

## *Painter & Photoshop* **PAINTING PERFECT SKIN**

**Marta Dahlig** explains everything you need to know about creating realistic complexions for your portraits

### *Artist* **PROFILE**

**Marta Dahlig**  
COUNTRY: Poland



Born in 1985, Marta Dahlig is a young and talented artist who is an

expert in custom brushes.  
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### **DVD Files**

The files you need are on your DVD in the Marta Dahlig folder in the Workshops section.

**SOFTWARE:** Photoshop CS3, Painter X (demos)

**P**ainting skin is one of the hardest tasks faced by every photorealistic painter, due to the number of factors that make up a final effect – colour choices, blending techniques, special brush usage and custom texturing are all equally important to achieve a truly realistic effect. It's also crucial to remember that different types of skin require a different approach and therefore a different combination of these elements. A delicate porcelain skin tone will require a similar technique to the transparent skin typical for babies, but will drastically differ to darker skin rendition methods.

In this workshop, I will cover the main differences between portraying major types of complexions, and discuss some basic anatomy notes, useful brushes as

well as tips and tricks useful for achieving certain effects. While I'm talking about a particular skin tone, I will also share variations of colour palettes for you to study or use in your own paintings.

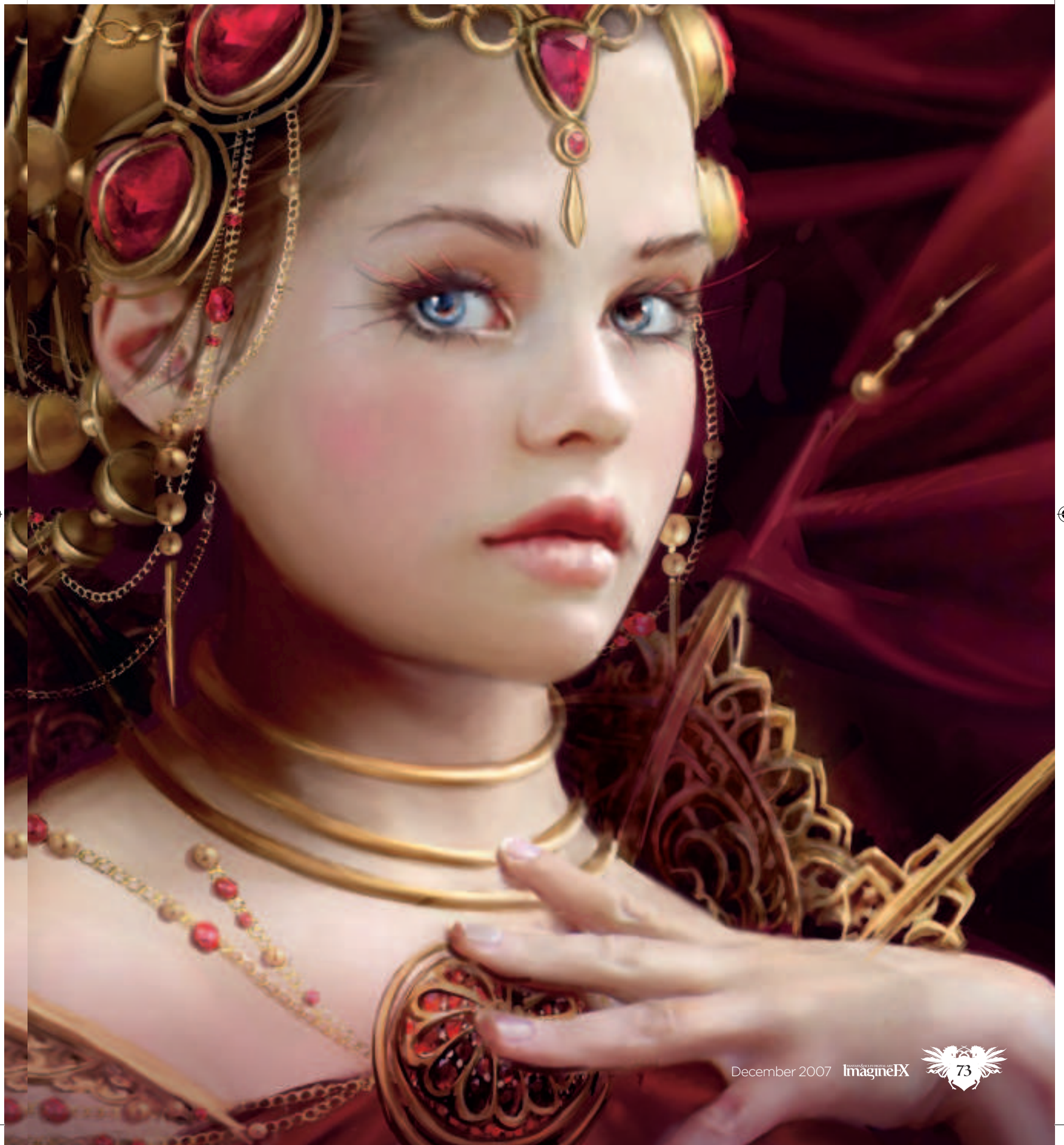
The workshop will not contain much on the basics of face painting, and therefore it is aimed at those already possessing a basic understanding and skill in painting faces, including general rules of colour application and blending techniques. Where possible, however, I will give reminders of the most important issues as the workshop progresses.

