

Pastel pencils: There are 8 major brands on the US market.

Caran d’Ache: 84 colors. This is a very different pencil from the others (why its first). It has a waxy feel more like a colored pencil (but it does not contain waxes or oils—company won’t release the binder)

Pros: Rich thick color, and does not create dust. Sharpens relatively well.

Cons: It doesn’t play so well with others. It’s a bit hard to layer, both within the line itself but even more with other brands or soft pastels. It can be done though—I’m learning how to tame this now.

Derwent: 72 colors. This is probably the most commonly available if you purchase in a store vs. online. They recently changed their full line. New colors start with a “P”. Old colors have a letter on the end (i.e. 74B, and are no longer in production).

Pros: This is a decent staple pencil. Decent colors, and layers well. Fairly strongly pigmented.

Cons (sort of): Sharpens ok. The new line is better at sharpening than the old, but a bit poorer in color range. Medium dust.

Conte: 48 colors. This is a rich pencil, with a bit of grit to it, that allows it to tackle some situations better than other brands. It’s a bit easier to handle over Caran d’Ache, and it works well on lower grit papers (like Canson MiTientes).

Pros: I really like the grit, and use it as a tool. It’s a tough pencil.

Cons (sort of): Sharpens ok. I think it sharpens fairly well, but some folks don’t so it may do better in some sharpeners than others. Its an oversized pencil (width) so it needs a wide sharpener opening. It has a narrow, and odd color range. Some people don’t like the gritty noise.

Gioconda: 48 colors. This is a very soft, low pigment pencil, which may sound bad, but it has its uses.

Pros: Because of the low pigmentation and softness, this is a great pencil to use to layer or soften things. You may feel that you have a gritty look in a given area and running one of these, of a close color over it, changes it very little but softens the gritty look. Its white is so weak that its almost a good blender. I use the white when I do the edges of the bubble masses. It suggests white without screaming white. The black is awesome...one of the strongest surprisingly among all the brands and its softness is fun to use.

Cons (sort of): Sharpens ok. Produces a slightly higher amount of dust (the most perhaps for the pencil lines). If you are looking for power color, this is not your brand.

Bruynzeel: 48 colors. This is also very soft, but has a stronger pigment load than Gioconda

Pros: If you like soft and want richer pigment, this is a good one. Has some nice, hard to get colors (like a rich magenta)

Cons: This is probably the fussiest for sharpening.

Carb Othello: 60 colors. This is a bit harder than the above two (Bruynzeel and Gio), but softer than the others—has a decent pigment loading.

Pros: Good color range. Layers nicely because of the softness.

Cons (sort of): Sharpens ok.

CretaColor: 72 colors, and **Faber Castell:** 60 colors. I can’t really tell the difference between these two in terms of working characteristics. These are slightly softer than Derwent, but harder than Gio, Bruyn and Carb.

Pros: Good color range for both. Layer well. Reasonably good for sharpening.

Cons (sort of): The only con you might have for either of these would be if they are missing colors you like.

So, what should you buy? That will have to be your decision, based on:

1. Where you want to buy
2. Price you wish to spend
3. Color range, and any specific colors you want
4. Working characteristics that match your style
5. Level of softness you prefer.

