

HOW TO PAINT BUILDINGS

The best way forward is to see buildings as shapes and textures.

Buildings are a vital part of all kinds of watercolour painting.

Being able to paint them convincingly is essential. Many students over-work buildings. They want to paint every brick, which is a basic mistake that needs rectifying. The best way forward is to see buildings as shapes and textures. If you look at *Farm Near Outwell* you will notice that I have focused on colour and tone, not details. Although the farm was the focal point, my main concern was capturing the early morning light, and sense of stillness and space.

The main thing to understand when painting buildings, from a simple barn to a super-structural cathedral is to think: simplify. By simplifying the building to basic geometric shapes such as circles, rectangles, cones, cubes, triangles and so on you give yourself confidence to tackle them. After you have got the proportions of these shapes correct, you can then begin to paint in details such as doors and windows. Again, the thing to remember is keep them simple. Shadows are a key ingredient in painting successful buildings. I am always amazed to see the effect of shadows painted on buildings – it somehow brings them to life, giving structure and form.

Notice how in *Farm Near Outwell* the darkest wall shadow is placed next to the lightest roof to give impact and counter-change. It's where the eye goes first, and the dark trees behind the farmhouse help to throw up the roof, too.



Farm Near Outwell, Cambs 15"x22" (38cm x 56cm)



Near Bergerac, France 15"x22" (38cm x 56cm)

Rural France is awash with wonderful subject matter. The buildings always throw up evocative feelings of a bygone age, a slower pace of life. In *Near Bergerac*, I want to bring your attention to the treatment of the buildings. The closest, right-hand building was painted with a strong mixture of Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna. Some of the paint was lifted off with kitchen roll and a fine mist sprayed in, where gravity could do its work. It's important to tilt the painting to a 45 degree angle so that the paint and mist can blend and bleed.

The left-hand shadow of the building next to the café awnings was painted with the same two colours but more Ultramarine was dropped in. I think the textural elements of the buildings come through well using this technique. The church is a big shape painted as a sharp wash of Cobalt Blue. The big building shapes give this painting drama and impact, as do the strong building shadows throughout the picture.

Notice the tonally strong foreground shadows, too, which add impact and push back other elements. I also used dry brush technique in several parts of the painting, along with dry rub technique, where I dragged my fingers and thumb across already dry paint to create a blurred textural effect. It is most noticeable just next to the two shuttered windows on the left-hand side building, above the café awnings.



Issigeac Market, Dordogne, France 15"x22" (38cm x 56cm)

Although the people in this busy market scene are the main points of human interest, the buildings play a big part in creating drama and scale. I simplified the buildings, too, reducing them to basic geometric shapes. Notice that the roofs are much darker tonally than the walls. The windows are painted very economically. There is a range of techniques in the painting – from the flat sky wash, to dry brush, wet into wet and even stippling in the tree foliage.

Shadows on the buildings play a vital role in giving form and light. Notice the large right-hand building's shadow. It was painted first with a mix of Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine. I then dropped in a Permanent Rose/Ultramarine shadow mix and let it blend and bleed into the original wash. Once this was totally dry I added a thin glaze of my Permanent Rose/Ultramarine shadow mixture. Thin glazes can add a subtle glow to areas of a painting – especially useful on buildings.