

Fine-tune Your Tablet

Graphics tablets have become essential tools for digital illustrators. In addition to simulating the distinctive look of real-world tools such as paintbrushes and chucks, a properly configured tablet can make you more productive. One of the most popular lines of graphics tablets is Wacom's Intuos (800/922-9348, www.wacom.com). By customizing pressure curves, pen functions, and program settings, you can tailor your Intuos tablet to complement the way you work and give you maximum control over your designs.

Working under Pressure

Because no two artists paint in the same way, each graphics tablet must be trained to accurately interpret its user's unique style of motion. If you find that your strokes leap from light to dark, skipping some of the subtler stages, or that you have to bear down on the tablet to get the heavy strokes you're looking for, you probably need to adjust your tablet's pressure settings.

Training Your Tablet The first step in improving your tablet's sensitivity is to adjust its pressure curve.

To access your tablet's pressure curve, open the Wacom Tablet control panel. (In OS X, open the Wacom folder in your hard drive's Applications folder and double-click on Wacom Tablet. In OS 9, you'll find it in the Apple menu's Control Panels submenu.) In the Wacom Tablet window, select the pen from the Tool list and then go to the Tip Feel tab (to adjust the eraser, go to the Eraser Feel tab). If you want to base the

parameters on your typical stroke, click on the More Options button and draw a brushstroke in the drawing pad farthest to your right. You'll notice the pressure curve (located in the middle) changing accordingly. When doing pencil sketches, I usually prefer a soft pressure curve; I don't have to press as hard to get subtle variations when shading. To achieve this, I draw first very lightly and then gradually more heavily on the drawing pad. To test your results, you can draw in the scratch pad to your left. If you're not satisfied, repeat the process.

Brushing Up on Brush Tracking If you're using Procreate's Painter 7 (800/772-6735, www.procreate.com), you can refine your tablet's sensitivity even further with the help of the program's Brush Tracking feature. Brush Tracking lets you customize parameters such as stylus pressure and brushstroke speed, and it works in tandem with the control panel's pressure curve. Because I draw with a heavier hand and make faster movements when creating initial sketches than I do when adding the finishing touches to a painting, I reset Brush Tracking before most work sessions to match my current task.

To set Brush Tracking, choose Edit: Preferences: Brush Tracking, and make a continuous stroke in the window. The higher the setting for Pressure Power, the more sensitive Painter becomes. For instance, with Pressure Power set to the maximum, you can create fine, delicate line work with the Scratchboard variant of Painter's Pens category or build up subtle shading with one of the brushes in the Pencils category. When you're done, click on OK, and Painter will reconfigure itself to match your pacing. Painter retains this Brush Tracking setting until you reset it.

Power Buttons

As with the assignable buttons along the top of your Intuos tablet, which can perform common tasks such as copying and saving, you can also customize your pen to speed through tasks. The i2 Grip pen, included with Wacom's Intuos2 tablet, has three programmable buttons: the rounded top of the stylus (which serves as an eraser by default) and the long button on the pen shaft—which is actually two buttons in one. By default, the lower part lets you double-click, while the upper part functions as a control key, giving you easy access to timesaving contextual menus in Adobe Photoshop and Painter. Using the Wacom Tablet control panel, you can change the buttons' functionality to match the type of work you're doing.



ILLUSTRATION BY CAMPBELL LAIRD

Wild and Free When you're doing gestural drawing (a style that uses strong, quick, intuitive strokes), programmed buttons can easily get in the way. To make sure you don't accidentally activate menus or tools while tilting and rotating the stylus in your fingers, it's a good idea to temporarily disable the shaft buttons. To do this, open the Wacom Tablet control panel, select the pen from the Tool list, and click on the Tool Buttons tab. In the Tool Buttons window, set the two pop-up menus located on the right of the pen shaft to Ignore.

Keys for Quick Access When the task involves a more-controlled use of tools and brushwork—retouching, for example—the pen buttons can be essential for quickly accessing your tools. It's often useful to leave the upper portion of the shaft set to the control key so you can open context-sensitive menus. But rather than using the lower portion to double-click, set it to a different modifier key or a useful keyboard shortcut. When working in Photoshop or Painter, for example, you can set it to the option key; with one click, you can then switch temporarily from the Brush tool to the Eyedropper tool. In the Wacom control panel, open the Tool Buttons tab. Click on the pop-up menu to the left of the lower shaft button and choose Modifier. In the Define Modifiers dialog box, click on the Option check box and then on OK.

