



Whiskey Slough

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/83-Whiskey-Slough>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to the enchanting Whiskey Slough in Pender Harbour on the west coast of Canada, a location that captured my heart during a recent workshop. This charming spot, with its weathered old boat and rustic shed, offers a perfect backdrop for exploring the art of painting glowing light and vibrant color. In this chapter, I will guide you step by step through the techniques I use to infuse a scene with warmth, radiant hues, and captivating textures. You'll learn how to transform an ordinary view into a masterpiece that radiates life and energy. The lesson begins with a simple yet powerful technique: using an image editing app to adjust the temperature of your reference photo, enhancing the scene's warmth without losing its natural beauty. This foundational step sets the stage for a painting that truly glows. Join me as we delve into this rewarding subject, capturing the essence of Whiskey Slough and bringing its serene beauty to life on canvas.



"Whiskey Slough - Plein Air" 14x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- M. Graham & Co. Acrylic Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas (Giving it a light sanding first helps the paint stick better).
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette knife
- Paper towels
- Stay-wet palette
- Water spray bottle

1 Using technology to adjust color temperature



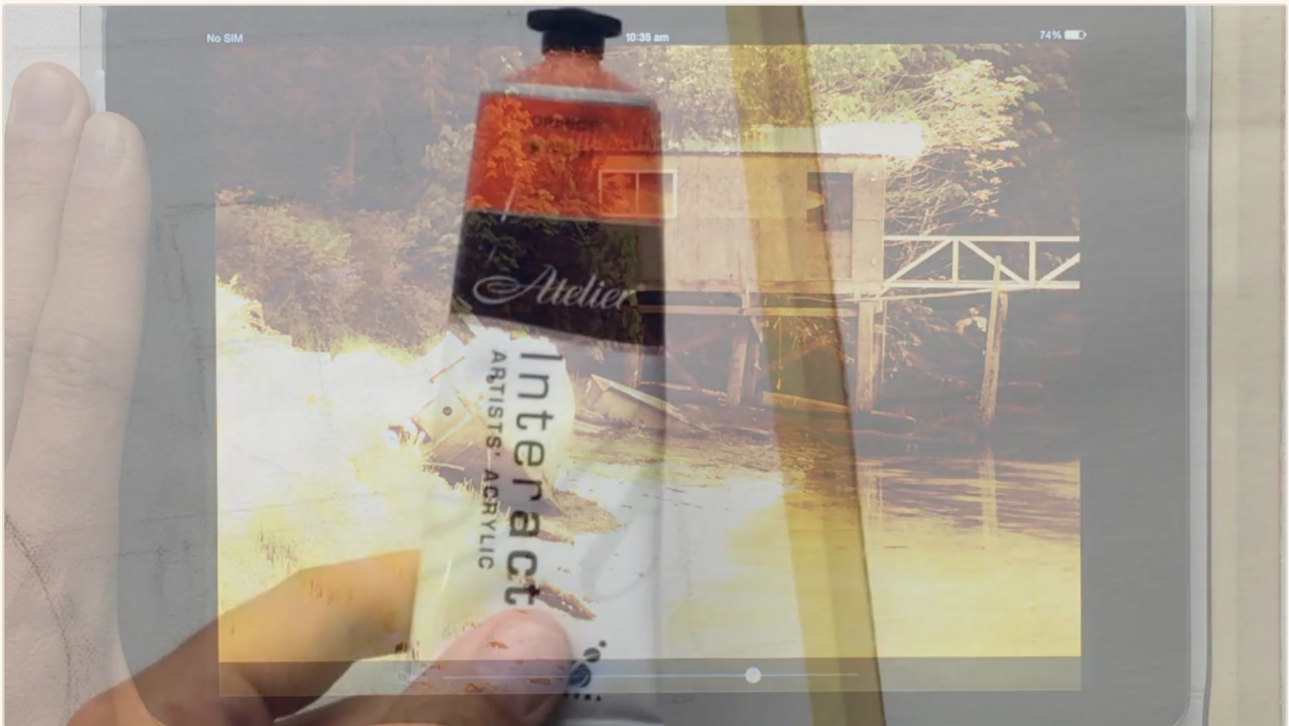
Use Technology to Adjust Color Temperature

Open an image editing app like Photoshop Express on your device. Locate the temperature adjustment feature within the app. Use the slider to warm the image by pushing it towards orange and yellow. Be cautious not to overdo it; adjust until the warmth looks natural and pleasing.

