

I have always been fascinated by atmosphere, temperature and light, and how to achieve them in my pictures. I paint mostly in watercolour, which appeals to me particularly for its translucency: letting the paper reflect back through the washes.

Shadows are the key to an attention-grabbing picture; they give life and atmosphere, warmth and coolness. Lively shadows make your picture sing, and fill it with sunlight, defining shape and depth, and creating interesting patterns and designs on the picture surface. Rich colour and reflected light in shadows make your pictures stand out from the crowd.

*Glancing shadows* — Palazzo Nicastro, Ragusa, right, is about the shadows cast across this extraordinary baroque façade: without them, the effect would be flat and featureless. Like many of my pictures it is painted on a heavy weight handmade sand-coloured paper from Two Rivers, with a pronounced tooth to enable broken lines and areas, as the brush is swept quickly across the surface of the paper. This lends the whole picture a warm feeling.

I think of the picture in tonal terms, but with the shadows given richness and depth through colour. Having sketched in the key features with a pencil, my first concern is to 'catch the sun': get the main shadows in.

I started in the top-left corner with a very loose wash of cobalt blue and raw umber, not mixed on the palette: I simply dipped a very wet brush first into the cobalt, then the raw umber, and washed in the shape of the sunlit shadow over the archway. If the shadow appears too deep, without sufficient reflected light, I just lift a little of the colour out right away. While it was still wet, I dropped in a dash or two of burnt umber to liven it up.

I then tackled the shadows under the cornice in a similar way, using burnt umber with the cobalt, and strengthening the definition of the cornice with ultramarine and burnt sienna, while the wash was still wet, but not so wet that everything blended meaninglessly together,



**"Lively shadows make your picture sing"**

*Glancing Shadows, Palazzo Nicastro, Ragusa,*  
16×10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in. (40.5×26.6cm)

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## SHADOW PLAY

*Clive Wilson* demonstrates how he uses the colours of shadows in his watercolours to give richness and depth

drawing all the time. The same approach was used to define the sculptural details at the tops of the two pilasters, and round the balcony door, using rather more burnt sienna to give the impression of heat and reflected sun on the architrave of the door.

Next I tackled the shadows cast by the right pilaster, and across its lower half by the building next door. This required the same colours, cobalt and raw umber, applied as a loose wash, but proportionately rather more cobalt, to take account of the fact that there was less reflected light in the shadows.

The shadows round the lower door and its portico contribute immensely to the feeling of

sunlight. These again use washes of the same colours, with dashes of burnt sienna or burnt umber, reinforced with a little ultramarine, to define the architectural details.

The dark shadows on the paving in front of the door using the same colours, were reinforced, while wet, in some places with a dash of ultramarine, and in others with Indian red and Winsor green (a vicious colour, which has to be treated with extreme care, but washed in with Indian red it makes lovely deep shadow greys).

The deep shadow under the arch uses a heavy wash of Indian red and Winsor green, with subsequent washes of Indian red and ultramarine.

In this picture the angle of the sun is clearly critical. I like climates with consistent sun, so that I can go back to the same place at the same time of day, several days running if necessary, and be able to rely on the same lighting. However, particularly for a picture like this, where the shadow effect is fleeting, I also always take a photograph right at the beginning, as soon as I spot a subject, to be able to remind myself what it was that gave me a buzz, so that I can always refer back to it. This is often essential: if you're lucky, you'll get an hour-and-a-half to work before the sun has moved round too much, and you realise you are looking at a completely different picture:



*Sun-saturated shadows, S Maria dell'Itria, 15×10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in. (38×26.6cm)*

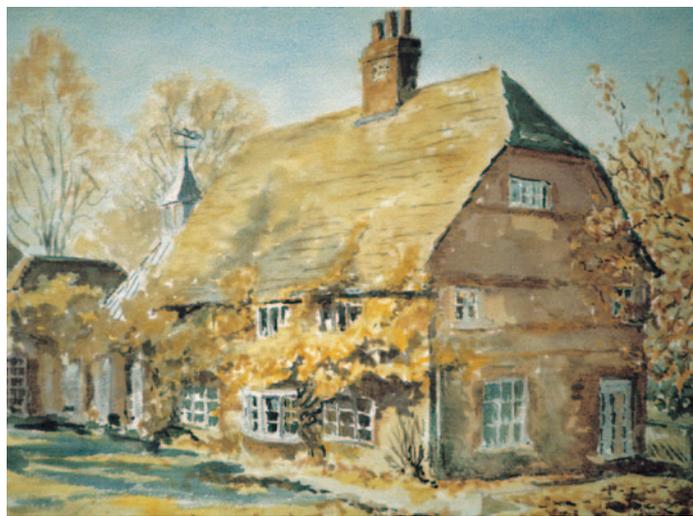
you've lost your original inspiration, and risk messing up a picture that started well.

