

Tarnincolour step by step painting exercises

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110 – Rabasten sur Tarn (SW France)

A step by step watercolour exercise by Allan Kirk

There is a full size drawing on the last page of this document and this can be printed on watercolour paper, or even traced, if you would prefer.

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Rabastens sur Tarn - in Southern France

A step-by-step guide to watercolour painting

Allan Kirk's impressionistic watercolour exercise shows how to capture light and present the beauty of the Tarn in southern France. The commune of Rabastens nestles on the banks of the Tarn river in the heart of the Gaillac vineyards. Its Toulouse red brick buildings stretch back to medieval times. From the bridge, you get a sense of the historic importance of the Tarn river to this community. Houses perch on ancient red brick foundations that once served as landing docks and storage for the river traffic. You can almost see Johnny Depp stepping off his boat in the film *Chocolat*.

For Allan Kirk, watercolour impressionism is the constant pursuit of light. Living in the south of France, Allan is able to work under strong sunlight in old, dusty medieval towns of the Tarn department. It is the combination of light and old buildings that attracts Allan's interest.

With watercolour paper and paint, Allan has the perfect tools to capture light as it plays on the old buildings, doors, windows and street furniture of the many medieval towns in the French Midi-Pyrenees region.

In this exercise Allan has worked from the bridge over the Tarn looking towards the centre of Rabastens.



Original Photo

Fuji Fine pix digital - Rabastens in Southern France.



Finished Watercolour - Rabastens sur Tarn.
Arches Rough paper 300gsm, (22x28cm)

Materials

Paper

Arches Rough, 140lb (300gsm)
(22X28cm)

Pencils

4B Pencil

Colours (Artist quality watercolour)

French Ultramarine
Cobalt Blue
Windsor Blue (green shade)
Cobalt Violet
Burnt Umber
Burnt Sienna
Alizarin Crimson
Windsor Yellow
Raw Sienna

Brushes

Sable 10, 8 and 6, 4 and rigger
Pro Arte small sword liner

Rabastens sur Tarn

A drawing, lunch and a painting makes a perfect day out with my wife, Lesley, (at least for me). It was one such day out at Rabastens, where I was taken with this view from the bridge. When you draw and paint a location, it becomes fixed in your imagination. I actually created this step-by-step version mainly from my drawing and photo when I got back home. In that way I was able to take a scan at each step of the work in order to develop this lesson.

Below is my ink drawing from the bridge: I completed this with PITT sepia waterproof drawing pens.



I knew there was a beautiful watercolour here, and I was determined to give my best to get it down. Watercolour doesn't always work, but I am not too unhappy with my finished watercolour.

Composition

I decided I wanted a light watercolour full of lost and found edges. In this way I would only resolve work fully around the focal point of the house..

With this decision made, I chose Arches rough 300gsm paper. Arches is 100% acid free cotton paper that is sized very white. It is perfect for this kind of work..

I decided on only a few changes to the composition. I thought that the house roof was too straight and I broke it with a couple of chimneys. I pushed the distant houses further back and left them unresolved. I also left the foreground under the house less resolved and made it lighter than in my photo or drawing.

Finally when I paint I will try to make the sky a little more interesting by indicating clouds.



Step One - Initial Drawing

"When in doubt, leave it white." (Gene Allen)

Initial Drawing

To begin with cut the Arches rough 300gsm watercolour paper to size (22 x 28 cm) and using masking tape, attach it to a board. You can just use an old piece of hardboard as your painting board.

Now complete a simple line drawing using a 4B pencil. Use soft pencils to draw with and don't mind if the pencil is visible on the finished picture. It can be erased, but you don't need to bother.

Concentrate upon your drawing and try to get it to be accurate. You don't want too much detail, but you do want accuracy at this stage (that is you want the drawing to look like what you can see).

Most of my drawing detail is around the two main houses and the degree of detail gets less underneath and to the left of the house.

I have used my 4B pencil to create shadow and dark tones around the house windows. Later when we come to paint these the pencil marks will darken our brushstrokes.

If you are able, you could save the picture from the website and print at a chosen size and trace the drawing.



Step Two - First Wash

on painting a watercolor
"Make the best of an emergency." (John Singer Sargent)

First Wash

The key to the first wash is not to worry about the drawing too much. Yes there is sky, wall and foliage, but in this step it does not matter if the colours run over pencil lines and mix with each other. In fact it is desirable. The exception to this is the front of the house. Try to keep this white and dry (I have a tissue ready on these occasions to dab away any of the wash that intrudes on the front house).

