



**240**

**PAINTING TIPS**

FROM THE

**Plein Air**

**CONVENTION**

**Faculty**

**PleinAir**  
MAGAZINE™

Dear Plein Air Enthusiast:

*PleinAir* magazine is happy to present you with 240 Painting Tips from the faculty of the past several years of the Plein Air Convention. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience on these pages from a small sampling of the instructors who have participated with us at the convention.

We love the art of painting outdoors, *plein air* being the French term, originally assigned to the impressionists, for those who paint outdoors. Today's movement is huge, with thousands of outdoor landscape, portrait, and even still life painters painting from life outdoors and in the studio. Since we began publishing, hundreds of plein air events have begun around the world. Thousands of individuals have become plein air collectors and painters, and specialty galleries are seemingly popping up everywhere. We're proud to have played a small roll in this movement and are excited about seeing it continue.

**You can become a part of this movement, too – by learning to paint, growing as a painter, or collecting outdoor paintings. We offer several options to help you embrace the movement:**

- *PleinAir* magazine – subscribe at [PleinAirMagazine.com](http://PleinAirMagazine.com) or call 800.610.5771
- *PleinAir* Today weekly newsletter – FREE at [OutdoorPainter.com](http://OutdoorPainter.com)
- The Plein Air Convention & Expo – [PleinAirConvention.com](http://PleinAirConvention.com)
- The *PleinAir* Salon art competition – [PleinAirSalon.com](http://PleinAirSalon.com)
- Streamline Art Video – instructional art videos on learning to paint – [StreamlineArtVideo.com](http://StreamlineArtVideo.com)

If you're not a painter, **YOU CAN LEARN**. You do not have to have natural talent to become a good painter. We encourage you to find a local painter to study, look at the techniques in our magazine and videos, or attend our educational events like the Plein Air Convention. **You can do it!**

**Plein air is the new golf.** Why? It's fun, it's challenging, you get to be outdoors, you get to go to exotic and beautiful places to paint, and it's very social. You'll make lots of new friends and become a part of this burgeoning community.

**Join the movement!**

Eric Rhoads,

  
Publisher

**PS:** I hope you like our 240 tips. You may also like our magazine *Fine Art Connoisseur* ([FineArtConnoisseur.com](http://FineArtConnoisseur.com)), which is about the contemporary and historical art movement in America and the world today. We feature collections, the stories of art, the artists making their mark, the historic artists and their stories, and lots of beautiful images of paintings. We hope you'll consider subscribing.

# 240

## PAINTING TIPS



**B. ERIC RHOADS**

*PleinAir Magazine Publisher*

While everyone else is offering you tips on painting, my goal is to help those who want to sell their paintings sell more of them. In my Art Marketing Boot Camp Series ( I-VI), I outline the basics of art marketing. Here are a couple of ideas.

- 1. If you build it, they won't come:** There is a misconception that any great artist will eventually be discovered and sell well, yet the world is littered with highly accomplished, unknown artists. A few get lucky and are “discovered,” but that is rare. Most great artists who sell do so because they make consistent marketing efforts. To sell, you need a marketing plan, a life plan, an effort that requires devoting about one out of five workdays to marketing.
- 2. The three-legged stool of all marketing is media, message, and market.** You have to present the right message, and reach the right market. When advertising fails, most people blame the media, when that's often not the problem. If you're “getting no calls” or Web visits, ask how the media you're using can possibly survive if it doesn't work. The reality is that it does work, and the problem is with your message — in the content, and possibly in the targeting of your market. Most ads fail because someone assumes running an ad one or two times will work. Ads require repetition over long periods of time. Other ads fail because people are copying what they've seen others do rather than writing an ad that grabs attention and includes a call to action.
- 3. No ad should have a single purpose.** Most artists put a single painting in an ad, hoping there's one buyer out there who likes it. But what if there isn't? You do shows with multiple paintings, and sometimes none of them sell. This is no different. Your ad should have a capture device designed to pull people to your website to sign up for something, so you can place them in your sales process beyond your ads.
- 4. You can't get where you're going without a map.** Most people advertise and don't know why. They simply tell themselves they want to sell more. Rarely do they have a plan, nor any idea of what they want to achieve, what their brand should be, or the purpose of it all beyond just selling. I outline this in my Marketing Boot Camp I, explaining how to design a life plan so you can build your marketing plan around it. You need to design your ideal life, decide what you need to accomplish that life, and then build a plan to meet those needs.



**KELLY KANE**

*PleinAir Magazine Editor-in-Chief*

- 5. When looking at your painting subject, squint so you see only large areas of value and not the small**

**details.** Paint from big shapes to smaller ones so your painting has unity and focus. Judge each new color mixture against what you've already painted, asking yourself if the new strokes of paint need to be warmer or cooler, darker or lighter, than the paint already on the canvas.

**6. Stand back from your painting in progress so you see the overall image and not just the up-close details.**

**7. Try different painting surfaces, brushes, mediums, and solvents** to determine which combination feels best for you. After completing 10 plein air paintings, look at them all together to judge your progress, emerging style, and new challenges.

KEN AUSTER



**8. Spend more time understanding what you are trying to paint.** Edit out anything that you cannot understand intellectually. Define the focal point — the hook, the thing that caught your eye. Build the painting around the focal point like a spider web. The closer you are to the focal point, the tighter the brushwork, and the further from the focal point, the looser it gets. All roads lead to the focal point; no jumping around the painting.

STEFAN BAUMAN



**9. Paint what you love.** When painting what you love, ask more deeply what it is that you love about it. The light? The color? Is it the pattern it makes, the shadow or contrast? Or how cool or light it is? Getting to the root of understanding your world will get you in touch with your inner artist and developing a style of your own. Ask yourself, "What is here that I love?" Not just like. See if you can love one thing about the scene. Now communicate that intense feeling to the viewer. Don't stop on location, take out your paint, and slosh it on until all the white space is covered. It's not a race to see who can paint it faster. Painting is communicating, but make sure you have something to say.

**10. Sketch quickly, first in value.** When painting outdoors, it is important that you capture the drawing first. Many students hurry this process, but I feel that this must be done. Start with an earth color and cobalt blue to establish the drawing, along with warms and cools. This is the most important part of the painting because it sets the tone and values, so as the light changes throughout the day, you can place "footnotes" on where the light is by wiping out highlights with a paper towel.

**11. Vision and technique are the only two disciplines that, when learned and improved upon, will make the pursuit of art more passionate and the journey more enjoyable.** Artists can achieve greatness by learning

techniques and using them to promote their vision. With these two elements, an artist's reputation can go on forever.

BRENDA BOYLAN



12. **Practice setting up your easel a few times before your first outing.** Navigating an umbrella can be a humorous endeavor for others to observe, so practice where and how to hook it up to avoid frustration and wasted time.
13. **Your first mark should be the horizon line.** This grounds your painting and immediately navigates the space.
14. **When dressing for the outing, think thin-to-thick.** Wear layers of clothing to avoid colder-than-expected or steaming hot conditions.
15. **Painting outdoors is a little like camping.** Be courteous and respectful with nature and your fellow painters while out painting. If you are in a very wild area, expect natural things to happen. Bug bites, wildlife, unexpected weather conditions, or a potential angry farmer, as well as the best painting subject matter, are all part of the plein air experience. Leave no trace behind.
16. **Have a sense of humor at the easel.** This keeps things simple and not overworked — not to mention, the “fun factor” is definitely increased.

RYAN S. BROWN



17. **Self-critiquing is perhaps the most helpful skill that one develops in one's training.** The main purpose of good training is to help students become self-sufficient in their knowledge and capable of achieving their potential as artists.

In my experience, **mastery in drawing is absolutely the most important factor and the first step toward developing the visual clarity that allows you to critique your own work.**

**Learn to see the whole — all elements in a work must work in harmony to support the whole.**

**Use your mirror. This helps provide a mental separation with the piece that brings clarity.**

**Learn to see it as it is, and not how it was — separate yourself from the small steps that made the work better in order to see whether it is fully resolved yet.** Self-critiquing is difficult because we see everything that

has gone into the piece. When we make a change or a correction, it is easy to convince ourselves that it's right, or that it's fully resolved, because we see how much better it looks than it did in previous stages. **It's necessary to blind yourself to how much better it looks and see it as though you've never looked at it before.** Try to figure out whether it's fully resolved or if it still needs some adjusting.

Good drawing is a product of good understanding — it is easy to see in a final painting how well the artist understood his subject. You cannot define something you do not understand. In the initial stages of a drawing or painting, we concentrate on the flat, abstract explanation of a subject, or how the shapes, rhythms, and proportions look. An important transition in our thinking leads us to why the shapes look like they do. This “why” helps bring us to a fully realized, sculptural explanation of the subject.

**Never knowingly leave anything wrong on the canvas.**

**Take breaks and rest your eyes — and after a break, don't come back and pick up where you left off. Look for the worst thing in the painting, and attack that.** This forces you to assess the whole of the painting and look for the areas that negatively affect the visual impression of the painting.

Self-critiquing will only get you most of the way there. Always ask someone whose eyes you respect. Don't assume you can pull it off by yourself. Painting is hard enough; don't cheat yourself out of a needed pair of fresh eyes and a fresh perspective. Your painting deserves every opportunity to be as brilliant as it can be. Greatness is never achieved alone.

MICHELE BYRNE



**18. Painting should reflect your passions and obsessions — look deep inside yourself for inspiration.**

**19. Have the right tools for painting and setup —** ask advice from other artists. Also, have the right possessions in your life. An artist should have less, not more.

**20. It is not necessary to finish a painting in one session.** Looking at waterfalls and fast-running rivers, viewing the horizon, looking at the stars — they're all important to the plein air painter.

There is much to do in life. As an artist, the best way to spend your time is at the easel. However, an artist's life cannot be scheduled as a job. Time alone, time for reflection, is all-important.

Artists have to learn to forgive, especially themselves.

LARRY CANNON



**21. You will learn far more from your failures than you will from your successes.** You will always remember the mistakes, while sometimes you will have no idea how to repeat the successes.

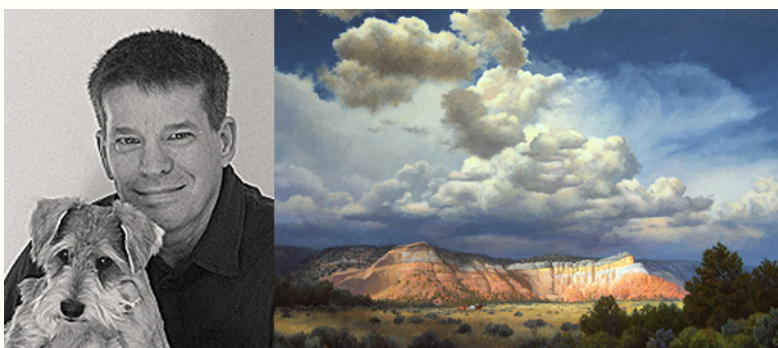
Look at any great artist in history. Only about 10 percent of their paintings rise to the exceptional level. You shouldn't expect every painting to be frameable. You are probably not going to be in the art history books, so relax, learn, and follow your passion.

