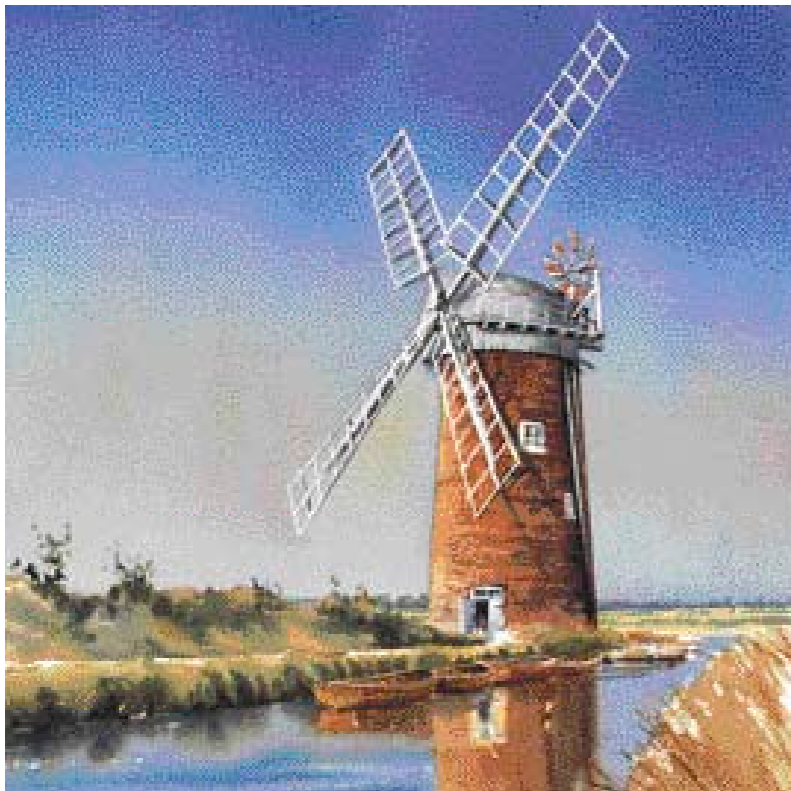


# The Landscape Painter's Essential Handbook

**JOE FRANCIS DOWDEN**





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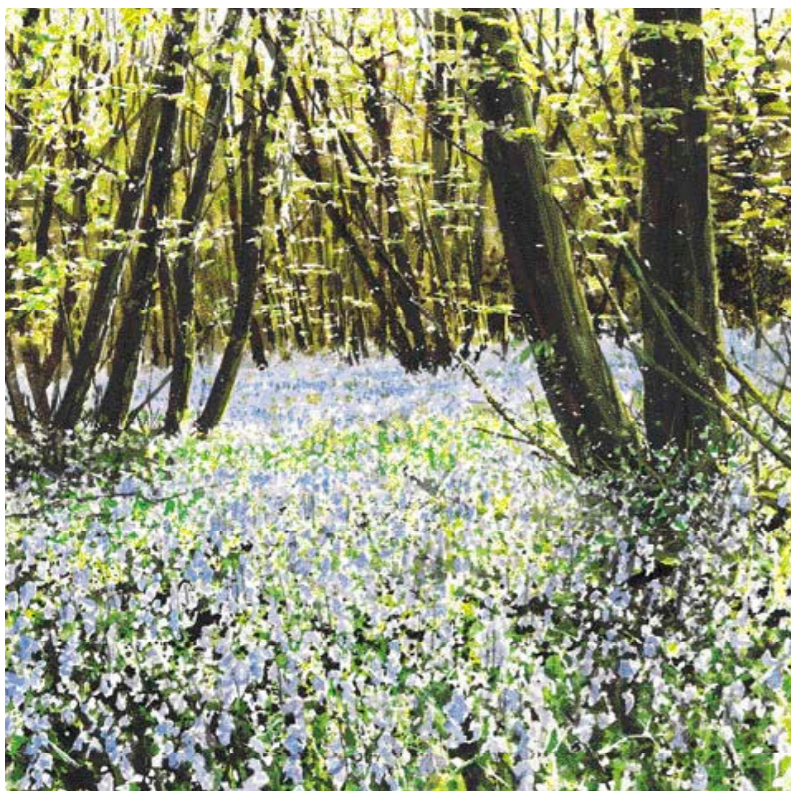
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# *Introduction*

This is a book for people who say, 'I haven't got the patience'.

Never forget, you can always paint better than you expect, and this book aims to help you to do so. This is my best shot at putting my own lifetime's knowledge down in an understandable way, and I hope it will serve you for a lifetime. Here you will find a vast array of different types of landscapes, and ways of putting them down in watercolour.

Some of the techniques are very simple – painting sparkling water, for example, or beach shingle, sky, snow, and more. They will give you the freedom to paint what you want, how you want. Here are the tools, the means for painting as you choose.

This is the book I wanted when I was struggling in painting. Use it to build your self-confidence, to strengthen and revitalize your work, or to get going for the first time.

