard boxes**

For your still life arrangement – one to place your still life arrangement in (or on) and one to raise your still life box up to eye height, or close to. Use a piece of light-coloured fabric big enough to create a backdrop for inside the box. You can also use white **corflute** (which you can get at **Bunnings** or **Officeworks**) and make your own 3 or 4 sided box, or use a big uncut sheet of corflute or **foam core board** to simplify the background behind your arrangement.

## **Photographic reference**

If you are painting from a photo (which is fine to do, by the way), make sure you have good 'information' to work with: Effective lights and darks, a pleasing composition and varying colours and tones. I often use my **ipad or lap top computer as reference** instead of printed photos, because I get better darks and lights that way.

## **Getting your paintings home**

If you've been painting in a class environment, or 'En Plein Air', take a pizza box to transport your wet painting home.

## **Where to buy your materials**

I buy most of my art materials at [theartshop.com.au](http://theartshop.com.au), which I find to be up to 20% cheaper than other art outlets. They have a flat fee of about \$10 for delivery all around Australia, and delivery in Melbourne is often free. When I need something quickly, Travis and his Dad at West Art in Footscray are very helpful and offer artist discounts.

Happy painting!