



Taupo Bay

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/206-Taupo-Bay>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to this painting workshop where we dive into the vibrant beauty of Taupo Bay, a stunning coastal gem in northern New Zealand. In this chapter, I'll guide you through the process of capturing the dynamic interplay of ocean waves, the rugged majesty of cliffs, and the ethereal dance of light that brings this scene to life. We'll explore techniques for painting clouds, sky, rocks, and foliage, all while focusing on creating depth and realism. You'll learn how to design a composition that harmonizes colors and values, ensuring your painting resonates with energy and aliveness. As we progress, I'll demonstrate how to mix those captivating ocean hues directly on the palette, sharing insights into color theory that are invaluable for both beginners and seasoned painters. Whether you're working with oils or acrylics, this lesson is packed with practical tips to enhance your seascape painting skills. By the end, you'll have a piece that not only captures the essence of Taupo Bay but also reflects your personal artistic journey.



"Taupo Bay" by Richard Robinson.

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

- Titanium white
- Burnt sienna
- Yellow oxide
- Cadmium yellow
- Cadmium orange
- Quinacridone magenta
- Ultramarine blue
- Cobalt blue
- Cobalt teal
- Phthalo green
- No.6 flat
- No.4 flat
- No.2 flat
- No.2 filbert
- No.1 round
- No.0 round
- 1/4" dagger
- 3/8" dagger

1 Canvas preparation and sketching



Prepare the Canvas

Tape a piece of loose linen to a board, leaving a border around it. This allows for later mounting on stretcher bars or easy mailing. Choose a size like 15 cm by 30 cm for a manageable, space-saving painting.

Tone the Canvas

Mix one part burnt sienna with one part Liquin and approximately two parts pure gum turpentine. Apply this mixture as a wash over the canvas to warm up the painting as it progresses.

Sketch the Composition

Use a number one round brush to sketch the composition with burnt sienna mixed with Liquin Original. This mixture thins the paint and speeds up the drying time, which is useful for quick oil painting.

PRO TIP

Using Liquin Original with your paint helps to thin it and speeds up the drying time, making it ideal for quick oil paintings.

2 Composition and design adjustments



Identify the Focal Area

Focus on the headland as the main focal area in your composition. Use the stream on the beach to subtly lead the viewer's eye towards this focal point, incorporating an S-shaped composition.

Adjust Elements for Better Composition

Lower the height of the cliffs slightly to ensure they fit well within your painting's dimensions. Move the large rock to the left side of the painting if it obstructs the view of the cliffs, enhancing the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Don't hesitate to rearrange elements in your painting to improve the composition, as you're creating art, not replicating a photograph.

3 Colour palette and atmospheric depth



Select Your Colours

Use Titanium White, Burnt Sienna, Yellow Oxide, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Orange, Quinacridone Magenta, Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Teal, and Phthalo Green for your palette. These colours will help you achieve a vibrant and dynamic landscape.

Choose Your Brushes

Prepare a range of flat brushes, filbert brushes, round brushes, and dagger brushes. Each type will offer different strokes and textures for your painting.

Establish Dark Values

Begin by painting the darkest values, usually found in the shadows. This step is crucial for creating atmospheric perspective and depth in your painting.

Understand Value and Depth

Remember that value refers to how light or dark a subject is. As landforms recede into the distance, shadows become lighter, which is key to achieving atmospheric depth.

PRO TIP

Start with the darkest values to quickly establish depth and perspective in your landscape.

4 Painting cloud and headland shadows



Mix Cloud Shadow Color

Use burnt sienna as a base for your cloud shadows. Mix in ultramarine blue and titanium white until you achieve the desired mid-tone value. Ensure the mix has a slight blue cast to avoid a muddy appearance.

Apply Cloud Shadows

Use a number six flat brush to apply the cloud shadow color. Start with larger brushes to create a painterly effect, allowing for finer details later. Remember that cloud shadows are part of the darker values in your painting.