It is a wonderful truth about the human brain that no matter its youth or age it goes on learning. You may have wanted to paint all your life, but not had the time or opportunity to start. You may be a student at college or university and want to progress quickly. You could be starting out, or have a moderate level of experience. You may be an accomplished painter, even a professional artist or illustrator, and may simply need to approach watercolour from a new angle. There is something in here for you.

The information in this book is easy to follow. It builds on what has gone before, but it is not bound by tradition. It will help you to bring something different to show the world, your peer group and your friends. Above all, this is for you, for your own art.

Stay positive – Happy painting!



# Materials

Excellent materials help, but you can still achieve good results without the best. Obtain what you are able to, and add as you go. Get top-quality paper and sable brushes if you can. If you cannot, substitute others. The same applies to the colours used for these projects if you do not have them all. If you are short of what you need, remember that many fine artists have lacked the best materials. Whatever you work with, have a positive attitude – your greatest asset.

## Paper

You need paper designed for watercolour painting. Watercolour paper is cheaper to buy by the sheet, but it is useful to have a couple of pads at the ready for on-site watercolour sketching. Pads are also easier to carry and for storing finished paintings on the move. You may prefer to take a couple of boards with paper stretched by soaking and stapling down for painting outdoors, and I nearly always work this way in the studio too.

## Choosing watercolour paper

Watercolour paper comes in three surface types – hot-pressed or smooth, cold pressed ('Not') or moderately rough, and rough – with many variants of texture. A fine surface texture does not show in the finished painting, while a coarser rough surface is clearly discernible, but gives texture effortlessly. Most projects in this book are on Not surface paper.

Use good-quality papers if you can; they are easier to work on and can give your painting a boost. Cotton fibre papers – known as 'rag' papers, usually perform well, and are often hard surfaced, but there are some good-quality papers based on cellulose fibres extracted from wood pulp. If you are masking, get one of the hard-surface papers. These will not rip, whereas soft papers rip when masked.

The weight of the paper is a measure of its thickness, and hence resistance to buckling. I use a minimum weight of 300gsm (140lb), and prefer 425gsm (200lb).

## Stretching paper

Watercolour paper is best stretched before use by soaking and sticking down to prevent it buckling or cockling. For years I used gummed tape to stick soaked paper to board. These days I staple paper because it never comes unstuck. Some artists do not stretch paper that is 425gsm (200lb) or more. I prefer to stretch all papers – even 850gsm (400lb).

*There is a wide range of paper on the market and your style of painting will dictate to some extent which brand, type and weight you work on. I favour a heavy, hard-surfaced Not paper and like to stretch it, stapling it to the board as shown left, rather than using masking tape.*

## Brushes

No other brush can match the qualities of a sable for painting. Pure red sable and kolinsky sable 'round' brushes – if made with top-quality fibre and put together by an excellent brush maker – are controllable, firm, point well, hold pigment and release it evenly, and clean in an instant when changing colour. A kolinsky brush has a wider middle or 'belly' and returns to a point with a snap when flicked. It is the better performer, though more expensive; the longer the fibre, the more expensive the series. Be sure not to push the fibres or

get masking fluid on your sable brushes. I recommend at least two sable brushes – a size 2 or 3, and size 6 to 8. The number refers to the ferrule diameter.

My other brushes include squirrel mops, which are cheaper alternatives to sable, for a loose approach. For various techniques I use several brushes including a home-made woodcock-feather rigger, which makes the longest unbroken fine lines possible. I find a bristle 'bright' brush useful for lifting out small areas. I also use many other different shapes of brush – a fan, a goat hair wash brush, and a hake, as well as colour shapers, and a toothbrush for spattering.

## Paints

Some artists use a limited palette, but I enjoy colour and I love trying new ones. I often like to balance strong bright colour with powerful tone, ranging from light or bright, to intense dark.

You can produce many of the colours perceived by the eye with just a handful of paints. A useful starter palette might consist of burnt sienna, burnt umber, cadmium lemon, french ultramarine, cobalt blue and quinacridone magenta.

These six colours will allow you to paint with a full colour palette. You can mix french ultramarine and cadmium lemon to make a good green. French ultramarine and burnt umber will give a dark grey or black plus greys and browns, while quinacridone magenta and cadmium lemon make a scarlet red.

The addition of other colours can extend your range and save mixing time.

*Buy good-quality paints, or student quality from major brands. You only need six, or eight, colours to start with; this small palette will help you organize as you discover the properties of different colours. Later add other colours you like.*



*Mops, rounds, brights, feathers and shapers have various uses.*



*Use old brushes, toothbrush or pen to apply masking fluid.*



*Apply water and washes with a goat hair brush or hake.*



## Other tools and materials

I am always trying to discover new techniques, and the tools used for different effects can be absolutely anything – a coiled-up piece of paper for masking, a laden seed head for spattering, a toothbrush for applying spatter or masking – it is just a matter of finding what works for the painting. You can use a vast array of ordinary items, such as kitchen roll, drinking straws and coins as stencil templates. Use a hairdryer if you need to dry areas of your painting quickly.

