

Water WORKS

The secret to painting stunning water is in the reflections. Follow along step by step as a master shows you how it's done.

By Penny Soto



Flower in a Glass
(watercolor on
paper, 15x22)

Seeing color in reflections and looking for unusual shapes and patterns is half the fun of painting water. Exaggerating those colors, shapes and patterns is even more fun if you let your imagination run wild. It helps if you think of water as a

mirror. Try this exercise: Take a small mirror, lay it on a table and set something on top of it to study. Now try and draw all the little nuances. For a look at how I paint reflections on water, follow along with the step-by-step demonstration that follows.

DEMONSTRATION

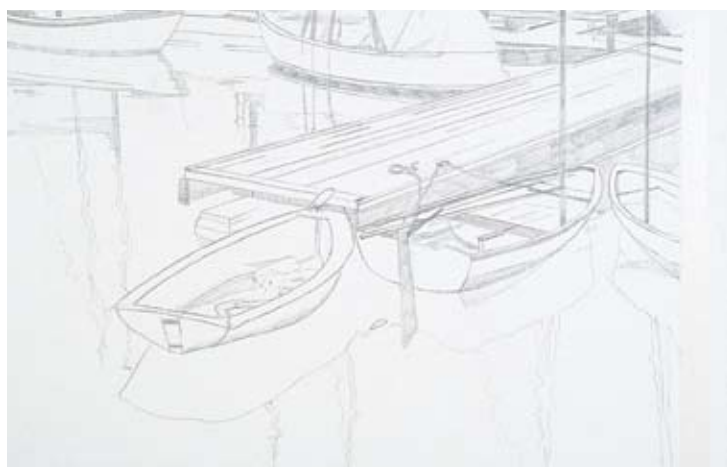
Boats on the Water

A good place to see lots of color, different shapes and abstract patterns is water on a sunny day. In this photograph I liked the subtleties of the subject as it was, but it invited me to add more color.

First, I analyzed the composition of the photograph. The boats and pier were pointing to the lower, left-hand corner leading your eye out of the picture plane. I sat down and drew a loose, quick study to decide how to bring the eye back into the picture plane. I decided to simply add another boat. I used the computer to scan the photograph, duplicated it and flopped the image of the boat. I cut out the top of the largest boat and placed it in on the right-hand side so it would stop your eye from leaving the picture. This gave me a good opportunity to study the revised composition. I immediately liked it.

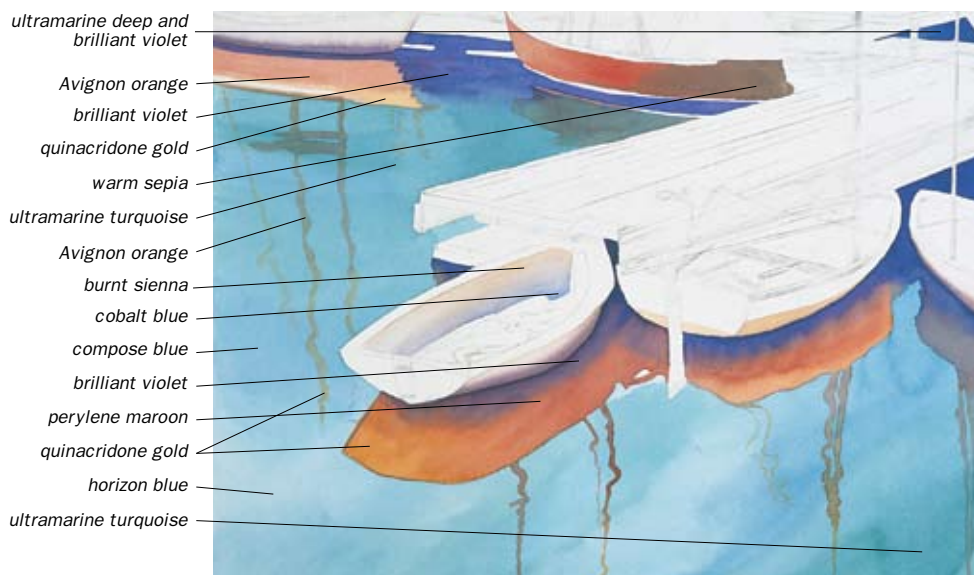


Reference Photograph



1 Complete the Drawing

Draw the image using the reference photograph on 300-lb., Fabriano Uno cold-pressed paper. This is a softer paper, which is good for this particular painting. Use the three-value tones in most places except in areas that are going to be very large and dark, like the reflections under the boats.



- ultramarine deep and brilliant violet
- Avignon orange
- brilliant violet
- quinacridone gold
- warm sepia
- ultramarine turquoise
- Avignon orange
- burnt sienna
- cobalt blue
- compose blue
- brilliant violet
- perylene maroon
- quinacridone gold
- horizon blue
- ultramarine turquoise