Some subjects, such as *Sun-saturated shadows, S Maria dell'Itria*, above, are simply too complicated to tackle as finished pictures on site. I always start on the spot, to get to know the subject by concentrated observation. My first attempt at this subject required two hour-and-a-half sessions on successive days. I was not very pleased with the result, *Roofscape, S Maria dell'Itria*, right, from the point of view of composition: the effect of sun in the shadows was OK, but the roof in the foreground did not lead the eye into the picture; and the sunlight across the whole picture, while accurate in terms of what I had seen, was not as interesting pictorially as I would like. So I re-composed it afterwards in the studio, taking advantage of what I had learnt on the spot.

*Glancing Shadows*, page 45, used a very strong, hot-climate

combination of complementary colours to achieve light in the shadows. This is not always appropriate, and certainly not in the much gentler light of a more northern climate, such as ours.

It would not have been so appropriate, either, for *Sun-saturated shadows, S Maria dell'Itria*, where distance calls for a less contrasty effect. Here, the subtle reflected light in the shadows is achieved using a combination of rose madder genuine, cobalt and aureolin. These colours can be combined on the page (not mixed to destruction on the palette) to achieve any shade of grey — which, literally, seems to glow. And you can swing blue greys to warm reddish greys, to yellowish reflected sunlight on stone colours, simply by adding an extra dash of the three colours in turn, according to which you wish to achieve within a wash. You can see this effect particularly in the church tower, and on the façade of the



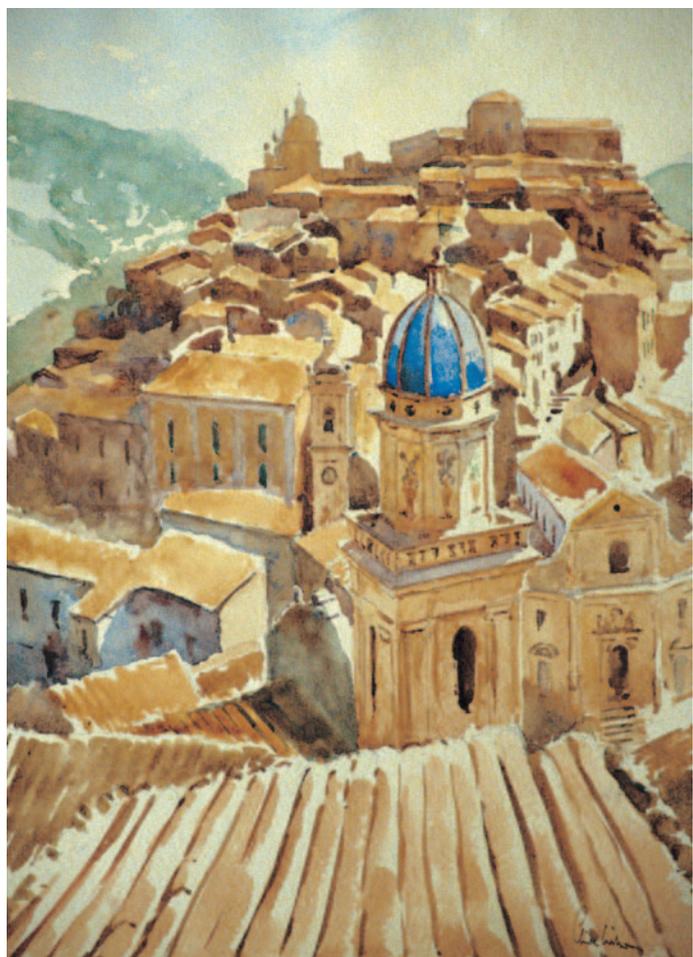
*Harbrook — Last of the Autumn Leaves, 12×16in. (30.5×40.5cm)*

church below, behind the tower.

Quick, free washes, blended on the page, are taken to extremes in *Haveli Sunrise*, right. In this case I was dealing with a fast-moving, early morning sun in Rajasthan. I reckoned I had 30 to 45 minutes, maximum, and the architectural details of the façades of the buildings on each side were far too complicated to get involved in: the interesting thing was the negative space in the gap

between them.

I sketched in the outlines of the balconies and canopies very quickly, and started sloshing the colour on — rose madder genuine, cobalt and aureolin — letting them find their own warmth and coolnesses, but making sure that the profile at the top on the left was more of a cool blue, to emphasise the burning heat of the sky. As the wash was drying, I sketched in indications of the balconies,



*Roofscape, S Maria dell'Itria, 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>×13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>in. (54.5×33.5cm)*



*Haveli Sunrise*, 16½×11 in. (42×27.8cm)

arches and windows. I left the strip of sunlight at ground level, and lifted out the sun catching the canopies at higher levels, once the whole wash was dry. The figure, cows and dog were added later. This picture is all shadows.