To get the most from this workshop, you should own any version of Photoshop or Painter from version 6 onwards, as well as have a tablet. To help you further with this workshop, I've included my colour palettes on the DVD. ➔





# In depth Painting perfect skin



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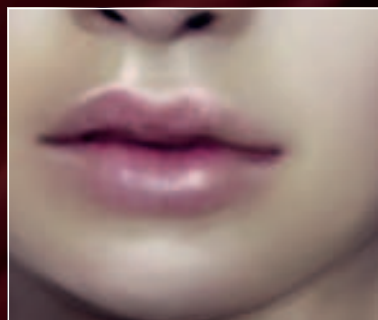
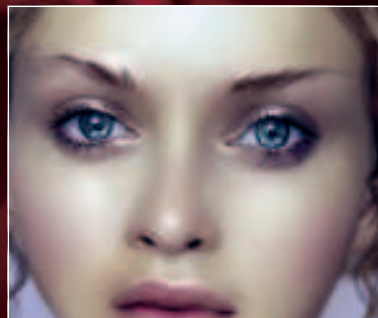
## PORCELAIN



### PRO SECRETS

#### Saturated colours

If you create a skin tone palette, choose really saturated colours except for the midtone. This is important, because the colours are always applied on a lower opacity, and so they lose some of their boldness. Mild colour choices at the very beginning would end up looking greyish and uninteresting. Also remember that if at any time you feel unhappy with the colours you choose, you can use the Colour Balance tools to help you out. The most usual problem is colours looking too brownish, and usually moving the highlight's red slider to the left and the Shadow's blue slider slightly to the right helps quite a lot.



### 1 Ever important colours

Porcelain skin complexion is very specific, where the main role is played by the choice of colours. It is a well known fact that the highlights, shadows and midtones should all be of a different hue, no matter what type of skin you paint. This rule is most important in painting porcelain tones. Usually, this effect is created by choosing a lightly saturated midtone and a bluish shadow.

What I personally find key to achieving this effect, however, is the highlight. There are many possibilities, but a light turquoise/green highlight creates one of the core effects of this complexion, which is its fragile, fresh glow.

When you have your palette chosen (or pick one of mine, supplied on the DVD), sketch out a basic face. It doesn't really matter what tools you use for this, but for now try to avoid the Airbrush.

### 2 Smooth it up!

Blending is the second most important factor in achieving the porcelain skin effect. Usually it might be good to solely use rougher blenders for additional texture, but in this case we want the blending to be perfectly smooth. In order to achieve this effect, first blend with rougher blenders (Hard Round in Photoshop or Blender in Painter) to define the shapes later moving on to soft blenders (Just Add Water from Painter or any Airbrush used on a low opacity) to soften the transitions.