Consider Light Values

Keep in mind that clouds and skies are often the lightest values in a landscape. This helps the sky to sit back in the painting, creating depth.

Paint Headland Shadows

After blocking in the cloud shadows, move to the next darkest value: the headland. Ensure the headland shadow also has a blue cast to maintain consistency with the cloud shadows.

PRO TIP

Mix burnt sienna with ultramarine blue for neutral grays with a blue cast, avoiding muddy colors.

5 Establishing depth with dark values



Mix Darker Values for Headland

Use the same colors as in the clouds but with less titanium white to create a darker value. Mix burnt sienna with ultramarine blue and titanium white for the headland.

Create Shadow Mix for Cliffs

For the next tier of cliffs, mix ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white. Add a very small amount of quinacridone magenta to give the shadow mix a violet tint.

Establish Tonality for Depth

Focus on establishing the tonality of the painting to create atmospheric perspective. This helps in visualizing the painting's direction and prevents it from looking flat.

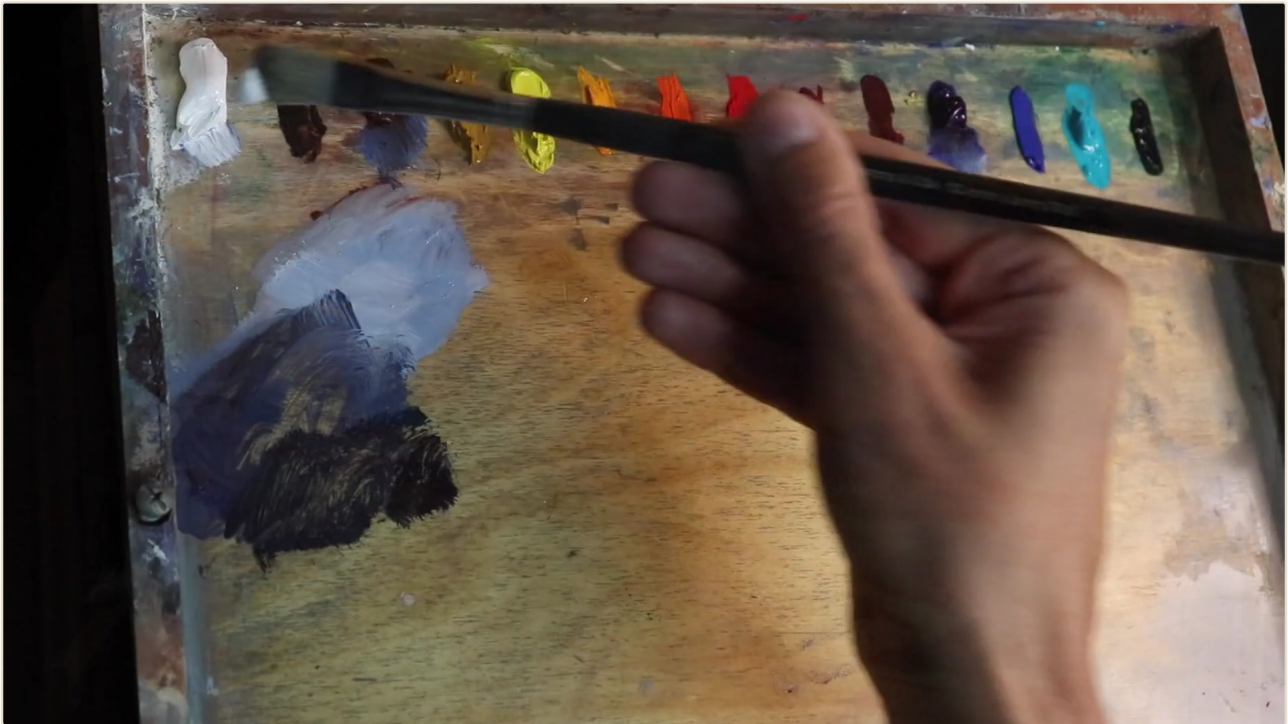
Use Darkest Values in Foreground

In the foreground, use the darkest values to achieve the full extent of the value scale. Mix ultramarine blue with burnt sienna to create a near black for the rock shadows.

