

What printmaking paper should I be using?

M.E.S

Melbourne
Etching Supplies



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It's a question we hear often here at M.E.S. Read on to discover some of the key factors you might like to consider when choosing your printmaking papers.

What type of printmaking are you doing?

Within the broad realm of printmaking, it makes sense that different printmaking techniques would require different types of paper. Let's break it down.

Relief Printing (e.g., woodcut or linocut): Papers that are strong and can handle the pressure of the printing press, such as traditional Japanese washi, mulberry paper, or heavier weight Western papers such as Stonehenge, Fabriano Rosaspina or BFK Rives. It's good to note, heavier paper does not necessarily mean stronger.

Intaglio (e.g. etching, engraving, drypoint): Papers that can handle being soaked and pressed without tearing, such as Hahnemühle, Velin Arches, BFK Rives, Somerset, Magnani 1404, Dutch Etching).

Lithography: Smooth papers that can hold fine details of the lithographic process. Good choices include BFK Rives, Somerset Satin.

Screen Printing (Serigraphy): Papers that are smooth and can handle multiple layers of ink such as Stonehenge, Dutch Aquatint.

Paper Weight

The weight of the paper is measured in grams per square meter (gsm), or for our American friends, in pounds (lb). Heavier papers (e.g., 250gsm and up) are typically used for most printmaking techniques because they are very durable - be it in the printing process itself or during soaking. Lighter papers can be used for a variety of techniques like Japanese woodblock printing - where they may be used if you don't have access to a press and are using a hand baren to print! Our Hosho Hik and Kozo papers are fantastic for this.

Heavier weight papers are perfect for deep embossing, and will pick up the finest details from relief blocks and intaglio plates. A good example of this is the Magnani 1404 Corona 400gsm, or the Hahnemühle 350gsm papers.



Surface Texture

The texture of the paper surface will affect the final print. Smooth papers are ideal for fine detail and delicate lines, while textured papers can add interesting effects and depth to the print.

Colour & Tone

Printmaking papers come in a variety of colours and tints. White or off-white papers are the most versatile, and at M.E.S. we stock an extensive selection of these neutral papers. The Hahnemühle papers, in Warm White, offer a gorgeous cream surface that will pick up extraordinary detail in intaglio prints. The Somerset range offers a White and Soft White option - the White is bright, similar to a true Titanium White, whereas the Soft White is smooth and warm like a light butter.

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Coloured papers can be used creatively to add a different dimension to a print. The Magnani 1404 Pescia range is available not just in White and Ivory, but also in Pale Blue, Cream and in Grey! Somerset offers a Black Velvet option. (Try printing Charbonnel Silver on the Somerset Black!)

Paper Composition

Printmaking papers are typically made from 100% cotton or other high-quality fibres. Printmaking papers are generally acid-free and archival, ensuring that your prints will last without deteriorating over time (if and when stored appropriately). Our proofing options, the Fabriano Unica or Canson Editioning are top quality mixed blend papers that don't break the bank.



Testing and Experimentation

If you are new to printmaking or trying a new technique, it might be worthwhile to buy small quantities of different papers to test how they perform with your specific process and plates. The beauty of printmaking is its variability and individuality - every printmaker will wipe back their plate ever-so-slightly differently, and will mix their ink with just that extra touch of carbon black or prussian blue (thats a nod to those seeking the deepest, darkest black). Each plate and ink combination will work slightly differently with different paper stock.

Here are some recommendations to get you started:

Hahnemühle: Excellent for intaglio work, due to its strength and smooth surface. All Hahnemühle papers are sized with a plant based gelatin - making them one of the only vegan-friendly art papers!

BFK Rives: A very popular paper for good reason. BFK Rives has a smooth surface and is extremely

versatile. It's an excellent choice for intaglio, relief & lithographic work. A classic Bright White in colour.

Somerset: Soft paper excellent for intaglio and relief printing. The Somerset papers are wonderful for bookbinding and they offer three different surface textures - Satin, Velvet and Textured.

Velin Arches: Versatile and strong, suitable for intaglio and lithography. The Velin Arches is the Soft White cousin of the BFK Rives. (A personal favourite).

Magnani 1404: Historically beloved papers that kind of disappeared off the 'scene' for a while, but these papers are back and with a vengeance. These papers PRINT. To say we were blown away when we tested them is an understatement - in particular with the Corona 400gsm. Delicious. Excellent for intaglio work and relief prints.

We are getting carried away now so we will end on the **Awagami Kitakata**. An exquisite Japanese paper available in two tones, the Warm (almost peachy cream) and the Cool (a sort of light mint green). These papers print woodcut and woodblocks beautifully as well as being a great choice for Chine Collé.

Hopefully, with the consideration of some of these factors, we can help you continue to make informed paper choices uniquely suited to your work.

As always, we are team of artists & printmakers at M.E.S, and we welcome your printmaking & paper questions if you have one - we will do our best to find the answer for you.

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