

# How to paint a landscape

Follow **Stephen Coates** step by step as he takes you through the painting of a simple cottage in a rural setting

I designed this painting to include a wide variety of watercolour techniques. I recommend that you use scraps of watercolour paper to practise each technique before adding it to the painting.

## MATERIALS

### Surface

- Hahnemühle Harmony 300gsm Cold-pressed (NOT) watercolour paper 8¼×11¾in. (21×30cm)

### Winsor & Newton

#### Cotman watercolour

- Ultramarine
- Raw sienna
- Burnt umber
- Lemon yellow
- Burnt sienna

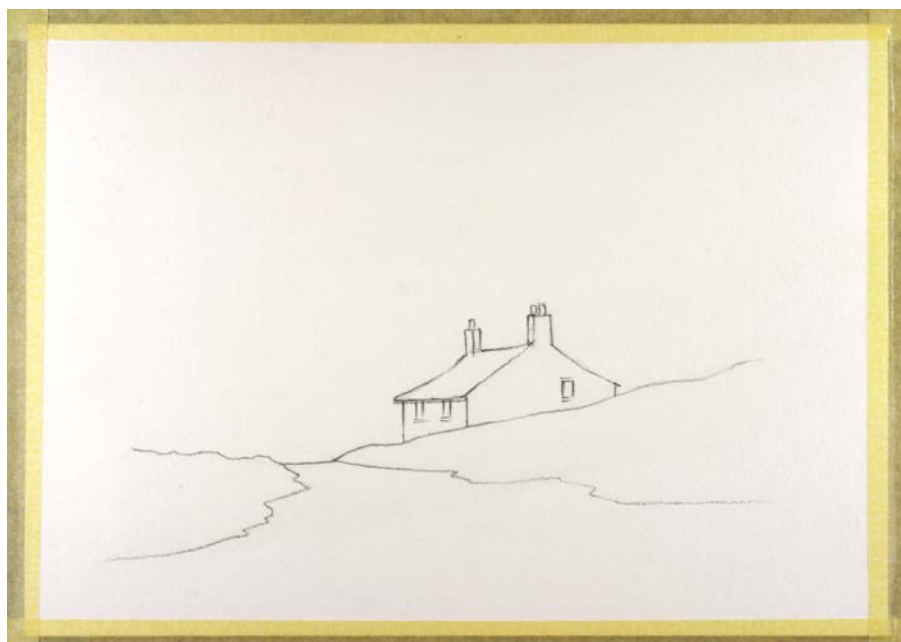
### Brushes

- Mini hake
- Rounds Nos. 2, 6, 8 & 10
- Flat ¼in.
- Rigger No. 2

### Miscellaneous

- An old toothbrush
- An old credit card or ruler
- Kitchen towel

All materials are available at [www.painters-online.co.uk/ArtSupplies](http://www.painters-online.co.uk/ArtSupplies)



## Drawing

### STAGE 1 ▲

Use an A4 piece of watercolour paper and draw the cottage with the lines for the sloping hillside and the edges of the winding track. The painting will be completed in a *vignette* style,

which simply means we leave lots of space around the subject. This is a lot easier than you might think and takes away the pressure of having to fill the whole sheet.

## Broad washes

We start with the sky using just ultramarine and a mini hake brush. All skies should be completed quickly within a minute or so to achieve the best results. I always recommend that you wet the paper evenly first and use the ultramarine undiluted straight from the tube. The idea is to place the paint as quickly as possible into the blue areas of the sky then leave the paint to develop without touching it again. Any other medium allows you to keep painting until you have the desired finish. With watercolour you have to stop painting long before it dries in order to allow the paint to develop by itself in the active water. Constant fiddling as the water evaporates is highly destructive.



### STAGE 2 ▲

**1** Squeeze out a small amount of ultramarine onto your palette.

**2** Soak the hake in water then sweep it gently over the entire area of the sky and cottage, ensuring it is wet well below the line of the meadow. Keep the brushstroke light and continue to move it from side to side until the paper is covered with an even film of water.



### STAGE 3 ▲

Now push the tip of the brush into the ultramarine and shuffle it from side to side to pick up a little of the paint and spread it evenly across the brush tip. (You don't want any lumps!)



