

ALPHORA

The Tool List: What I Actually Use Daily

Hard gel overlays • Basic Russian Manicure Course

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Welcome. This is the exact list of tools, equipment, and gel systems I use every day at my table in California — not a wish list, and not a shopping list to make the course look expensive.

This course teaches the Russian manicure and the hard gel structure I work with from the ground up: how to prep so the gel doesn't lift, how deep to go and where to stop, and how to read a nail and a skin type instead of running the same routine on everyone. The tools serve that. They don't replace it.

Each item here comes with the reason I reach for it. If a tool is on the list, it's because of what it does in the hand.

1. Hardware & E-File Bits

E-File Machine — the engine of your work



💡 **Before you spend money:** you do not need to spend a fortune to start. In this course I demonstrate every technique on a \$120 machine, because your technique and your hands matter far more than what the machine cost.

Option A — Budget-Friendly / Amazon Favorites (\$100–\$120)

Why I recommend it: it suits someone starting out, and anyone working solo. Low vibration, quiet, and enough torque (30,000–35,000 RPM) to handle hard gel and clean Russian prep without stalling on you.

🔗 amazon.com/Professional-Cordless-Rechargeable-Portable-Resistant/dp/BoC1CWXV1P/>Shop on Amazon

Option B — Portable professional: Medicoool Pro Power 35K Portable (available on Erica's ATA website)

Why I recommend it: 35,000 RPM with high torque, no vibration, and up to 10 hours of battery. Cordless matters more than people expect — you're not tied to an outlet, and it holds up to a full day of bulk gel removal and prep without slowing down.

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Desktop Nail Dust Collector



Why I use it: high-power suction that captures 100% of the fine dust during dry hardware removal and filing. This one is about your lungs and your client's, not about a tidy desk — although it keeps the workspace clean too.

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Removal Bit 1 (Shaper) — carbide, blue indicator ring



Why I use it: this is what I use for fills, corrections, and removing my own previous work. It's soft, with a good balance — non-aggressive but still effective. If you're starting out, take note: it's very easy to control, and the risk of over-filing the natural nail is minimal. Its shape also lets you clean the underside of the nail easily.

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Removal Bit 2 (Piranha — aggressive) — flame-shaped carbide, red indicator ring



Why I use it: the flame shape works well in different zones. I use it for removing Gel-X extensions and for a large volume of old material when a client comes from another salon. Be careful with this one if you're new — take the surface down with it, then refine with Bit 1.

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Bit 3 (Uh-Oh Bit) — slim carbide, under-nail cleaning and detailing



Why I use it: for filing the natural nail from underneath in hard-to-reach areas, and for quickly cleaning up gel that has run where it shouldn't.

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Manicure Bit — Soft Flame, blue grit (diamond flame, blue indicator ring)



Why I use it: a medium (blue) grit blunt-tipped flame bit removes enough to be efficient without becoming unpredictable near the fold. I use it to open the cuticle pocket and clear the true cuticle — the dead tissue sitting on the nail plate — on normal to thick skin types. The rounded, blunt nose is what keeps you off the proximal nail fold, which is why I trust it for deep prep.

A note on the wording: *true cuticle* is the thin dead tissue attached to the nail plate — that's what we remove, every time. The *eponychium* is the living fold at the base of the nail — that we do not touch. Two different things, and the difference matters more than the words do.

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Polishing Bit — Barrel / Cylinder: Big E (fine / soft grit)



Why I use it: I use this barrel bit to smooth the cuticle cut and the sidewalls around it. It takes off the microscopic skin tags, so the sidewall reads clean in a close-up — and your client isn't picking hangnails off a week later.

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2. Chemistry & Prep Liquids

Dehydrator / Nail Prep — pure alcohol (isopropanol / ethanol)

Why I use it: pure alcohol has no extra chemical additives in it, so there's nothing extra for a client to react to.

Acid-Free Primer — not required, I don't use it

My reasoning: I don't use an acid-free primer in this technique. Correct mechanical prep and the absorbency of the base layer hold the bond on their own. If the bond fails, primer is not the missing piece — the prep is.