An honest interpretation of what you see is far better than a copy of some other artist's style.

At any point in your progress, you are truly only at the beginning of your learning curve.

**22. Learn to look, look to learn.** Your painting will always look inadequate when placed in front of your subject. It will only sing when viewed away from direct comparison with Nature's magnificence.

JOHN D. COGAN



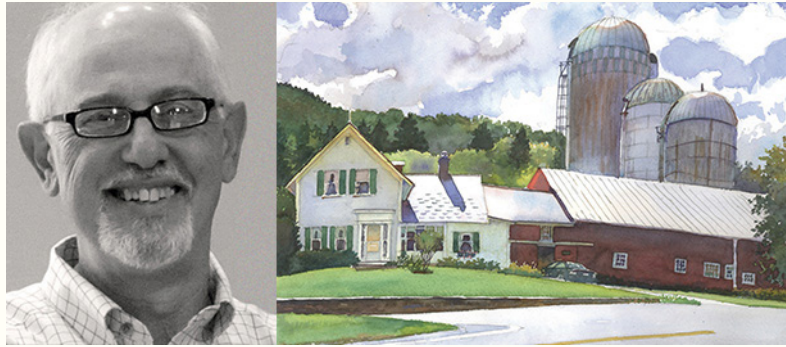
**23. Never lose your passion for painting.** Each of us as an artist fell in love with line, with shape, with color. Take pleasure in using these to create more beauty. Enjoy the line as it follows the pencil point, indulge the sensuous flow of paint as you layer thick color onto the canvas, feel the form as you mold it in clay. Love what you do as an artist, and you cannot help but do it well.

**24. Remember that as an artist, you are telling a story.** Think about why the story interests you, and concentrate on those aspects that will make it interesting for those who will look at your painting.

**25. When working in plein air, start with your most important elements.** Get your center of interest right, and everything else will fall into place. Don't begin with the less important things; the light you fell in love with when you set up may quickly be gone. But if you go for the center of interest first and get it right, you can make everything else work with it no matter what the light does after that. Even if you don't finish the painting, if you leave white patches on the canvas, you will get what you came for, and a good painting will be your reward.

**26. Learn to draw.** No matter what medium you work in, the basics of drawing are the basics of art.

FRANK COSTANTINO



Some tips for watercolor plein air:

**27. Set your easel in the direction of view.** Many artists position themselves at right angles to their subject and have to shift view and constantly refocus between the large-scale view and the reduced image on the easel.

Without an easel umbrella on site, look for the sun's track over a few hours to find a convenient shade condition to set up for the duration of work. Sometimes a shaded spot affects your choice of view.

**28. With inclement weather, pack a suitably sized trash bag to protect your hard work from showers or sudden downpours.** I've saved nearly finished watercolors by having one at hand. It's memorable after you've been soaked through, but your work is dry (I'll never forget Cranford!).

**29. Pre-size your image area to a planned mat or frame size, especially if you need to work quickly with a frame shop for displaying the piece at an event.**

**30. Paying careful attention to degrees of paper moisture, brush moisture, and dilution control can more quickly result in fresher hues and value areas.**

**31. Step back and squint!**

**32. Keep your darks light — i.e., transparent.**

GENE COSTANZA



**33. Be bold but controlled.** Paint with enthusiasm, but not chaos. Have a plan in mind for what you are doing. What was the reason you wanted to paint this? Always keep that reason at the forefront of your design plan.

**34. It's values.** We all get tired of hearing that, preferring to find the "magic secret" to better painting. But if it's not the right value, it is of little or no value.

**35. Start now to study composition.** In the long run, you will find that a good understanding of a good composition will take you further than painting with no purpose.



36. Going outside in the beginning is usually to practice the elements, or should be thought of that way. **Plan your practice sessions to attack your personal weaknesses.**

37. **Stick with a limited palette as long as you can.** Then when you add a color or value, you know why you want it. You add it for a reason.

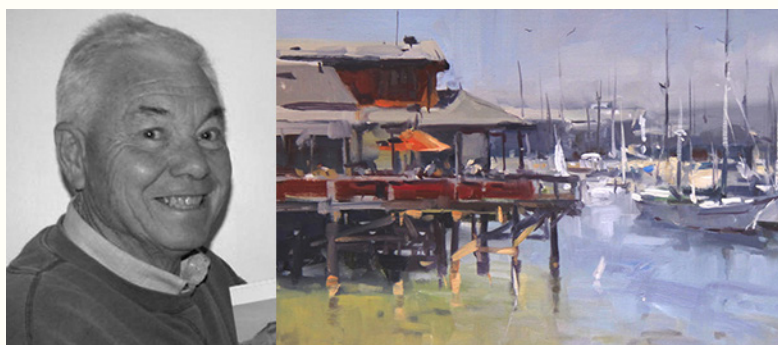
38. **Understand the value of gray. See the myriad of neutral tones in a landscape, and save your blast of color for emphasis.**

ELEANOR COX



39. **Never lose the passion! Paint every day, or nearly every day.** It's your job, as Wolf Kahn would say! Channel the passion and work energy into income, but never lose sight of the joy of the finished piece. It's euphoric!

JOHN CRUMP



40. **Most people seem to wash their oil painting brushes in turpentine and then with soap. Kerosene is much better.** It stops the bristles from drying out and breaking off and it keeps the brush soft and pliable right up to the ferrule. An inch or two of kerosene in a tin can, four or five brushes at a time rotated between the hands like an eggbeater — it's all over in a minute! I do a rinse with a second lot of kero. No need for soap! You can use the kerosene a number of times — just leave it in a three-liter juice container and when the rubbish has settled, carefully pour off the clean stuff.

41. **A palette needs to be as smooth as glass — it makes mixing color, picking it up, and cleaning so much easier when you're done.** I make my own and finish them with several coats of two-pot epoxy varnish. When the palette gets a buildup of hard paint, clean it by brushing on a little lacquer thinner, letting it soften the paint, and then scraping it off carefully with a palette knife. Ordinary varnish cannot stand this treatment — it needs to be epoxy.

42. Some believe that if you're using hardboard panels, they need two or three coats of gesso before you use them. I've tried this, but discovered that in doing so, the gesso becomes hungrier. It sucks the medium out of your paint, making the brushstrokes less fluid. **I prefer giving the panels one generous coat and allowing them to dry thoroughly before using them.**

43. **If your paintings dry too slowly during the winter, try using Winsor & Newton Liquin as your medium, and also mix up to 50 percent alkyd white into your (titanium) white oil.** The heavy lumps of impasto colour are touch-dry in 24 - 36 hours, while thinner paint is touch-dry overnight.

BILL DAVIDSON



44. **Take charge of your life and your painting.** Find what you love to paint and the way you would love it to look painted. Paint what moves you in the way you want to see it painted. Support your concept by your design work; you design it. Don't take the design as it is in nature, improve it.
45. **Be creative. Live first: Live, live, live, and design, design, design.** Learning to paint better should be foremost.
46. **Compare shapes and values:** Use a tonal (preferably warm) to create interesting big-value shapes. The importance of shapes in a painting that create design and tell the story cannot be overemphasized. It is hard to juggle shape, value, and color all at the same time, and most of us do better when we separate the processes. As Da Vinci said, "The more shapes you create, the better your repertoire of shapes." Shapes are the first thing the viewer sees, not color. Values create the magical lighting and mood. Try to connect the shadow areas.
47. **Premix colors.** After a beautiful tonal is created, premixing the colors allows you to focus on color only. This teaches us to focus on the values of colors, and it also allows us to see the harmonies on your palette and adjust them before overpainting them on your canvas. Premixing warms and cools of each color, in both the shade and light, will cause the painting to scintillate.
48. **Bring it all together at once.** Keep it simple — do not focus on details, but the relationships of all the big shapes to one another. You can detail and finish each area after you see how the simplified shapes relate.
49. **Energetic paint application.** Invent techniques for paint application to show your enthusiasm and what you are dying to say. Enjoy the process, so the viewer can see your joy in the subject matter and the aliveness and energy that caused you to create the painting. You need to paint it excitedly so the viewer feels this excitement.
50. **Put paint on, and don't overwork it.** Keep it simple; do not focus on details, but the relationships of all the big shapes to each other. You can detail and finish each area at the end.
51. **Appreciation.** Look for ways to appreciate your work, your current abilities, other artists, the art communities, and every close relationship in your life. By looking for these positives and being around positive people, life lifts you. Think abundance, and cheer on other artists.
52. **Share.** There is a great synergy in sharing.

MICHELE DE BRAGANÇA



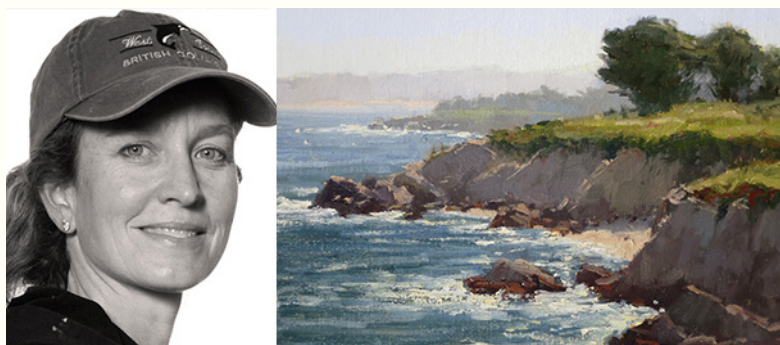
A few of the things that I think are most important when embarking on a painter's journey happen to be things that I am still working on myself, and really involve more wisdom than technical knowledge. We, as painters, all study and learn from other painters, better than we are.

We all learn, and continue to work on, the basics, like simplify, choose the main shapes that create a strong design, keep your shadows and light separate, stand back often and look at your work from a distance, don't "chase the light," etc. But for me, the most important lifelong lessons I have learned from my mentors are not just the technical tips, but the lessons more difficult to live by. They are:

**53. Trust yourself. Don't try to paint like your favorite painters – find your own voice. Be your own teacher (don't just stick with what works or what sells, try new things – a good painter's work is always evolving).**

Work really hard (paint every day), and never give up. You will always have setbacks, and many rejections. You never really "get there." The carrot keeps moving forward. We are blessed to love what we are doing enough to weather these disappointments. As Kevin Macpherson says, "Painting is sort of like fishing. You are out there enjoying the beautiful day, feeling the wind, taking in the sights and sounds – you never really know if you are going to get anything or not!"

