By Kathy Diamond Davis

Color nourishes the eye. And thanks to Yvonne Albritton, that sentiment today is truer than ever.

This artist from Renton, Washington, has perfected a color-blending technique that uses chalks, which makes her artistry even more remarkable.

Chalks, of course, have long been popular coloring agents in the world of art—sidewalk and warehouse graffiti included—but their use has called for spray fixatives and other special treatment. Albritton is no newcomer to chalks, art in general, or stamping, and she’s especially pleased to share her insights with others.

“I own a rubber stamp manufacturing business. I love to design and I love to color,” says the artist, whose company is Yvonne Albritton Designs. “My favorite part about teaching people is when they physically see they can do the projects, and they get so excited. Everyone is creative.”

Years of working with chalks caused Albritton to develop a keen awareness of their dust-laden health shortcomings, and from this came her chalk-blender technique.

As seen in her sample rubber stamp art—color enhancement with chalks has taken a surprising turn. Albritton has developed her chalk technique with a blender product that is both inexpensive and nontoxic. With a few simple tools, a little know-how, and some enjoyable practice, Albritton suggests, you’ll quickly be coloring images as brilliantly as her roses, teddy bear and poppies.

**Chalk-coloring basics**

Albritton used everyday white cardstock for the folded, base cards for *Roses for You, Sunlight* and *Susie’s Hat*. However, the paper she used for stamping and coloring with chalk is not the standard type.

**Cardstock meeting the demands of this chalk technique needs to have a very smooth finish.** This type of paper allows you to push or massage the blended chalks around on it, as needed. And to dry properly, the **cardstock needs to have a matte surface—not glossy.** Albritton has found that Royal Fiber Royal Silk paper meets her requirements and works well.

She recommends against using cardstock with a high recycled content. This type of paper readily absorbs the fluid used for blending chalk. This cardstock also “pills” when worked with blending applicators. Thus, she recommends choosing cardstock and paper with minimal recycled content when stamping and coloring with her technique.

**Ordinary make-up type applicators are not sturdy enough for the firm rubbing needed to achieve the dramatic coloring effects that are hallmarks of Albritton’s technique.** Moreover, detailed areas require coloring with tiny applicators, and larger areas call for foam applicators. The applicators Albritton’s company offers are firm enough for the task, detailed or broad. And, these applicators can be washed and reused. Experiment with whatever tools and materials you have on hand to determine their suitability with this chalking technique.

**You’ll need a separate “well” in an inexpensive white plastic paint palette for each chalk color.** The chalk-blender fluid comes from Albritton’s company. A small bottle lasts a long time, she notes, and it’s non-toxic and washable.

Clean-up after a coloring session is quick and easy. You’ll want to be able to rinse and dry your hands whenever
needed, so ready access to a wash basin is preferable. Applicators will remain stained with chalk color even after you wash them in warm water, but the color won’t transfer to your next project. The applicators will be ready for another go-around after they dry overnight.

**Picking Colors**

For your chalk colors, you’ll want at least one light and one dark tone of any color that you use in a relatively large area of your stamped composition. Such spaces offer a “canvas” that provides the most potential for drama and enjoyment with this technique. Depending on your color preferences, you may want to start with a set of pastel chalks and either an earth-tone or a vivid set for your darker shading colors. You certainly can do the project with one set, though, or with a set of pastel sticks.

The **ink pad you use to stamp your image must be stable for the chalk blender**, which can blur or erase some inks as the technique is carried out. The ones Albritton has tested and found to work well are Fabrico, an ink family from Tsukineko that has been renamed VersaCraft; and Fluid Chalk and Crafter’s Ink, both of which are ink categories in the Clearsnap ColorBox group.

For ink specifics, black is a good color for any of the images. Green works well for some floral images, brown for sunflowers and teddy bears, and dark blue for marine images and teapots. Follow instructions on your chosen ink pad. Fabrico (VersaCraft) works great either left to dry overnight or heat-set with an embossing heat tool. Again, experiment with ink brands and colors to determine the best choices for you as you practice the blending technique.

**For Example: Roses for You**

1) The first step in coloring the centerpiece roses is to stamp the image. Albritton used a black Fabrico ink pad. She points out that this ink can clog the design of some intricate rubber stamp images if it’s not applied carefully. She recommends either holding the pad to apply ink to the stamp or using a brayer. If you wash your stamp promptly after use, it cleans easily. Good stamp hygiene pays off in many ways.

2) After stamping and before coloring images, set the cardstock aside to dry. Overnight works great, if you have the time. Otherwise, dry the stamp art with a heat tool or similar device.

**Blending chalks**

1) Blending chalk colors calls for care and practice, so experiment beforehand with scrap paper or cardstock. Then proceed:

2) Put a drop of
You'll do this for each color, so you can start with a drop in each well that you plan to use. All the colors Albritton used on the rose image came from an earth-tone chalk palette.

3) If you wish, you can finish all coloring you're going to do with a lighter hue; then use the same paint palette well and applicator for a darker hue of that same color. Add more chalk blender to a well, as needed, but only one drop at a time. Too much blender causes the color to streak.

