

Color Composer is mauvelous!



Posted by [Brian Lawler](#) on October 28, 2007

Last year I had the opportunity to test MasterColors' HVC Color Composer Pro for Adobe Photoshop. I loaded the software, and began an exploration of color that has been quite unlike anything else in my world. Now, a year later, I find myself using it every day, and I still marvel at its ingenuity.

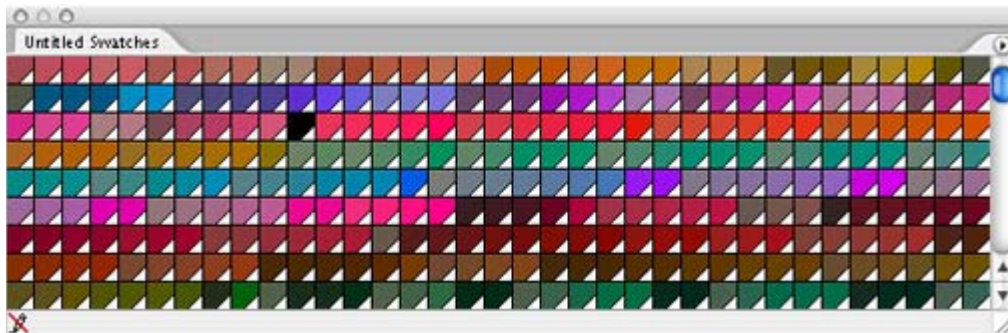


I teach color theory classes at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. I am aware of color systems; I pay attention to subtleties of color; I think in color adjacencies and analogies. The word "periwinkle" excites me.

HVC Color Composer Pro is a supplemental color picker for Adobe Photoshop (they also offer it for InDesign). It adds controls for selecting and building palettes using the color system developed in the early 20th century by Albert Munsell. The system is pigment-based, and relies on the concept of contrasts. Munsell spent decades perfecting his system so that a one-unit contrast difference in any direction was perceptually equal to a similar movement in either of the other axes. When you mix any two opposites in the Munsell system, you always get gray.

Munsell used Hue, Value and Chroma to describe his colors, and in the process he developed the first truly scientific method for describing colors, one which was measurable, repeatable, and reliable. His color system, adopted by paint manufacturers, was eventually accepted by the American National Standards Institute.

The software is nothing short of delicious. You can choose any color, or any pair of colors, and use those to seed the software to build a palette of analogous and complementary colors. From that palette you can design with colors that are interrelated. You can even export the resulting palette for use in Adobe Illustrator. Since I have had the software I have created dozens of breathtaking palettes for my designs. One of the nicest qualities of the HVC system is that all colors within the Munsell system are in-gamut compared to printing inks. Unlike additive colors (some of the RGB, and Lab gamuts), which are lovely but often out-of-gamut – any color you create in any palette in HVC Color Composer will be reproducible on-press.



A palette of colors created in Color Composer Pro, then exported to Adobe Illustrator

It's a fantastic tool for graphic designers, creative artists, logo designers – anyone who uses a computer to generate artwork. Add to that list anyone who needs to please a customer with colors that look good both on the computer display and on the printed page.

[Master Colors](#) also provides an online course in HVC color, and is now offering regular Webinars where you can learn how to use this delightful software to its fullest. I took that course a year ago, and was mighty impressed. The self-guided tour of HVC color is, in itself, a great lesson in understanding the mind of the

color genius Albert Munsell, and his modern-day counterparts at MasterColors who have delivered the product to the computer screen.

p.s. Mauvelous is a real Crayola color!