

Masterclass: Cool shadows, bright lights

If you want to create a bright watercolour scene, it is tempting to avoid the darker colours. However, as **Fabrizio Cembranelli** explains, cool shadows can provide a perfect contrast to really make your paintings sing



I am attracted to watercolours with strong contrasts because they have a powerful impact on viewers so I think that dark and well-planned shadows play an important role in creating excitement in a painting.

My main subjects are flowers but I also enjoy painting doors, gates and entrances. In fact, I realised that I'm not directly attracted to the architectural elements, but rather the shadows they cast and the way they can work to enhance the focal point.

In *Light and Shadows in Lucca*, I painted a front door with defined shadows and sharp edges. My first step was to draw interesting masses of shadow and light to give my painting power and solidity.

My darkest shadows were made with Ultramarine Violet and Payne's Grey and a bit of Sepia. After choosing a shadow colour, it's important to understand how it fits in with the rest of the painting: there are lots of greens and strong reds in my composition, it means that my overall colour temperature is warm and in this case I use a cool shadow (mixing Ultramarine Violet with a bit of warm Sepia or Alizarin Crimson). Creating a warm shape with a cool shadow can help to guide the viewer's eyes to the focal point.

Be confident with shadows: learning to paint them well can enhance the light-filled areas in your paintings.

For details of Fabrizio's workshops and painting holidays, please visit femtribranelli.blogspot.co.uk



PAINTS

Cadmium Yellow Light, Quinacridone Gold, Transparent Orange, Perylene

Maroon, Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, Sepia, Vermilion, Opera Rose, Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue, Ultramarine Violet, Sap Green, Green Gold, Payne's Grey, all artists' quality watercolours from Winsor & Newton and Maimeri! Bu

BRUSHES

Round (No. 10), round mop (No. 10 and 14), flat (3/4"), Escoda Aco (No. 4) and rigger (No. 2), all Fabrizio Cembranelli signature brushes from Escoda

PAPER

Arches 140 (cold-pressed or NOT) 300gsm watercolour paper, 58x35cm



1 CHOOSING MATERIALS

I begin by squeezing out my watercolours from the tubes into a portable folding plastic palette. I prefer to paint with pigments from tubes, as the creamy consistency is easier to work with. My pigment choices are constantly changing but in general I avoid opaque colours.

I use round and flat brushes with sharp points made by synthetic fibres and usually keep one rigger brush at hand for final touch-ups. Sometimes, when I'm painting leaves or trees, I use a synthetic fan brush, too.



TOP TIP
COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS ENHANCE EACH OTHER – A TOUCH OF RED CAN BOOST A GREEN AREA, FOR EXAMPLE.

3 LAYER THE WASHES

Here I applied a series of very wet, background washes, using warm colours such as Burnt Sienna, Quinacridone Gold and Perylene Maroon, and cool blues, including Cobalt and Ultramarine Blues with a few touches of Sap Green. I used two brushes for this: a "flat one and a No.10 mop. At this stage, the composition should have what I call "lost and found" edges occurring throughout – a range of blended and hard edges that will give the finished painting an overall glow. Notice how the complimentary red touches have enhanced the surrounding greens.



2 BLOCK IN BRIGHTLY

After making a light pencil drawing on my stretched watercolour paper, I began working on the background using a No.14 mop brush loaded with a light, cool mixture of Cobalt Blue, Raw Sienna and Quinacridone Gold. I do it carefully as it's quite important to keep the colours clean and bright at this stage – laying down too dark a background at this point can affect the second layer of washes, which will include the green leaves and red flowers on the wall.



4 PICK OUT GREENS

After applying the first wash over the door with a No.10 mop brush, I started working on the positive shapes of the plants with a darker green mixture of Cobalt Blue, Sap Green and Burnt Sienna. Notice how I then worked with the No.10 round brush just touching the paper as I made the dots. It's important to start painting the darker greens while the first wash applied to the background is still wet because the aim is to create soft edges.



5 ASSESS THE BALANCE

The painting is now made up of the first washes, some dark areas and the white areas where we can see the paper showing through and the composition has room to 'breathe'. I like to allow the colours to mix on the paper, leaving highlights of white paper. I don't like to lose these white areas, as they will reflect the light of the composition. At this stage, I like to look at my painting and pay attention to the overall balance, so I can decide which darker areas are lacking or if it's time to start adding a few more details to the composition.