#### STAGE 4 ▲

Gently flick the brush across the area of the sky above the cottage, leaving a few white spaces. If the blue looks a little weak, pick up a touch more and flick that in. Now just leave it. You will be amazed how the edges of the brushstrokes will develop and soften in the active water and how the white spaces will look like clouds.



#### STAGE 5 ▲

Dab off any excess water below the line of the meadow with kitchen towel then dry it off with a hairdryer.



#### STAGE 6 ▲

**1** Now to add another broad wash on the track. Squeeze out a small blob of raw sienna onto your palette and don't dilute it. Wash the hake and scrape off a little water so it isn't quite as wet as it was for the sky. **2** Pick up raw sienna in the same way by giving it a shuffle through the paint then gently sweep it across the whole area of the track. Dry this with a hairdryer.

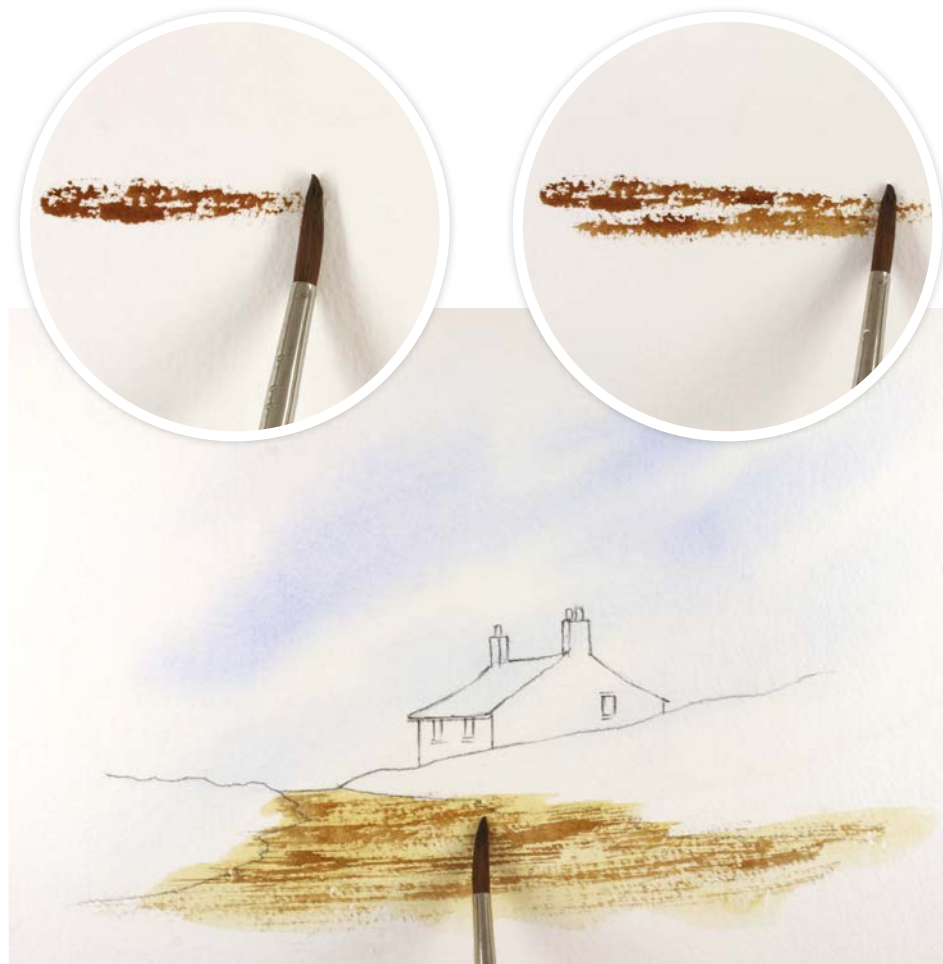
## Dry brushing

This technique creates a lovely broken brushstroke that's ideal for rough tracks or sparkling water, for example. It uses the rough texture of the paper to help us along the way. The brush is held at a very

low angle to the paper and dragged across so that the side of the brush catches the top of the 'bumps' on the paper but doesn't flow into the depressions, therefore the brush needs to be fairly dry.