KATHLEEN DUNPHY



**54. Get up earlier than you think you need to.** I can't tell you how many times I've gotten to a painting site when the light was perfect – and by the time I set up my gear, the effect I was interested in was gone. I often leave the house in the dark in order to get those first rays of sun. You can always take a nap later!

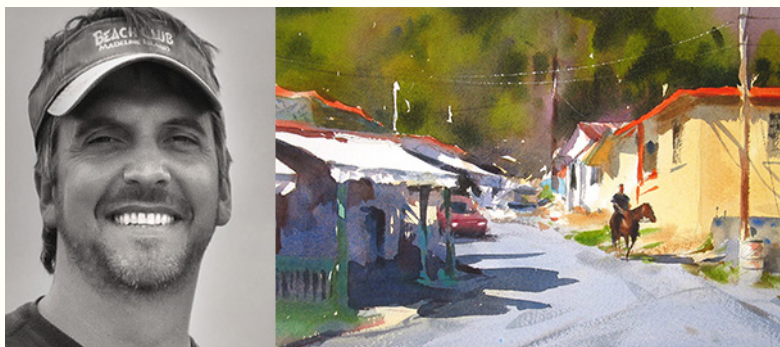
**55. Plan ahead, and keep a notebook of places to paint and times and dates when the light is best.** That way, when you have time to go out and paint, you'll have a list of possibilities already figured out and won't need to waste time looking for a good spot to set up.

**56. Keep an extra set of gear in your car at all times.** When you just have a small window of time, your easel and paints will be there and ready to go – no more excuses to not paint! You can also cannibalize that set if your regular gear breaks or you forget something.

**57. Keep sketchbooks everywhere!** No one can ever practice drawing enough, so take advantage of every free bit of time to draw. Stash a sketchbook in your purse, in the glove compartment of the car, next to the coffee maker, in your backpack – that way, when your friend is late to meet you at Starbucks or you're stuck in traffic,

you can pass the time sketching and improving your drawing skills instead of playing with your iPhone.

ANDY EVANSEN

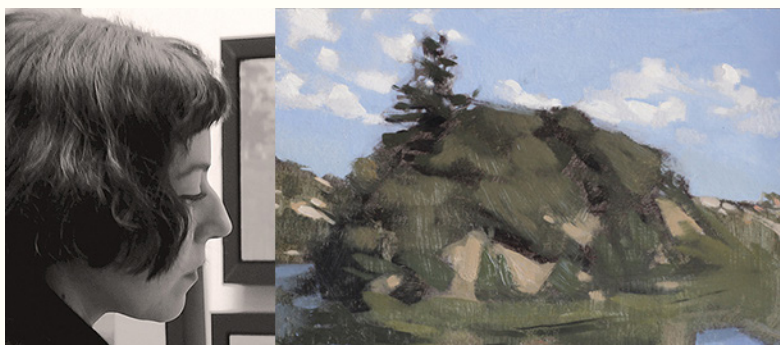


**58. Try to squint at the scene and simplify it down to three values: light, middle, and dark.** Then merge the shapes that fall into those three larger values for a stronger composition and a painting with a nice variety of lost and found edges. Often I will do a quick five-minute value study with Payne's Gray to reinforce this, leaving the white of my watercolor paper for the lights, paint a medium value that connects most of the scene, then accent it with darks for details.

**59. The more I paint in watercolor, the more I try to work wet-into-wet in the early stages as long as possible.** I used to paint an initial wet wash, then wait for it to dry before proceeding to the next stage. I now begin to paint darker areas with thicker paint into the first wet stage, again to achieve a nice variety of lost and found edges.

**60. It may sound sacrilegious to some, but I always compose my painting through the viewfinder on the back of my digital camera, take a photo of the scene in case I need to finish things up in the studio, then switch the camera to playback mode and draw in my first few composition lines from the screen on the camera.** Our tendency when painting outdoors is to include too much information because, let's face it, often the panorama is so lovely we don't know what to leave out. **By capturing the horizon, the location of a large building or tree, and maybe the angle of a roadway or stream, you can then turn off the camera and draw the rest of the scene from life, confident in the fact that you won't need to erase or run out of room on your paper.** This is particularly useful for watercolor painters, as we don't have the luxury of being able to fix our paintings once we've started.

FELICIA FORTE



**61. I recommend using a very limited palette to start.** I use the Zorn palette: cadmium red, yellow ochre, titanium white, and ivory black (occasionally adding in ultramarine blue if I really need to get that sky true blue!). **With the changing nature of our outdoor subject matter, it saves you time to eliminate the extra color options.** You need green, you've got one option: black with yellow! You need blue, it's black with white! Besides helping to make quick decisions, I find that I get a very pleasing and harmonious look throughout all of my plein air paintings.

**62. I remember when I was first venturing outdoors to paint on my own, I was nervous! Folks wanted to come up and watch, talk to me, and tell me about their own painting stories. And though this was all lovely, it**

took me a while to build up the confidence to paint while being watched. So for the first year or so, I brought an iPod with earbuds, and people interrupted much less. If you prefer to listen to the sounds of the world around you, you can place the earbuds in your ears and just hide the unplugged cord in your pocket!

**63. Make sure to have several painting surfaces on hand, and artist's tape.** Sometimes the light will change, clouds will form, or something new will grab your attention, and you don't want to have to stop early or wipe out one painting's start for another's.

**64. Artist's tape!** This is handy for a compositional thing that I love to do. I will tape off a square or rectangle shape within the limits of my painting surface, say a 3 x 6-inch rectangle in an 8 x 10 canvas or panel. On day one, I will paint within that space. Then I will go back to that spot another day and paint a second view of the same scene on that very same surface, within another taped-off shape, allowing two visions of one place. Sometimes the second painting space has a zoomed-in quality to it. I will also do this with "failed" sketches. Having scraped down a day's work, I will later return with that dry scraped sketch and tape a smaller section right on top of it, attempting the scene again with all the knowledge I learned in the first attempt. The result is often very pleasing.



GUIDO FRICK



**65.** Before you dream of the super subjects beyond the horizon, paint the ordinary ones on this side. **Simplify the subject in your mind instead of making it too complicated by seeing too many details.**

**66.** What you paint is less important than how you paint.

**67.** Remember, if your painting is good, good is good enough. To try to make it even better is the first step to frustration.



GERALD FRITZLER



**68.** When putting a painting together, on location or in your studio, always consider your composition and how your eye is led through the image to a focal point within the painting. I see way too many paintings today that do not do this, or even have a focal point or center of interest for your eye to go to. This can be achieved by a bit more detail, a touch of color, or a dark and light edge. You always want to try to lead the viewer's eye to something that they can enjoy within your painting!

**69.** Always look for your pattern within a painting! Make use of light and shadow, as these elements give your

painting great interest. How many times have you gone into a gallery and been drawn to paintings that capture your interest because they have great design and pattern? These are always works that stand out to me and to everyone else who views them, which in turn may help in getting a sale!

**70. As you work on a painting, be aware of your color and brushwork.** The finest artwork to me always has great brushwork and a fantastic sense of color — whether you are painting something bright and colorful, or muted and gray as a stormy, cloudy, or foggy day! Always look and respond to the color out there in plain air or in your studio. When you do work indoors, try to get your work to have that same freshness, color, and emotion that you would have captured on location. This really makes a difference in your studio work!

**71. Go with your emotional response!** This is what I feel is the biggest element in any great painting: your immediate emotional response to your subject. How you relate to it, how you compose it, what grabs you about it, and how you put it down! All of the points that I mentioned come into play with your emotional response, and that emotion will always come through in your painting for the collector to enjoy for years!

GEORGE GALLO



**72. Ask yourself, “Why do I want to paint this, and what do I want to say about it?”**

**73. Paint your first impression.**

**74. Be open to “happy accidents.”**

**75. Squint at your subject to get the big design.**

**76. Don’t be afraid to recompose your image before starting. A lot of landscape painting is about what you leave out.**

DANIEL GERHARTZ



**77. Squinting: Bring on the Botox — or not.** Through the 25 years I have been painting, there is one recurrent problem that will hinder my efforts to produce an effective representation of what I am seeing. That problem is not properly squinting at the subject to simplify the information enough to solidify the masses and amplify the essentials. I have “Squint” signs up all around my studio, because even after years of doing this, I still want to open wide to see every little thing.

One not-so-excellent approach is the “cheat squint.” I see this a lot as I teach. As I am harping to “squint down.” I have seen some in a stealthy half-squint, gathering all the info they can with the open eye. I, too, have been guilty of this.

The best approach is to gently close your eyes until the lights and darks become more separate or value patterns simplify and the sharpest edges emerge. The key is to keep this up through the process, only opening your eyes to more easily identify the color-temperature shifts within the simple shapes.

**78. Work from life whenever possible.** As always, the best-case scenario is to complete the entire work from life, but because this is not always practical, one must use whatever means are appropriate to simply finish the work. When finishing a piece from life isn't possible, the goal becomes to get the canvas covered from life with the accurate tones and values that carried the sense of light. You can then continue the painting in the studio to refine the drawing and work the edges to turn the forms. Having said that, one must be careful not to make a habit of only blocking in the subject on site or taking shortcuts as a general rule of technique. Again, your best paintings will be when you are absorbing all of the stimuli of your senses and allowing them to work their way into your work. This is only possible when standing before your subject.

LYNN GERTENBACH



**79. In selecting what to paint, ask yourself the following:**

What attracted me toward painting this subject?

Will it translate well into paint?

Does the subject have a strong focal point (exciting movement, emotional impact)?

What can I leave out of all the jumble that will enhance my focal point?

Remember that each painting is not precious. Painting is a learning process. Don't take yourself so seriously that you can't have fun with the paint.

ULRICH GLEITER



**80. When your painting appears to be “stuck,” always examine shadows.** Keep in mind that “light” in your canvas

will appear when shadow values appear. In the same sense, color in a painting is made up of lit parts — but also through the colors in the shadows. Regarding value, shadows are always darker than anything else that is in light or half-tones in your painting. Speaking about the shadows' colors, it is a common flaw to keep painting shadows with the same set of colors. In fact, shadows' colors vary and change as the colors do in lighter parts.

In nature, observe and compare the patches of shadows: their colors, value, and relatively softened edges, and how they change in the distance. Try to get a hint of that into the painting, too.