In *Harbrook — Last of the Autumn Leaves*, above left, the same colours are used in

different combinations to achieve all the shadow effects. I have tried other combinations of different reds, yellows and blues, but none give the extraordinary glowing effect that happens with these three.

I try to paint as loosely and quickly as possible, with free-flowing washes, and deliberately quick brush

### MAKING SHADOWS

- Lots of people have problems thinking in reverse: playing with the shadows, letting shadows create form and depth, leaving the highlights. Avoid the temptation to focus first on the local colours in the subject and add the shadows later.

- Start with the shadows to give shape, pattern and structure. Think of the picture in tonal terms, but with the shadows giving warmth and coolness, richness and depth, through colour. Forget about local colour till right at the end.

- Because of the nature of light, ready-made greys or blacks don't exist in nature: all shadows are full of reflected light, however deep they seem to be. Make your own greys using the constituents of light (rose madder genuine, cobalt and aureolin) or complementaries (raw or burnt umber, plus cobalt or ultramarine, or Indian red plus Winsor green). This is the key to a lively picture.

- Float a little of the complementary into a wash: adding a dash of ultramarine into burnt or raw umber, or burnt umber into ultramarine or cobalt can have a magical, even electrifying effect.

## Watercolour

### Clive Wilson

is a self-taught painter who developed his skills through a life painting course at the Slade School of Art Summer School; various Royal Watercolour Society courses; and life drawing and painting courses with the New English Art Club Drawing School and Bobby Gill (Royal College of Art).

He has been included in the Singer & Friedlander, Royal Watercolour Society and New English Art Club exhibitions and other group exhibitions, and has had solo shows with the Ebury Gallery and Dragon Design in London.

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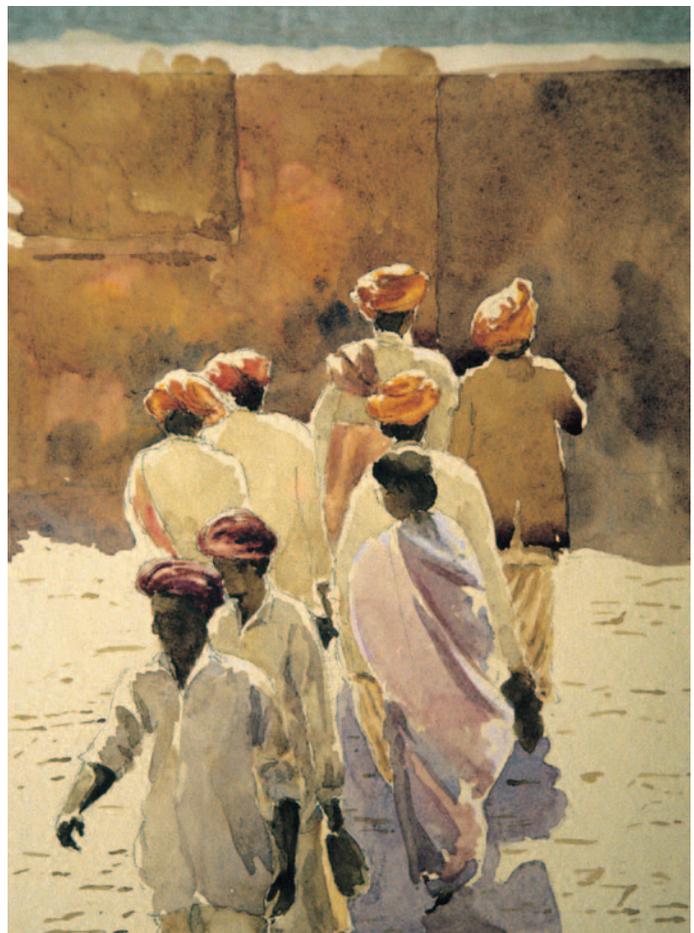
strokes, dipping the brush into liquid colour straight from the tube, sometimes two or three colours together on the brush without mixing, letting the paint settle and find unexpected, and often exciting effects. If you are lucky enough to get the chance to see any of Sargent's original watercolours, you will see that the speed and vigour of his brush strokes are astonishing. This is my aim.

But it doesn't always work that way: frequently, an obsession with getting it right can make you more careful, and this spoils the immediacy and excitement of the result. One mistake to avoid — difficult — is messing about with a stroke which looks wonderfully fresh and exciting, but isn't quite right in terms of accurate drawing: invariably second thoughts and further touching up ruin that first fine careless rapture!

Worrying too much about getting the detail right results in a finicky-looking picture.

There is the same emphasis on glowing shadows in *Colours of Jaisalmer*, below. Here again, all the shadows use rose madder genuine, aureolin and cobalt. I started with the

background, which used a very rich mix of the three colours, straight from the tube, to get the essential tonal structure of the picture right from the beginning. The figures were assembled from very quick sketches done in the street, and photographs. □



*Colours of Jaisalmer*, 9½×7½ in. (24×19cm)