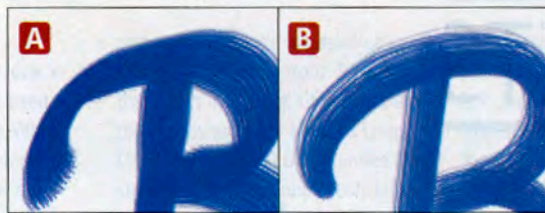
Painting in Photoshop 7

With a vastly improved drawing engine, Photoshop 7 (800/833-6687, www.adobe.com) offers new possibilities for tablet users. It lets you exert pressure-sensitive control over not only dozens of new paintbrushes but also retouching tools such as Clone Stamp, Dodge, Burn, and Liquify. This lets you make subtle, carefully controlled edits to your artwork. For example, you could apply a pressure-sensitive airbrush to a layer mask to hide or reveal portions of the edited layer.

To build an airbrush that has pressure-sensitive size and opacity, select the Brush tool in the Tools palette and open the Brushes palette (Window: Brushes). From the preview list, choose a soft-edged brush preset that varies in width (for instance, the Soft Round 35-pixel preset). Enable the Airbrush option in the left-hand column of the Brushes palette. (This option allows the medium to continue flowing regardless of movement. You can also access it from the Options bar when the Brush tool is selected.) Make sure the Shape Dynamics option is enabled, and select Pen Pressure from the Control pull-down menu. To make the brush's opacity pressure-sensitive, click on Other Dynamics and set Opacity Control to Pen Pressure.

Using Realistic Brushes in Painter 7

Pressure-sensitive tablets are the heart and soul of Painter 7. By interpreting subtle hand, wrist, and arm movements through the tablet and pen, Painter excels at mimicking a real paintbrush. In fact, all



drawing, painting, cloning, and retouching tools in Painter 7 respond to the pen's pressure, tilt, and bearing. Using the Brushes palette, you can choose brushes that reproduce almost any effect created by traditional media (see "Different Strokes"). Here are two Painter brushes that take advantage of the sensitivity and power of a tablet to re-create the motion and behavior of real-life brushes:

Tilt and Bearing For a brush that twists and twirls as you draw, choose one of Painter's flat brushes, which can sense tilt and bearing input from the tablet. Tilt represents the angle of the pen relative to the tablet; when the two are perpendicular, the tilt is 0 degrees. Bearing represents the position of the pen relative to the tilt. So when you roll the pen in your fingers—a natural drawing movement—Painter interprets the motion by changing the shape of the brushstroke, making the mark twist and twirl as a traditional brush would. To use this brush in Painter 7, open the Brushes palette and select Brushes from the pull-down menu in the bottom left corner of the palette. Then choose Opaque Flat from the Variant pull-down menu.

When painting with a flat brush, think of the brush as a thin rectangle, with the long side of the rectangle oriented to the long button on the shaft of the stylus. If you tilt the pen and roll the stylus in your fingers as you draw, your brush strokes will twist and twirl as they switch from thick to thin.

Splay It For a different effect, you can *splay* your brush. Splaying mimics the behavior of traditional long-bristled brushes, the bristles of which actually spread out individually as the brush is pressed on and rotated. To get this look, choose a brush that incorporates a variation of the Bristle Spray dab type (such as the Opaque Bristle Spray variant of Brushes or the Fine Bristle variant of Watercolor). Splay is useful for painting brushstrokes where the brush's hairs dynamically spread out along the top of a curve based on the angle of your stylus tilt.

Something for Everyone

Whether you use your tablet for doodling or for professional painting and retouching, configuring your tablet and stylus settings will improve your productivity and greatly enhance the quality of your work. □

Different Strokes

Painter 7 lets you mimic the brushwork of traditional paintbrushes. The Opaque Flat brush changes with the pen's tilt and bearing for a calligraphic effect **A**. The Opaque Bristle Spray brush, on the other hand, spreads out along the tops of curves in response to the pen's tilt **B**.



Ocean View Painter 7's Round Camelhair, Smear Flat, and Opaque Flat brushes were used to paint this vision of the ocean. These brushes allow expressive brushwork because they respond to pressure, tilt, and bearing.

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