**81. Keep changing brushes. When painting with a new brush with a different size, it will immediately force you to see and paint new things. Using similar-size brushes makes for a lazy and a dull painting.**

**82. We won't read volume and space if it is being shown everywhere.** Instead, try to keep things flat as much as possible. At the same time, pick only a few spots in your painting where you will show volume and space. A great tool to get brushwork and, thus, volume, away is by flattening the brushwork with a palette knife. You can also use your thumb, painting cloth, etc.

**83. Don't be a slave to your viewfinder.** Use it in the beginning for blocking in. But once that's done, put it away. There are many useful things and ideas outside of the composition as it appears in that little square.

**84. Regularly change something about your palette:** Introduce new colors, leave others out. Force yourself to make changes.

DEBRA JOY GROESSER



**85. The most important thing I have found is keeping my equipment and backpack as light as possible.** Painting with a limited palette really helps, as carrying five or six tubes of paint instead of 10 or 20 really lightens the load. This is so important if you have to hike any distance to a painting location. Using a backpack instead of a roller cart or bag gives you more freedom to reach areas in rougher terrain.

I rarely pack an umbrella — not only for weight purposes, but because I have not found one yet that works well in windy conditions, which seems to be what I paint in most of the time. Instead I turn my pochade box so that it's facing away from the sun, keeping my canvas and palette in shade. This sometimes means my subject ends up being behind me, but I find my colors are much more accurate if I keep my canvas out of the direct sunlight — plus, it's much easier on the eyes.

When painting in windy conditions, be sure to have a bungee cord with you so you can attach your backpack to your tripod to weigh it down. I have painted in extremely windy conditions, and doing this has prevented my easel and tripod from blowing over. Another tip for windy days: Turn your easel so you are not facing into the wind. If you have the wind hitting your easel from the side, there will be less surface area exposed to the wind and less likelihood of blowing over. When all else fails, I use my car as a windbreak.

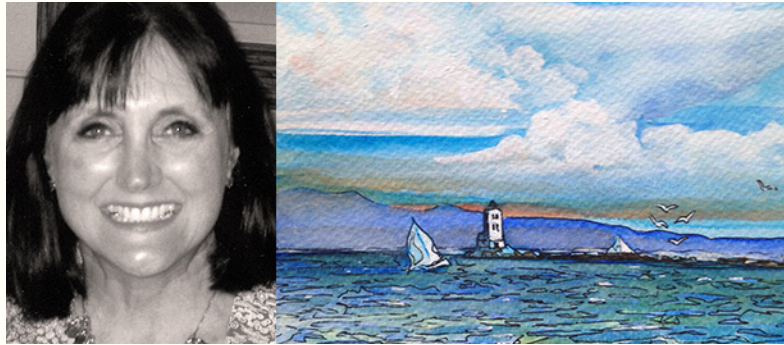
When traveling with oil paints, I never put my paints in my carry-on luggage. Always put them in your checked bags. I have an old plastic ArtBin brush carrier (they are still available for purchase) that I now use to pack my paints in for travel. It measures 14 x 6 x 1.25 inches and holds 12 37ml tubes of paint (so I can take extras of each color I use). I line it with bubble wrap above and below the tubes of paint, then snap the lid shut. For extra protection against possible leaks or punctures in the paint tubes, just wrap the container in a plastic grocery bag.



Perfect for tucking in your suitcase! And never, ever carry solvents on a plane, even in checked luggage.

**86.** When painting outdoors, avoid highly reflective or brightly colored clothing to avoid reflection back onto your canvas, which can skew your colors.

LINDA GUNN



**87.** A multifunctional sketchbook/journal is best used like a diary, a notebook, for thumbnail sketches and mini watercolor paintings, and as a scrapbook. A large wire ring sketchbook will expand for bulky mementos and keepsake souvenirs.

When in the field and before beginning to paint, take time to describe your vision and the surrounding environment in your sketchbook.

To help with composing a painting, draw a quick little “road map” with written directions and arrows on the loose sketch. Don’t worry about the drawing being perfect, since it’s your personal reference.

Paint a simple monochromatic value study opposite your rough sketch. Carry a small watercolor brush and a small, flat, makeup container with a squirt of cobalt blue watercolor.

Make note of events that happen while you are painting. For example, a gopher might push its head out of the dirt by your foot, there’s a heavy downpour of rain, your umbrella blows away, your easel falls in the stream, a friendly bird perches on your canvas, or a passerby might comment on your painting.

Create a library of these personal journals so that years from now, you and your loved ones can relive your creative adventures.

JAMES GURNEY



**88.** Have a clear purpose in mind before you start painting. Don’t just start squeezing paint and swinging brushes until you know what you’re after. The objective might be a strong emotion, a color concept, or a memory that the scene evokes. Look for something beyond the facts that a camera might capture. If your head is empty when you start out, the painting will be empty, too.

**89.** It’s easy to make a painting look like paint. It’s much harder to make a painting suggest light, air, wind, weather,

and mood. **Don't get caught up in gobs of paint or showy brushstrokes for their own sake. Good technique happens when you're not thinking about it. A painting is a record of your thoughts, and if you're thinking about light, chances are that your viewer will think about that, too, when they look at your piece.**

**90. Paint the commonplace.** Capture familiar scenes from your own life. Don't hunt far and wide for postcard subjects. You know your own world better than anyone else. You know best its common but transcendent moments. Those are the paintings your grandchildren will fight over.

**91. Remember the B.L.A.S.T. Rule: These basic principles or procedures apply to all sorts of painting.**

Big brushes.

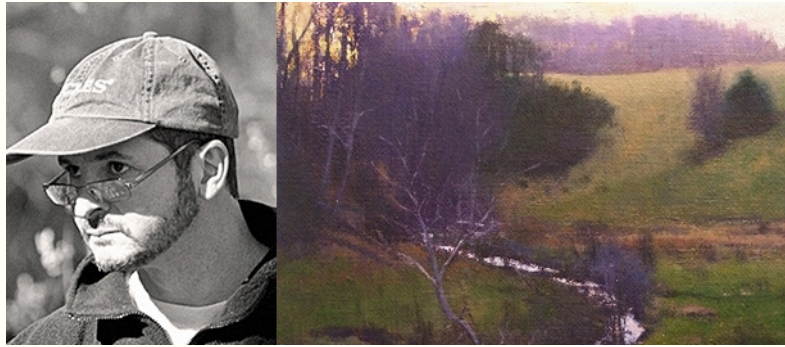
Large to small.

Accents last.

Soften edges.

Take your time.

JOSEPH GYURCSAK



**92. Use a limited palette to create unity and harmony.** There is no better way to strengthen a painting!

**93. Remember, black and white are color manipulators.** They are not colors, so they must be mixed with colors.

**94. What you are after is your first impression of inspiration.** Hold that, paint that. It will carry an undeniable truth in your painting!

**95. Value precedes color in every painting circumstance.** This is our inheritance from the masters.

**96. In every painting, try to paint with one less brushstroke.** Eventually, you will master the essence of your subjects.

CHARLIE HUNTER



**97. If it is a sunny day and the fundamental direction of the light changes (e.g., the difference between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.), pack it in.** The whole composition of your painting has just fundamentally altered. Painting is

hard. In the realm of representation, one must get the shapes right, the values right, the proportions right, the edges right. That's enough, and why I decided chroma was the one thing expendable.

**98. Eighty-nine cent “chip brushes” from the hardware store are our friends, because they give us gestures we can’t control.**

**99. Michelle Dunaway just taught me this one: The way the human eye sees is like a game of darts. The focal point – the bull’s eye – is realism, the next circle out is impressionism, the next abstraction.**

**100. Listen to an audiobook or music that is very familiar while painting.** The conscious brain engages with that and lets the meditative brain get busy with the painting.

DEBRA HUSE

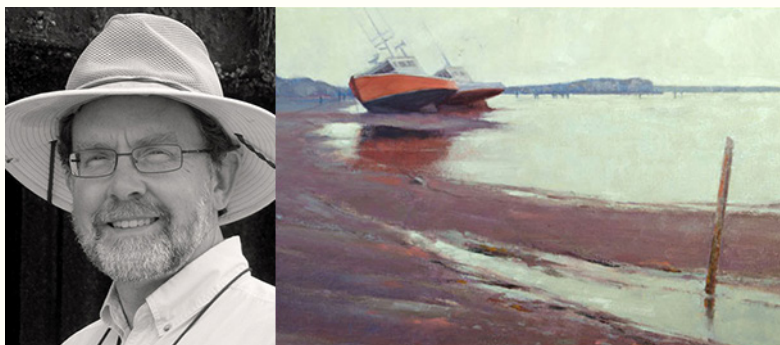


**101. Work small to start.** Six by 8 inches is a great size for getting a big idea on a small canvas.

**102. Four factors worth remembering: A) design; B) big shapes; C) what is in light and what is in shadow? (values); D) keep it simple.**

**103. Lay it down & leave it alone.** Copyright Debra Huse. Have fun, damn it!

MICHAEL CHESLEY  
JOHNSON



**104. Don’t paint the landscape photographically.** Feel free to move (or remove) things in the landscape for more impact or a better composition.

**105. Do be truthful with the light.** That is, don’t change color-temperature relationships. If the shadows are cool with respect to the light, keep it that way. But if it helps convey the truth of the moment, you may “push” the temperature contrasts.

**106. Don’t get hung up on materials and gear.** Sure, it’s fun to buy new stuff, but once you get comfortable with these things, work on improving your craft rather than on constantly improving your setup.

**107. A painting started in the field does not have to be completed in the field for it to be plein air.** As Emerson

wrote, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” Once you have captured the truth of the moment, and recorded any necessary details, you can finish (or improve) the piece in the studio if need be.

**108. Don't be afraid of the studio.** It's a great place to work out all those issues that are difficult to work out in the field, such as design and color harmony. Take your plein air paintings and try to improve upon them in the studio by creating new pieces based on them. You'll learn a lot that you can then take to the field. Consider the studio to be something like the practice driving range you had in Driver's Ed back in high school.

BECKY JOY

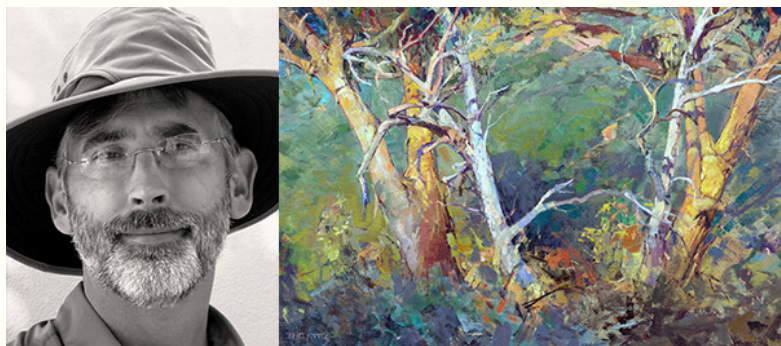


**109. Keep it simple.** Don't try to paint a large, complex scene. Paint just an object, if that is what you feel comfortable with. Concentrate on a good, solid block-in. Spend no more than 45 minutes on it. This will help you keep focused on the important things, leaving out detail.