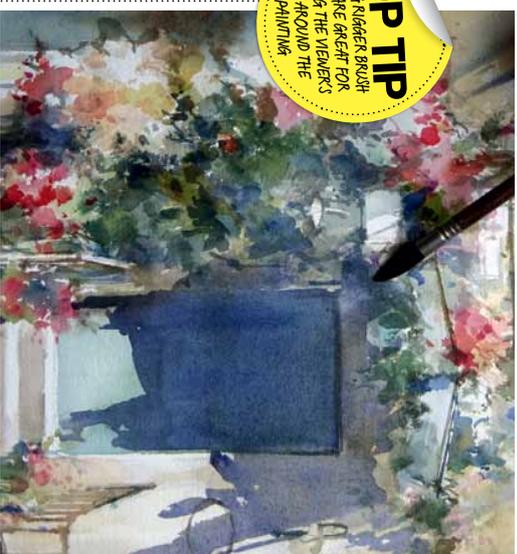
6 TIME TO DRAW LINES

Here I started adding a few lines to the composition, as they are very good tools for guiding the viewer's eyes around the painting. I used a No.10 round brush for this and I aimed to achieve the correct colour and tonal value with my first stroke. If you don't like your lines, let them dry and try to correct them just once – overworked lines can damage the entire composition, so take care when applying them.



9 EMPHASISE THE COMPOSITION

As my first layers were almost dry, it was time to start adding a few more thin lines to the composition using a No. 2 rigger brush. When I begin to use a rigger brush, I need to be ready to finish my painting as the lines are going to be very thin and strong at the same time – they will define directions and emphasise edges more clearly. Be conscious of the overall composition here: try to avoid stopping a line short of the edge, and also don't forget that a sharp line made with a rigger brush can be used cleverly to guide the viewer's eye toward the areas you consider most important.



TOP TIP
STRONG RIGGER BRUSH LINES ARE GREAT FOR GUIDING THE VIEWER'S EYE AROUND THE PAINTING

10 PLUNGE INTO SHADOWS!

Now is the time to start adding the main shadows that will connect all elements of the composition. I applied a mixture of Ultramarine Violet, Cobalt Blue, Sepia and Alizarin Crimson to the shadows of the front door shadows with a No.12 round mop brush. My shadows are deliberately strong as I want to emphasise the play of light and shade. Most of the time, deep shadows convey a sense of drama and I like to show this tension with architectural elements, like the doors or gates. Remember that if a shadow falls on a flat surface, it will probably have hard edges.



11 CREATE A RHYTHM

With the shadowy support of my composition in place, I looked again at the greens around the door here. I added small red dots using my No.10 round brush with a mixture of Vermillion, Opera Rose and Transparent Orange. I repeated this mixture of reds across different parts of the composition (such as the pots on the stairs and the flowers around the door). Repeating a colour like this is a great way of creating rhythm in a painting and connecting together the various parts of a composition.



12 FINISHING TOUCHES

I finished my painting by working with the shadows around the brighter and completely white areas, mainly where I left the paper showing through. I used a No.10 round brush and a mixture of Ultramarine Violet, Sepia and Payne's Grey. I was working with the negative shapes here, as I wanted to enhance the white areas by developing the stronger and more powerful colours around them. Slightly enough, my final touches were made on the shadows, which are the focal point of my painting, the main subject of this composition.



7 DRY BRUSH THE FOLIAGE

I worked with a No.4 fan brush for this step. This type of brush is quite important in my work: it is this that I use to define leaves, trees, grasses, thin branches and even some flowers seen from distance. I mixed Ultramarine Blue, Sepia and Green Gold here, picking up very little paint on the brush. I want to achieve a drybrush effect, so if the brush is dripping wet it will give quite a different result.



8 EVEN THE TEMPERATURES

I started to work on the darkest shadows here with a No. 14 round mop brush, using a mix of Ultramarine Violet, Sepia, Cobalt Blue and a bit of Alizarin Crimson. Sometimes my shadows are warm (if I've used more Sepia and Crimson) and if I think that the composition is too warm, I try to break the monotony with a cooler shadow colour (mixed with more Ultramarine Violet). That's what I call a play between the cool and warm areas, a balancing act that pushes and pulls shapes and spaces.

