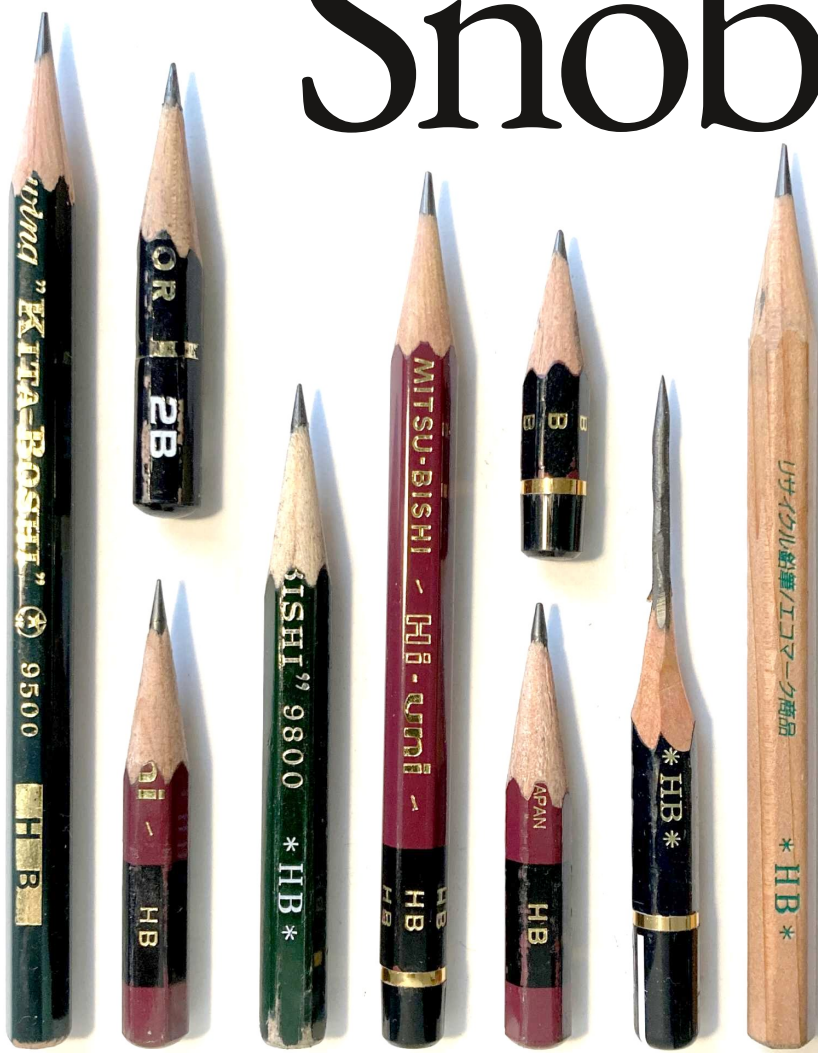


Pencil Snob



By Tim Weaver

© Tim Weaver 2023

timoweaver.com

timoweaver@gmail.com

1st Printing 2022: made on a **Acer CB311-9H Chromebook** with **Scribus** as the layout program, and an **iPhone** to take the photos, photo edits in **Photopea**.
You can do some wild stuff with a \$100 computer now a days.

2nd Printing 2023 brought into **Affinity Publisher** (painstakingly imported via PDF due to no export option in Scribus) on a **M1 Macbook Air**

Why Pencils?

The pandemic hit in 2020, and then I somehow got into wood cased pencils. I have no recollection of what sparked it, possibly an interest in the Blackwing 602, but I just remember reading **The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance** by *Henry Petroski*. I found **CW Pencil Enterprise** online and ordered a few different types of pencils around May 2020.

I was startled at how much smoother a lot of them felt than my mechanical pencils, and I had used a lot of different types of lead. I was previously using .5mm, .7mm, and .9mm mechanical pencils in various grades and even some colored lead, and had attempted to use 2mm mechanical lead holders too. The wood cased pencils just seemed smoother. They also had the advantage of having a uniform barrel design (no clips, no weird grips, just a smooth lacquered barrel).

Then I started looking for old vintage pencils in thrift shops, things that I had never tried, while also buying up boxes of new pencils to try from different shops online. Japanese, German, American, Indian, all kinds. I couldn't stop until I found out as much about them as I could, if this one was smoother or darker or had less grit, I had to find the best of the best.