#### STAGE 7 ►

Squeeze out a small amount of burnt umber onto the palette and add a little water using a No. 8 Round brush. Make sure the brush is not full of paint, hold it down low and try gently dragging it across the paper. If it is too wet, it will fill the space so keep trying until it starts to create a broken effect. You can flick in one direction or scrub from side to side. Keep practising this on scraps of watercolour paper before you try the technique on the painting.



#### STAGE 8 ►

Now on your painting, use the practised technique to create a broken texture across the width of the track, making sure you drag the paint over the verges of the meadow.

## Splattering

It is quite easy to splatter a spray of paint onto the paper to create the effect of sand or gravel. To do this all you need is an old toothbrush and something with a firm straight edge such as a credit card or ruler.

### STAGE 9 ▼

Create a puddle of fairly loose burnt umber then press the toothbrush firmly into it and stir it around until it contains plenty of paint.



### STAGE 10 ▲

Hold the toothbrush so it is pointing at the target and firmly flick the bristles back using the sharp edge. It should release a fine spray. If you get large

blobs shooting out of the toothbrush, you have probably loaded it with too much paint. Please practise this on scrap paper before committing to your painting.

### STAGE 11 ►

**1** Now add this effect to the track in the painting. Use scraps of paper to protect the sky, cottage and grass meadows.

**2** Use the burnt umber to splatter the effect of gravel onto the track.



## Blending

Most proficient watercolour artists use a wet-into-wet method to blend colours together. This simply means that a secondary application is blended into an initial placement of paint whilst it is still wet. This can be a thicker version of the same colour to create a graduated transition, another colour entirely or as with the sky, a colour into a clear wash.

More often than not, when blending in a secondary colour, it should be thicker in consistency than the initial placement of paint. In the following example, we are creating a variegated meadow of grass that needs three different preparations on the palette. I recommend that you try this on separate scraps of watercolour paper before committing to the painting.

### STAGE 12 ►

**1** Create two puddles of green on the palette. Squeeze out two blobs of lemon yellow, keeping them well apart. Add plenty of water to the first one so it is the consistency of milk then stir in a small amount of ultramarine to create a light sunny green colour.

**2** Stir less water into the second blob of lemon yellow so that it is the consistency of double cream. Add much more of the ultramarine to achieve a dark green.

**3** We are going to blend the darker green into the light one so it should be much thicker, otherwise it will disperse too readily. When blending you should always consider the



consistency of the paint.

**4** Squeeze out a touch of burnt sienna and add a little water until that is also a slightly thicker consistency, the same as the darker green.





### STAGE 13 ▲

Fill a No. 10 Round brush with plenty of the light green and sweep it gently across the entire area of the meadow. You may need two or three brush loads of this paint for it to be wet across the whole area. Blending will not occur if it is too dry.



### STAGE 14 ▲

Now, don't wash the brush, and pick up a small amount of the burnt sienna on the tip and flick it gently here and there across the meadow. You should immediately see the light green change shade in places as the burnt sienna suffuses into it.



### ◀ STAGE 15

Again, it is important not to wash the brush. Pick up a small amount of the dark green and do the same, flicking some in here and there.

### STAGE 16 ►

**1** Pick up more of the dark green and use the tip of the brush to run paint along the verges. Try to flick this up and away from the edges to blend into the wet paint on the upper meadow. If this paint leaves hard brushmarks, the chances are the lighter green has dried before completing. You do have to act quickly when blending wet into wet. **2** Do the same with the meadow on the other side of the track.



## Scratching

A fabulous and really effective technique can be used to create white marks in the paint by simply scratching the paint away with a sharp tool; this method is used mostly for tree trunks, branches and light-coloured grasses as well as creating jagged

rocky highlights. Artists use a variety of tools for this. It should not be too sharp so, for example, a craft knife blade is unsuitable. Many use the butt end of a paintbrush, the corner of a credit card or a kebab stick, which is my favoured tool, because it is thick at one end

and sharp at the other for finer branches.

