

THE Sky's THE LIMIT

Go beyond blue to fill your landscapes with stunning skies.

By Evelyne Boren



Stretching the Truth

I wanted to show the warm glow of the sunrise in *Morning Glow, Provence* (watercolor on paper, 22x41), but I also wanted to give it something extra. So, with a little artistic license, I heightened the warmth of the blue-gray clouds with shades of orange.

One of the first things viewers notice about my watercolors is the brilliant skies. They burst with color, the result of a passionate painting style that makes the work unique. Dramatic skies are some of my favorite subjects, and I'll push color to the utmost to achieve the vision I have for them.

My painting method, however, is one that focuses on a few relatively straightforward ideas about such techniques as color mixing and the handling of light. Here's a look at how I do it, and in this process I think you'll find valuable tips that can help you achieve the same effects.

Finding a Scene

I love painting on location, and when my heart starts to beat twice as fast and my adrenaline gets flowing, I know the scene before me will make a good painting. Some of my favorites are outdoor markets, mountain vistas and views that I see through windows and doors. I travel frequently on painting tours in search of new scenes, and I like to take some time to get familiar with a new location before deciding how to paint it.

But I caution you not to be bound by the reality of your subjects—I'll only include in my painting those elements that

1 The Rough Draft



2 Letting the Color Flow

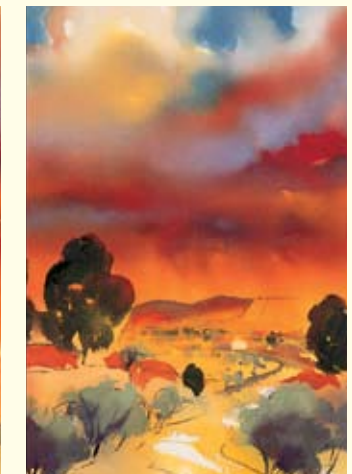
3 Doubling the Effort

4 Below the Horizon

5 Enhancing the Effect

1 Even though I've painted this scene at the Black Mesa in New Mexico many times, I began by making some color sketches. From them, I created this charcoal sketch on a large block of newsprint, setting in the values and the contrasts with the subject still fresh in my mind. Because this will be a sky painting I placed the horizon about two-thirds of the way down the paper.

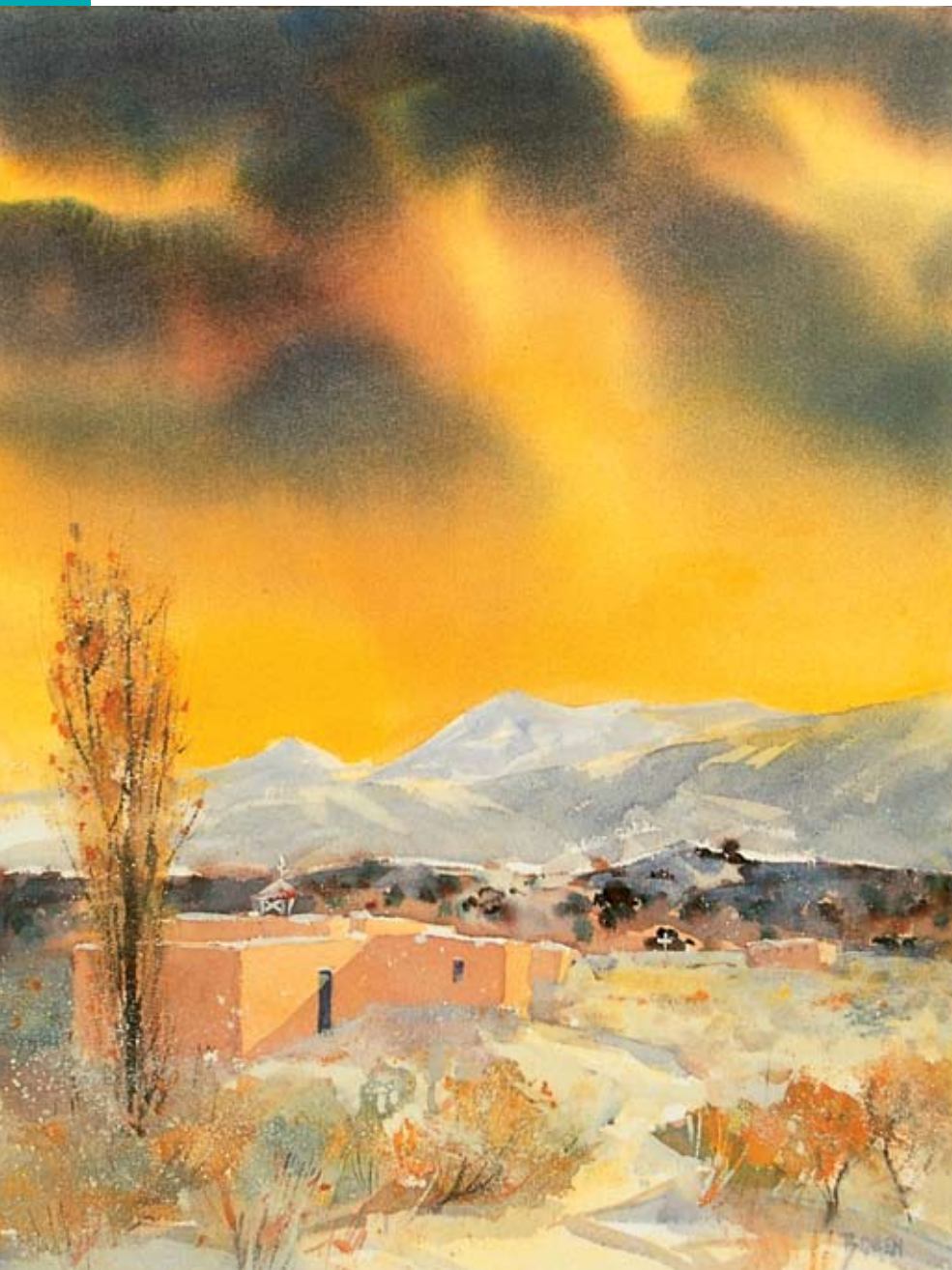
2 On my watercolor paper I marked out the little church and some other white areas with masking tape (you can also use masking fluid) and wet the entire sheet. I waited a couple of minutes, then filled the paper with color—yellow on the horizon, a pinch of red and blue higher up—using some of the same colors in the foreground. Then I tilted the paper a bit as it dried to get the paint to run together.