What I determined is that wood cased pencils worked better for me and my art practice than mechanical pencils. I liked the control of the tip (sharp versus broad and dull) and how much lead you could expose. I like the way they feel in your hands, much warmer than a mechanical pencil. I like that they get used up, and the nub is proof you got something done. And I love how easy it is to tell what grade it is versus trying to remember what lead loaded in the current mechanical pencil I'm using.

If you haven't given a pencil a shot in a minute, I suggest you do. Here is a few of my favorites, some that are readily available online at places like **Jetpens.com**, **PencilFight.org**, or **Amazon**, and some stuff thats vintage that you might need to look at the **Kamikokuken Etsy shop**, **BrandNamePencils.com**, or **eBay**.

I'd suggest trying out a few singles of pencils first (if you have a local stationery store that sells singles thats the best option), and then buy a box of your favorites. If you really fall down the Japanese pencil hole, it might be worth it to import via **Amazon.co.jp**.

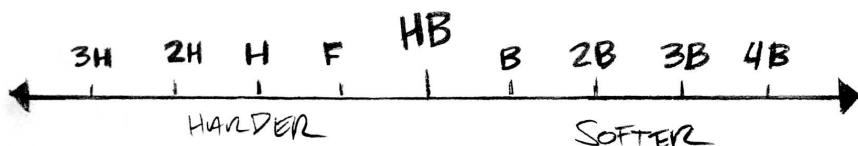
Whatever you do, have fun, and try not to buy too many.



-Tim Weaver

A Word on Lead Grades

Most people seem completely confused by grades, so I thought I'd touch base on the subject. I'll mention grades like HB mostly, but pencils come in loads of different grades. Pencil leads are composed of two main ingredients: graphite and clay (to bind the graphite particles together). The more graphite in the lead, the softer the lead. The more clay in the lead, the harder the lead.



HB is going to be the middle of the road, everyday, normal grade for a pencil. It's the same thing as a #2 pencil you used for tests technically. Anything that is a B and up is softer, makes a darker mark, and has less point retention meaning you'll sharpen more. 2B is softer than B, 3B is softer than 2B, etc. A #1 pencil is a B grade pencil.

A pencil marked F is a hair harder than an HB. It's called Firm, if you've ever seen a pencil labeled #2 1/2, or #2 2/4, or #2 4/8, etc, that was an F.

From there, H is even harder than an F. 2H is harder than H, 3H, is harder than 2H, and so on. A #3 pencil is a H pencil, and a #4 pencil is a 2H pencil.

Because there is no standardization, an HB from one company might feel like the H of another company. As a standard practice, Japanese (**Tombow**, **Mitsubishi**, **Kitaboshi**) pencils are softer, European (**Faber Castell**, **Staedtler**, **Caran d'Ache**) pencils are lighter, and American pencils (General's, Musgrave) are kinda in between, but edge closer to Japan than Europe. Indian pencils (**Apsara**, **Nataraj**) align more with Japan I would say.

The hardest pencil in HB I've found thus far is probably the **Koh-I-Noor 1500**. It feels like a **Mitsubishi Hi-uni** in a 2H-4H or so grade.

What grade should you use?

When you are drawing, unless you are creating a full tonal drawing, most people use between a H to a 2B. You have to do some soul searching and find which one you prefer, and it also depends on the paper. Certain papers work better with certain pencil grades, so if you are drawing and it feels too scratchy or you need more feedback, try something else.

Some people like to use a 3B, 4B, even up to 10B for drawing, but that tends to be more for the animation crowd. You'll see Hayao Miyazaki using a **Mitsubishi Uni** in 5B or 6B, or a **Tombow Mono** in 3B to 4B, but that's because he has reduced use of his hands from years of overworking and stress, which forced him to move to a softer pencil that left a mark more easily than his old 2B pencils.

I've heard of some comic artists using down to a 2H or 4H to draw penciled pages, which is something I'd never do myself. It's a super light line, less prone to smearing because there is less graphite on the page, and less to show up after inking and erasing. For my taste, it feels more like I'm carving out the drawing because it's so hard and scratchy, but that might not be the same for you.

For full tonal drawing, you can't beat getting a whole set of pencils in all grades provided by the manufacturer, and from the same line (like **Hi-uni**). Don't get a HB from one company, and a H and F from another, because they might not be as different as you'd expect.