More specialist art equipment includes water sprayers, masking fluid, gum arabic and ox gall. A mirror is useful so you can see your work in reflection because it gives that vital second objective viewpoint – you can see instantly any creeping flaws in the work.

My paintings are generally exhibited in artificial light so I don't mind painting in it. You can use a daylight bulb if you wish, but remember that your paintings will look different under changing lighting conditions – often less colourful.



Here are some useful tools and materials, including a sprayer bottle, which can be recycled, and a sponge, which can make interesting textures. You can build up a selection of specialist materials, such as gum arabic and ox gall as you require them.



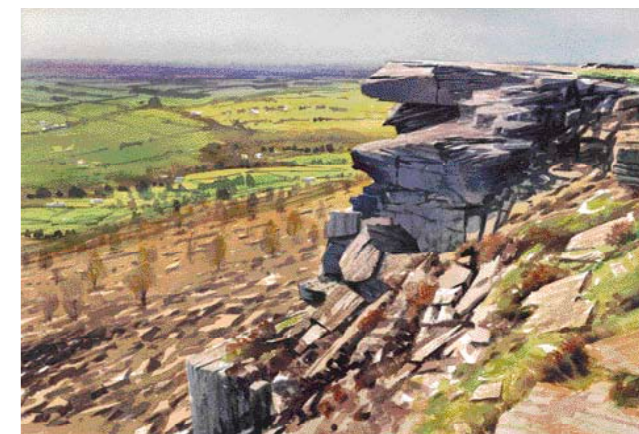
### Materials for textures

- Keep old brushes for dry brush effects.
- Use an old toothbrush to spatter paint or masking fluid on the paper.
- Sprinkle coarse salt on a damp wash to create 'salt stars'.
- Squirt water from a sprayer before or after applying paint.
- Dab paint on or off with a sponge.
- Rub candle wax over the paper.
- Scratch out with a knife.
- Add gum arabic to slow the spread of paint – ideal for super-wet puddles.

Above is a selection of items from the home that you could use in your painting – masking tape, a steel ruler and craft knife, a hair dryer, kitchen paper and a saucer that works well as a small palette.

# Composition

Why is it that one image looks great, while another does not? This is largely down to composition, and there are certain guidelines that can help you compose any subject into something visually truthful and pleasing. Planning is the key, so ask yourself questions: Where is the focal point? Where will I put the horizon? What is the best aperture shape? Answering these questions will help you produce a good composition with ease.



## The point of interest

Keep the focal point away from the middle of the composition – if it is in the centre the image will appear very static. Likewise, make sure that the horizon does not divide the painting into equal halves. These guidelines can be broken, of course, but only when you know how to use them.

### Using guidelines

One way to place the main parts is to divide the horizontal and vertical edges of the image into eighths. Place a line across for the horizon at three eighths or five eighths depending on whether you want it high or low. Place a vertical line for dividing masses at three or five eighths. Draw within these lines.

### High horizon

Raising the horizon in the image removes some of the sky, emphasizing the height of the view by forcing the eye onto the land below. This has the effect of lengthening the horizon, giving a sense of breadth and scale. Even when the image is about sky, information can be contained in the short space above the horizon line.

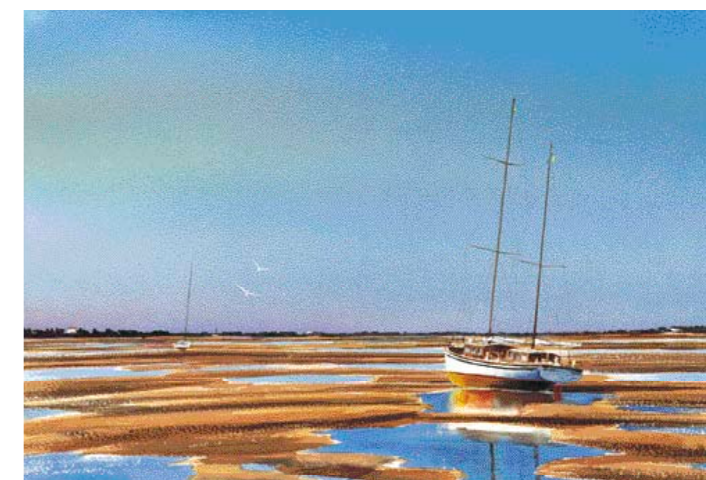
### Low horizon

With a lowered horizon, the foreground drops out of the frame and pushes the viewer's gaze into the distance and sky, producing a sense of space.



A high horizon (above) increases the sense of distance and gives a deep foreground. (See pages 30–31 for this painting in detail.)

In the riverbank scene shown left and on page 74, the horizon line is set approximately five-eighths of the distance up the image. The dark mass of trees to the left and its reflection forms a vertical at about three eighths in from the left.



A low horizon, as in this low-tide scene (see also page 49), puts emphasis into a tall summer sky. The horizon placement is massively influential in the outcome of the composition.