4) Lay either end of the foam-tipped applicator on a flat side and pick up the drop of blender on that side. Rub that side of the applicator against the side of the well in the white plastic paint palette to massage the chalk-blender liquid thoroughly into the foam.

5) Take the applicator to the lightest color of your chalk-blender palette that you're using for the roses. Rub the side of the applicator end that has blender worked into it onto that color. (If you plan to use this chalk again for dry applications, touch the blender to only one part of the chalk cake. If you are using pastels, you could break the stick in half and keep half for dry and half for blending. But it's likely that you'll love this technique and want to keep a chalk palette solely for blending. It's addictive!) One more option is to scrap off a little chalk into a well on the palette and then add blender to that. With this system, your chalks stay dry.

6) You will develop a feel for when to add more chalk to the applicator and when to add more blender. Add blender only when the applicator drags or scratches on the paper. Generally, you'll use a lot more chalk than blender. You can always add more blender, but you can't always take it away when you overdo it, so be sparing.

7) If you get a little too much on the paper, you sometimes can pick up some of it with the clean, dry side of the applicator. You also can transfer it to another, uncolored area of your design. But don't count on being able to do this. Blended chalk stays wet awhile, which allows you to work with it. Make the most of this opportunity to hold back on how much you apply. Chances are, you'll find that less is better.

Application Tips

1) Albritton uses a circular motion with lighter colors, and says it's easier to color a flower when you put the lighter color to the outside and the darker color to the inside. She recommends that you rotate the paper to better control the application of the secondary color that goes out to the exterior lines of an image. It's difficult to erase blended chalk beyond the lines, so be advised.

2) Fabrico ink is nice and black, and blended chalk is somewhat translucent, so you don't have to worry about avoiding the lines with your coloring. You'll need to use micro-applicators for small areas, though. On the rose image, for example, you need a micro-applicator for the yellow center.

3) Once you've applied the lighter color, pick up the darker color and apply it inside the light-colored area. Leave lots of the lighter color showing, however, as this becomes the "eye candy" of the image.

4) If you want more dark color, even after it dries, simply go back and add more. But you can't take it away and make it lighter.

5) With the two flower colors completed, put blender and chalk on a micro-applicator and color the yellow center of each rose. You'll need a different micro-applicator for the small areas of the rose buds, and one or two more for the stems and leaves.

6) Leaves are done as blossoms are, starting with a light green up to the exterior lines of the image, and a darker green in the middle of that. Other color combinations work for leaves, too, such as yellow under green.

7) Use moderate, even pressure as you apply the lighter layer of color to your stamped art. Circular motions give that smooth look and lessen streaks. You can blot excess blender off the applicator with a paper towel.

8) With all sections colored—in just a few minutes—it's time to set your piece aside to dry. Temperature and humidity determine requisite drying time, but it's safe to expect it to dry fully overnight. And, no fixative spray is needed, even if you use pearlescent chalks.
Finally, for the *Roses for You* card, the white cardstock with the completed roses is mounted onto green paper that, along with the ribbon, complements the leaves. The green layer of paper also establishes an attractive, strong border around the top cardstock layer. (Albritton created both *Sunlight* and *Susie’s Hat* with this type of layering.)

**Sunlight**

Albritton used chalks from a bright palette to color the poppy blossoms. She continued with the same muted greens—as used on the rose leaves—for the poppy leaves. The lighter poppy color is orange, and the darker color is red. Black in the center completes a dramatic composition.

To get the dramatic contrast in the blossom, remember to keep the orange light toward the outside, and leave lots of that light color showing when you add the red inside it. The light part of the coloring is the key to success with Albritton’s technique.

**Susie’s Hat**

The teddy bear was colored with dry chalk, and you can see differences between it and coloring done with the chalk blending on the other two cards. The rounded, almost dimensional bear image is well-suited to shading, which can be done with either technique.

With dry chalks, Albritton either blends three colors—light, dark and medium—or comes back with the light color to blend after adding the dark color. Notice that you can see color texture that you don’t see in the blended-chalk floral cards.

By their nature, dry chalks have to be stabilized with fixative. The safest one that Albritton has found is a very light application of hairspray. Any spray fixative needs time to dry. Colors applied with the chalk blender are much more intense and smooth than colors applied with dry chalk. Albritton notes that chalk-blender colors are even smoother than watercolor. The process is easier than watercolor, too.

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*Kathy Diamond Davis is a longtime contributor and resident of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Read her blog at kathydiamonddavis.blogspot.com.*

**Resources**

- **Yvonne Albritton Designs**: Chalk palettes in pastels, earth-tones, pearlescents and many other attractive groupings are featured with this Seattle-area online and mail-order retailer. Additional items are foam applicators, ink pads, Royal Silk paper and a large catalog of original rubber stamp designs. Visit www.yvonnealbritton.com. Write P.O. Box 59464, Renton, WA 98058.

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**SUSIE’S HAT**

*Colorful stripes and swirls echo the look of the flowered hat.*