Vintage Pencils:

the Eberhard Faber Blackwing 602 isn't worth it

I'm sure if you've heard of anything in pencils, you've heard about the **Blackwing 602**. There is a Blackwing 602 out now, but it is not the original Blackwing 602. **Cal Cedar** got the rights to produce a new pencil under the old name, but they don't have the same lead formula, which was the most important part.

The original Blackwing was produced by **Eberhard Faber**, and it has a cult following. It was a much softer writing oriented pencil than most people were used to when introduced (think a 2B to a 4B), in a world where pencils were a little grittier and harder (the harder the pencil the longer they last!). It was also potentially the first pencil impregnated with wax, making it an even smoother writer.

But those are no longer produced. People love the story and the people who used them (John Steinbeck, Chuck Jones, Richard Dreyfus in Jaws, etc.) so they want one of the originals. I know I did. With supply low, and demand high, that means they cost money. \$50 is probably the cheapest you'll find a single pencil unsharpened, 12 packs go for \$500 to \$1000 or so depending on the version (the ones from the 1930's fetch a higher price).

It's no better than a pencil produced today (the Mitsubishi Hi-uni in 2B feels like a close dupe). In fact, I would say most pencils produced today are just as good or better.

The Pentel Black Polymer 999 (pictured) also fetches a high price. I bought 3 of these for 50 bucks, and it was 100% not worth it. The paint lacquer is thin, feels cheap, and I didn't find the lead inside to be worth the price of a 12 pack of **Mitsubishi Hi-unis**.

If you find any of these for a deal, they are fun to try, but don't expect the results to be mind blowing. This is pretty much true for all vintage pencils. They are pretty and fun to have, but at the end of the day a readily available modern version exists and is 10 to 100 times cheaper.



My Favorite Pencils

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but these are some of my favorite pencils that I've found over the last two years. You might have some other favorites, or maybe you're looking to try something new. Hopefully this list will give you a head start.

Mitsubishi Hi-uni

This pencil, specifically in HB, is my favorite modern pencil. It's smooth enough and dark enough without being too dark, a real work horse. It's pretty, has finished end caps (meaning the end of the pencil isn't bare wood, but covered in either paint or an end cap attached made of plastic or metal), the grade designation on all 6 sides of the barrel, and if you buy a 12 pack they come in a snazzy case that they haven't changed the design of since the 70's.

They also have a whole line of 22 different grades, if you do full tonal drawing I'd say get a whole set.

The **Hi-uni** in HB is one of the only pencil lines I've ever used to never run into a bit of grit (a rough patch in the lead that feels irregular from everything else). I can remember a moment with nearly every other pencil that had a tiny bit of grit. Not this one. The vintage version of this pencil isn't different from the current model, other than having a white dot on the end cap versus a yellow dot, there is a **JIS** mark (Japanese Industrial Standard), and no barcode. Virtually identical otherwise.



Tombow Mono 100

Tombow's answer to the Hi-uni, the **Tombow Mono 100** is also an incredible pencil, and probably my second favorite. A little darker and softer in HB than the Hi-uni, it still feels great and it has a gorgeous design of black and gold with a white strip on the end cap. The Mono 100 doesn't come in as many grades (17 lead grades), but it's still a pretty great selection. It's also a smidge longer than nearly every pencil without an eraser, 7.2 inches versus the normal 7 inches.

The vintage of these has different imprint font, and the most major difference is that the vintage is made in Japan, while the current day pencil is made in Vietnam. I heard rumors that they still make the lead in Japan, but Tombow doesn't say that in any promotional material so I highly doubt it.

From my testing I don't feel much of a difference between the new and vintage version, but I'm sure someone out there would disagree with me.



Kitaboshi 9500

Kitaboshi is one of the few other companies left in Japan that produces pencils. The **9500 *Super Drawing*** has one of my favorite green lacquers on a pencil, and while this pencil doesn't have finished end caps like the Hi Uni and the Mono 100, it's still pretty classy. The HB version of this pencil is even a little softer than the Mono 100 in HB. The barrel also features gold and silver embossing, which some people find tacky, but I like.

I've only seen this pencil in HB, B, and 2B, so its selection is much more limited, but it's one I'd add to my collection if I were you.