**110. Start with a limited palette.** Learn how to use the colors before adding any more.

**111. Keep your equipment and supplies simple and to a minimum.** Have them handy, ready to put into the car when you want to go out painting. If it is easy and available, you will go out more often, which will improve your painting.

THOMAS JEFFERSON KITTS



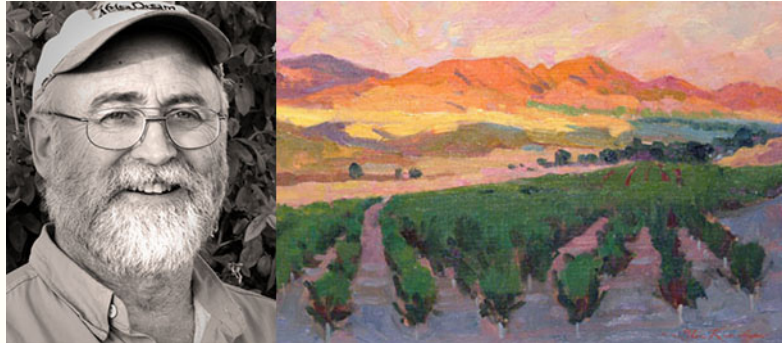
**112. If you want to become an accomplished *alla prima* painter, then try to minimize your use of white at the start of a painting.** If you have difficulty doing this, don't put any white out on your palette until you actually need it. We often reach for a white too early on and end up sacrificing the highly prized transparency of our dark and middle values.

**113. There is a well-worn axiom in oil painting that essentially boils down to, “Keep your darks lean and load your lights.”** Lean, in this case, means mixing little or no white into your shadows but slathering it and other colors into your lights. Why? Because in contrast, a thin dark will appear more vibrant if it is left transparent, and a light will appear more substantial if it is laid down thick and juicy. The natural tendency of an oil color is to become more opaque as it moves up the value scale, so why fight this characteristic?

**114. In addition, if white is introduced too early, we tend to set the middle values of our painting higher than they actually are — which then leads us to overstating the highlights and creating a general sense of**

**“chalkiness.”** It is better to learn how to use your lighter colors to lighten the darker ones than it is to reflexively reach for the white. Besides, adding white into a mix changes two things: It pushes whatever hue you’ve been carefully targeting toward the cool (blue), and it reduces (grays) the intensity of that hue’s chroma. Sure, there are times when you want both those things to happen, but not always. Not every time. So pause and reflect before you dip into your white. Ask yourself, is there another way I can achieve the lighter value I need without the use of white? Knowing that, at some point you will start using white in a more restrained way that remains invisible to the eye.

GLEN KNOWLES



**115. If there is a white object in the landscape, you can best tell what color the light is by the white object's color shift, which establishes the harmony of light and color temperature in the landscape.**

**116. Many artists like to use a primary palette outdoors, and use the same set of pigments for every painting. Consider substituting a different red or blue or yellow occasionally. The advantage is that you become more familiar with, really learn the qualities and nuances, of mixing with that substituted color. After trying a few different primary combinations, you might even start to match different specific primary sets to your motif, exploiting the different characteristics of your pigments.**

**117. If you don't like to spray mosquito repellent on your face and you are wearing a wide-brimmed hat, take the hat off and spray the underside of the brim with insect repellent. The sprayed hat will create an invisible shield around your head and face.**

ERIK KOEPEL



**118. Consider each part of the picture with the whole in mind, in order to present a more powerful and decisive composition.** Details are only helpful when related to a larger vision.

**119. Atmosphere affects every part of the landscape.** Carefully consider each object's position in atmospheric space as you paint it. Warm dark shadows come forward. Light blue-purple shadows fall back. Create a scale, and place each object properly within it.

**120. Learn only from masters.** If you don't believe in the complete excellence of an instructor's paintings, be cautious of their advice. Teachers can only lead you down the path they took themselves. Consider all advice compared with your own personal ideals and goals.

**121. You will immediately have more interesting compositions if you expand your view out to include as much of what you are seeing as possible.** Include the tops of trees arching over your head, and the sky above. Include the rocks at your feet, and the full panorama. When you leave the viewfinder behind, you'll have to correct optical distortions using perspective. This is why the masters loved perspective!

**122. Draw incessantly.** Draw from the masters, and draw from nature. Try to capture the character of things gracefully and quickly, then define the details. Try to capture large, complex areas with only a few lines. If you decide to copy master drawings, imagine yourself reconstructing the form and space of the world they created, rather than just copying what you see.

PAUL KRATTER



**123. Take the time to do a quick thumbnail drawing.** Spend five minutes working out a composition, using three values: white, gray, and black. This will save you valuable time and give you a great head start with paint.

ANNE LADDON



**124.** Sticky notes on my easel should say:

**What do you want the painting to say? What is your intention?**

**Are the shapes beautiful, is the design strong?**

**Do the colors you are using reflect your intention? Are they subtle, complex enough?**

**Have you paid attention to values?**

Since I love bright color, and lots of it, I often forget about values and get into trouble.

JEAN LeGASSICK



**125. Always wear a dark, neutral-colored shirt when painting outside.** This prevents the sun from bouncing off you and reflecting glare onto your panel. In addition, bright colors will bounce color on the panel, which will change how your paint colors look.

**126. Panels (either gessoed or with canvas) are preferable to stretched canvas.** If all you've got is a stretched canvas, make sure you bring a piece of cardboard, at least as big as your canvas size, to put behind it so the light doesn't shine through.

**127. Always wind-proof your setup, even if it's not windy.** I've learned the hard way that a gust can suddenly come up out of nowhere! Bungee cords work well for holding down your palette when using a French easel. Hanging a weight from your tripod is a good idea for pochade boxes.

**128. Bungee cords are so handy in the field!** If you have a panel that's bigger than your pochade box can handle, you can bungee cord it around the back (the little ones work best for this). They are also handy for tying back foliage that is blocking your view. I once even had to wrap them around my backpack to hold it closed when a zipper failed. Don't leave home without some!

**129. Paint with your panel or canvas in the shade, either by the position of your easel or under an umbrella.** If the sun moves, adjust your umbrella or move your easel to keep things shaded. And be careful under trees — dappled light is not good, either. How do you expect to get your values right if your panel is various values to start with? I will say that I know a few artists who can handle painting with their panel in full sun, but they are very rare. Whenever I do it, I come home with very dark, dreary paintings. This is because the light outside in the sun is always brighter than light indoors, so a shaded panel more closely resembles the light where we will view the art.

CAROLYN LORD



**130. I fill the paint wells of my watercolor palette a day or two before a painting trip so the paint has a chance to set and form a dry skin on the top.** That way I don't have to worry about colors oozing into adjacent colors if the palette is tilted, or even upside down, as I carry my materials to my painting site. Also, as I mix my colors, the dried paint allows me to control how much paint I want to re-dissolve with my wet brush.

**131. I use a 14 x 11-inch sketchbook to make pencil sketches of my motifs and compositions.** Since I do mostly quarter-sheet watercolor field paintings, at 11 x 15 inches, the similar paper size is helpful because I conceive my painting at its full scale. This helps me avoid composition gaffes that might not be readily apparent in a thumbnail sketch.

**132. I use my lap as my watercolor easel: It's affordable, adaptable, and I can never lose it.** My non-painting hand holds the board, tipping, turning, and tilting it as needed.

**133. To paraphrase *The Godfather*: "Keep your friends close. Keep your values closer."**

**134. My favorite, from Millard Sheets: "All you have to know about watercolor painting is that water runs downhill."**

KIM LORDIER



**135. There is always another canvas/paper.**

**136. Work from life.**

**137. Paint like it is "just an exercise."**

**138. Paint for the process, and not the finished product.**

JANE MCGRAW-TEUBNER



**139. Solve problems in pastel by application techniques instead of always resorting to rubbing.**

**140. Don't call unsuccessful paintings "failures"; think of them as exercises in learning.** I have hundreds of exercises in learning!

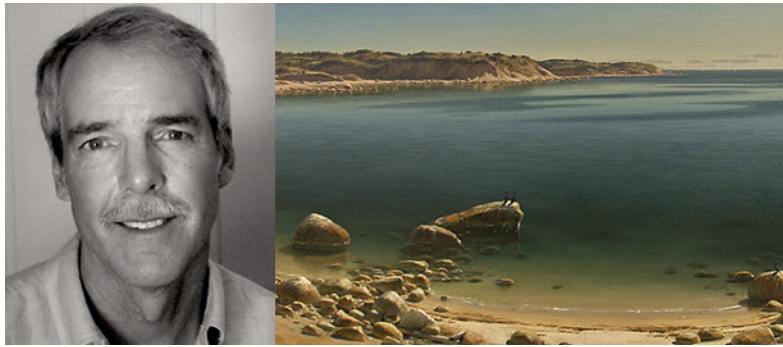
**141. Listen to your painting. It will tell you what to do next.**

**142. Spend time preparing.** A five-minute composition and value-study thumbnail and a 10-minute color study will save hours of frustration.

**143. In order to get better, devote many, many hours to painting.** Classes and workshops can only make you better if you practice what you learned.



JOSEPH MCGURL



**144. Never bring a camera when you go plein air painting.** Leaving it at home will force you to stay in the field until you get all the information you need, and your observational abilities will be sharpened knowing you will not be able to refer to photographs to finish your paintings. It may be hard in the beginning, but it will cause you to improve faster in the long run, and it will prevent you from becoming dependent upon a camera. The unique aspect of plein air painting is that it is just you, your paints, and nature. Strive to keep it that way.

**145. Experiment with different palettes.** Some artists use limited value and/or color ranges because it helps create harmony. However, nature is already harmonious, and if you are able to record what you see accurately, all the colors and values will naturally be in harmony. Artists also already have a limited value range because there is no paint as bright as the sun or as dark as a deep shadow. So why limit yourself even more? A full palette will give greater variety in color and value to a body of work.

**146. Make your methods fit your philosophy, not the other way around.** We are all unique individuals and have different goals and philosophies. That is why some artists will have valid reasons for giving opposing viewpoints to the tips I have suggested here, so don't work in a certain manner just because your teacher does. The most important aspect about art is that it has the ability to communicate an idea. Art should be more than just a pleasing design. Try different methods, and constantly search for the ones that express your ideas most completely. Concept and execution are equally important and should work in harmony with one another.