As you work, remember that the washes will appear lighter when they dry.

I work top to bottom with my board at a slight angle between 30 and 40 degrees. You should choose the angle you are comfortable with.

Process

1. Do not pre-wet the paper; you will apply washes to the dry paper and let them run together.
2. Prepare 5 separate colour washes in your palette. Create fairly weak washes of Cobalt Blue, Windsor Blue (green shade), Cobalt Violet, Raw Sienna and Burnt Sienna. As you work, do not worry if your palette washes become contaminated.
3. Use an 8 or 10 sable brush to apply the colour washes.
4. In this sky I have used Cobalt Blue and Windsor Blue. I let them mix on the paper. I left a few random gaps to indicate clouds and I used a weaker wash in parts.
5. For the house shadow I used a base of Raw Sienna upon which I washed a combination of Cobalt Violet and Burnt Sienna; I let this mix on the paper. Finally I dropped some Cobalt Blue into the shadow. I did use a tissue to maintain the sharp edges of my shadows on the house and below.
6. The old walls leading to the river are a mixture of Burnt Sienna and Raw Sienna (again mixed on the paper). I left white paper for highlight and I used the same shadow mix as on the house in step 5 here, and I kept my tissue ready for sharp edges.
7. For the foliage I used a base of Windsor Blue and Raw Sienna (again mix on the paper). I added a little Cobalt Violet and Burnt Sienna to the wash. I randomly created dark and light parts to represent bushes.



Step Three - Second Wash

"In watercolor, if you are not in trouble, then you're in trouble." (Selma Blackburn)

Second Wash

Wait until the first wash is completely dry before commencing this step. Read the step fully before beginning, and study the difference between step two and this step.

In this second wash you will start to work up the buildings and walls leading down to the river.

As you work, remember to try not to think about the walls and buildings as solid objects. Concentrate on the way the sun presents them to us with all the light and dark tones and lost and found edges. If you find yourself thinking of a solid wall and building, your work will become less free. Don't mind if every wall edge isn't shown, you want beautiful transparent lost and found edges and shadows.

I did not add any more paint to the sky.

Process

1. Use the existing colours in your palette. You may need to freshen up the washes. In addition, create a well of Burnt Umber that you will use as you tackle the house roofs and some of the darker shadows. Do not worry if your palette colours become contaminated.
2. Using a small size 4 sable brush darken the house roofs with Burnt Umber, Cobalt Violet and a little Cobalt Blue. Apply these colours to the roofs separately and let them mix on the paper. I do not even clean my brush between applications.
3. Work on the house shadows (leave the windows in this step). Again, I used a size 4 sable brush and added a mixture of Burnt Sienna and Raw Sienna to the house shadows. Again, let colours mix on the paper. Try to leave a thin light strip between the house roof and shadow. Do not mind if the line gets broken. If it does, it is meant to be.

Whilst the shadow is still wet, add a mix of Cobalt Violet and Cobalt Blue between the houses.
4. Add another wash to the walls leading down to the river. Use Burnt Sienna and Raw Sienna and let them mix on the paper. To remove the pure white from the highlights in the walls, use mainly Burnt Sienna. Try to leave some parts white at random.
5. Darken the shadows on the walls leading down to the river. Use the colours in your palette and follow the process outlined in 3 above. Painting the wall shadows in the same way as you did the house shadows, will maintain a harmony across your work.

Remember to darken the shadows above the walls and below the houses where there is an old shed and canopy.

6. Darken the foliage a little using Windsor Blue, Cobalt Violet and a little Burnt Sienna. Use restraint here; you do not want any deep tones that the eye could rest upon.



Step Four - Completing Shadows

on watercolor

"And then you sock in the dark." (Malcolm Myers)