### 3 Forget texturing

Even though I always underline the necessity of using textures in order to achieve extreme realism, the porcelain skin tone is an exception from this rule. I would usually advise to paint in tiny skin pores for skin texture, however in this case it's better to skip this step. Instead, pick a colour for your highlight and run with an Airbrush over the most convex areas of the face, which are the forehead, chin, cheekbones, eyebrows and the tip of the nose. Make the highlights really bold by using a high opacity in order to create that glowing skin effect we discussed in the first step.

### 4 Final retouches

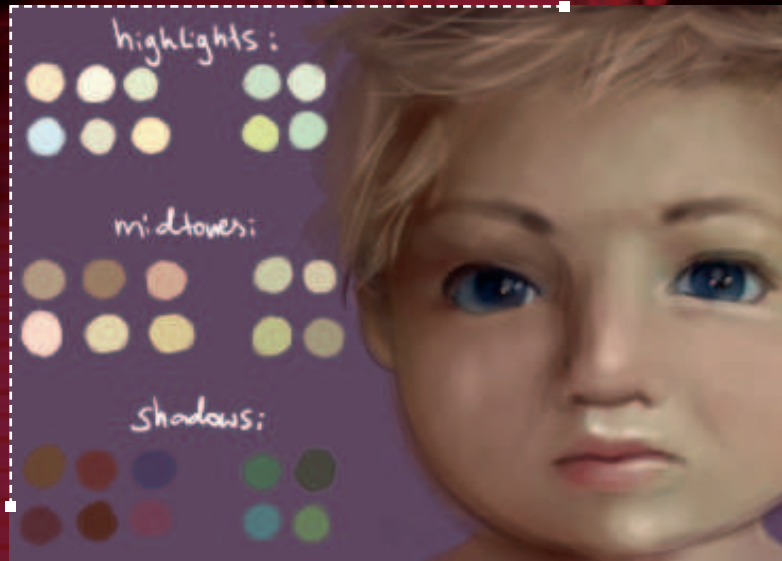
When you are basically done, you can use some extra tricks to underline the skin's softness to a higher extent. First, pick your midtone colour and, with an Airbrush, use it over the lower lip's outer edges, making the lips blend in with the rest of the face. Then, still with an Airbrush, pick a highlight and run with it over the small convexity where the upper lip begins and also on the lower lip edges you just worked on. Also, try to soften the edges of the actual face slightly, by using the Blur tool on them, or simply by creating them with an Airbrush.



## TRANSPARENT

### 1 Babies and vampires

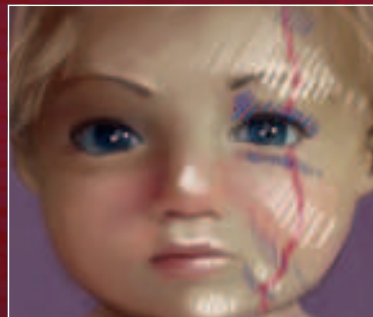
Transparent complexion at the very first sight seems quite similar to the porcelain skin tone. There are, however, several differences that make it worth looking at separately. Aside from the rule of hue switching between shadows and midtones, the colour choices aren't as determined, as they depend highly on the character you are painting. The baby palettes are much more natural looking, what you might describe as 'typical' skin tones, while the vampirish ones are more pale and sickly, in keeping with the creatures' legend. The key to creating the final effect of this particular complexion lies in understanding of this skin's structure and doing appropriate texturing.



### 2 Anatomy alert

Keep in mind that aside from the anatomy, a child's face convexities are a bit different than the ones of an adult. This phenomenon is visible especially in the cheek area. You can see in the image to the right that I've marked the convexity with the red line and the ways of shading with marks of blue (shadows) and white (highlights).

Also, if you haven't yet, enrich the nose and cheek area with some pink shades.



### 3 It's texturing time!

It's time to create the illusion of skin transparency – sketching in the veins. The skin is the thinnest and the veins most visible on a child's forehead and, usually, just above the eyes. Remember that the older the child, the less visible the veins will be.

If you chose to paint a vampire, do what your heart desires. I found the combinations of intense, nearly black vein nets around the eyes and lips, fading gradually, to look very interesting, and give a convincingly undead appearance.