PRO TIP

Use similar colors throughout the painting to achieve color harmony and enhance depth.

6 Painting sky and clouds



Paint Cloud Highlights

Mix titanium white with a little burnt sienna to create the cloud highlights. Apply these highlights with loose brushwork to establish basic colors and values. Ensure the highlights are not too bright to prevent them from jumping forward in the painting.

Adjust Distant Clouds

For distant clouds, add a bit more burnt sienna to the mix. This helps the clouds recede and sit back in the sky, maintaining depth in your painting.

Blend Cloud Tones

Blend the cloud tones by working with areas of light and dark, adding a few half tones. Use the same colors from the start to maintain consistency and fluidity.

Mix Sky Colors

Combine ultramarine blue with cobalt teal and titanium white for the sky. Cobalt teal adds a vibrant turquoise blue, ideal for skies and water.

Create Sky Gradient

Darken the upper section of the sky and lighten it towards the horizon. Mix in more titanium white and cobalt teal as you approach the horizon to achieve this gradient.

PRO TIP

Ensure cloud highlights are not too bright to maintain depth and prevent them from jumping forward in the painting.

7 Painting the sea



Mix Sea Colors

Use your existing sky mix as a base. Introduce more ultramarine blue and cobalt teal to the mix. Add yellow oxide to give the sea a turquoise green cast.

Paint the Sea

Apply the mixed colors to the sea area. Leave a few gaps to represent the white water on the crest of the waves as they break.

PRO TIP

Leave gaps in the sea for adding white water on wave crests.

8 Mixing and applying greens for foliage



Mix Olive Green for Foliage

Combine ultramarine blue with yellow oxide to create a natural olive green for the trees and shrubs. Add a little titanium white to lighten the value, and round off the mixture with quinacridone magenta to introduce a red element. If the green appears too saturated, adjust by adding more titanium white.

Apply Olive Green to Cliffs

Use a number two flat brush to apply the olive green to the tops and edges of the cliffs. Focus on creating sharp contrasts between shadows and light areas to define the cliff contours. Employ loose, gestural brush marks for a painterly effect, without worrying about detail.

Mix Vibrant Green for Grass

Create a vibrant green for the grass by mixing yellow oxide with cobalt teal. This combination results in natural grass colors that are not overly saturated. Lighten the value by mixing in a little titanium white.

Apply Vibrant Green to Grass Areas

Use the same number two flat brush to apply the vibrant green to the grassy areas on the cliffs. Notice the enhanced vibrancy achieved by using cobalt teal in the mix.

PRO TIP

Use loose, gestural brush marks to achieve a painterly effect without focusing on detail.

9 Painting the beach sand



Mix Sand Colors

Combine titanium white with yellow oxide and ultramarine blue, then add a touch of quinacridone magenta. This mix will create a balanced sand color without being too saturated.

Balance the Mixture

Ensure the mixture doesn't appear green or overly saturated by adjusting the amount of quinacridone magenta. The red in the magenta will help desaturate the greenish tint from the ultramarine blue and yellow oxide.

Lighten the Sand

Add plenty of titanium white to the mix, as the sand should be one of the lightest values in your painting. This will help achieve the correct tonal dynamic.

Simplify Color Combinations

Aim to keep your color combinations simple, ideally using two to three colors. This will help maintain harmony and clarity in your painting.

Tidy and Detail

Tidy up areas of the painting by restating darks and shadows. Add more detail even in the blocking-in stage to create a solid foundation for further refinement.

PRO TIP

Use quinacridone magenta to desaturate the greenish tint in your sand color mix.

10 Restating darks and shadows



Restate the Darks in the Headland

Use a combination of ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white to restate the darks in the headland. Add a little more titanium white to suggest lighter cliff faces and reflected light.

