

Deb Watson's Lesson # 1 – Doorway To Understanding Watercolor Painting

This lesson will demonstrate how to:

- Use a photo for a watercolor painting
- Improve your composition
- Work with a limited palette of primary colors
- Use masking tape to mask and clean up edges
- Use layering to add shadows and finishing detail (in Part 2)

First: Pick a photo or scene. I like the **complementary colors** in this photo – the red of the brick and flowers and the green of the plants and door. (Definition – complementary colors are two colors on opposite sides of the color wheel and when you place them side by side, both appear brighter. Examples: red & green, blue & orange, or yellow & purple.) This scene can be bright and pretty.



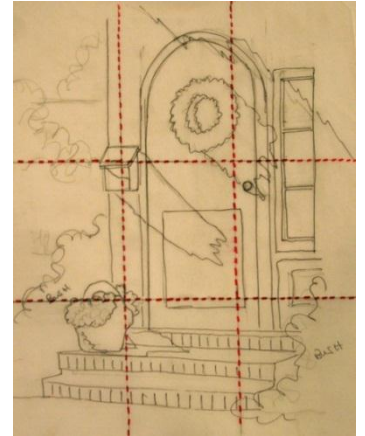
Second: Improve your composition. I use **tracing paper**, to make my drawing so I can easily make changes while I can see the original composition underneath. Making a tracing paper sketch will save a lot of drawing and erasing on your watercolor paper, keeping the watercolor paper in better shape. I straightened the upright lines of the wall and door. (Cameras often distort upright lines, but your painting will feel more stable if they are not skewed.) Next, I **eliminate fussy details** that don't really matter – the oval number plate, the glove with flower, the top door panel. I changed the windows on the right from four in number to three in number. **An odd number of items often look more attractive.** I changed the door top to round, as it's more pleasing and helps keep my viewer's eye in the picture.

I'm making the flower basket simpler. Lastly, I **add a sense of distance** to this picture, by eliminating the building on the left. I'll leave a distant sky with green foliage on the left of the house, with the foliage going from light green at the top to very dark green at the bottom.



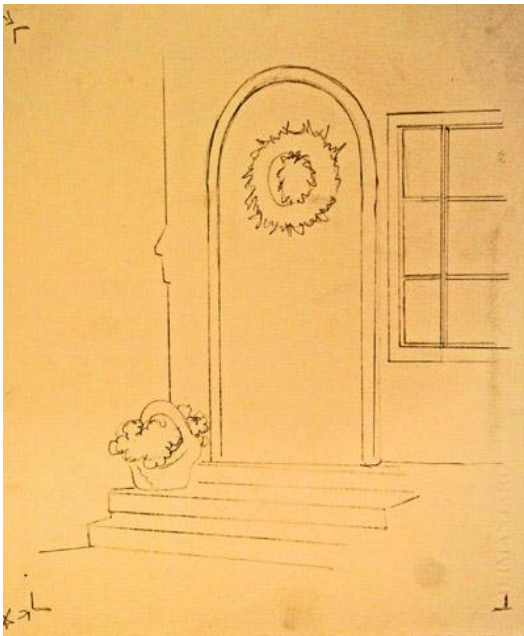
I plan to make the white of the flower basket against the dark of the bush on the left my **focal point** (center of interest) – that is usually the area of the picture with the most value difference, white to a dark black green.

Rule of Thirds – I often use the rule of thirds for my composition's focal point. If you divide your painting with lines into thirds horizontally and vertically, it establishes four points where the lines intersect. Any one of these points is a visually pleasing place for a center of interest.



Third: Transferring your drawing to your painting – To transfer my drawing, I tape the drawing to the top of the watercolor paper. I put graphite paper between the drawing and the watercolor paper and outline all the lines I want copied. (You can make your own graphite paper by filling in the back of the

drawing with several layers of pencil.)



This is my drawing transferred to the watercolor paper, (which in reality is white). You may want to go over your transferred lines with more pencil, if they are too light, or erase them a bit if they are too dark.

Fourth: Picking and prepare your colors – Using a limited palette (a **small** number of different colors) will help you learn how to mix your colors, and give you better results than using a large number of different colors. I will use permanent rose, aureolin yellow, cobalt blue and Joe's blue (or Winsor blue or any Thalo blue). Get out fresh paint, or, if your paint is dried in your palette, add some water 15 minutes or so before you want to paint so it will soften back up.

Masking Straight Edges With Masking Tape -

I'm going to start painting with the background and the side window, because both areas are mostly cobalt blue. Since the sidewalk, side of the house and edges of the window are pretty much straight lines, I'm going to use masking tape to help keep the edges straight. (I don't worry about the white lines in the window, as straight lines are quite easy to lift and you'll get better results if you paint the whole window area at one time.) Masking tape will only work on paper that hasn't been painted. Masking tape on unpainted paper will give you clean edges, but once an area has been painted, even if it's dry, the paint will creep under the tape and ruin the masking effect. I put the tape on the paper and rub it firmly with my finger to be sure it has a tight seal on the side its masking.