Completing shadows

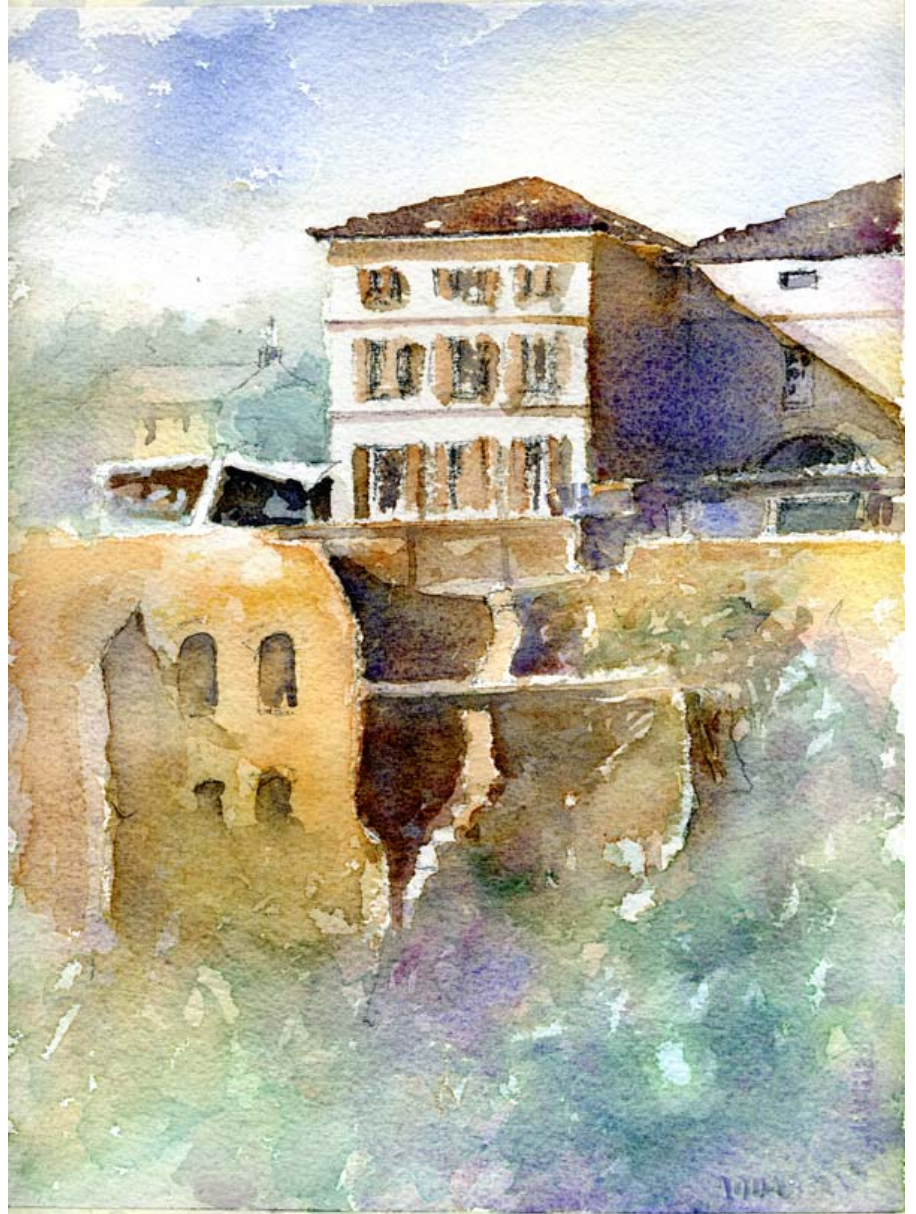
Wait until the previous wash is completely dry before commencing this step. Read the step fully before beginning, and study the difference between step three and this step.

It is only when we fill in the dark tones that light really appears.

In this step you will work up the darker tones in the shadows and around the house windows. This step is key and we want to get the contrast between light and dark to be strong, but only around the focal point. We do not want a painting that has strong darks all over.

Process

1. Use the existing colours in your palette. You may need to freshen up the washes, including your Burnt Umber. Do not worry if your palette colours become contaminated.
2. Using a small size 4 sable brush, deepen the dark tones in the shadows on the wall and house (do not work on the roof).
3. Using a rigger brush work on the house windows. The windows are a mixture of Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber with some Cobalt Blue. Draw the windows with your rigger. Do not be too precise or careful. I do not think I have one complete or accurate window or shutter.
4. Add a little Windsor Blue to the distant house on the left of the picture to surround it with trees. Also just indicate the possibility of a roof shadow and a couple of windows. Again do not be too careful and precise.



Step Five - Final Details

"Watercolor, with all its subtle color and value gradations and its many welcome surprises, is the perfect medium for capturing mood." (Ray Hendershot)