3 Unfortunately, these juicy colors tend to lose their strength as they dry, so next I rewet some areas of the painting and went back over the colors with less water and more paint. Then I laid in some of the landscape elements with a soft charcoal stick. By not having the piece sketched in from the start, I've retained the freedom to let the paint determine the direction of the composition.

4 At this stage I removed the masking tape, toned down the white of the church, and painted the piñon trees with a heavy mixture of bamboo green, red and ultramarine. Then it was on to the chamisa plants in the foreground with a mixture of bamboo green, white, blue, yellow and rose, while for their shadows I used cobalt and rose. I continued to build the landscape by adding color details to the road and the foliage.

5 I saved the dark mesas, which nicely balance the composition, for last and I made sure their colors were repeated in the dark patches of the sky. I finished by adding some loosely painted foreground detail, including a bit of sponging. *Sunset Over Black Mesa* (watercolor on paper, 30x22) captures the mood of the New Mexico sky at the end of the day.



The Surprise of Color

What struck me about this scene was how the warm sun broke out over a cool, overcast winter landscape. The yellow sky against the dark clouds gives Winter Glow (watercolor on paper, 30x22) great contrast.

the right color combination. From them I make a charcoal sketch that sets in the values and contrasts. Then I'll usually clip a sheet of Arches 300-lb., cold-pressed paper to foam board, soak my brushes and squeeze plenty of paint into the wells of my palette.

Watercolors dry fast, so you have to be totally prepared. Have your sketch ready, and I recommend keeping two containers of water at hand to have clean water available whenever needed. I work wet-into-wet, always standing, which gives me the freedom to move and keeps me from getting too tight. I use a 3-inch flat brush for wetting the paper and a No. 36 to lay in washes, while most of the painting is then done with a No. 26 round and a 1-inch flat. Only toward the end will I use smaller brushes. I've found that the longer you work with a big brush, the freer your painting will be.

will enhance the design. Consequently, to get the result I want I'll change the elements freely until they work together. I'll move the clouds if they throw off the balance of my composition, for example, and that goes for the trees, buildings or anything else. An important responsibility when taking this license, however, is to make sure that you keep your light source constant.

Getting Prepared

I always start a painting by doing some 10-minute color sketches to take back to the studio, and I use these primarily to find

Attacking the Color

What stands out in my paintings is the color, the light and the drama. One good reason for this is I use clean, pure color right from the start; it will naturally tone down as I layer one color over the other, so I use about twice as much paint as most watercolorists would normally use, and keep my brush and colors clean at all times. I experiment with interesting color combinations by making a few color swatches first, rather than trying them out on the painting itself while I'm working on it.

For the most dramatic skies, I wet the entire sheet of paper and then wait a couple of minutes—until the sheen on the surface dulls—before applying the paint. Then I load my brush with paint and fill the paper with rich color. I watch the paint carefully as it dries, sometimes tilting the board to get the colors to run together. And then, with great disappointment, I watch as these juicy, brilliant colors inevitably lose their strength.

But I don't worry when this happens, I just rewet some of the paper and then paint over certain parts of the underpainting using less water and more paint. With this process I can keep the color brilliant, and at this point I may add some white to the clouds to maintain the contrast, as I did in *Sunset Over Black Mesa* (on page 45). Again I watch the paper as it dries and tilt it as necessary. Then, only after this much is complete, I move on to the details of the landscape by using my previous sketch as a reference to lay in some of the landscape elements with a soft charcoal stick.

Letting clean, pure color mix on your damp paper before drawing your sketch is a good way to keep your painting loose, and I've found that the process becomes much more creative when you let yourself go with the flow. I don't paint things; I let them appear. That's a good philosophy for painting striking skies that really push your artistic limits, and it will help you make the most of your landscapes in general. When you're free to take your colors in any direction, you'll see what beautiful paintings can result. ▣

Painting with Emotion

I never seem to get over the excitement of seeing the brilliant way our New Mexico sunsets color the sky. To represent that feeling in Southwest Sunset (watercolor on paper, 30x22), I flooded the paper with yellow at the horizon and ultramarine blue at the top, then floated reds and purples into the still-moist wash.



Meet the Artist

A native of Munich, Germany, EVELYNE BOREN enjoys worldwide recognition for her paintings of the Southwest, Mexico and Europe, in both watercolor and oil. Having traveled widely and lived in both Europe and the United States, she had a successful show-business career in movies and television before becoming a full-time professional artist. She has sold more than 3,000 original works, has had many one-woman exhibitions and has paintings in several corporate collections. Currently she maintains permanent studios in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Sayulita, Mexico, and plans to establish a third studio in Europe.

