



Envelopes addressed by Joi Hunt using ink made with Pearl Ex Powdered Pigments: top, Sunset Gold; middle, Aztec Gold; bottom, Rose Gold.

Pearl Ex Calligraphy Ink

By Joi Hunt Photography by Dano Keeney

Pearl Ex Metallic Powdered Pigments have been around for a long time, and the product has been used in various ways by many different types of crafters. They like it because of its versatility and its colorfastness. Calligraphers have found it makes a wonderful metallic ink.

I'm not sure who first thought of making an ink for pen calligraphy with the powders, but it was a natural thing to try. Calligraphers have made inks from powdered pigments for centuries. Scribes in the Middle Ages even made real gold ink from the scraps of gold leaf that resulted from gilding. They would grind the little flakes, add gum arabic dissolved in water, and they had metallic ink. (The mixture was dried in a little cake, which was reconstituted later with water.) Making a metallic ink for calligraphy with Pearl Ex Powders follows the same recipe – pigment, gum arabic, and water – substituting Pearl Ex for the gold (no grinding is done).

Unfortunately, not all of the forty-nine colors in the Pearl Ex range are equally suitable for calligraphy. For whatever reason, ink made from some of the colors flows off the pen well, and other colors do not.



Pearl Ex Metallic Calligraphy Set.

A Pearl Ex Set for Calligraphers

With more and more calligraphers using Pearl Ex-based ink and showing their work on social media, Jacquard Products (the maker of Pearl Ex) took note and decided to put together a Pearl Ex set exclusively for calligraphy. I was asked to test and select the nine colors for the set, which would also include gum arabic. Because there was some confusion in our community about which colors flowed well from a nib, I was very happy to be involved in this project. I personally tested each color, and I selected the colors for the set based on their beauty and on which colors calligraphers would need to use most often. I am so proud of

this set; it takes the guesswork out of using Pearl Ex Pigments – you know which colors will work well in your pen and will sparkle beautifully on

the page or envelope. (To see my script in gold foil on the set's packaging was an added bonus, a dream come true.)



Rose Gold, the newest Pearl Ex color, is now available in 3 grams, 1/2 ounce, & 4 ounces.

Creating a New Pearl Ex Color

As a professional calligrapher, one product I really wanted was an off-the-shelf Rose Gold ink, as it is often requested by brides. While working with Jacquard on the calligraphy set, I brought the idea to them, and they said to go for it! Looking at foil samples from previous jobs, household goods, and even my own jewelry, I came up with countless recipes for Rose Gold. Then the testing began. I sent the top choices to a few colleagues to help me evaluate color and consistency. I wanted eyes on this color from other wedding and event calligraphers because I was developing this color for us. Their feedback was invaluable. One thing I found was that everyone has their own idea of what Rose Gold looks like. To some, it is really pink; to others, it is more bronze. Keeping that in mind, I eventually created a color that is versatile. One of the advantages of using Pearl Ex is that other colors of Pearl Ex can be added to adjust the hue. You can match the Rose Gold to your job by adding pink, copper, bronze, or gold Pearl Ex. (I made Rose Gold heavy on the pink, so when other colors are added, the pink does not get completely canceled out.) Another advantage to Pearl Ex is that you can add it to other mediums, such as acrylic ink or metallic gouache.

Initially Rose Gold was only available in the calligraphy set, but it is now available singly in three sizes, and Asher Katz, president of Jacquard, has noted how successful the color has been. He adds: "It has been absolutely exhilarating getting to know this community and seeing all the sparkling, golden work calligraphers are doing, having discovered Pearl Ex. I feel extremely fortunate to get to work with such passionately creative people and to produce tools that can enrich their work."



You can add other Pearl Ex colors to Rose Gold to adjust the ink's color. You can even add walnut ink.

Using Pearl Ex Ink

To make Pearl Ex ink for your calligraphy, mix 4 parts of pigment and 1 part gum arabic (liquid or solid) and slowly add distilled water, stirring to an ink-like consistency.

I use these amounts in a Jumbo Dinky Dip jar from John Neal Books:

- 1 teaspoon Pearl Ex pigment
- 1/4 teaspoon gum arabic (liquid or powder) (If using powdered gum arabic, stir the two powders together before adding water.)
- 1 teaspoon distilled water

You can adjust the amount of water used: a thinner consistency will lie flatter on the paper when dry; a thicker consistency will stand up a bit on the paper and have a raised texture when dry. I like to use distilled water because my water is very hard (full of minerals).

Always test your ink: Write a sample and allow it to dry, then lightly rub your finger over it. If it smears or transfers, add more liquid gum arabic.

The ink will need to be stirred often while you are using it, either manually or with a magnetic stirrer. The mica pigment particles are heavier than water and will settle to the bottom. If your ink has been sitting for a while,

just be sure to use a stiff tool or brush to break up all the pigment at the bottom.

As you use the ink, water will evaporate out, so adding a few more drops of water may be necessary.

In addition to the nine colors chosen for the calligraphy set, the following Pearl Ex colors are also pen-calligraphy-friendly (the colors in bold are among the more popular colors): **631 Scarlet**, **633 Shimmer Violet**, 646 Mink, 647 Sky Blue, 635 Apple Green, 642 Salmon Pink, 653 Red Russet, 655 Super Copper, **662 Antique Silver**, **656 Brilliant Gold**, **664 Super Bronze**, 665 Sunset Gold, 689 Blue Russet, and 688 Misty Lavender.



Norton's Darkening Medium

by Carol DuBosch



Darkness of writing is affected by both ink flow and color.

If you are a fan of Tom Norton's Walnut Drawing Ink, there is now a Walnut Darkening Medium from the same company that you can use to make the ink more intense. Norton's Walnut Ink is a light shade of brown – lighter than I like for broad-edged pen work. I like a darker, richer brown color for my lettering. (You may find straight-out-of-the-bottle Norton's Walnut Ink suitable for pointed pen scripts. The pointed pen lays down a thick layer of ink in the stressed strokes, making for a darker stroke on the page.)

To setup for testing the Darkening Medium, I added varying amounts of Darkening Medium to three small containers of Norton's Walnut Ink. In addition, I had a container of pure Norton's Walnut Ink and one of the Darkening Medium, for a total of five gradations. I then wrote a word with each of the five gradations with a broad-edged pen nib, with an Automatic Pen, and with a Luthis Pen. All the ink variations handled well on the Stonehenge and Gilbert papers I used, but in these first tests, I did not get the even progression from light to dark that I expected. Mostly I couldn't tell the difference from one ink color to the next. The darkness of the writing was affected by how heavy the ink flow was from my pen as much as it was by the darkness of the ink.

But using only three gradations – Norton's Walnut Ink alone, the Walnut Darkening Medium alone, and a mixture of the two – and keeping the ink flow more constant, the differences were clear. The Darkening Medium made for a more intense walnut color, both when used alone and when mixed with the ink.

Using Walnut Ink Crystals to make walnut ink is another way to vary the intensity of the walnut color. While the bottled ink and the crystals are labelled "walnut," I don't think either is actually made from walnut husks.



Two writing tests. Top: Norton's Walnut Drawing Ink. Middle: Mix of Walnut Ink and Darkening Medium. Bottom: Norton's Walnut Darkening Medium.