PRO TIP

Use the temperature adjustment feature in image editing apps to easily warm or cool your painting reference.

2 Preparing acrylics and stay wet palette



Prepare the Stay Wet Palette

Use a stay wet palette made from canvas and paper towels. Tape them securely to your easel to prevent movement during painting.

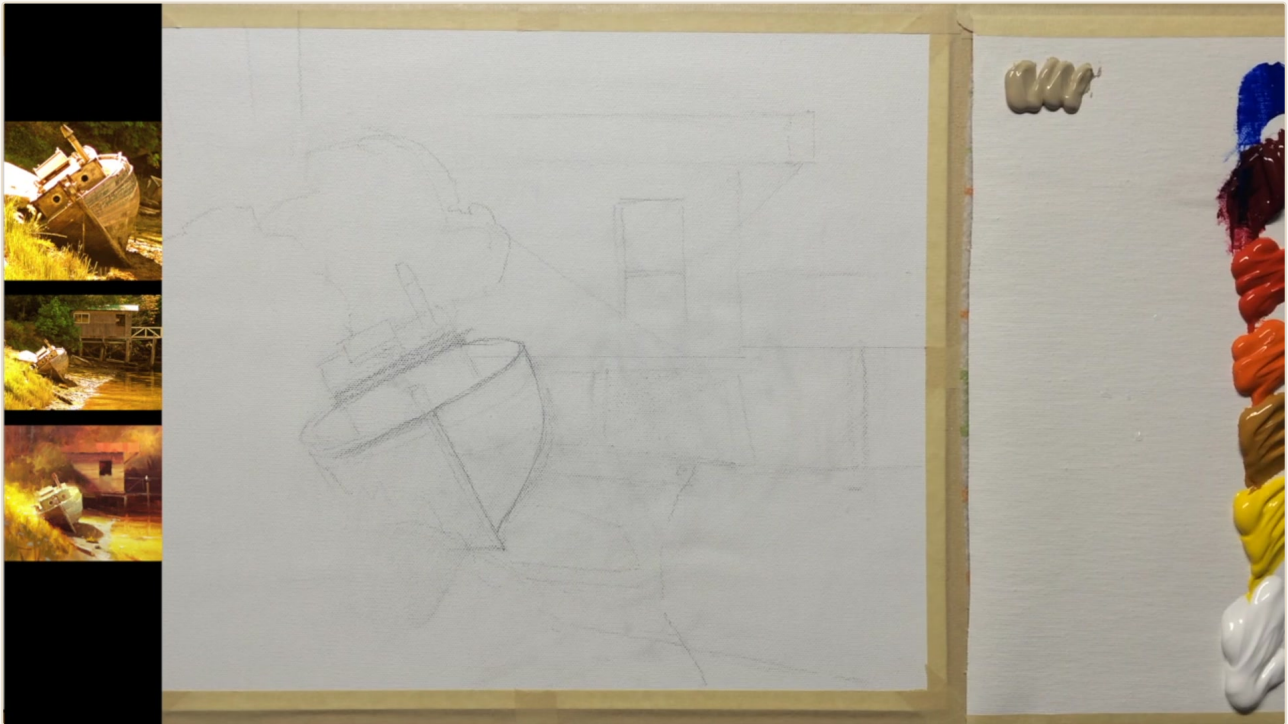
Moisten the Palette and Canvas

Spray water generously onto the paper towels and the back and front of the canvas. This helps keep the acrylic paints wet for longer, allowing more time to work with them.

PRO TIP

Ensure your palette and canvas are well-moistened to prevent acrylics from drying too quickly.

3 Starting with the glowing foreground



Prepare the Canvas

Ensure your canvas is stretched and ready for painting. Have your pencil sketch in place to guide your composition.

Apply the Glowing Foreground

Load your biggest brush with yellow paint and thin it slightly with water. Broadly brush this mixture over the brightest area of the glowing foreground to establish a strong base.

Extend the Glowing Area

Use a fine mist from a spray bottle to lightly dampen the area. Add more yellow paint to extend the glowing effect, preparing to paint back into this area with darker, cooler tones later.

PRO TIP

Thin the yellow paint with water to cover the brightest area broadly and smoothly.

