Color in nature is not the color in a tube of paint, and artists spend years learning how to reconcile one with the other. Some represent nature in shades of gray, then lay veils of transparent color on top. Others combine a limited number of tube colors to mimic the subtle shifts of hue, value, and intensity in nature. And then there are painters like Camille Przewodek, who lays down one color that accurately represents what she observes and then gauges every other color mixture against that first spot of pigment. “If your first note of color is correct, then you can comfortably put another next to it, and so on,” Przewodek says. “There are theories about how all this works, but the only way to really learn is to be out in nature, observing and painting — that is how your color sense evolves.”

Przewodek’s approach to painting is influenced by that of her teacher Henry Hensche (1899-1992) and his teacher Charles Hawthorne (1872-1930). But as she is quick to point out, her methods of teaching and painting are somewhat different from those of others associated with their school, the Cape School of Art in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

“I continue the basic exercises of painting colored blocks in sunlight, as well as the so-called ‘mud head’ portraits of figures posed with the light behind them, casting their faces completely in shadow,” she explains. “But one of the key areas in which I differ is that I have students begin with a limited palette of just six tube colors, not a full palette.”
Meadow at Sunset
2010, oil, 22 x 30 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

expand their palettes to include more pigments, and can also tackle more difficult subjects, such as live models posing outdoors.

"It's very important to paint from life and not photographs," Przewodek says. "Artists have to first learn to understand the subtleties of color in nature before they can interpret the distorted images in photographs. Artists need to learn what happens in nature and then bring that understanding and the memory of visual experiences into the studio. That's about the only way to avoid copying photographs."

Przewodek and her husband, artist Dale Axelrod, are innovators in the field of art education because they have a well-developed program of distance learning and offer a regular series of classes in their studios in Petaluma, California. Przewodek says, "About 15 online students send digital photographs of up to three paintings, and Dale puts those on a gray background on the computer monitor so I can quickly comment on

Vineyard Melody
2009, oil, 16 x 20 in.
Private collection
Plein air

AT WORK IN THE SUN
Przewodek recommends that students begin painting blocks sitting in direct sunlight, using permanent alizarin crimson, cadmium red light (or Winsor red), cadmium lemon, cadmium yellow, ultramarine blue, memento blue hue (or Sennelier blue by Rembrandt), and titanium white. Once they are comfortable working with that limited range of warm and cool variations of the primary colors, they can

ARTIST DATA
NAME: Camille Przewodek
BIRTHDATE: 1947
BIRTHPLACE: Detroit, MI
LOCATION: Petaluma, CA
INFLUENCES: Dale Axelrod, Cedric Egeli, Dan Pinkham, Carolyn Anderson, Mary Cassatt, Joaquin Sorolla, Henry Hensche, Charles Hawthorne, Frank Benson, Nicola Fechin, Claude Monet, Robert Henri, and Nina Kostina
the work. On Monday afternoons I schedule 15 minutes of one-on-one dialogue with each student, using the GoToMeeting.com online conferencing application. The students can watch as I adjust their paintings on-screen, using a digital version of my oil palette loaded into a computer paint program, and then ask questions until they understand the critique.

“Completion of a five-day live workshop is a prerequisite for online study, and most students who enroll in one or more four-week sessions then work on their own for a while or sign up for another live workshop, during which they can paint with me again for several days in a row.”

If students live near Przewodek and Axelrod, they can attend a Monday-morning class that meets for a critique in her studio before going out on location. Since both instructors studied with Hensche, their advice is consistent and they agree on the steps needed to make significant improvement in painting. Przewodek also accepts invitations to teach four- or five-day workshops and has developed a following in communities in Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Arizona, and Mississippi.

GETTING PERSONAL
The classes held in the California studio and in out-of-town locations allow students to have a great deal of personal interaction with Przewodek. “Even students who previously studied with me begin the classes by doing the block studies,” she explains. “It’s like a pianist limbering up by playing the scales. Once they have completed those, they can work on mud heads or landscape paintings, depending on their skill levels and interests.

“As I constantly remind students, this is a long-term pursuit, not a short-term hobby. If they take it seriously and paint on a regular basis, they can make significant progress, and I have several artists currently studying with me who have advanced surprisingly fast. Nevertheless, there is always more to learn, and it helps to work with an instructor who can key his or her advice to the student’s individual needs and aspirations. I’ve been painting outdoors for about 30 years, and I face new challenges every time I set up my easel, so I understand that education is a continual process.”

On the last day of a workshop, Przewodek offers to discuss any of a number of topics of

Morning Stroll
2009, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Private collection
Plein air
interest to the students, but more often than not they want her to discuss how to promote and sell their artwork.

“I’ve been marketing my own work for a long time, so I have information that students don’t often get from other workshop instructors,” Przewodek says. “But before I talk about galleries, advertising, the Internet, competitions, pricing, etc., I ask the students to tell me about their personal vision for themselves as artists. I ask them to define what excites them, what inspires them, and how they want to be seen as painters. The worst thing an artist could do is to try to put their own passion aside in order to fulfill the ambitions of a gallery owner, critic, teacher, or friend. Once an artist has a firm understanding of himself or herself, it will be easier to determine what professional steps they should take.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISION

Przewodek goes on, “There are no right or wrong decisions if an artist is realizing his or her personal vision. I tell students what I have done over the past 20 years, but in no way am I suggesting they have to make the same choices. If they love teaching, for example, they should develop a career as a teacher. If they want to become part of a social group of artists, they can join a local, regional, or national organization and have a great time working with other artists. And if they want to have a successful business selling paintings, as I have had, then they have to become the best painters they can be and establish their own identity.

“By all means they should avoid falling into the trap of copying their teachers or pursuing the fashions of the day. Unfortunately, there are a lot of misguided artists copying the style of painters like Ken Auster and Kevin Macpherson, and they are wasting their careers.

“I made a decision 20 years ago that I would take charge of my career and use the money I would have otherwise paid galleries in commissions as a resource for promoting myself. I establish an annual budget for advertising in art publications, maintaining my website, and promoting my business. I really enjoy all of that because I feel as though I have a lump of clay in my hand and I can shape into anything I want.”

Finally, says Przewodek, “The last piece of advice I try to leave with students is that they have to be positive about themselves and their prospects. No one wants to be around depressed, self-indulgent artists, least of all collectors who want to know the paintings they buy today have the potential to be worth more tomorrow.”

M. Stephen Doherty is Editor of PleinAir magazine.
Coastal Fog
2006, oil, 9 x 12 in.
Private collection
Plein air
Demonstration: River View – North

STEP 1: The artist uses a thin mixture of oil color to establish the scale and placement of the shapes.

STEP 2: Using a brush and palette knife, Przewodek applies mixtures of oil color that establish a clear separation between the warm- and cool-colored shapes.

STEP 3: The artist breaks up the big shapes with additional mixtures of warm and cool oil color.

The completed painting: 
River View — North
2011, oil, 8 x 10 in.
Collection the artist 
Plein air