**147. Try varying the viscosity of your paint in the field.** My first layers of paint are very dry, with no medium, and my white is underpainting white, which sets up quickly and is quite stiff. As this sets up, I am able to start adding oils and gels to my paints to make subsequent passages juicier. This allows me to layer paint in the field without it becoming too slick, and I can add a great amount of detail. On a hot day, I can even add a glaze if I am very deft with the brush.

**148. Remember that nature is a combination of order and chaos.** For example, a cloudy sky has a system to the cloud formations, which meteorologists have categorized. However, if you follow these characteristics too rigidly, the clouds will look unnaturally ordered. You have to introduce variety and a bit of chaos. Our minds also strive for order, so we often unconsciously create repetitive shapes. **By using a palette knife, you can introduce chaos because it is hard to predict exactly what will happen as you use it to manipulate the paint.** If you create too much chaos, the form will be lost, but you can re-establish some order by re-introducing the brush. Thus, a combination of brushwork and palette knife often works well in balancing order and chaos to lend a natural appearance to your landscape paintings.

LORI McNEE



The importance of value in painting. Little did I know that my drawing background would give me a good foundation in understanding the importance of value in painting. For example, if you take a black-and-white photograph of your painting, the varying shades of gray represent the different values. Value is the lightness or darkness of a color or hue. Believe it or not, value is more important than color to the design and success of a painting.

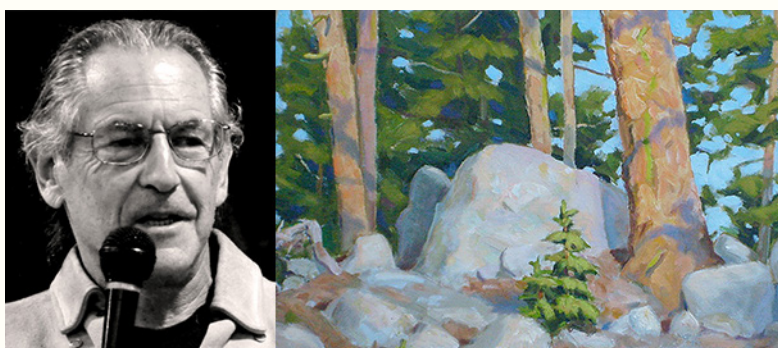
**149. Use value to create a focal point within a painting or drawing.** The human eye is immediately drawn to a light element against a dark element. This creates the focal point of interest. The artist can use “low-key” or “high-key” values to achieve dramatically different results.

Today, many successful artists believe in keeping a narrow value scale — limiting their composition to approximately four values. In this case, it seems, less is more. Fewer values help to create a cohesive and harmonious work.

**150. Use the hidden meaning of color in your paintings.** With the use of color, artists can achieve their own creative individuality and flare. Color can also be used to evoke a certain mood, or to create a message or sharp response in the viewer. As artists, we can learn how to use the positive or negative attributes of color to subliminally send a message. Cool colors with a blue undertone bring to the mind a calming effect. Blues lower the heart rate and reduce appetite. This might be one reason Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” and “Irises” are so well loved.

Warm colors, on the other hand, are based on yellow undertones and tend to convey emotions ranging from happiness to violence. Great artists like Bouguereau and Caravaggio used red to incite terror. Red instantly attracts, makes people excited, and increases the heart rate. Just think of Coke and Red Bull! Think how yellow sunflower paintings make us feel cheery. Most successful artists know how to use color to their advantage, which can help create meaning in their work. [www.finearttips.com/2010/03/how-to-bring-out-the-mona-lisa-in-your-own-artwork](http://www.finearttips.com/2010/03/how-to-bring-out-the-mona-lisa-in-your-own-artwork)

GARY MICHAEL



**151. Start with a limited palette and master all the combinations it will yield.** Add colors only as you find need for them.

**152. Experiment with different palettes, however limited.** Palettes are personal. Anyone espousing one over another simply finds the one he or she recommends more suitable to his or her particular needs and taste.

153. Always paint from a place of joy. If it's not fun, it's not likely to be useful.

154. Never fear to fail. If you fail, you learned something: "That doesn't work."

CLARK MITCHELL



155. Probably the most important tip I didn't know when starting out plein air painting was to **wear a hat with a brim, or a visor**. This is not for the obvious reason of protecting my forehead and face from the sun, but to block out all the extraneous light from the sky above that bleaches out colors and value contrasts in the landscape before me. What a difference this makes!

156. Another: **As a pastelist, I like to do an underpainting with dry pastel brushed with a liquid to fix the first layer of color to the paper before layering pigment atop**. I was in the habit of using Turpenoid (unscented turpentine) to accomplish this. Then, during a quick draw on a foggy day in Laguna Beach, I struggled to continue a scene because the underpainting just would not dry. All the other artists were progressing nicely with their scenes as I waved mine in the air. In desperation, I stood on the outside patio wall of a restaurant, heat lamps aglow above the brunch diners. Thankfully, this dried the underpainting quickly, and I was not shooed away by a nervous restaurant manager. To my delight, I have since learned that **rubbing alcohol, 91 percent, dries very quickly even in damp weather, and I can proceed with my plein air work in a timely fashion**.

157. **When I go out painting with pastels, to save time, I take whatever paper I'm going to use already mounted on a drawing board (usually gatorboard), and with a somewhat larger sheet of glassine (slick, non-static paper) taped down over. When ready to paint, I remove the glassine, work the scene as far as I want with pastels, then tape the glassine once again over the painting. This is completely portable, protected from smearing, and easily stowed in my backpack for carrying to the car.**

NED MUELLER



Most paintings are ruined at the start, as not enough thought and time are given to what we will paint and how we will compose it.

158. Really simplify the large shape relationships and find their place in the overall composition.

159. Get the surface covered as fast and as accurately as you can, so you can see how the large color

relationships are working for you.

**160.** Paint as much and as often as you can — mileage will take you a long way in improving. Concentrate more on the process of painting than on getting a finished painting, particularly in a workshop setting. Often thinking too much of a finished painting can get in the way of learning.

C.W. MUNDY



**161.** In the history of art, great representational paintings were designed with a primary area (centrality of focus), a secondary area (supporting cast), and a tertiary area (background, negative space, simple non-objective shapes).

**162.** Design is one of the most crucial parts in any artwork.

**163.** Value (scale 1 through 9) is one of the greatest challenges for the beginner.

**164.** If you're a plein air painter, it's a must to experience Europe with all its antiquity.

DONALD NEFF



**165.** Most artists I see use kitchen-type paper towels to wipe their brushes, etc. At the end of the painting, they walk away with a shopping bag full of trash. Instead, use the blue paper shop towels, which cost just a little more than the kitchen type. You can buy them by the case at Costco. I only need one or two sheets for an entire plein air painting, and there is much less trash!

**166. Travel light!** I see many artists haul half an art studio out to paint in crates, on luggage rollers, etc., and probably tired by the time they get to the location! Travel as light as you can, taking only the materials you will need. I usually take just my Soltek easel, a turp jar, and the canvas. Well, also maybe a camping chair to sit on.

**167.** When painting landscapes with lots of depth (e.g., background mountains, middle ground, foreground), use soft filbert or similar brushes in the background to achieve softer edges, keeping the paint thin. As you work forward, switch to brights or flats for harder edges and thicker paint.

**168.** Use as large a brush as possible.

JEAN PERRY



**169. One of the best tips I can give a beginner is “do your color charts.”** These are the charts that will show you all the possible color mixtures of your palette. The very act of doing them brings you closer to understanding the potential colors that you can mix, and I think you will go to these charts again and again in the future when you want to duplicate a color that you see.

I did my charts on inexpensive canvas boards and panel boards painted white. One of my artist friends made his on squares of primed linen, and he was able to attach them together and carry them in his backpack when painting on location.

**To Make Color Charts:** Use masking tape to create squares. As an example, I had 10 colors on my palette, so I had 10 rows across the top and five squares under each color. The five squares are where I added an increasing amount of white to the pigment, changing the value until the bottom row was very light. If I was working on the alizarin crimson color chart, the first square at the top was half alizarin crimson and half cadmium yellow light. The next square on the top row would be half alizarin crimson and half yellow ochre, and so on, using all nine colors.

There is a wealth of information that you will get from doing your own charts. One of the lessons I learned is the beautiful harmony that each chart has when a single color is added to every other color. I was also surprised at the many rich dark colors that I could create using just two pigments from my palette.

These charts will take a little time to complete, but I would urge any beginner to make the effort.

**170. Never buy one of those inexpensive easels for painting outside or for that matter, for painting in the studio.** Buy a well-made plein air easel, like a Julian with brass fixtures. I have seen too many beginner artists spending too much time trying to fix a poorly made easel. Save money on something else.

**171. Think about your goal. Are you spending your time painting and learning and growing, or are you focused on how many galleries you can get into, how many paintings you can sell?** It’s a balancing act. We need to sell and we need galleries to be able to sell, but most of all I would advise the beginner to keep the learning and growing as their main goal.

CAMILLE PRZEWODEK



**172. You should wear glasses with UV coatings to reduce your risk of developing cataracts and other eye conditions.**

MORGAN SAMUEL PRICE



- 173. The more the artist develops the ability to focus, the easier it will be to enhance your design ability and speak emotionally in color.
- 174. Rules are for assistance in the development of a painting. Rules apply when they do.
- 175. The darks in the light are not as dark as the darks in the dark, nor are the lights in the dark as light as the lights in the light.
- 176. Trust yourself. Believe in you. Be your own best cheerleader!
- 177. Your technique should stand behind you, not in front of you.

LORI PUTNAM



**178. Use a mid-value mixing palette.** (If you use a white mixing area, your eyes are more likely to be strained, which makes determining values difficult.) **When you first arrive on the scene, while your eyes and mind are fresh, make a thumbnail sketch, and determine what mass or area in your scene is a mid-value. This is the area that will be the exact same value as your mixing palette.**

**Make a note in your sketch. Be sure, when you mix color for that area, that the mixture value matches your mid-value mixing palette perfectly. Masses in your scene that are darker than this mid-value mass should be mixed darker than your mixing palette. Lighter passages should be mixed lighter.**

**Once you have been painting for 30 minutes or so, your eyes will begin to “lie” to you. Trust your notes regarding key and mid-value, and constantly compare all mixtures to your mid-value mixing palette. Ask yourself how much darker or lighter each mixture should be. Do not second-guess your original observations about what is right in the mid-value.**

**179. If you find that once you bring your paintings inside, they are much darker than you expected, try keeping both your mixing palette and your plein air panel shaded, even if it means having to face away from the scene.** Our eyes are working at optimum efficiency to protect themselves in bright sunlight. That means there is a natural tendency to make mixtures too dark when mixing values with either surface in bright sunshine.