4 Creating shadow shapes in the grass



Mix Yellow Ochre with Yellow

Add a little yellow ochre to your yellow paint. This will push the yellow towards red on the color wheel and slightly gray it down, creating a more natural tone for shadows.

Create Large Soft Edge Shapes

Use mostly vertical strokes to form large, soft-edged shapes. These shapes will represent the shadow side of large clumps of grass.

Soften Stroke Edges

Ensure that both the tops and bottoms of your strokes have really soft edges. This softness will suggest that grasses are in front of the shadow areas.

PRO TIP

Use vertical strokes with soft edges to create natural-looking grass shadows.

5 Adding depth and texture to the grass



Create Depth with Color

Mix a little orange and blue to achieve a greenish tinge with a slightly darker and greyer color. Apply this mix to the grasses as they get closer to the viewer, using bigger brush strokes to enhance the illusion of depth.

Add Texture with a Paper Towel

Use a balled-up paper towel to lift out some of the glowing areas in the grass. This will add texture and create a gradual color change from bright yellow to a dull warm green in the foreground.

Transition Colors to the Background

Use the same dull warm green color to softly transition into the background. This helps create structure in the shadow areas and maintains a cohesive look.

Enhance Texture with Water

Flick water with a clean brush onto the wet paint and lift little dots off. This adds more texture and interest to the grass. Rotate the paper slightly after each mark to avoid creating a pattern.

PRO TIP

Use bigger brush strokes for grasses closer to the viewer to enhance depth.

6 Painting the boat with glowing effects



Create Soft Edges with Transition Colors

Use a number six brush to paint the boat, focusing on achieving soft edges where it meets the grass. Begin with an orangey brown near the grass, transitioning to a darker brown for the deepest shadows. Apply fairly thin paint with mostly vertical strokes to blend into the grass, varying brushstrokes to avoid uniformity.

Add Darkest Dark

Mix blue, alizarin, and red to create a slightly darker brown for the boat's darkest areas. Apply this darker color above the initial layer of brown, ensuring it doesn't extend as far down. Use a large dry brush to lightly blur the edges for a softer transition.

Reflect Yellow Light on the Hull

Observe the photograph to see where the hull reflects yellow light from the grasses. Gradually add more yellow ochre towards the bow, increasing the yellow as you move higher. Ensure the edge remains soft and light to create a glowing effect.

Lighten and Warm the Cabin Front

For the cabin front, mix toning grey with yellow ochre, lightening it with white and yellow. Ensure the drawing is accurate, with verticals parallel and deck tops perpendicular. Lighten and warm the area off the right-hand deck to create a glowing spot.

Enhance Glowing Spots

Lighten and warm the left side of the boat to create a larger glowing spot. Use a light to mid-value warm color for any darks in this area. For the front of the boat, use the same color as the cabin front, ensuring it appears worn and beaten, reflecting the boat's age.

PRO TIP

Vary brushstrokes to prevent uniformity and achieve natural-looking grass clumps.

7 Reflective light on the boat hull



Mix Reflective Light Color

Mix a color for the shadowed side of the hull. Although it's in shadow, it receives a lot of reflected light from the light beach and shallow water, making it slightly lighter than the other side. Incorporate more warm toning grey into the mixture for this side.

Achieve a Cooler Tone

Add more of the warm toning grey to create a cooler tone compared to the rest of the canvas. This neutral grey will appear cooler because it contrasts with the warmer colors already present.

PRO TIP

Use a warm toning grey to create a cooler appearance in shadowed areas by contrasting with warmer colors.

8 Enhancing the glowing effect on the boat



Enhance the Glowing Effect

Add more yellow and white to the colors as they approach the glowing spot on the right-hand deck. This will help create a stronger glowing effect.

Roughen the Boat's Surface

Use a palette knife to roughen up the shapes on the boat, making them appear more organic. This will help reduce the shiny, new look of the boat.

Weather the Boat

Splatter some water onto the boat and dab it with crumpled paper to create painterly marks. This technique will make the boat look more weathered and beaten, adding character.

Prepare the Glowing Area

Mix a light yellow and black in the glowing area, dissolving the edges. Use very thick white and yellow paint to block in the deck, enhancing the brightness and warmth.

