

The Wacom Graphire tablet is available in 2 sizes: 4x5 or 6x8. There are 512 levels of pressure sensitivity.

Wacom offers the Intuos tablet in 5 sizes: 4x5, 6x8, 9x12, 12x12 & 12x18. Intuos2 tablets are still available as of this date, for systems that do not support USB. Intuos tablets offer 1024 levels of pressure sensitivity, giving twice the range of control that the Graphire gives. Quite a difference and one to consider if you are working with it professionally.

See www.wacom.com for more details about tablets and tips on using yours.

*Wacom does not claim that their product will cure or prevent CTS.

So you think you might benefit from using a tablet instead of a mouse for cartooning? Well, to tell the truth up front, I wouldn't work without one. It's convenient, feels natural and gives much more control when compared to working with a mouse, and there are a number of things a tablet will do that are impossible or nearly so with a traditional pen or brush. And if you are using Photoshop with just a mouse, you are missing out on a lot of features that a tablet makes possible. Beyond that and in more practical terms, many users swear that their symptoms of Capal Tunnel Syndrome caused by using a mouse have been eliminated by switching to a tablet.*

A tablet is fairly simple to use if you have a reasonable amount of eye/hand coordination, a reasonable assumption if you are a cartoonist. The tablet layout can be set to approximate the screen layout, making it easy to navigate. In other words, if you touch the middle of the tablet with the pen, the cursor will jump to the middle of the screen. Or if you prefer, the settings can be altered to act in the same fashion as an ordinary mouse, requiring you to sweep the cursor from one point to the next. Once you have established a consistent and comfortable position for the tablet on your desk, it quickly becomes second nature to pick up the pen and begin working with nary a glance to the tablet.

Although the great majority of my cartoons begin as pencil sketches on paper and go through the entire process of inking and scanning, sometimes it is faster for smaller images to be drawn completely with the tablet. This eliminates pencil smudges, stray lines and a lot of the cleanup time needed during the scanning process, but even though it has a certain advantage in speed, the look of a cartoon is slightly affected by not sitting at a slanted drawing table with pen on paper. The muscle movement is different and it shows. With that in mind, I gen-

erally my limit tablet drawing to small cartoons or icons.

One of the most useful features of a tablet is pressure sensitivity. The pressure preferences can be adjusted to control brush size, opacity, color and more, as you work, or any combination of these. It's a very convenient, intuitive feature and one I use constantly.



A view of my computer desk with the 6"x8" Intuos Wacom in it's usual position beside my keyboard. The darker area of the tablet is a plastic overlay that allows for placing a drawing beneath for tracing.

If you've made up your mind and have your heart set on buying a tablet, you'll need to decide which size will be right for you. Even if money is no object (and if it isn't, more power to you), keep in mind that getting the biggest size available might not be the right choice. Unlike a monitor where bigger is always better, a tablet is a hands-on device and it's important to get one that fits you and your working space. A large tablet will require larger arm movements for the cursor to travel from one side of the screen to the other, and the tablet itself will take up more premium real estate on your desktop. Personally, I've found that the mid-size 6"x8" version is a good fit for me and my desk. Other artists prefer to work with the tablet in their lap instead of on their desk and a larger tablet is preferable to them.