Define Mid-ground Cliffs

Restate the shadows in the mid-ground cliffs using the same colors. Utilize the shadow mix to define contours, cliff edges, and transitions between light and shadow. Keep shadows on the blue side for darker rocks.

Mix Shadows for Mid-ground Trees

Create a dark green mixture using ultramarine blue and a little yellow oxide for the trees. Add grass shadows with this mix and adjust the value with titanium white if needed.

PRO TIP

Adjust the green shadow mix with titanium white if it appears too dark.

11 Mixing greens and maintaining saturation



Understand Green Saturation

Recognize that green does not maintain its saturation over long distances in a landscape. Distant greens appear less saturated, so avoid making them too vivid to prevent them from leaping forward in the painting.

Adjust Green Saturation

If your green appears too saturated, mix in a color containing red, such as quinacridone magenta, burnt sienna, or cadmium red. These colors are opposite green on the color wheel and help reduce its intensity.

Use Titanium White

Add titanium white to your green mix to further desaturate the color. This will help the green sit correctly in the painting, especially for distant elements.

PRO TIP

Mix in a color with red to reduce green saturation and help it recede in the painting.

12 Detailing cliffs and rock faces



Use a Dagger Brush for Rock Faces

Switch to a dagger brush to suggest rock faces in the cliff. Utilize the tip for finer details and the broad end for bold marks. This brush is ideal for small paintings and helps emphasize the form and shape of rocks.

Paint Cliff Shadows with Reflected Light

Paint the cliff shadows dark but ensure there's enough reflected light to highlight the form. Be cautious not to make the reflected light too bright, as it may move forward in the painting.

Emphasize Shadows in Trees and Shrubs

Use the same shadow mix to accentuate shadows in the trees and shrubs on the cliff. The green mix, containing ultramarine blue, blends well and creates a green cast within the shadows.

Add Lighter Tones to Rock Faces

With a 3/8 inch dagger brush, paint lighter tones on the rock faces and rocks at the cliff's base. Mix ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, titanium white, and a touch of quinacridone magenta for color harmony.

PRO TIP

Use the fine tip of the dagger brush for precise detailing on rock faces.

13 Detailing the sea and waves



Paint the Distant Island

Use a mixture of ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white to paint the island in the distance. Ensure the shadows are lighter than those on the cliffs for a realistic effect.

Add Color to the Sea

Focus on the sea and introduce more color using ultramarine blue, cobalt teal, yellow oxide, and titanium white. Adjust the mix for the horizon with more ultramarine blue and yellow oxide, and for the foreground, increase cobalt teal and titanium white to highlight turquoise tones.

Form the Wave Crests

With a number zero round brush, add the crests of the waves in full sunlight using titanium white mixed with a little burnt sienna. Loosely form the crests and white water in the foreground as a foundation for later detailing.

Set the Value for White Water

Keep the value of the white water darker at this stage. This will allow lighter layers added later to enhance three-dimensional form and make the sea stand out.

PRO TIP

Use varying amounts of the same colors to create depth and interest in different parts of the sea.

14 Blocking in the beach and stream



Paint Sand Shadows

Use a combination of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to paint the shadows in the ridges of sand by the stream. This mix creates a very dark tone, perfect for the darkest shadows in the foreground.

Mix Stream Water Color

Mix ultramarine blue with yellow oxide and a little quinacridone magenta to create a greeny brown color. This reflects the foliage in the cliff and shows the sand underneath the water.

Adjust Stream Water Tone

If the stream water color appears too dark, mix in some titanium white to lighten it. This adjustment helps achieve the correct tonal balance.

Mark Stream and Rock Highlights

Roughly mark where the highlights on the stream and foreground rocks will go. Use a combination of ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white for these highlights.

PRO TIP

Try to block in the painting in one sitting to quickly assess the tonal dynamics and color saturation.

15 Modelling phase: Sky and clouds



Prepare Cloud Highlights

Mix titanium white with a little burnt sienna using a number four flat brush. Apply this mixture with loose, gestural brush marks to add texture to the clouds. For distant cloud highlights, add a bit more burnt sienna to help them recede in the painting.