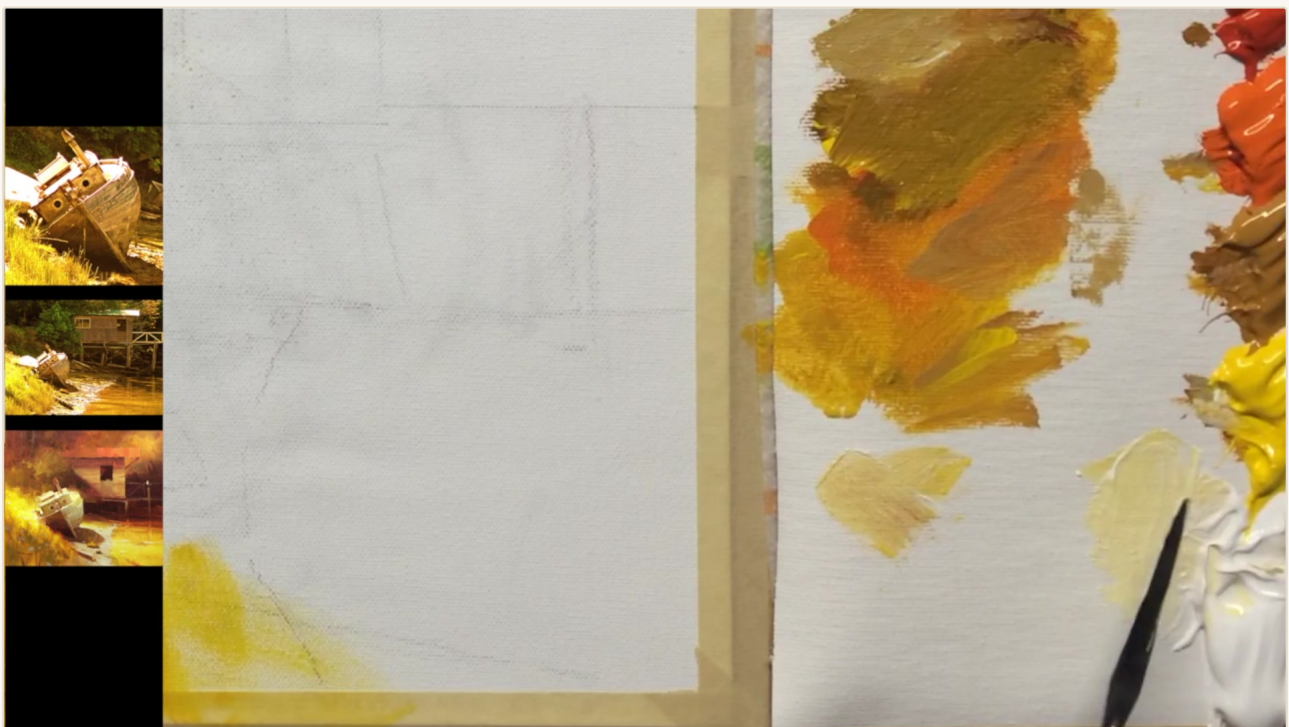
Blend the Edges

Brush the edges of the glowing area to blend the color into the background. This will help the glow appear more natural and integrated.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife to roughen up shapes and create an organic texture on the boat.

9 Detailing the boat's edges and textures



Create Thin Light Strips

Mix a light color and flatten it out on the canvas. Clean the palette knife, then press its edge into the flat paint to pick up a crisp line. Press the knife down hard onto the canvas where you want the strip, and drag it off carefully.

Add Weathered Texture

Repeat the process to create another line. To achieve a weathered look, break the edge slightly to soften the crispness and add character.

PRO TIP

Press the palette knife edge into the paint to pick up a crisp line for detailing.

10 Final details on the boat



Paint the Whites of the Eyes

Add a lighter border around the portholes at the front of the boat. Use a shade that is just a bit lighter than the underlying color to create contrast.

Darken the Portholes

Paint the portholes themselves with a dark brown. Apply careful pressure on the brush to achieve a good circular shape without much effort.

Lighten the Right Porthole

For the porthole on the right, add a little more white and yellow to lighten it. This adjustment complements the glowing area nearby.

PRO TIP

Use careful brush pressure to achieve clean circular shapes for the portholes.