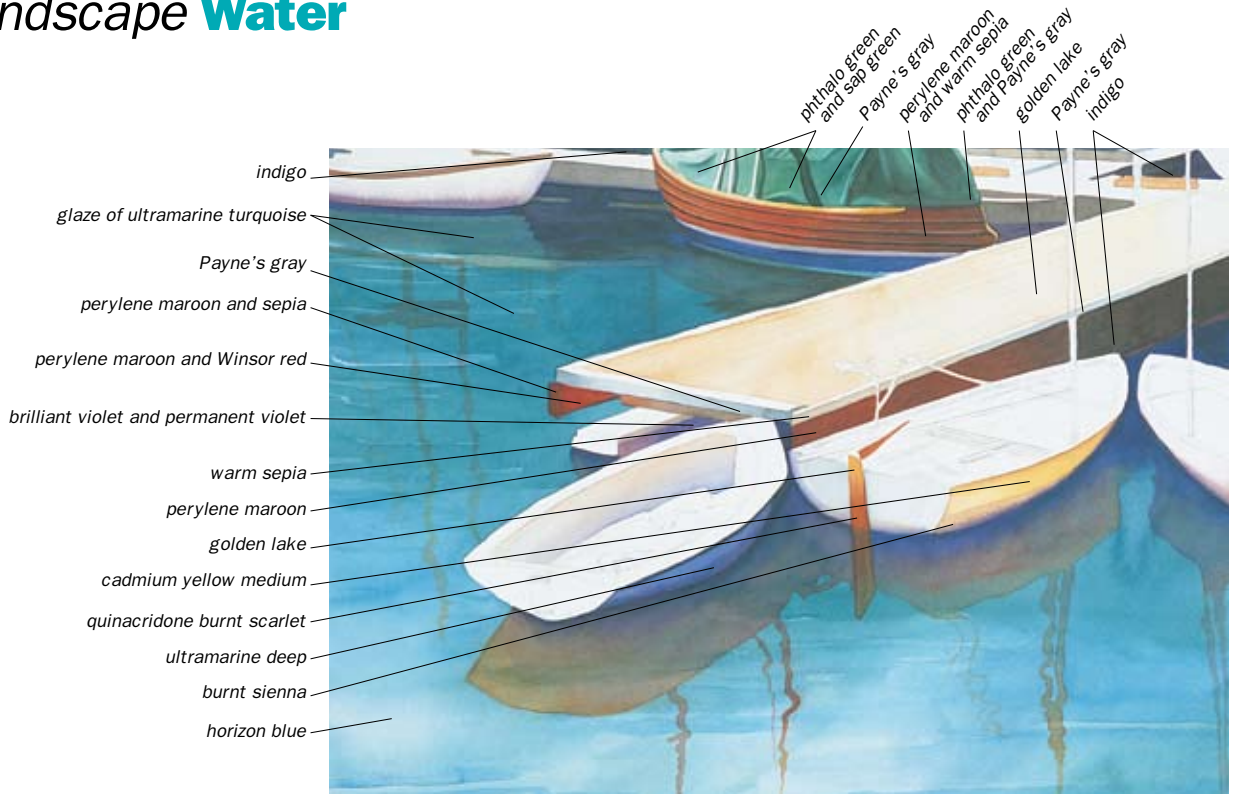
2 Paint the Water

Begin this painting with the green-blue of the water. At the top paint ultramarine turquoise, followed by compose blue and ending with horizon blue on the bottom. You want an overall feeling of the water before you place in the darks. Be aware of the gradation from dark at the top to light on the bottom. Allow this to dry, then add the rest of the underpainting.

Palette

Avignon orange, brilliant violet (Smickel), burnt sienna, cadmium yellow medium, cobalt blue light, compose blue, golden lake, horizon blue, indigo, Payne's gray, permanent violet, perylene maroon, phthalogreen, quinacridone gold, sap green, sepia, quinacridone burnt scarlet, ultramarine deep, ultramarine turquoise, warm sepia, Winsor red

Landscape Water



3 Build Up the Colors

Add a light glaze of burnt sienna on the dock and a variety of blue-greens to the boat in the back. Paint the boat in the back almost to completion to get a feeling for the painting. The darks help to establish the correct values. The middle boat will be the focal point, so glaze it with a deep yellow. This boat will eventually be red.

Paint Beautiful Color, Not Mud

There is so much emphasis on mud in watercolor painting. I have even read where some artists say not to mix a warm and a cool together. Huh? Too many rules... and some rules are made to be broken! Try this: Mix an ice-cold French ultramarine blue and a warm sap green together. The result you'll see is a beautiful, crisp blue-green. I think the key here is to plan before you paint. If you keep going over and over a color, eventually it'll lose its brilliance, creating mud. Plan what you want to do, study your colors and be careful of complementary colors glazed or mixed with one another. If you plan before painting, you'll get glowing colors. Try and make some mud colors without using complementary colors. I bet it'll be harder than you think!



4 Add Detail

Add some of the little things, like the background decking and another glaze on the large deck. You can use the same colors or change them. Just be mindful of complementary colors.



5 Accent the Boats

Now put some emphasis on the boats. Block in the blue and a violet, then add the interior boat colors. Don't put in too much detail, because you want your attention on the colors. Basically, add dots and dashes of color. Be creative with your colors. That's half the fun!



Vibrant Colors

Try and think of colors that'll make your final color more vibrant. For instance, try new gamboge under Winsor red for the boat.

Dock of the Bay (watercolor on paper, 15x22)

6 Review Your Painting

Put your painting on the easel and study it. The eye wanders out of the picture plane in the upper, right-hand corner. Add a piece of wood in this corner and a mast to the small red boat on the right to stop this wandering. This will help keep your eye from flying out of the picture. Apply another glaze to the reflections of the boats using the colors from the boats. Use pastel sticks to add some bright dots and dashes, but not too many. You still want to focus on the intense colors in the painting and the soft feeling of quiet, still reflections. ▣

Meet the Artist



California native, PENNY SOTO lives and works in Pollock Pines near Lake Tahoe. Her paintings can be found in private and corporate collections across the country. She's a popular teacher and lecturer, and is the author of *Painting Glowing Colors in Watercolor* (2003, North Light Books), from which this article is excerpted. Used with permission of North Light Books, an imprint of F+W Publications, Inc. Visit your local bookseller or call 1-800-448-0915 to obtain a copy.