General's Cedar Pointe

This pencil is super simple. American made, graphite, cedar wood, no lacquer clear coat, black ferrule and eraser. Because the wood is bare, it can form a patina with use, making it even more your pencil over time. There is just a little bit of grit and feedback, but for certain pencils I like a little feedback. It comes in a #1 and a #2, I waffle back and forth on which I prefer the most.

If you have a **General's Semi-Hex #498** pencil, it's pretty much the same thing but with a much more rustic aesthetic. This pencil is still produced in Jersey City, New York, and is the only one of my favorite pencils to be from the USA.



Colleen 2020

Another *Super Drawing* pencil, the **Colleen no. 2020** has a muted green color that you don't see much. It's one of the harder HB pencils I've ever used from Japan, but it feels really good on paper, with an occasional bit of grit. I don't know if I like this one so much because it's from a company that no longer exists, or truly because it's a great pencil. It's hard to be impartial sometimes.

There is a new company that is run by an employee of the previous Colleen that produces pencils out of Thailand, but they are alike in name alone. If you want the true Colleen experience, you have to go vintage.



Staedtler Mars Lumograph 2886



This is a vintage version of the current **Staedtler Mars Lumograph Art Nr. 100** that you are most likely familiar with. Probably from the 1950's or so. This thing is nothing but class. Being a german pencil, it's a bit harder than all these Japanese pencils I've mentioned, but it's very smooth for how light a mark it makes. Also, this pencil is printed "left handed", as in it only reads correctly if you hold it in your left hand. Most pencils are printed in such a way they read correctly for right handed people.

The paint job is a little brighter than the current version. The blue and gold imprint looks amazing, I love the little moon emblem on it, and that the grade marker is on all 6 sides. Just an amazing pencil from the past.

Tombow 4612 Homo

Probably one of my favorite vintage pencils. Featuring a clear coat on the wood finish, silver embossing, and just looks and feels amazing. The HB feels a step between a HB and a B, the F I have feels like a modern day Mono 100 in HB nearly. The B and 2B are close to grade if a little softer.

This is the precursor to the Mono line. You'll still see <HOMO-GRAPH> on the current pencil, it's an homage to this one. They reduced the prominence of the "Homo" name (short for Homogenous) when they found out what the english slang for Homo meant, but I kinda wish they'd just do a rerelease of these at some point, at least a special Pride month release. This is easy pickings Tombow!

Regardless, it's still one of my most sought after vintage pencils, I'd love to get my hands on a full 12 pack of HB's.



Sharpeners

Pencil sharpeners are a necessity, and it's hard to use a pencil without one. My current handheld favorite is the **KUM Automatic Brake Long Point 2 Step** Pencil Sharpener. It helps create a long point on the go, and produces some of the sharpest tips I've seen a pencil sharpener produce. It can be finicky at times, but I've gone back to it enough that I'll say it's my favorite. They have another sharpener called the **Masterpiece**, and it's an even longer point, but it's a little too long for me. I end up touching bare rough wood on the collar of the pencil while drawing, which I dislike.



Left to right: Apsara Long Point, M+R Brass Bullet, KUM Automatic Long Point

I also have a **M+R Brass Bullet** sharpener on my keychain so I can sharpen a pencil anywhere I am. They work well as an all around sharpener if you aren't too worried about a perfect point. The **Apsara Long Point** pencil sharpener is probably the best sharpener for the money, you can get a whopping 20 of them for 8 bucks, and they make a pretty great point.

For hand crank sharpeners, I love the **Carl Angel-5 Royal**, but it's discontinued at this point. If you can find one, get one. The **Deli 0635** pencil sharpener is cheap and works amazing. It makes a slightly smaller point and doesn't feel as solid, but if you want to try something out I would start here. These both create a concave point, which exposes even more of the lead than a normal sharpener would for the same length of point.

For electric sharpeners, find an old **Panasonic KP-110**. They are work horses and can still make great points, but you are playing Russian roulette with the used ones. I got a good one used my first try, but you might not be so lucky. Most people prefer the ones that were still made in Japan, but my **Panasonic KP-350** was made in Thailand and works great.

Erasers

My favorite pencils nearly never have erasers attached. Most of the best pencils being made do not have erasers attached, so you're going to need one.

I'm not too picky. I prefer ones a little smaller (in the Japanese eraser sizing they usually have a 60 on them). **Tombow Mono** erasers and the **Sakura Arch Foam** eraser work great. **Pentel Hi-Polymer** erasers are also a great choice.