Create Cloud Shadows

Mix ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white for cloud shadows, varying the amounts to keep it generally on the blue side. Use this mix to form the shape of the clouds, adding highlights and half tones as needed. Adjust the mix for darker areas to enhance depth.

Paint Headland Shadows

Introduce more ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to the cloud shadow mix to darken the value. Paint the shadows on the headland, ensuring the mixture is slightly more blue to sharpen the edges and help it sit back in the landscape.

Refine Sky Colors

Lighten the distant sky by using the same colors from the blocking in stage: titanium white, cobalt teal, and ultramarine blue. Keep the value light to maintain harmony. For the upper section of the sky, mix in more color to darken it.

PRO TIP

Use similar colors throughout the painting to maintain color harmony and cohesion.

16 Modelling phase: Foliage and cliffs



Mix Greens for Foliage

Combine yellow oxide with cobalt teal and add quinacridone magenta to create a vibrant green. Lighten the mixture with titanium white for highlights, which also desaturates the color. This mix will harmonize with the sky and sea due to the shared cobalt teal.

Create Darker Green Tones

For darker, olive-toned shrubs, mix yellow oxide with ultramarine blue and quinacridone magenta. Add titanium white to adjust the value. Introduce phthalo green sparingly to enhance saturation, but balance it with yellow oxide to avoid a cold appearance.

Add Mid-Tones and Shadows

Focus on mid-tones and light areas of foliage using dagger brushes for detail. Use ultramarine blue and yellow oxide for shadows, lightening with titanium white as needed. Darken shadows closer to the viewer with phthalo green and quinacridone magenta.

Highlight Foliage

Enhance the shapes of trees and shrubs by adding highlights with a number one round brush. Use existing greens, titanium white, yellow oxide, and quinacridone magenta. Adjust saturation with cadmium yellow for grass highlights, ensuring a lighter value.

PRO TIP

Use dagger brushes for detailed foliage work, as they offer both fine detail and broad gestural strokes.

17 Modelling phase: Sea and waves



Mix Sea Colors

Mix ultramarine blue with yellow oxide, titanium white, and cobalt teal. Adjust the mixtures to create different tones within the water. Use more ultramarine blue towards the horizon for shadowed areas.

Paint Breaking Waves

For the breaking waves in the foreground, use more cobalt teal, titanium white, and yellow oxide for a lighter, more turquoise appearance. Ensure the face of the main breaking wave is darker by adding more cobalt teal and ultramarine blue, but keep it soft and inviting.

Add White Water and Foam

Reapply the white water on the crest of the waves and the foam in the foreshore. Use a mixture of titanium white with a little burnt sienna and ultramarine blue to keep the white slightly darker. This will allow lighter tones added later to make the waves come alive.

PRO TIP

Edge everything a little darker initially, saving the lightest values for the end to enhance the painting's depth.

18 Modelling phase: Beach and rocks



Add Shadows to Breaking Waves

Mix ultramarine blue with a tiny amount of burnt sienna and titanium white. Use this mixture to add shadows to the breaking waves. This will give depth and dimension to the waves.

Position the Water

Adjust the position of the water slightly on the canvas. This helps in refining the composition and ensuring balance in the scene.

PRO TIP

Focus on completing the sky, cliffs, and sea before detailing the beach and rocks.

19 Final details on cliffs and foliage



Enhance Cloud Highlights

Mix pure titanium white with a touch of yellow oxide to create a warm highlight color for the clouds. Use a number 4 flat brush to apply these highlights, maintaining loose brushwork to suggest sunlight shining behind the clouds. Tidy up the cloud shadows using ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white, ensuring the base of the shadows is slightly darker.

Refine Distant Sky

Add lighter color to the distant sky on the horizon using a mix of titanium white, ultramarine blue, and cobalt teal. Feather the ends of some clouds with this mix to enhance the effect of bright sunlight behind them.