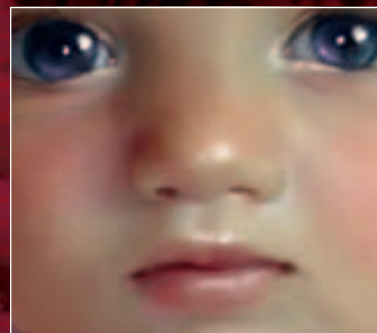
Pick a violet or bluish brush (a Hard Round or an Airbrush), create a thin net of lines, which are to simulate veins (1 on the image, right). Blur the layer slightly and experiment with the layer modes to see if they give interesting results. Now underline the thickness of the veins by running with a crimson Airbrush over some shapes concentrating on the vein junctions (2), adding darker strokes every now and then (3). If needed, dim the effect by slightly airbrushing the area with your midtone.



### 4 No pores

For final skin texturing I again refrain from painting skin pores. If you paint a newborn, you can try to add a subtle rash, which is very typical for little babies (cradle cap). Do so by placing various dots of reddish colour on top of each other – start with big blobs of low transparency, gradually moving on to smaller and more opaque. Concentrate especially on the cheek and chin area. You can also add a tiny spot highlight to the nose and lips – it's a small touch, but adds to the cuteness greatly!

If you paint a vampire, run over the edges of the face with a huge Airbrush. It'll add to the unearthly glow of the sickly skin.





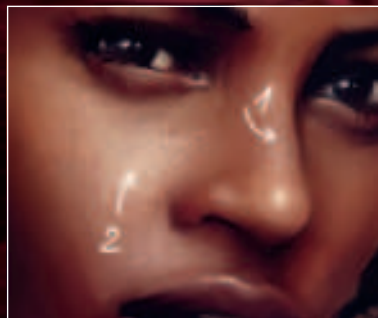
## DARKER TONES



**1 Anatomy issues**  
Colour choices for this complexion might be a bit hard to decide upon at first, but you can create a palette by choosing typical midtones for a Caucasian complexion and then darkening them with the Brightness/Contrast tool. The key to achieving a realistic deep complexion, however, is the knowledge of anatomy and texturing. This is a bit of a generalisation, but the nose should usually be a bit stronger and wider and the lips very puffy. To underline the puffiness, aside from using the typical glow on the edge of upper lip (1) mark a small shadow cast by the lip's convex edge on to the face (2).



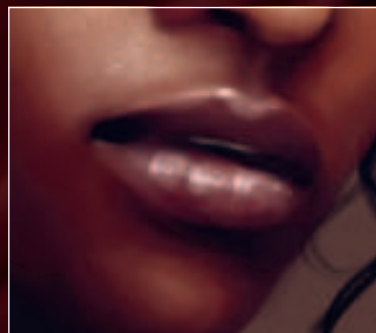
**2 Typical blending**  
As you can see, I also attached some palettes for lighter skin that you might find useful for painting tanned complexions, as the logic of applying and blending colour is pretty much the same. You start off by picking some sets from the palette and blocking in the midtones and shadows with any tool of choice, except the Airbrush. Remember you don't have to be so careful about the transitions as with the porcelain complexions, so avoid using any smudge or blur tools and just smoothen the rough parts with the Blender in Painter and/or the Hard Round brush in Photoshop. You can also check the DVD for the Spackled Skin Blending brush.



**3 Paint those skin pores!**  
After painting the base, it's time to concentrate on the texturing, which you'll need to do quite a lot of here, adding oily skin pores, a characteristic for this complexion. Start off by picking a very light flesh colour and with a Hard Round brush painting the pores one by one. Concentrate on the nose-cheek area. Also, it's quite important for those blobs of colour be very close to each other and diagonal (1). Remember to be constantly changing the opacity of the dots, increasing it in the most highlighted places.

After the basic texturing is done, Photoshop users can now do a little trick: create a new layer and place some more, nearly white short diagonal strokes over the desired area.

