



The Color Brown

by Elizabeth Finch Howell, CPCP

Let's face it – if our clients would agree to blue, yellow, or red eyebrows, life would much simpler. No problem Ms. Jones, I've got just the right red for your eyebrows. It will compliment the color of the bloodshot eyes you seem to have all the time and will last far longer than the brown we used to use because it is a primary color and primary colors have longevity. Or, how about a nice yellow to match the jaundice appearance of your skin, Ms. Smith? No problem. Yellow will fade faster than red or blue, but for you that yellow eyebrow will be the sunshine of your life for a very long time. Or, we could do a nice sea blue eyebrow for you, Ms. Doe. Now there is a brow color that you will most likely take to your grave and since we always try to harmonize our brow colors with skin tone attributes, the blue will bring out the dark circles under your eyes like no other color. Lovely indeed.

OK, we've had our silly moment and hopefully it made you smile. We have to find some humor in the brown dilemma or we would surely go nuts chasing it around. Now to get down to the real intent of this article which is to better understand and how to stay out of trouble with brown pigments. The majority of clients want shades of brown eyebrows whether it is a blonde (the lightest of the brown tones,) a light brown (darker than blonde,) a medium brown, or a dark brown, (some bordering on the appearance of black.) There are a few, but just a few, clients who ask for black eyebrows and it is rarely recommended that you use straight black for an eyebrow procedure unless a stark black is the only color that will show up after healing on an extremely dark skin tone. This is rare, but we do not want to operate in absolutes when it comes to skin tones and client requests. Black brown pigments will serve the eyebrow client much better than a straight black because straight black may fade to blue or gray tone overtime. The most commonly requested color correction for an eyebrow is the one that has faded to an orange, gray or blue tone. Rarely will you see green (however not impossible) because of the warmth factors of the blood flow in the forehead area and occasionally you will see a pink or violet residual eyebrow that requires correction.

Needle configuration impact:

When selecting a brown pigment for your client, as you have heard time and time again, you must use your experience and fast forward in your mind the affect the client's skin tone will have in relationship with the pigment you are putting in the skin. Pigment plus skin tone equals a different appearance of the pigment you put in the skin. There are other factors that affect the healed brown color as well.



Elizabeth Finch Howell introduced to many the concept that the smaller the needle configuration used for the eyebrow procedure, the more ash (and ash is always cooler and darker) the healed procedure will appear. Why? Because the smaller needles slice through the skin more effectively and generally place pigment deeper. The use of larger needle configurations have less of a slicing effect and for lack of a better word, more or less plummet pigment into the skin, thus placing the pigment slightly closer to light and further from direct relationship with the bloodstream (blue.) Pigment that remains closer to the surface of the skin will reflect more light and appear less cool than pigment that resides deeper in the skin.

In theory if you use a number 1 or 3 needle on the right side of a client's eyebrow procedure and a number 5 or 8 on the left side when the procedure healed, you might see that the right eyebrow is slightly cooler (ash) and thus darker than the left. So, right up front we have the knowledge that if our choice as a technician is the use of smaller needle configurations, and the client desires a warmer eyebrow, you will need to compensate for the small needle usage by selecting a slightly warmer eyebrow pigment.

Properties of Brown

Now that we have determined that a needle configuration selection can affect the overall healed color and tone of a brown, let's explore the properties of brown pigments. Basic color theory teaches us that opposites on the color wheel neutralize. If your client's skin tone is ruddy or red, the best selection is a green or green-yellow based brown. If your client's skin tone were olive (green) then the neutralizing brown color would have more red in it. Although in theory if your client's skin tone is translucent or transparent (having more blue or violet undertones,) the proper pigment base would have more yellow, you may find these clients actually prefer a taupe (green base) color. This is common because the more mature clients seem to feel their eyebrows must match their hair color. Many translucent and transparent skin tones have extreme white, silver, or salt and pepper (silver and black) hair. Nonetheless, these skin tones are strong in blue and violet undertones and even if you use other colors such as blonde, they will have a tendency to ash out to a more gray appearance when healed. Although it is easy to resist the request for a gray eyebrow because as we know gray is not the most splendid color for the skin, if this is what the client has been used to applying for herself forever you may find her hard pressed to change.

Judging the pigment base of any pigment may be difficult if the manufacturer does not provide a corresponding pigment base information sheet. Most manufactures do provide pigment guideline charts at this juncture in our industry's positive transition toward full



disclosure and support. In yesteryears we were all in the back room pouring pigments into little cups to see how the brown separated in water to try to determine the primary base color. Little did we know that the brown we were working with could have been made from a calcined process of changing a black, yellow or copperas red to brown. Chances are under those circumstances and without the assistance from the manufacturer, determining the true base of the brown was not going to happen.

