

## The Planes of a Street Scene by Phil Starke

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This is a street scene from San Miguel, Mexico and my goal here is to suggest the light in the scene and not copy the photo and rely on detail. So I will establish the shadow pattern and separate the planes of the landscape by value.

There are a variety of greens and whites in this scene and I want to show some color variations in these colors, but always thinking value first.



In the drawing stage of the painting, the first thing I want to do is find the shadow pattern. It helps to see shape first, then use some line to modify or refine the shape. Our paintings, and nature, are made up of shape not line.

The shadow pattern is made up of the trees (both in shadow and in the sunlight), the shadow side of the buildings and the shadow on the street. If I can develop the shadow pattern and eliminate the detail in the drawing stage, then the painting has a better chance to succeed.



This is the palette I'm using. The colors, in order from the left, are:

Ultramarine Blue  
Alizarin Crimson  
Cadmium Red Light  
Cadmium Yellow Light  
Titanium White

I've premixed some of the colors I'll be using. I've more or less worked lighter to darker. You can see the sky colors, building colors, and tree colors. Once I get the greens in the trees, I'll use the other colors mixed for the trees to break up the green color of the trees. You can see the subtle color changes I'll be using within the planes. If you pre-mix, make sure you get the right value relationships.



This stage is the color block in stage. I want to start with the simple pattern of dark and light shapes in the trees and move to the lighter sky to establish the value relationship between the two. Since I'm suggesting light the green trees turn to yellow green in the sunlight and blue green in the shadow. I want to think in terms of light and shadow, or warm and cool, not in terms of copying the color in the photograph.



My greens are a combination of ultramarine blue and cadmium yellow light with a small amount of cadmium red light to mute the color. I will also use alizarin crimson or you can also use violet (which is a mixture of ultra blue and alizarin crimson) to achieve some subtle color variations. Sometimes I use viridian only for accents in the trees. Viridian isn't a natural green so be careful with it. Blue and yellow create a more organic looking green.



In this stage I move from the trees to the buildings, making sure I achieve the right contrast between the darks and lights. Always compare the value you're mixing with other values around it. That way you will always get the relationship between the different shapes. Too often we just stare at the value we want to mix and don't compare. Look and compare values. The church tower is white but we want to show how the light effects the value so I will mix a warm white using titanium white and cadmium yellow. In the shadows I create a cooler value to suggest the shadow using ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson with a small amount of cadmium yellow light to mute the color.



The color of the street is more of a gray color so I use 2 compliments to create a gray, Blue and orange (I use red & yellow to make orange). After getting the right value I warm the gray with a little more cadmium yellow light for the sunlit areas. In the shadow I add more blue or violet to cool the gray and give it a strong temperature contrast with the sunlight. It's very important to get the right value relationship between the sunlit street and the sunlit walls of the buildings. They are both in the sunlight but the street is a lot darker.



At this stage everything is blocked in and I start breaking up the large shapes and planes with subtle color changes. The key is to create color changes, not value changes. Value changes are detail and I want to keep the detail to a minimum, but color changes, that are the same value, will create a refined look and color vibrations that makes the shape look finished but not overworked.



I will pick one or two areas that are my focal point or center of interest and add enough detail to make them stand out or draw the viewers attention. Through all the detail and broken color I still want to keep the large shadow pattern very evident. The large pattern of dark and light is what holds the composition together.



At the end of the painting, I go back and intensify the lights and the dark accents. This will increase the contrast. It helps to keep the lights a lot thicker than the darks. I want contrast of dark and light value, warm and cool temperature, and thick and thin paint.

I'll also take a look at the edges. If the edges are too hard everywhere the painting will lack depth and atmosphere, but if they are too soft the planes and objects will appear mushy and lack any weight.

The harder edges will be between the sunlight and shadow and the softer edges will be in the shadow and in the distance.