Mixing colors – I start with a large, soft oval brush that holds lots of water and has a sharp point – a silver black velvet 3/4” oval wash brush. I get out a large puddle of cobalt blue in my main mixing place and put a more watery wash of cobalt right beside the main puddle, so I have mostly thick paint, and a smaller puddle of more dilute blue. In a separate mixing area I get out the dark Joe’s blue. The third pure color I make a small puddle of is the light yellow. I add some yellow to the dark blue to make an area of dark green on one side of the dark blue, then add some red to the other side of the dark blue, so I have a dark purple to blue to green.

Painting – I start with cobalt at the top of the window, then dip my brush into the purple and put some purple in the middle. I dip my brush in the water and paint the bottom with clear water, letting the color mix on the paper. The key to painting is to have a medium amount of paint, so it doesn’t dry too light, and a medium amount of water, so the paint can move about a bit and mix on the paper. Using a big brush and as few brushstrokes as possible will give you the best results. I put cobalt at the top of the sky, then add water as I come down. I pick up some watery cobalt and yellow to make a light green without too much mixing and paint that right against the wet sky. I want to put the dark green at the bottom of the bush, but the dark green with just yellow and blue is just too green, so I add a little red in to tone it down.

Color Mixing – Most people know that blue plus yellow makes green, but green plus red can make black, brown or some nice grays, depending on how much of each color you add. Almost any primary color plus it’s complement can create browns, blacks, grays and thousands of neutral shades of colors.



Painting (con’t) – After carefully painting the darks, I mix what’s left in the brush with the light green puddle to make a medium green and paint that in the space between the light and dark green. Note – all these areas are still wet. To help blend the mixes a bit, I dot in light green and then dark green and tilt the paper just a bit. I add salt to the wet mix to help create texture. I let those areas dry, remove the masking tape and rub off the leftover salt.

Bricks – Next I mix up a very light (lots of water) brick red by using yellow and red to make an orange, then adding a touch of cobalt blue to tone it into a more brick like color. I just cover the whole area, leaving space on the right for another bush.

Door – I mix a bit of the pure dark green with the light green and add a touch more cobalt blue to make a bluish, sea foam kind of green color and paint the door. I start at the top and leave jaggedy edges for the wreath. I could have masked the straight edges of the door with tape, but I want to show how to clean up ragged edges on this. Don’t forget to paint the inside of your wreath, like I did!

Foreground bush - I mixed more yellow with some of the light green to paint the right side bush. It's better to have different colors for bushes or trees when you have one on each side, so they don't look like bookends. Once again, I salted the wet bush for texture.

Cleaning up edges – On dry paper, you can use masking tape to block out the area you want to lift up. (Note: your paper needs to be completely dry before you put masking tape on a painted area, or you may have trouble with the tape tearing or lifting up the paper. I suggest trying it on a corner first to see how your paper reacts.) I do this with the edge of the mailbox and the side of the door. I also put tape on each side of the white edge for the window pane. I usually use a small piece of Mr. Clean's Magic Eraser. I dip it in the water, squeeze out the excess water, then wipe the area to be lifted up gently. Once the color has come up onto the piece of eraser, I turn the piece, so I'm not rubbing the picked up paint back into the paper. You can rinse out the picked up paint when all the sides are covered. Do this very gently – don't tear your paper. Remember - it won't look pure white while it's wet, but will dry lighter.

Brick shadows – I start the detail on the brick by mixing up a dark reddish brown. I use red plus dark green and a touch of yellow to brown it up and put the shadows on dry paper. At this point, I switch to a smaller brush, a round #6, for the details. I also paint the side of the steps on the right side with the dark brown.

House – I decide to paint my house a kind of beige, using the left over brick red with more yellow and my larger oval brush, as this is a larger area. Once again, I start at the top and work down. (If you go back into a drying wash, you'll have problems like irregular areas known as blooms.)

While that dries, I use tape to lift out the cross pieces of the window panes. I decide to paint the basket next, using the smaller brush. By the time you get to painting detail and shadows, you have hundreds of shades of color to pick from on your palette! Browns and blues and purples and greens – every shade you could possibly need. I leave the sunlit areas of the basket and handle white and paint the shadow areas bluish, then put some house color right in the middle of the wet shadow for reflected light. I dab in very diluted pure red for the basket flowers and then dab most of that off with a paper towel, leaving an extremely light pink for the flowers. I dotted in some oranges and yellow for flowers or berries on the wreath.

This is what we have so far.

