



# Costa Vavagiakis

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## oil painting: supplies for plein air

*[Note: As you put together your supplies and equipment to paint outdoors, think lightweight and portable, find creative ways to simplify everything you carry with you on a painting trip.]*

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### Portable Field Easel

I use several different portable field easels depending on travel and location situations. Here is a link to an extensive review of several pochade boxes and outdoor painting gear options from the *Lines and Colors* blog:

- Pochade Boxes | [review](#)

These are some field easel/paint boxes that I use. Buy one of these or any portable lightweight rig you can put together and is easy to carry and set up:

- Mabef Sketch Box | [purchase](#)
- Soltek Easel | [purchase](#)
- 9x12 Guerrilla Box | [purchase](#)
- Easy! | [purchase](#)
- Open Box M | [purchase](#)
- Strada Mini | [purchase](#)

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### Oil Colors

If you are an experienced painter, bring your favorite palette and colors. All artists' grade brands of oil paints are good. I use a variety of oil colors from different companies. Holbein and Charvin offer 20 ml paint tubes which are great for portability.

- Holbein Oil Paint 20ml | [purchase](#)
- Charvin Oil Paint 20ml | [purchase](#)

### Minimum Palette

- Titanium White (Gamblin Flake Replacement White, Gamblin FastMatt White, Graham Alkyd White, or any quick drying white)
- Cadmium Lemon Yellow
- Indian Yellow
- Cadmium Red Light
- Burnt Sienna
- Alizarin Crimson Permanent
- Cobalt Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Sap Green Permanent
- Viridian
- Raw Umber
- Mars Black

### Optional Additional Colors

- Brilliant Yellow Light
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Orange
- Schevenings Blue Light
- Kings Blue
- Cinnabar Green
- Permanent Green Light

*[Note: **Do not buy paints that are called Hues.** For example, buy Cadmium Red Light, not Cadmium Red Light Hue; buy Cobalt Blue, not Cobalt Blue Hue; Cerulean Blue, not Cerulean Blue Hue. Hues are dye colors made to emulate the other colors, but do not have the same properties.]*

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## Brushes

Most plein air painters try to limit the number of brushes they bring along. I usually paint with two to three filberts and maybe 1 flat and 1 smaller round. These are some of my favorite brushes:

- 1 each of Blick Masterstroke Filbert Bristle sizes: 4, 6, 8 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of Blick Masterstroke Flat Bristle size: 10 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of W&N Lexington Filbert Bristle sizes 2, 3 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of Silver Renaissance Sable Cat's Tongue sizes 1, 2 | [purchase](#)

### Or order from Trekell & Company:

- 1 each of Hog Bristle Filbert sizes 0, 2, 4, 6 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of Hog Bristle Flat sizes 8, 10 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of Legion Filbert sizes 0, 2, 4 | [purchase](#)
- 1 each of Red Sable Cat's Tongue sizes 0, 2 | [purchase](#)
- 1 Brush Restorer | [purchase](#)

I buy 2 to 3 of the same size so I can use them for lighter and darker areas of the painting without having to clean them in between.

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## Mediums

You will need a drying medium and a solvent. If traveling overseas, you will need to purchase it at the travel destination.

- Weber Res-N-Gel | [purchase](#)  
—or—
- Sennelier Gel'N Dry | [purchase](#)
- Weber Odorless Mineral Spirits (Turpenoid) | [purchase](#)

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## Drawing for Compositional Studies

You will need a sketchbook and drawing instruments to work out your compositions. The drawing instruments I prefer are either/or:

- 0.9mm Mechanical Pencil | [purchase](#)
- Lamey Safari Fountain Pen | [purchase](#)
- Tombow Dual Brush Pen | [purchase](#)
- Parker Jotter Ball Point Pen | [purchase](#)
- Kneaded Eraser | [purchase](#)

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## Small Sketchbook

A sketchbook can be as small as 4"x 6." Here are some options:

- Field Sketch Journal | [purchase](#)
- Moleskin Notebook | [purchase](#)
- Holbein Multimedia Book | [purchase](#)

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## Painting Supports

Options are:

- Canvas Pads | [purchase](#)
- Oil Painting Papers | [purchase](#)
- Stretched Canvas | [purchase](#)
- Primed Panels | [purchase](#)

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## Wet Painting Carriers

I cut two wood boards of equal size and put vinyl bumpers on the edges on one of the boards. I then tape prepared paper and/or canvas cut to different shapes onto the boards (see Figure A, next page). I make sure the dimensions of the boards fit my field easel (see Figure B, next page). I hold the boards together with thick rubber bands or bungee cords. This allows me to paint more than one painting in a day and carry the wet paintings back home.