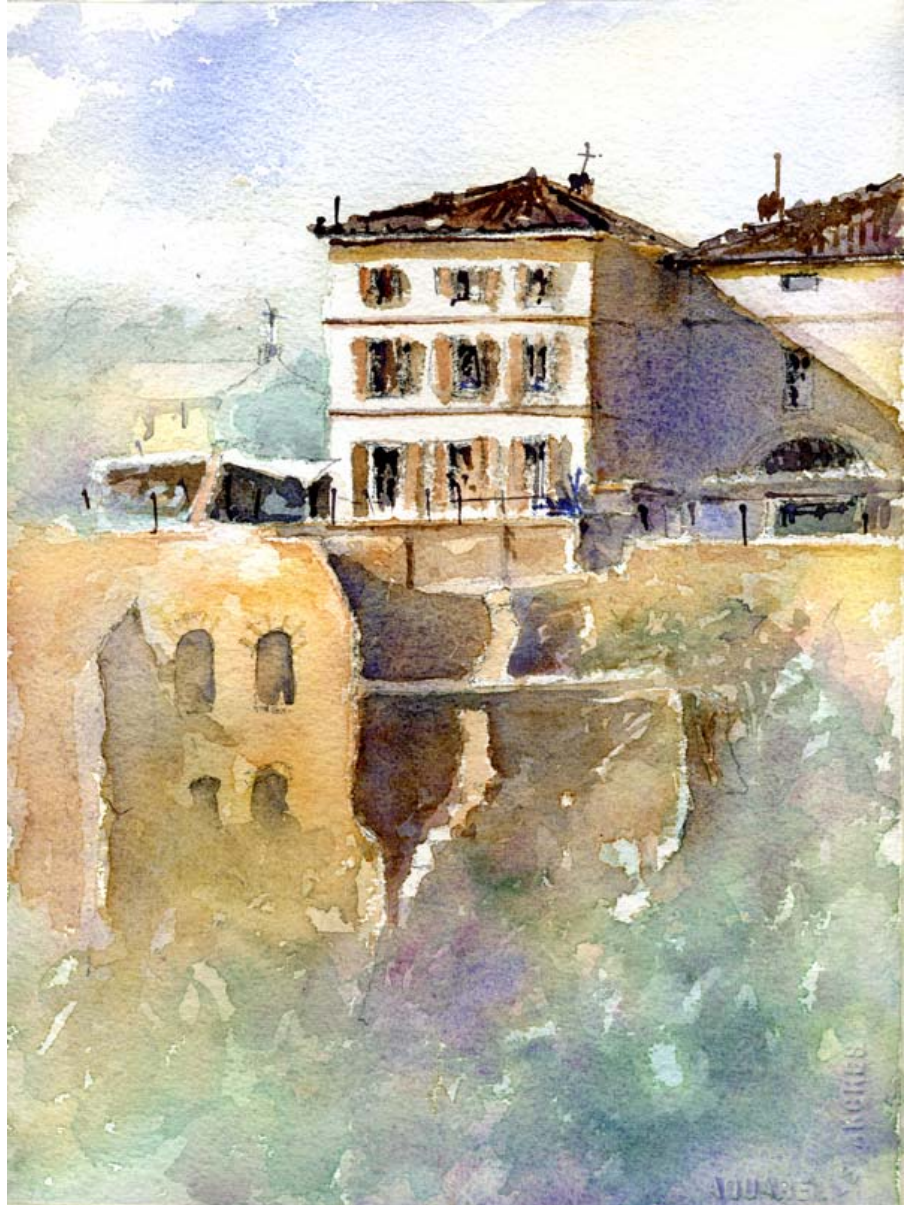
Final Details

Wait until the previous wash is completely dry before commencing this step. Read the step fully before beginning, and study the difference between step three and this step.

This is often known as the "jewelry" stage. It is here you will apply the final touches that complete the work.

Process

1. Use the existing colours in your palette. You may need to freshen up the washes. Do not be too careful; work quickly and confidently.
2. Use a rigger brush or sword liner brush to add a couple of chimneys to the house roof (it is too flat). Using the same brush and colour just add a few dark ridges on the roof to indicate tiles.
3. Using a mixture of Burnt Umber and Cobalt Blue, darken the inside of the windows in parts.
4. Add the remains of fence posts to the top of the wall and darken under the canopy.



Use the printable drawing on the last page as the drawing for your painting

Over the page is a printable FULL SIZE drawing that you can use for your painting, over and over again!

To use the included drawing you need to:

Print it on Watercolour paper

1. Cut your watercolour paper to A4 size (21cm x 29.7cm).
2. Put your A4 watercolour paper in your printer.
2. Select A4 paper size, portrait, in your printer.
3. Print the drawing on the last page of this PDF document.

Different printers and inks behave differently. My canon and cheap compatible inks will smudge if I paint on them too quickly, after printing. After leaving them for two hours they do not smudge when I apply a wash. You will have to find out by trial and error how to get the best from your printed drawing.

or

Trace it from the last page of this document

If you don't have a printer why not just trace the drawing that is on the last page!

Bon Courage !