Left to right: Pentel High Polymer, Tombow Mono, Sakura Arch Foam

Some people like black erasers because they don't show graphite smudges, but I want to be able to see the smudges. Erasers can get over loaded with graphite, and end up making a deposit of graphite instead of erasing it away.

I use a lot of kneaded erasers too. They are versatile and great for gradually removing value. I use them to lightly “ghost” a drawing, remove a little bit of graphite while leaving a light layer behind to work it up further. They aren't very good for completely erasing away marks, so a kneaded eraser can't be your only eraser most likely.

Tombow also makes some eraser pens with 2.3 mm erasers in them, and that's about as small as you're going to get. Great for fine details.

I was a super smooth bristol board and copy paper guy, but I've veered more towards paper with tooth (surface texture). Better for building value, not as good for inking if you like smooth crisp lines. If I'm sketching, I want something with tooth. If I'm inking, I'm going to use smooth "plate" finish bristol (**Strathmore 300 or 400**). Most of the time I'm transferring the sketch to the final board anyways.

Made in the U.S.A.
Fabriqué aux États-Unis
Hecho en EE. UU.

Dick's Corporation Company
P.O. Box 1000, Waukesha, WI 53191-1000
www.dicksincorporation.com

© 2004 Dick Corporation. All Rights Reserved.
No other goods sold under the Dick Corporation name.
© 2004 Dick Corporation. Tous droits réservés.
Aucun autre produit n'est vendu sous le nom de Dick Corporation.

400 Series | Best Série 400 | Meilleur Série 400 | Superior

400-1

0 12017 44004 5

William Rose

Drawing

Drawing paper medium surface
Papier à dessin surface moyenne
Papel de dibujo superficie media

Acid free. Heavyweight. For finished artwork - dry media.
Sans acide. Fort grammage. Pour œuvres définitives - médias secs.
Libro de ácido. Alto gramaje. Para obras terminados - medios secos.

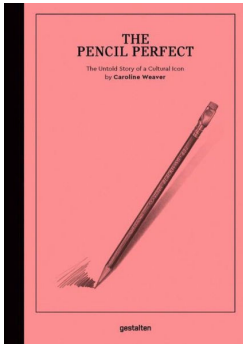
24 sheets, feuilles, hojas
4 in. x 6 in. (10.2 x 15.2 cm) 80 lb. (130 g/m²)

For journals, the **LEUCHTTURM1917** or a **Moleskine Plain Journal** work great. **Rhodia** is too smooth for me, feels weird to write or draw. Sketchbook wise, I'm using **Strathmore Sketch 400** or their **Strathmore Drawing 400** wire bound pads (the medium surface one, though the smooth has just enough tooth to work).

Don't feel weird pressure about using a piece of paper. Just draw. If you are making a finished piece, an investment of \$1 to \$2 dollars is nothing. I've spent 3 times as much on a iced coffee that I drank in 15 minutes and didn't give it a second thought. Drawing on paper is a very cheap hobby to have. Enjoy some nice paper.

Further Reading

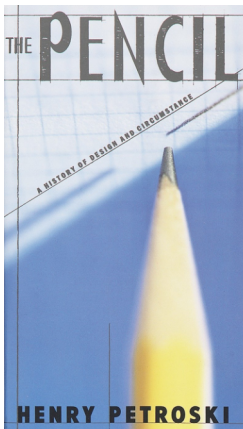
If this wet your whistle on pencils, here is a few other resources for further research:



The Pencil Perfect: The Untold Story of a Cultural Icon

by *Caroline Weaver*

Great starting point to the history of pencils, very beginner friendly. Lots of great images of pencils and boxes and advertisements, and a great way to go from the beginning to today in terms of knowledge and companies.



The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance

by *Henry Petroski*

A little more advanced, and more focused towards engineering at the end of the day, but unparalleled in the wealth of knowledge it provides. This book was used as a source for The Pencil Perfect, so there will be some retreading of content, but theres some info in here you won't find anywhere else.

Blogs:

- contrapuntalism.wordpress.com by *Sean Malone* (RIP)
- blackwingpages.wordpress.com by *Sean Malone*
- www.lexikaliker.de by *Gunther Schmidt* (German blog, you will have to translate)
- bleistift.blog by *Dr. Matthias Meckel*

If you check out the blogs links for other blogs, or just google Pencil Blog, more will pop up and you'll end up reading every post I'm sure.