The principle is that as the paint dries, you press down the tool then scratch it upwards to remove a narrow channel to reveal the paper underneath. If the paint is too wet, it runs back into the channel so some practice with the timing is needed.



### STAGE 17 ▲

**1** You will need the same two green mixes used in the previous meadow blending technique. Take a No. 8 Round brush full of the light green and gently bobble it around to create a tree canopy shape.

**2** Then using the same action, immediately blend in some of the thicker dark green and leave it to settle.

### STAGE 18 ▲

Leave this to dry a little until the shine on the paint starts to go slightly dull. Now use the thick end of the tool to scratch lines into the paint. Start at the base, press down then jerk the tool upwards.

### STAGE 19 ▲

Use the thin end of the tool to create thinner branches higher up.



### STAGE 20 ▲

Let's now add trees to the painting by blending more of the two greens and scratching out the tree trunks. Use the No. 8 Round brush full of the light green and bobble it around the left-hand edge of the cottage and across the top of the meadow leaving a slight gap.



### STAGE 21 ▲

Dip the brush into the darker, thicker green and bobble this in to blend. Use the dark green to cut an edge along the top of the meadow and the end of the track. Don't worry if you get any paint on the cottage at this stage.



**STAGE 22 ▲**

Repeat this on the right-hand side of the cottage.

**STAGE 23 ▲**

Leave both these areas for a short time then scratch out some tree trunks and branches.

## Lifting out

With most watercolour paper, it is possible to lift paint off the surface. This enables us to paint over something then take the paint away afterwards. Cotton papers and many budget high street papers are more absorbent, which makes the removal of the paint more difficult. You may want to test yours. All you need is a fairly firm brush and a sheet of kitchen towel. I would recommend a ¼in. (6mm) flat brush for this. Try this first by removing a strip of paint from a dried sample.

**STAGE 24 ▲**

Wet the brush then gently scrub away the shape you need in the paint.

**STAGE 25 ▲**

Dab the area with kitchen towel and it will remove the paint.

**STAGE 26 ►**

If there is any green paint on the cottage at this stage, you can use the lifting-out method to remove it, leaving a lovely outline of the walls and roof.



## Completing the painting

Refer to the earlier technique 'retaining the bead' on pages 14-15 of *StartArt: Watercolour* and use this method to complete the gable end of the cottage.

### STAGE 27 ▼

Mix a little ultramarine and burnt sienna to create a warm grey colour and add some water until it is the required consistency to provide a strong contrast to the front wall. Using a No. 6 Round brush full of paint, start at the chimney then ease it down the gable end, painting around the window. Keep adding a little paint as you go to keep it wet and retain the bead of paint.



### STAGE 28 ▲

When the gable end is dry, paint a narrow shadow under the eaves of the cottage using the same mix and a No. 6 Round brush.



### STAGE 29 ▲

To paint the roof, take a little burnt umber, add water and a touch of ultramarine to

create a loose stone colour. Use the tip of the No. 6 Round brush and paint lines across, leaving occasional white spaces. This is to represent the lines of the roof tiles.



### STAGE 30 ▲

Now create a really strong version of the burnt umber and ultramarine mix to paint the windows, using a No. 2 Round brush. Note how I left the front window panes incomplete. They always look better this way! I also left a narrow white border on the right-hand window to represent the frame.

### ◀ STAGE 31

You can add a few finishing touches to your painting now. You will need the same burnt umber and ultramarine mix that you used for the windows. This time try a No. 2 Rigger and practise a few birds on scrap paper before adding any to the painting. Gently bring the brush down and paint a delicate curved line, stop and paint a little dot then finish with another curved line lifting the brush away to achieve a tapered wing tip.



**STAGE 32 ▶**

To complete the painting, use the Rigger and the same burnt umber and ultramarine mix to add haphazard horizontal lines and a few clusters of small stones to the track, concentrating mainly in the foreground.



▲ Stephen Coates *Simple Cottage*, watercolour, 8¼×11¾in. (21×30cm)



Watch Stephen Coates paint this scene in his video 'How to paint a landscape': [bit.ly/StartArtWatercolourVideos](http://bit.ly/StartArtWatercolourVideos)