BASIC HAIR COLORING TECHNIQUES

Introduction

When it comes to coloring hair, most people think it's much harder than it actually is. Oh sure, you can make it difficult if you want to... but why would you want to?

The truth is in most cases the hair is just one part of the image. Or put another way, one of many parts of an overall whole. As such, well rendered hair should fit within the over all context of the image. Too many individual hairs or too many details in the hair can detract from the image as a whole.

In this class we are going to treat the hair as a combination of "masses". We will add only as much detail as necessary to create the feeling of soft, flowing luxurious hair. The structure of this class is a little different. Rather than create a single finished image with a single hair color, I've chosen instead to use the class to cover as many different hair colors as was reasonable.

Copic Colors Used For The Class Page

(Refer to the color conversion chart for non Copic alternatives)

|	
E08	
E25	W2
E27	W3
E29	W5
E40	
E41	C2
E42	C4
E43	C6
E49	C10
E55	
E77	BLACK 100
	BROWN SHARPIE
YR02	ULTRA FINE
YR18	
YR21	

Chapter One:
Coloring Red Hair

For this class we will be using a template rather than a "hero" image. What I mean is, rather than color a "finished" image with eyes, skin, etc. and a single hair color, I've chosen to focus on the hair alone. This allows me to cover colors and techniques for four different hair colors rather than one.

In this chapter we will be coloring "red" hair. I'm using a colored line drawing so that the normal black "color book" lines won't detract from the final effect.
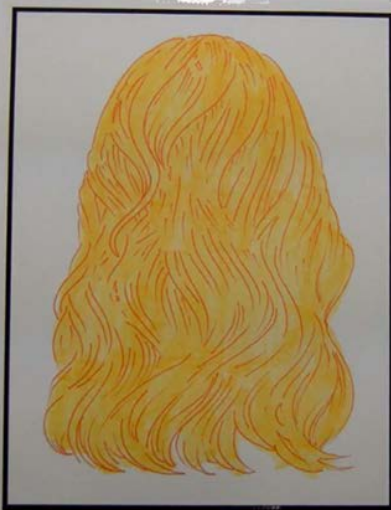
I lay in a base color of YR21 over the entire hair area. This color will act as our "natural" non white highlight and will be barely visible in the final image.

Colored pencil users use light pressure for this step.

I begin to define the major "hair forms" with YR02. A "hair form" is a collection or "wave" of individual strands grouped together to form a shape.

For each "form" I color the top...

...and bottom section (YR02) but leave the YR21 exposed in the middle area.

For the shapes at the bottom of the hair I start at the ends and "stroke" up following the direction of the forms. (YR02)

It looks like fire right now, and for a fantastic character I would probably blend this out with the YR21 and call it done. But lets keep going.

Following essentially the same procedure I add more definition to the forms with YR18.

YR18

After the YR18.

While the over all concept of application is the same as before, I've gone a little darker in spots and "drawn in" some larger strands.

I add E08. I'm using this color like a pencil and really drawing in strands. Be careful to follow the larger shapes you've established in the previous steps.

E08.

Notice how each shape retains its own individual identity yet interlocks and fits with each of the other hair forms.

E08

After the E08.

I add dark E25 accents...

...to further delineate the forms... (E25)

...and to give the illusion of one form tucking under another. (E25)

Careful not to overdo it here!

E25

After the E25.

I do an over all hard pressure blend with YR02 to soften everything together.

This could be done and you can stop here if you like, but I'm going to keep going :)

I add some additional hair texture with a brown ultra fine Sharpie marker...

...adding accents here and there.

I add "linear" strand-like highlights in "bands" across the hair forms with white gouache to finish off the image. You may choose to skip both the Sharpie accents and white highlights if you like. It does look nice without them after all!

Chapter Two:
Coloring Blonde Hair

In this chapter I'll be starting with a light gray line drawing. I would have preferred a more "yellow" line drawing, but it wouldn't have shown up well on camera and this ended up working out just fine :)

I lay in a base color of E40. The E4's are my very favorite colors for coloring realistic blonde hair.

I begin to establish the hair forms with E41...

...leaving the middle section uncolored as before. (E41)

After the E41.

I define the "layers" of shapes with E42.

After the E42.