11 Painting shadows and rocks on the beach



Mix Shadow Color

Mix a dark warm grey using toning grey, blue, red, and yellow ochre for the shadow of the boat on the beach. Adjust the mixture to be warmer and lighter by adding a little yellow and white as it moves to the right.

Paint Rocks

Use brown for the sides of the rocks. Apply toning grey for the light on the top of the rocks. Add a touch of algae color on top for a nice color note.

Add Log Shadow

Use an orangey brown for the shadow side of a log in the foreground. Brush very softly down into the grass to create the effect of the log disappearing into the grass.

PRO TIP

Add yellow and white to your shadow mix as it moves to the right to create a warmer and lighter effect.

12 Soft transitions on the beach



Create the Beach Base

Use toning grey, white, and a little bit of yellow to brush broadly across the foreground of the beach. This will establish the base color.

Add Light to the Beach

As the beach moves into the light, add more white and yellow to the mix. This will create a lighter area where the light hits the sand.

Create Soft Transitions

To achieve a soft transition as the light beach disappears into the shadow, work in stages. First, apply some yellow, then gradually darken the mix and paint nearly up to the previous color. Continue this process, making the color progressively darker.

PRO TIP

Work in stages to achieve soft transitions between light and shadow on the beach.

13 Background and shed details



Apply Darkest Dark

Use the dark brown as your darkest dark in the background. Apply it in the window and under the roof line to create depth and contrast.

Create a Glowing Transition

Make a colorful transition from a lighter, warmer color near the glowing spot on the boat. Fade this color into the dark background to enhance the glow effect.

Adjust Bush Color

Paint the bush behind the boat with a browner color instead of green. As you move left into the light, add more yellow ochre to lighten and warm the color.

Add Warm Gray to Shed

Mix a little alizarin crimson to create a warm gray for the shadow on the shed. Consider adding a triangular light area on the side of the shed for added interest.

PRO TIP

Use alizarin crimson to create a warm gray for shadows, adding depth and interest to the shed.

14 Roof gradient and background gradations



Soften the Edges

Soften the edges of the large shapes to prevent them from competing with the sharp edges of the boat. Avoid painting every weather board on the shed; suggest detail with a few small touches. Break up the window shape by adding a few other small shapes to create interest.

Create Roof Gradient

Start by mixing a subdued light orange using toning grey and a little white. Apply this mixture to the end of the roof, brushing it around to achieve a slight glowing effect. Gradually add more red and blue as you move left to create a darker, cooler gradient.

Fill Background with Gradations

Fill in the background using gradations of color similar to the roof technique. Ensure the top of the roof is straight and aligned. If brush strokes become monotonous, break them up with a palette knife.

PRO TIP

Soften edges to prevent competition with focal points.

15 Painting trees and water reflections



Paint Tree Trunks

Use toning grey to paint the trunks of the trees in the background. Soften the edges of the trunks to ensure they blend smoothly and don't stand out too much.

Create Water Gradation

Paint the water with a gradation of colors, starting from dark brown, transitioning to mid orangey brown, and finally to yellow. Add white to create a glowing patch in the water for added depth and interest.

Add Texture to Water

Spray a little water onto the painted area and dab it with a paper towel to create texture. This will give the water a more natural appearance.

Lift Reflections

Use a clean, wet brush to lift out paint and create light reflections in the water. Ensure these reflections align with the poles for a realistic effect.

Align Pole Bases

Pay attention to the placement of the poles' bases. They should follow the slope of the ground and appear flat on the water to maintain perspective.

PRO TIP

Ensure reflections in the water align with the poles for a realistic effect.

16 Final touches and signing



Add Grey Flowers

Use toning grey to suggest white flowers in the foreground. These flowers are in shadow, so the grey will give them a subtle, realistic appearance.

Highlight with Pure White

Apply pure white paint to create flowers in the glowing spot. This contrast will draw attention to the area and enhance the luminosity.

Paint the Rope

Add a very fine line to represent a rope extending into the water. This detail adds depth and interest to the scene.

Add a Seagull

With two brush strokes, depict a small seagull observing the scene. This adds life and a focal point to the composition.

Sign Your Painting

Sign your painting to complete it and add a personal touch. Carefully remove any tape used during the painting process.

PRO TIP

Use toning grey for flowers in shadow to maintain a realistic appearance.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by preparing your materials and setting the right mood with a warm color temperature. Start with a well-moistened canvas and stay wet palette to ensure your acrylics remain workable. Begin by establishing a glowing foreground, using broad strokes of thinned yellow paint to lay down a vibrant base.