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FIGURE A



FIGURE B



If you want to construct a wet panel carrier, here are the materials you will need:

- Hardboards | [purchase](#)
- Vinyl Bumpers | [purchase](#)
- Large Rubber Bands | [purchase](#)

Or you can buy ready-made wet panel carriers from:

- PanelPak | [purchase](#)

## Necessary Accessories

- Two Unattached Single Palette Cups, small size | [purchase](#)
- Italian Painting Knife Style 1 | [purchase](#)
- Italian Painting Knife Style 61 | [purchase](#)
- Cotton Rags | [purchase](#)
- Paper Towels (Viva or blue shop towels are the best) | [purchase](#)
- Artist Tape (white) | [purchase](#)
- Knitting Needle or Straight Skewer | [purchase](#)
- View-finder: Make one of cardboard. Make two "L" shapes, about 7"-8" on the leg and 1½" wide. Hold together with binder clips.—or [purchase](#)—
- View Catcher | [purchase](#)
- Hat with Brim
- Plastic garbage bags to tie to your easel for a trash bag. You can also fill one up and hang it from the middle of your easel to weight it down.

- A few clips and a bungee cord for attaching stuff to your easel and palette. (Thread a paper towel roll onto a bungee and hook the ends to two of the easel legs. It hangs there ready to tear off as much as needed.)

## Optional Accessories

I bring an umbrella, chair, and a mahl stick in most of my plein air outings.

Umbrella (I have one that clamps onto the side of my easel):

- BestBrella | [purchase](#)
- Artwork Essentials | [purchase](#)

Chair or stool (folding) — If you want to sit while you paint:

- GCI Outdoor Seat | [purchase](#)
- Mahl Stick | [purchase](#)

## Choosing Sizes and Shapes to Paint On

Here are some recommended sizes for canvases and panels:

- 5x7," 6x9," 7x12," 11x14," 12x16," 16x20," 18x24," 20x24"; I suggest you don't work larger than 24x30"

If you choose two shapes—one elongated and one more square—you will have compositional options.



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## To Tone or Not to Tone

What I find after many years of painting is that you don't get locked into one way of doing something. One moment a white ground is best. Another moment a toned ground works better. If you choose to tone your painting surface I would choose something close to a mid tone/hue (i.e. raw umber mixed with cerulean blue or burnt sienna mixed with ultramarine blue). The tone that I prefer for landscape painting is yellow ochre. Or you could tone your painting surface in a neutral warm gray (i.e., Golden Acrylic #6 Neutral Gray)

### Techniques of Toning Painting Surfaces (wood board, masonite, paper, or canvas):

#### *Transparent Oil Imprimura (on oil or acrylic surfaces)*

Mix up a batch of neutral color. The amount of paint mixed will depend on the size of your canvas or the quantity of canvas you are planning to prepare. Taking your palette knife, scoop up some of the mixed paint and gently smear it across the canvas. Then taking a clean rag, pour some odorless turpenoid onto the rag and gently push the rag over the surface of the canvas making sure not to push too hard on the canvas. If the paint is not thinned out enough, add a little bit of the turpenoid directly to the canvas surface. The paint should thin out quickly and become very fluid. Continue to gently sweep across the canvas with your rag in circular motions paying mind to cover the white of the canvas with the tone. The final product will be a canvas that is "stained" with a wash of color. Allow it to dry and use as needed. | [watch video](#)

#### *Opaque Ground (on acrylic surfaces)*

Apply one to two coats of Golden Acrylic #6 Neutral Gray paint diluted with water to the surface with a brush. The mixture ratio is approximately two-parts water to one-part paint. To apply the tone, first cover the entire surface of the canvas with the mixture using a 2- or 3-inch wide brush. When the surface is completely covered, make sure the paint surface is smooth by lightly dragging the brush through the paint from one edge to the other, across the entire surface. The finished canvas should have a uniformly smooth gray finish. If the first coat did not cover sufficiently then a second coat of the diluted #6 Neutral Gray toning mixture should be applied. Be careful to not apply the paint too thickly because it reduces the absorbency of the canvas and it makes it harder to apply the paint evenly. I recommend starting with closer to half water, half paint and see how it spreads.