Certified Asbestos-Free Cosmetic Talc (or premium cornstarch)

Why I use it: this is a real step in a dry Russian manicure, not an optional one, especially on moist skin. It absorbs the moisture instantly, so the bit doesn't skip or tear the skin. I use only 100% certified asbestos-free cosmetic-grade talc, or an organic cornstarch alternative — the concern with low-grade industrial talc is asbestos contamination, and certification is exactly what rules it out. US health regulations here are strict, and rightly so.

3. Structural Layers & Gel Systems

UV/LED Nail Lamp — the curing essential



💡 **A note on lamps:** polymerization is everything with hard gel. If your lamp is weak, the gel doesn't cure through underneath — and that shows up as instant lifting, or as a sensitization problem for you and your client. That said, you don't need to overpay. I'll show you both a budget lamp and a professional station, and how to get a full cure with either.

Option A — the workhorse: SUN2 UV/LED Lamp (\$40–\$50)

Why I recommend it: a time-tested lamp in the nail community. Removable metal bottom plate for light reflection, a roomy interior, and a dual wavelength source (365 + 405 nm) that cures hard gel evenly all the way through. Reliable, and very cheap for what it does.

🔗 amazon.com/SUNUV-Adjustable-Features-User-Friendly-Compatible/dp/B01NoBCN9B/>Shop on Amazon

Option B — professional investment: Akzentz Hybrid Pro or Luminary UV/LED lamps (available on Erica's ATA website)

Why I recommend it: built for complex gel systems. Deep, consistent polymerization of hard gel, low-heat modes that prevent the painful heat spike, and they hold up for years in a high-volume salon.

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Elastic Base Coat — Base Stay Perfect (Gel Point)

Why I use it: it creates a flexible cushioning layer over the natural nail. It takes the shock, and it protects the nail plate on the next removal.

Hard Gel / Builder Gel — Fast Gel 116 "Milky" (Gel Point Builder Gel)

Why I use it: it self-levels well and it holds its architecture for 4+ weeks — the apex stays where you put it instead of settling before the fill.

Top Coat — Top Coat Crystal Shine (non-wipe, high gloss)

Why I use it: scratch resistance that lasts, and a glassy finish that doesn't dull between appointments.

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4. Precision Hand Tools

Professional Metal Pusher — orange-stick shaped, slanted flat-edge blade



Why I use it: it repeats the exact bevel of a traditional wooden orange stick, but in medical-grade steel. You get a gentle, non-invasive lift of the cuticle pocket without scratching the nail plate — and unlike a wooden stick, it goes into the autoclave.

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Cuticle Scissors — Boss Lady Cuticle Scissors



Why I use it: medical-grade steel, sharpened by hand. Sharp scissors cut; dull scissors tear and send you back over the same spot. That's the whole difference on the cutting step of a Russian manicure.

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Nail Files — Diamond Nail File (coarse)

Why I use it: reusable and low-waste. The diamond coating lasts a long time, and unlike bulky packs of disposable files it takes up almost no room at the station.

⚠ Sterilization note: it handles liquid chemical disinfectants and autoclave sterilization without a problem. **Do not put these files in a dry heat sterilizer** — the plastic base will melt.

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5. Standard Salon Essentials & Course Practice Items

💡 **Quick note:** I won't spend much time on these, because as a working nail tech you already have 99% of this standard setup at your station (same as your UV/LED lamp). Nothing here needs to be premium or new — just have it ready at the desk, plus a set of ring tips for our e-file exercises.

- **Ergonomic handrest** — sits over your curing lamp, saves desk space, and it's more comfortable for the client.
 - **Desk lamp** — clear, shadow-free light on the work area.
 - **Replacement filter napkins** — for your dust collector.
 - **Orange wood sticks & dust brushes** — standard prep and clean-up.
 - **Lint-free wipes** — for clean, fiber-free prep and final wipe-downs.
 - **Water spray bottle & paper towels** — used at the very end of the service to wash the remaining dust off the client's hands before lotion and cuticle oil. A quick hand wash right at the desk.
 - **Colored gel polishes** — whatever shades you already reach for.
 - **Cuticle oil & hand lotion** — post-service hydration, and the final photo.
 - **Buffers (any brand)** — to smooth the surface before top coat.
 - **Ring display tips** — ⚠️ **required for the course, please have these ready.** We use them to practice safe material removal with the e-file bits before you go anywhere near real hands.
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