As you progress, focus on creating depth and texture in the grass with a mix of colors and techniques. Use vertical strokes and soft edges to form natural shadow shapes, and enhance the illusion of depth with larger brush strokes for closer elements. Transition smoothly into painting the boat, capturing its weathered charm with varied brushstrokes and organic textures.

In the final stages, pay attention to the details and transitions that bring your scene to life. Use soft transitions for the beach and background, and ensure reflections in the water align with the poles for realism. Add final touches like flowers and a seagull to complete the composition, and don't forget to sign your work, marking the culmination of your creative endeavor.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use the temperature adjustment feature in image editing apps to easily warm or cool your painting reference.
- Ensure your palette and canvas are well-moistened to prevent acrylics from drying too quickly.
- Thin the yellow paint with water to cover the brightest area broadly and smoothly.
- Use vertical strokes with soft edges to create natural-looking grass shadows.
- Use bigger brush strokes for grasses closer to the viewer to enhance depth.
- Vary brushstrokes to prevent uniformity and achieve natural-looking grass clumps.
- Use a warm toning grey to create a cooler appearance in shadowed areas by contrasting with warmer colors.
- Ensure reflections in the water align with the poles for a realistic effect.



"Whiskey Slough - Plein Air" 14x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.

Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

"Workshop35" by Hyun (Jane) Kim



"Workshop35" 9x12" Oil on Canvas by Hyun (Jane) Kim

Nice work Hyun as usual. Great colour, values and attention to the glowing areas. The drawing seems a little askew on the boat, I think mainly because the roof extends further to the right than to the left, and the chimney isn't parallel with the boat's centre line. The flowers in the foreground are spaced evenly which is making a pattern of them - easy to do! The right-most post on your walkway is not connecting with it's reflection convincingly. Other than those very few minor things I think you've done very well with this. Good work.

“Workshop35” by Casey Toussaint



"Workshop35" Oil on Canvas by Casey Toussaint

Hi Casey, nearly there with this one - just a few changes I can suggest as I've illustrated in the photoshopped version. I've added more colour vibrant colour (less grey) to the bushes behind the boat and given it some form with a shadow on the right and also the cast shadow onto the building which breaks up that big rectangle shape. I've added more yellow to the highlights on the boat so it fits in with the idea of a large yellowish glowing area amongst the grasses with I've also lightened just where they merge with the light on the boat. The dark transition you had there was interfering with the glowing effect. I also straightened the building a little. Other than that it's great to see you using plenty of paint and being free with your brushwork.

"Vance Birthplace, Weaverville, NC" by Eddie Morris



"Vance Birthplace, Weaverville, NC" 12x16" Oil on Canvas by Eddie Morris

Great glowing effect through the trees Eddie and beautiful shape work and subtle colour work there too. Your dilligent work on trees for the past year has really paid off in spades. Beautiful interesting texture through the painting. A good design where the fairly central building has been offset by the bulk of the trees on the left. The path leading us in is good but I have the feeling it's a little too perfect - dead centre and the s-curve is 'just so'. How about a shape that's a little less expected? Just breaking it up a little more perhaps. Maybe it's just me - I've seen enough paths like this in my own work perhaps. Adding a few more neutral grays throughout the scene as you have done in the tree trunks will just pull it back from looking like a sepia toned photo. Also beware the dark outlining effect around the cabin which tends to flatten it a little. A hint of structural detail on the front roof will add some more interest there - a loose panel for instance. Small things. Overall it's a great painting.

"Sanctuary" by Russell Kells



"Sanctuary" 15x19" Acrylic on Canvas by Russell Kells

Great glowing effect Russell and a strong design where you've linked all your major lights together. The success of your glowing effect is in the control of the values, keeping everything in the glowing area in the mid to light value range. You've done that really well. The drawing of the boat could be a lot better unfortunately - especially look at the angle of the waterline.

I've done a little photoshop work on your painting to try out a few other ideas. For instance, more unified colour in the glowing area to the right, darker shadow area in the rocks on the right and more contrast in the pole there. Vertical strokes in the water help with a more reflective feel. Cooling off the background into warm muted greens helps it to sit back and provides a colour complement for the reds in the boat. I hope that helps a little.