A little chemistry

Browns can be complex. They can be made from a copperas red that was calcined (roasted), or from a precipitated yellow ochre (formed in an aqueous solution of ferrous salt and an alkali.) Raw umber is a greenish-brown, but when calcined at 500-800 degrees F, produces rich walnut tones of burnt umber. Calcined ochres can produce pink, red, maroon and even black. Some red-browns appear warm but in fact, have a blue-base. The blue-based red iron oxides are suitable for lip color mixtures, but have no place in brow colors (mauve or purple brow undertones.) Calcination and precipitation simply means changing one color into another. Although these pigment color processes are said to produce colorfast final colors, one has to wonder if there are not exceptions to this when brows return healed or later fade to an undesirable color. Then of course we have the better-known formulations of a secondary color with a primary color to make a brown. Be aware that some brown pigment colors are actually Zinc and Magnesium Ferrite pigments. Although they are technically not iron oxides, the ferrite pigments have characteristics and chemical compositions similar to synthetic iron oxides and thus can be included in the iron oxide family.

It is recognized that all this information may seem too technical for many, however, knowledge is power and the more technicians know about the pigments they use, the more successful they will become. Because this is such valuable information, Elizabeth will provide a full presentation on all of the pigment processes mentioned in this article and more at the SPCP Philadelphia Conference in September. Also, with the new pigment manufacturer guidelines effective at the end of this year, you, as a consumer, will begin to see more and more information on pigment container labels that will provide helpful guidance.

Modifiers

Many pigment manufacturers also provide pigment color modifiers. Meaning that you do not have to necessarily have to mix two browns to create another brown in your attempt to meet your client's expectations. These modifiers are typically pigment colors that are more radically green, red, or yellow. With the use of these modifiers you can greatly reduce the number of brown pigments you maintain in your inventory. If you want a cooler brown, you



would add a small amount of the green modifier to a neutral brown color. A warmer brown would constitute adding a modifier that is red or orange, or the favorite corrective/neutral color in our industry, **ochre**. If your client's skin tone contains a noticeable amount of violet, the yellow modifier or an ochre would help balance out the brown to harmonize with her skin tone.

Guidelines

As a rule, lighter and using brown pigment bases that have yellow/green base alone or one that you have seasoned with a warm (red/orange or ochre pigment modifier) or another brown with those characteristics is better. It is easier to darken a brown that has healed too light and easier to warm up a brow that has healed too cool. In general, avoid eyebrow pigments that have a blue base (as stated above they produce mauve/violet eyebrows.) In the event an eyebrow pigment with a green or yellow/ green base consistently heals **too** green even when modified slightly with a warmer modifier pigment, take this pigment out of your inventory and replace it with a better balanced yellow/green based pigment. You will want to have neutral yellow/green based browns that can easily be modified with red, orange or ochre as a warming technique if needed, and used successfully time after time. A pigment that consistently heals "too anything" time after time is a pigment that needs to be retired from your inventory. As a tip for avoiding gray brows, it never hurts to put a drop or two of an ochre in a brown to ward off the grays which can be brought on by an ash skin tone that is not easily recognized. This is an insurance technique much like we use with orange added to a lip pigment to avoid a lip healing too blue.

- Your needle configuration has an impact on the healed color of brown. The smaller the needle, the cooler and more ash the color may appear.
- Although there are several browns that come directly from the earth as raw umber and raw sienna, browns can be made from primary and secondary colors mixed to produce a tertiary color.
- Browns are also made from blacks, yellows and copperas reds; Each through certain processes called precipitation (in an aqueous solution) and calcination (roasting.)
- Beginning the eyebrow procedure with a pigment that may end up too light and/or too cool (green or yellow/green) is a safe mode to operate in. At the follow-up visit, the depth and temperature of the color of this brow can be modified more easily than that of a brow having healed too dark and too warm (red, or red/yellow = orange.)
- Avoid using browns that contain blue as the primary base color.



- Most pigment manufacturers provide detailed information about their pigments ranging from disclosing warm or cool-base tendencies to actual color formulation ingredients.
- In theory and primary application, green bases are more ideal for ruddy or red-based skin tones, red or orange bases more ideal for blue, and yellow for violet skin tones.
- More mature clients may request taupe or gray eyebrows because it better matches their silver or white hair and the eyebrow pencil they have been using for years.
- The use of color modifiers is a good option to season a brown to better serve the wide variety of skin tones we see daily is common. Rather than add two browns and possibly offset the manufacturer's color balance to the extreme, use modifiers conservatively to season the brown to a cooler or warmer bias.

Browns, in general, can be a little tricky for all of the reasons stated above. It is important each technician develops the skills necessary to combine the concepts of color theory with brown color selection and skin tone determination. Establishing a good relationship with your pigment manufacturer is the final step necessary to reap the benefits of “those in the know” about base colors for brown pigments you use daily.