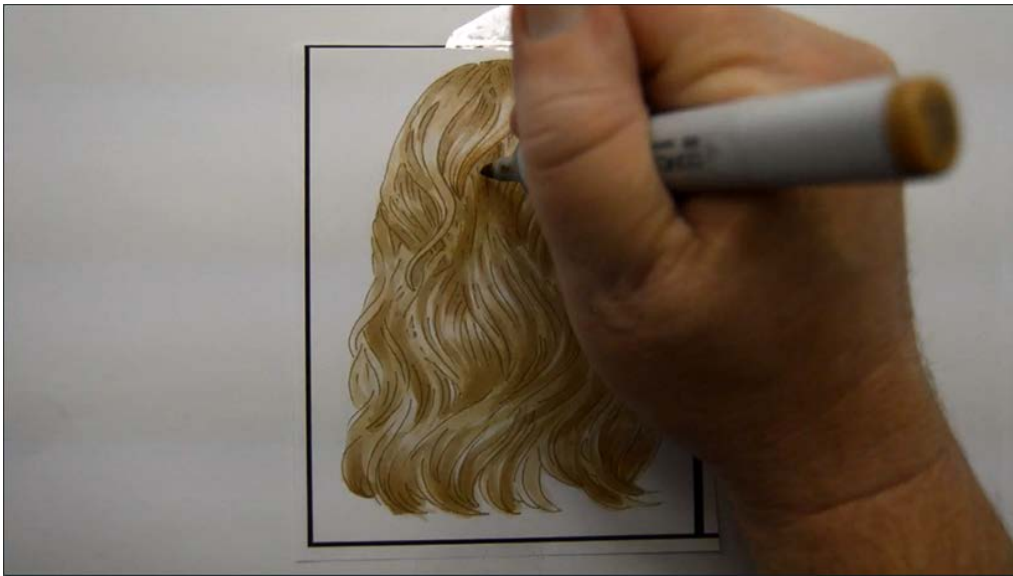I then add my darker areas with E43.

E43

E43

E43

After the E43.

Again, this looks nice as is and a blend layer of E40 could finish it off and give it a soft "platinum blonde" look. But let's keep going :)

I add dark accents with E55.

I also add "hair strands" with this color. (E55)

E55

After the E55.

I add even darker accents with W3.

W3

W3

W3

After the W3.

I go darker still with W5...

...but be careful... (W5)

Don't overdo it! (W5)

W5

When done with care and with attention to the shapes and movements of the individual hair forms, the W3 and W5 really add a ton of volume!

I add an over all heavy blend layer of E41 to finish off the image.

E40 as a final blend would have worked well too and given the image a more "dishwater" blonde look. You may add white highlights if you like but for this one I chose not to.

Chapter Three:
Coloring Brown Hair

For this chapter I'll be starting with a light brown line drawing. This drawing will completely disappear during the coloring process.

I lay in an overall base color of E55. Notice how there are darker and lighter areas. That's a good thing! You can get this effect from a single marker by overlapping your strokes and by slowing down or speeding up your hand movement.

I begin to delineate the individual hair forms with E27. I'm using a combination of flat, broad strokes and thinner hair strokes.

E27

Notice how the combination
of different strokes and
pressures creates the looks
of volume in the hair masses.
(E27)

After the E27.

I use E29 to accentuate the low points of each hair form.

Long fluid strokes that follow the forms are nice here.

E29

After the E29.

Honestly this looks really nice here and if I want the look of thicker coarser hair I could just add highlights and be done! But let's keep going :)

I add an over all blend layer of E55 to give the hair a softer, less coarse look.

I add dark accents with E77.

After the E77.

Again I could, at this point, add highlights and be done. But I'm not gonna!

Using a brown Sharpie ultra fine, I add smaller hair strokes and details to the hair.

These marks are more "felt" than seen...

...but I like the added level of detail they bring to the image.

Now I add my highlights with white gouache.

Notice again that I'm creating "bands" of light that flow across the forms.

White gouache

White gouache

And done!

Chapter Four:
Coloring Black Hair

For this chapter I'm using a black line drawing.

I lay in a base of C2.

I then delineate my forms with C4.

After the C4.

I add darker value accents and hair strokes with C6.

C6

C6

C6

After the C6.

If I wanted to make gray hair I would soften this down with C2, add highlights, and be done...

...but I want to make black hair, not gray!

So I add C8, again paying attention to the shapes of the forms.

C8

C8

After the C8.

I add a layer of C4 to soften everything together.

I add very dark accents with C10...

They are hard to see, but that's okay! We are going for "feel" here.

I add accents and hair strokes with Black 100.

I add white gouache highlights.

White gouache

White gouache

And done!

While basic, the lessons in this class can be applied to create a wide variety of hair colors and textures. The techniques you've learned can be modified simply by using smaller strokes and more precise hand movements to create ultra realistic hair as well. In short, you now know everything you need to color nearly any type of hair you run across!

My work here is done! :)

Until next time...

Christopher Kerry