Finally, right click the layer and choose Blending Options>Inner Shadow. Adjust the distance and size and pick the midtone as your shadow colour. (2) When done correctly, they look incredibly realistic when you zoom out of your image.



**4 Perfect lips**  
And now, a few words about painting lips. Their basic shading is quite typical – you can paint some small light dots with an Airbrush and dim them later with a bigger brush. However in this case, to underline the lips' size and convexity, add bigger vertical lines of light colour and connect them by a series of dots.



## PALE GINGER

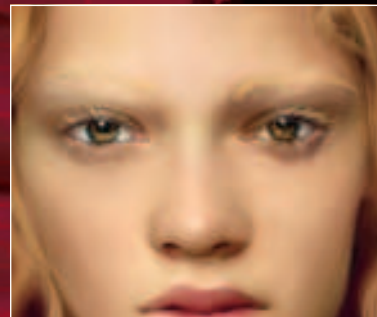
### 1 Freedom of technique

I personally find this complexion to be one of the most interesting, yet very rarely seen in digital art. To start off, pick any colours you like, as long as they will be pale. I personally prefer the orange tints because they go well with the hair. The colour application and brush choice is also standard. What makes this complexion so special, is some minor details, which separately insignificant, put together form a great effect. To start, sketch out a basic face with any tool you feel comfortable using.



### 2 Contrasts

The face ought to be colourless. This means using absolutely no contrasts inside the face, which is done by choosing a mild yellow or light orange colour to paint the facial hair with. Eyebrows should be barely visible, so use a transparent Airbrush to block the hairs in. For eyelashes, paint delicate strokes of brown and, on top of them, highly opaque strokes of lighter colour. If the eyes need some definition due to the lack of a dark eyelash framing, you could try adding transparent blobs of darker colour at the base of the lashes.



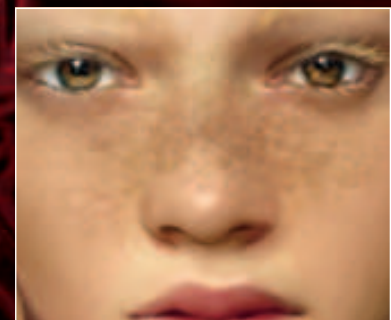
### 3 Freckled cuteness

There are a few types of freckles out there, all depending on the skin type: there are temporary sun-derived freckles which can be found on any type of Caucasian skin and there are permanent freckles characteristic of a very pale complexion.

The former ones are the easiest to depict, achieved by simply adding a couple of dots on top of a normal complexion. The later ones, however, are a bit more complex. Their shape is more patch-like and they cover much more skin surface.

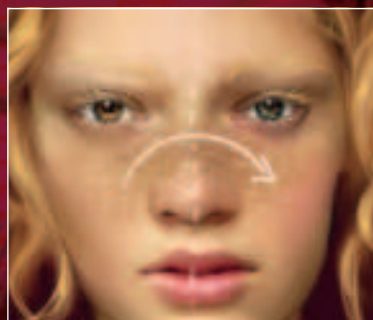
To start rendering a realistic freckle texture, create a Spackled brush in Photoshop (or use my brush that I've supplied on the DVD). If you work in Painter, use a jittered Airbrush.

Now, choose a colour slightly darker than your midtone, and with a low opacity run with it over the majority of the face. Gradually move on to more opaque, darker orange colours. At the very end, paint in some freckles one by one for a natural look. If they do not blend well with the face, try switching the layer modes.



### 4 Extra colours

When you are done with blending, facial hair and freckles, there is not much you still have to do. If you feel the face turned out to be too colourless, which is quite often the case, try enriching it with shades by adding blushes or, if possible, adding some additional colours to the pupil.



### PRO SECRETS

#### Switch between software!

Many artists feel awkward learning Photoshop or Painter and limit themselves to one. It seems like a waste of time to spend many hours just figuring out how to paint something that you already know perfectly in another program. Both, however, possess some distinctive qualities: Photoshop has wonderful colour adjustment tools and, best of all, fantastic brush creation possibilities, while Painter has fabulous blenders which speed up the and painting process, and many natural media simulating brushes.