**180.** When mixing your lightest light, “test” a dot of paint on a white paper towel. Lighter, outdoor mixtures will appear to be almost white. Comparing them to the white of a paper towel will give you a more accurate reading on their actual color and value.

**181.** Most shadows are not as dark as they appear, particularly in the distance. Compare middle and background darks to darks in the foreground. Make notes on your sketch.

**182.** Use a grayscale card with holes punched out so that you can compare masses. You can purchase them pre-made, or visit a hardware store paint aisle and make one from the strips of color choices that show a range of grays. Determine how many value steps are between the light, middle, and dark masses. For example, after choosing which mass is in the mid-value, ask yourself how many steps darker your darkest darks are, and how many steps lighter your lightest lights are. Again, make these notes on your original thumbnail sketch.

**183.** Once you have been painting *en plein air* for several years and are nailing values perfectly by learning and copying value-for-value in nature, begin to experiment with pushing value masses darker or lighter in half-step increments. You will learn that sometimes it is better not to match each value exactly in order to make a stronger and more exciting painting.

KATERINA RING



**184.** Ask yourself, “What’s it about? What am I trying to say?” Know this, and remind yourself often.

**185.** Do a value study in black, gray, and white. Does the value pattern make a pleasing composition? What’s in light? What’s in shadow? Keep them separate. Connect the darks or connect the lights.

**186.** Use thinner only to put down a thin wash or block-in, then put it away and use the paint progressively thicker as you move from dark to light.

RICHARD ROBINSON



**187.** Paint what you love!

**188.** Lay out big blobs of paint on your palette — more than you think you’ll need.

**189.** Squint and look for the big shapes.

**190.** If you’re not happy with it, scrape it off and try again, with more resolve.

191. Consider the big visual idea for your painting before anything else.

192. When you get stuck, speak to your painting. Ask it what it needs.

AARON SCHUERR



193. **It's natural to try to be exact and detailed with the block-in, but often this leads to errors in perspective and scale. The solution is to simplify the landscape into geometric abstract shapes.** That will make it easier to get the drawing right, but it will also help you see the relationship of forms. The horizontal ground plain must relate to the uprights of the trees and the slanting plain of the hills or mountains in a way that is varied and interesting. Starting with simple, geometric shapes will help you establish a strong, dynamic composition.

194. Nature does not always offer up the perfect composition. **Though there is no prohibition against making changes to what you see, it is important to make these changes deliberately and carefully. Ask yourself if these changes improve the overall composition, or if you are simply being careless. Be a student of the landscape first and worry about the artistry later.** In doing so you will discover that a few subtle changes are usually enough.

195. **Just as a musician must first learn to read music before he can improvise, so artists must first understand what they see before they can invent.**

196. **Get out and walk!** I often find that one aspect of a landscape catches my eye — the shape of a tree, or the light on the mountain, for example. This is the main idea. I then ask myself if the rest of the landscape supports the main idea. If it doesn't, I walk, keeping my focus on that main idea and seeing how the rest of the landscape changes in relation to it. I find that a strong, unified composition is a short walk away.

197. I once drove past a flock of sheep rimmed by morning sunlight. They looked so beautiful, but I decided that it was far too difficult a subject for me to tackle. As soon as I thought that, I pulled a U-turn and set up to paint the sheep. "I'll never be able to paint sheep," I decided, "if I don't paint sheep!" I must have scraped that painting 10 times before it worked. And even if I hadn't pulled it off, the attempt would have been worth it. **Plein air painting is the arena to experiment, challenge yourself, and sometimes fail. It's where we discover ourselves. If you're not failing now and again, ask yourself if you are playing it too safe.**



BRENDA SWENSON



**198. Select the right approach.** When I set out to sketch or paint, I ask myself an important question: **How much time is available?** If I have realistic intentions, I can very likely complete what I start. If I'm not realistic, I'll become frustrated and feel my skills are lacking, when in fact I didn't allow myself enough time. **Be realistic about how much time it takes for you to do a quick sketch compared to a finished painting!**

**199. Assess the location thoroughly.** When I arrive on location, the first thing I do is walk around for five to 15 minutes. This is when I get a sense of the place. Until I explore, I don't know what options are available. When I find something that really excites me, such as the light, shadows, or a particular view, I begin.

**200. Time of day.** Look for the position of the sun, and how it will change the scene over a period of a couple of hours. **If the subject will be in completely different light shortly, it might not be a good choice.** My favorite time of day to work on location is in the morning, between 8:30 and 11:30 a.m. The shadows are interesting, and the light is clean and bright. As the sun moves toward midday, the shadows are straight down and less exciting. In late afternoon, the shadows are once again interesting — however, on warm days, it may be too hot!

**201. Personal safety.** The number one priority is personal safety. **I do not encourage anyone to work alone, especially women.** I have always had a painting partner and suggest you do the same. When sketching or painting we become oblivious to traffic, loose dogs, sprinklers, unscrupulous people — an extra set of eyes is always advised. And of course, it's always more fun to share the experience. If you are alone, I suggest you sit in a safe place, such as a street cafe.

**202. Protect your eyes.** When working on a white surface (such as watercolor paper or sketchbooks), light reflects off the paper and into your eyes. It doesn't take long to burn your corneas, and repeated exposure can cause serious eye problems. So, **before you set up, make sure to position yourself in the shade, or turn your body so the light doesn't directly hit your paper.**

URANIA CHRISTY TARBET



**203. When painting in plein air, don't pick the first spot you see to set up your easel. Do a slow 180-degree turn, as the most beautiful scenery might be behind you.**

**204. Placing your center of interest within the "golden mean" will produce a well-balanced painting.**

**205. Look three times, paint once.**

**206.** Instead of a white canvas that creates a glare when painting out of doors, **consider adding an underpainting of your dominant hue or complementary color by applying a light coat of watercolor, gouache, or acrylic.** It dries fast, and the painting process can proceed.

**207.** Before starting a painting, observe your chosen scene, then **ask yourself three important questions: What is my dominant hue? Will my painting be warm or cool? Where is my center of interest?**

BRYAN MARK TAYLOR



**208.** In order to judge color and value more accurately, keep both palette and canvas in shadow.

**209.** Start the painting by laying in the shadows first. Light and atmosphere are most effectively conveyed by the shadows in a subject.

**210.** Simplify, simplify, simplify!

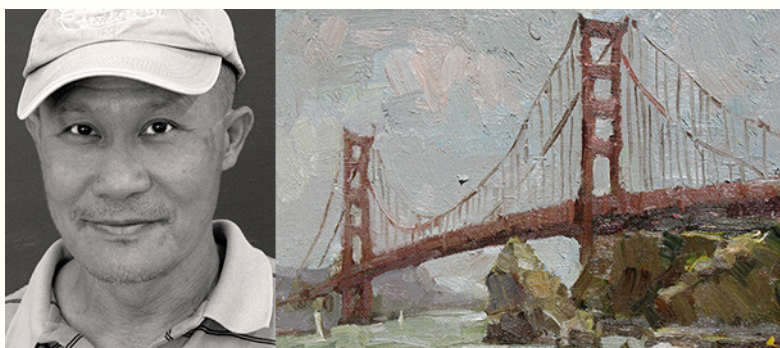
**211.** Create a strong value pattern by mixing one average tone in the shadow and one average tone in the light of each given object. The closer you keep the values within a given mass, the better the painting will read from a distance.

**212.** You are not painting the object, but the light and air that exists between you and the object.

**213.** Don't be stingy. Squeeze out enough paint!

**214.** Outdoor painting is a sport. Get the right equipment.

TIMOTHY TIEN



**215.** Do not forget the first time you made art. Most likely there was no pressure to make a masterpiece. Go back to when you were a kid, and paint for the simple reason that you enjoy doing it. Trust your own sensitivity and expressive nature. There are way too many professional standards, rules, and painting books out there to inhibit you. This tip also applies to the representational painter, not only abstract expressionists.

**216.** Understand the simplicity and relationships of what you see in front of you. On your canvas and within

your deeper self are some very important aspects of what makes art.

**217.** Skill, technique, craft, and fundamentals such as shape, value, edges, color, and light are just tools, methods, and experiences we can choose among many others to express our vision. Do not overemphasize skill and technique, and try not to limit your growth by insisting on perfect fundamentals. **It's more important to apply the concepts of "wholeness" and "contrast," while learning the fundamentals and craft.** Skill and technique do not equate to masterpieces – by themselves they do not make art, nor do they imply the maturity of the artist. Beware that too much technique and skillfulness obstructs the spirit of art reaching your viewer.

**218.** **It is not the accuracy of your drawing that makes a painting, it is knowing when, what, where, and how to emphasize a part in relationship to the whole that makes art. Compare, compare, compare.**

ALEXANDRA TYNG



**219.** **Make sure you are physically prepared for your painting expedition. Do your research on what type of equipment is best suited for your needs. It is much better to have lightweight, practical equipment than high-tech or cool-looking equipment – though if it's all those things, so much the better!** Lightweight equipment makes it possible to hike around and set up anywhere. You can hang stones or your camera from your tripod for extra weight on a windy day. Be sure to carry insect repellent, sunscreen, water, snacks, your cell phone, a hat, windbreaker, trail map, etc. Don't leave unprepared.

**220.** **Ask yourself what your painting is about.** Take a few moments to think about it. How are you going to communicate that to viewers? Make some decisions about that before you begin. Your focal point is the essence of your idea. How are you going to direct the eye toward it? Several ways: bright light, contrast of color and/or value, harder edges, interesting shape. Every decision you make should support your idea.

The idea behind a painting is almost always connected to a particular quality and direction of light. When you are painting outdoors, plan on taking two (or at the most three) hours to complete your work. After three hours maximum, the light changes too much. (The only exceptions are if you are working in cloudy weather or you are able to come back the next day.) **Identify what parts of the composition are most central to your idea, and block them in first before the light changes!** Figure out where the sun will be moving so you can predict what parts (the side of a house, for example) will stay in shadow. You can work on those parts last.

SHARON WEILBAECHER



**221.** Getting out of the studio and painting outdoors can be liberating and fun. Even spectators can be enjoyable, and sometimes chatting with them can lead to sales. Weighing yourself down with too many materials can cut into this joy. **The trick is to find the right materials for you as an individual artist. What works for one may not work for another, depending on your chosen medium, your physical condition, and your preference for easel painting, seated or standing.**

Travel as light as possible. You might consider a photographer's vest; they may have a dozen or more pockets to free your hands and hold your digital camera, paints, brushes, water, billfold, or whatever you find necessary to take. You can hang things on the vest with provided hooks.