Add Reflected Light on Headland

Introduce a slightly lighter tone to the headland to suggest rock faces, using ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white. This will help define the forms and add depth to the headland.

Highlight Foliage on Cliffs

Mix a more saturated green with yellow oxide, ultramarine blue, and cadmium yellow, adjusting with quinacridone magenta and titanium white for lighter value. Use this to highlight leaves and foliage in sunlight, creating vibrant greens. For Puhutokawa trees, add phthalo green and yellow oxide, lightening with titanium white.

Detail Cliffs and Trees

Use a number zero round brush to add highlights on cliff ridges and tree canopies. Create straw-colored grass with yellow oxide, quinacridone magenta, and your existing green mix, lightening with titanium white as needed. Add more detail to the right-side cliffs, using ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white for reflected light.

PRO TIP

Use phthalo green sparingly due to its high chroma, adjusting with other colors to achieve natural greens.

20 Final details on sea and stream



Add Sea Spray Highlights

Mix titanium white with a small amount of yellow oxide to warm up the white. Use the paint straight from the tube without thinning it, and dry brush it onto the linen. This will create a glowing effect on the waves, enhancing the bright sunshine reflecting off the water.

Create Sparkles in the Water

Using a number zero round brush, apply the same paint mixture to add sweeping lines and dots on the wave crests. Reload your brush frequently to maintain thick paint for vibrant sparkles. These highlights will contrast with the darker white water, bringing the sea to life.

Highlight Rocks Below Cliffs

Mix ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and titanium white to create a light value. Use a number zero round brush to paint highlights on the rocks, ensuring they have a three-dimensional form. Adjust the mixture to lean towards blue or burnt sienna as needed for variety.

Define Foreground Rocks and Sand

Establish basic rock shapes with a mix of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna for shadows. Lighten the sand value by mixing titanium white, yellow oxide, ultramarine blue, and quinacridone magenta. Use smaller brushes for detailed marks around rocks and sunlit areas.

Add Stream Sparkles and Highlights

Apply the same titanium white and yellow oxide mix for sparkles on the stream to convey strong sunlight. For water reflecting the sky, mix titanium white with ultramarine blue and cobalt teal. Ensure this layer is thicker than previous ones for added depth.

Finish with Foliage Highlights

Use a number zero round brush to apply a lighter green mix on the foliage, enhancing the three-dimensional form. Start with yellow oxide and ultramarine blue, add cadmium yellow for saturation, and quinacridone magenta for balance. Lighten with titanium white for sunlit effects.

PRO TIP

Use a thicker paint layer for final highlights to enhance depth and sunlight effects.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your Taupo Bay painting journey by preparing your canvas with a warm burnt sienna wash, setting the stage for a vibrant landscape. Sketch your composition with confidence, using Liquin to thin your paint and speed up drying times. As you lay out your design, let the headland be your focal point, guiding the viewer's eye with thoughtful composition adjustments.

Dive into your color palette with a rich array of hues, establishing depth with dark values to create atmospheric perspective. Paint with intention, using broad strokes for clouds and headland shadows, while ensuring your colors harmonize across the canvas. As you progress, layer your sky and sea with dynamic blues and greens, leaving room for the play of light on wave crests.

In the final stages, refine your painting with detailed brushwork on cliffs, rocks, and foliage. Use your dagger brush for precision, and adjust your greens to reflect distance and depth. Balance your composition by restating darks and highlights, ensuring your painting captures the essence of Taupo Bay with clarity and vibrancy.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use Liquin Original to thin paint and speed up drying time.
- Adjust composition elements to enhance the overall design.
- Start with the darkest values to establish depth and perspective.
- Mix burnt sienna with ultramarine blue for neutral grays with a blue cast.
- Ensure cloud highlights are not too bright to maintain depth.
- Leave gaps in the sea for adding white water on wave crests.
- Use loose, gestural brush marks for a painterly effect.
- Mix in a color with red to reduce green saturation and help it recede.



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