**222.** Watercolor, which is my primary medium, lends itself to plein air painting. It requires fairly minimal supplies, is quick-drying, and can even be done without an easel by finding a seat or taking a folding stool and holding on your lap a foamcore board with watercolor paper stretched, or taped to it with acid-free 3/4-inch tape. Also, you can use the Arches watercolor blocks. I sometimes separate the block to save weight if going on a trip, especially to a foreign country.

**223.** If you use watercolor paper taped to a lightweight foamcore board, after it is finished, either on location, in your hotel room, or in your studio, you can wet the back of the painting with a small soft house-painting brush, place it face-down on a foamcore board, and on the wet side place a blotter. Then weight it overnight with foamcore board, heavy wooden drawing boards, or art books. It will dry flat.

A watercolor painter can look for a big rock or log or, if you are agile, sit on the ground. In the city, find a park bench to hold your painting on your lap, or a cafe table where you can order coffee, a soft drink, or a glass of wine, and prop your watercolor board or block on a book at an angle or on your travel bag. Seeing a great view from a hotel room can work well with your supplies propped on the windowsill while you pull up a chair, sketch, and paint with a sink handy. Bridges with short stone walls are good, and sometimes balconies have walls at a good level where you can prop your stretched paper and put your supplies around, including your water, palette, and paints.

**224.** If you like easel painting, the En Plein Air Pro Easel with a palette (with cover to protect the paints) that fits on the front legs of the easel, a retractable holder for brushes, and a collapsible water container is great for watercolor painting. It can be used seated or standing. It is relatively lightweight and fits in a bag.

**225.** The Winsor & Newton Travel Bag suits my needs as a watercolorist and traveler. It is waterproof, 7 x 9 x 2 inches, with attachment inside for a ruler and brushes. It zips on three sides and has a strap for wearing it around your waist or hanging over your shoulder, and has a small plastic water container with lid and mesh pockets to hold your choice of supplies. I put the following items in small Ziploc bags in the travel bag: automatic pencil with extra leads; a few colored pencils, a No. 2 pencil, and a sharpener; Pink Pearl eraser; a small ruler; Q-tips; a small package of Kleenex; sometimes Grumbacher Miskit frisket; a few folded paper towels in a Ziploc bag; a small sponge; a single-edge razor; a small amount of acid-free 3/4-inch tape; a sandpaper pad; two Sharpie ultra-fine-point black permanent markers for sketching; a small plastic water container or collapsible cup; and small tubes of Winsor & Newton watercolors in alizarin crimson, Winsor red, cadmium red, ultramarine blue, Winsor blue, cobalt, blue, sepia, burnt umber, burnt

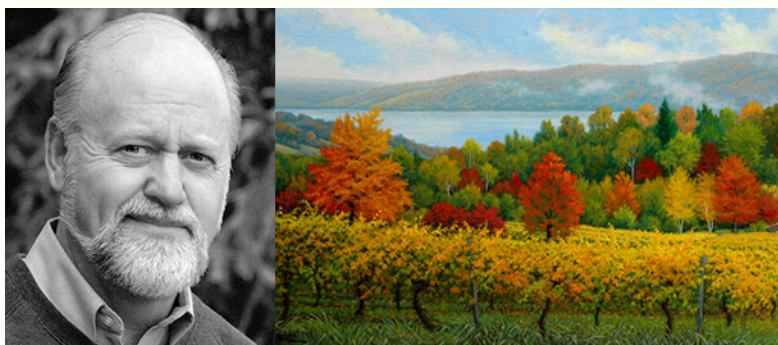
sienna, Winsor yellow, cadmium yellow, yellow ochre, raw umber, permanent sap green, viridian, designer's gouache, and permanent white.

My brushes are primarily Winsor & Newton Series 7 Sable brushes (Nos. 7 to 0) and 1-inch Robert Simmons Flat. I also bring a few other small flat brushes, a small plastic palette, a small Guerrilla Painter Composition Finder, a Winsor & Newton travel set with 14 colors (for when time is very limited), a small watercolor pad, and a small sketchbook.

In addition, I carry an over-the-shoulder zipper bag with plastic kitchen garbage bags inside in case of rain, and a Cachet studio portfolio, 12 x 16 inches or smaller with acid-free lining and an elastic band closure. Inside, I have various sizes of watercolor papers from 12 x 16 inches – Arches 140 lb., both hot and cold press – 5 x 7 1/2 inches, 7 x 10, 9 x 12, and 10 x 14. I take only what I need for the day and leave the rest in my room. (I've taped watercolor paper to the back of the portfolio when I've needed to.) For airplane travel, I put this bag in the bottom of the checked suitcase along with the Winsor & Newton Travel Bag.

**226.** Try to get a drawing on your watercolor paper as quickly as possible. In a city scene or buildings, this may take longer, and it is a very important step. I like to lay in the sky if it is a landscape first by wetting the sky area and floating colors on from dark to light. If there are clouds, I spare these out with Kleenex before the color dries. This encourages me to get something down quickly, as I am a slow painter. I then take a digital photo of the scene I am painting, particularly to establish the shadows and highlights before they change and interesting cloud formations. Recently I've been taking a small iPad photo of the scene, particularly on foreign travel where time is limited. I can either work more in the hotel room at night or at home in the studio from the iPad image.

CHARLES WHITE



**227.** Over the past 20 years, I've given hundreds of classes and workshops where I constantly give tips to improve students' work, so it's hard to narrow those down to just a couple. However, I do find myself repeating the importance of proper values and temperatures in the landscape. It seems so obvious and basic, but many students fail to grasp the fact that **size, value, and temperature are all reduced as you shift from foreground to background.**

The easiest way to accomplish this is to paint the largest and darkest shapes in the foreground first and gradually lighten the value and cool the temperature as you move back into the mid-ground and again into the background. Highlights will not shift so much in value, but they will get warmer in the foreground and cooler in the background, so be careful of using white to lighten in the foreground, since it will cool down the color. Using yellow or orange would be a better choice.

**228.** I also like to tone or underpaint my canvas with a warm color before I start the composition. I find that it tends to warm and unify the painting. I use warm earth tones such as red oxide or burnt sienna with white to lighten the value so that the end result is a salmon color. As Edgar Payne says in his book on basic composition, "Every argument is in favor of a warm undercoat for marines or any other subject. The danger of coldness in any painting is something that should be forestalled."

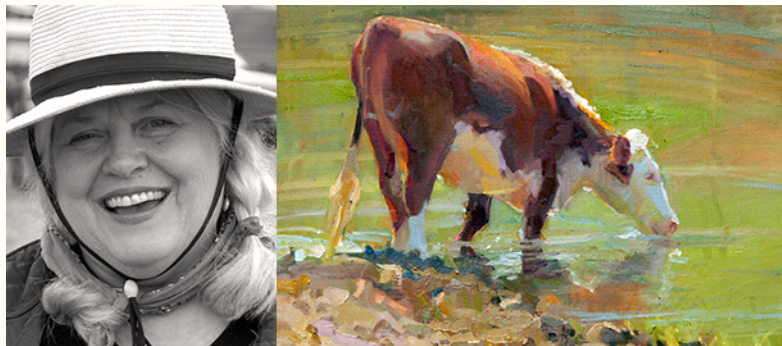
STEWART WHITE



**229. One thing I like to do when I'm in a new location for a painting event is visit the local visitors' center and start talking to the volunteer who happens to be there.** They are so eager to talk to anybody interested in their town. And there you can get some insight on what particular novel subjects might be just below the surface. I also learn a bit of history and find significant things that I might not ordinarily get from a quick read on the place. Librarians are a help, too.

**230. I enjoy plein air events for exactly the reason that it is about mirroring a response to a place. It's not about how well one can paint a particular thing that you can paint in your own backyard.** Residents like to see their own town as seen through the visiting artist's eyes. I believe that is the primary draw to a plein air event for the locals.

DAWN WHITELAW



**231. Don't always think of plein air painting as just a way to produce paintings to be put in a frame to show or sell. Think of the plein air experience as a way to become a better painter.** Painting from life outdoors is a time-honored way to study a particular subject, or a certain light effect or texture or transition. If you can remove yourself from the pressure of production, you can open your mind to meaningful learning. I am not saying to turn your back on "production." I am just saying to incorporate this learning opportunity into your time outdoors.

**232. "Thou shall not paint two ideas on the same canvas."** — Birge Harrison. Approach a plein air site as you would an all-you-can-eat-buffet where you are only going to choose your favorite bites instead of trying to put some of everything on your plate.

**233.** A quote that often runs through my head when I am out looking for a location to paint is this: **"Don't paint beautiful things, paint normal things that catch your eye, and find something beautiful in them."** (I am sorry to say that I don't know the origin of this quote.)

**234. If the light on the scene you are painting has significantly changed since you started the painting, spend more time looking at your canvas and less time looking at the scene.** Ask yourself what the original intent for the painting was and what needs to be removed or added to this canvas to best convey that thought. Only refer back to the actual scene when you need to answer a specific question about shape or edge, etc. Don't be tempted to chase the light.

**235.** To help determine proper values when plein air painting, keep direct sunlight off the canvas, and work on a toned surface.

**236.** Use thumbnail sketches or the ValueViewer app to help determine the big value patterns. Design the painting using only two values, giving the painting a strong structure. Then carefully and intentionally add the third and possibly fourth values to add mood.

JOHN WURDEMAN



**237.** An artist needs to tune his eye just like a musician his ear. This is only achieved by an open gaze, looking at everything at once, not focusing on any single point. Then relationships of hue, value, space, and texture can be felt. If you use a camera-eye vision, focusing on a point, you abstract that point from its natural context and you can't see the big relationships any longer. Hence I never like using photographs as a reference — the tone, hue, and space are contorted and exaggerated. There is a reason we have two eyes, not one.

**238.** Color should be felt with the heart, not the mind. Color wells, value scales, all of this is part of the *logos* and turns something spectacularly diverse into something very mundane. Color should be felt by measuring the temperature, how warm or how cool. **Try not to think in terms of names and colors, for the micro-hues in nature are far more subtle than we have words for or can even recognize with our minds. The more directly we can feel, execute, feel and execute, bypassing the logical analysis, the more pungent and acute our color chords will be.**

**239.** Even the best of musicians continue to do scales and etudes. When working on longer pieces, especially if painting indoors from sketches done on site, the eye and ear can get weary. **Never forget the value of quick small sketches. They enliven your connection with nature, and, because we have less invested in them, they often are purer and can bring back enthusiasm that can be hard to kindle in the studio if you are removed from your subject.**

**240.** Traveling the world and painting in different places is exotic, much like snapshots we make when visiting a new country on vacation. Although this can be fun, often **our deepest pieces will be painting landscapes that we have the most emotional attachment to and where our roots go deepest.**

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