



Handwritten signature and date
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Architectural rendering
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Handwritten signature and date: JMS/2008

The Dennis Technique for SketchUp Models in Photoshop

The big concept is to put a Black & White drawing over a coloured one and then artistically erase just enough of the top Black and White so that essential parts of the drawing are accented with colour. It is easy to line up the layers in Photoshop if they are rendered with the same resolution from the same position with the same camera lens.

Your Photoshop file should contain two groups of layers - SketchUp Generated Layers and Support Layers.

You'll need three SketchUp Generated Layers:

- A. Colour Texture and Shadows.
- B. Line Art only
- C. Line Art and Shadows

Make these to contain images from three saved pages in SketchUp...

A. The "Colour Textures and Shadow" layer represents the watercolour component of the sketch.

The first step is File / Export / 2D Graphic /Export - type = Jpg, that would have NO Edges. Use a blue colour for the background and white for the gradient ground (see properties/colour). This background colour combination will later allow you to easily select the sky in Photoshop so it can be replaced with a watercolour wash. Set pixel dimensions to be 3000 pixels wide (the height dimension will come up automatically). Open the Image in Photoshop then duplicate the background layer and erase the original background. Now, use the Magic Wand Tool to select the sky. Once the sky is selected - delete it. Later this will allow you to put a watercolour wash image of fluffy clouds under the building layer. It is really difficult to keep watercolour edges perfectly straight, so the next step will make your heart bleed; you've got to distort the precious image that took you so much effort to create. In Photoshop, go Filter/ Distort/ Ripple (medium 50% waves). Now, you've got slight imperfections that are similar to watercolour paintings.

B. The "Line Art" layer pretends to be the pencil work over the loose watercolour.

In SketchUp Set Face Display to Hidden Line, for Edge Style choose Jitter and Extensions (about 3 to 5 pixels), switch background colour to white. Set shadows to "Off". It is also a good idea to set the edges to loose the contrast with distance from the camera. Now you are ready to render - File / Export / 2D Graphic /Export type - Jpg. Make sure that pixel dimensions in the Options Menu are the same as for previous drawing. Open the drawing in Photoshop, go to Select, choose ALL and copy the selection to the clipboard. Switch to the previous drawing and paste the Line Art. Both drawings should line up perfectly. You now have a Black & White image covering everything else. However, all we need is just the line work to lay over the colour. To do this, go to Layer fly-out, find Blending Options roll down menu and instead of Normal select Multiply. Now your drawing looks like a normal SketchUp image with colours bleeding into each other under the hard line work.

C. The "Line Art and Shadows" is the top layer that we will be erasing holes in.

That is where most of the "magic" is happening. Prepare SketchUp for export in the same way you did for the "Line Art", only this time turn on the shadows. Again, Make sure you are using exactly the same view and same resolution for you Jpg file. Open, Copy and Paste the image into the Photoshop file that you were working with as before. What you should see is your brand new B&W shadow drawing covering everything that you've done. That's where the real art begins: get a rough big brush eraser of your choice and set it's opacity to 50%. Start erasing the top layer. Do it really fast, leaving many imperfections. Erase only those areas that absolutely essential to the presentation. The more white drawing you leave the better the final image is going to look. Go over the top layer second time with the 50% eraser that should give the effect a layering brush strokes. Keep your strokes very loose, giving every colour field a several passes with the eraser. Keep the edges of the drawing very light and clear it up a bit more at the focal point of the presentation. The way you move your eraser makes a big difference. The image will look more like watercolour if the eraser is moved in a similar way as a real brush. For example, where there are 2 different colour fields bordering each other a brush would finish one field before moving into another.

The two Support Layers are used to insert a background sky, vignette the edges and perhaps put in a signature:

D. Water Colour Sky Wash Layer

E. White Vignette Layer.

D. The Water Colour Sky Wash is easy to do - it is a vivid cloud photo with Dry Brush effect (in Photoshop go: effects /artistic /dry brush). Vignette the edges with a soft eraser and use the roughest effect settings. Insert the image under your colour layer and stretch to an appropriate size.

E. The White Vignette layer is a place where you can artistically adjust the edge of the drawing. The purpose is to evoke the look of a loose sketch. Since sketches never fill the entire drawing field there should be a soft edge to the composition. Create a new Layer in Photoshop and, make a big fat white frame for your drawing, make it creep-in on your drawing significantly. Then get a dig rough brush shaped eraser and clear out only those covered parts of the drawing that are absolutely essential - the trick is to cover up as much of the drawing as you can afford. Breaking away from a "square cut" rectangular composition is one of the purposes of this. After clearing the non-essential parts of the drawing make sure there are no straight white edges left.

Note:

Another good trick is to go around with a 50% opacity eraser once and then go around a second time with a 100% opacity eraser, leaving some of the field to be just 50% erased. This way you get a layering effect, as if you used several layers of watercolour over the drawing surface.

Grant Marshall's Comments:

If I may add a few things I've learned using this technique:

1. When you are exporting your images from SketchUp, consider the possibility that you might have to export a few more later (i.e.: after you think you're finished). I've had it happen that the client loves the images but wants a few small changes: "move the car a bit, lose the tree, change those gables to hips, and shift the window".

Those things would take a just few minutes of modelling in SketchUp, exporting and pasting the affected areas into your 'doctored' pictures *IF* you can export at exactly the same image dimensions. If you've changed your camera position or your working window size since you exported last time, you're screwed; it's quicker to start again.

In other words, in an effort to keep my drawing window constant, I run SketchUp full-screen and I don't mess with my toolbars - OR you can always save pages, don't move the camera, keep the window constant and leave everything the same size always! [TIG].

2. Avoid very 'mechanical' textures like roof tiles, bricks, tiles etc. when you're using this technique. It just doesn't look right when you have this loose, sketchy 'watercolour' image and you take a stroke with a big, chunky eraser and it uncovers a precise patch of Letraset-perfect bricks. You wouldn't draw perfect bricks in a loose sketch, so why 'erase' them in?

It's probably better to turn off textures and export flat colours.

3. If your colour-image layer is flat colours (i.e.: not textures and not gradients) then the magic wand selector thing in Photoshop can be very useful.

On the colour layer you can select, say green grass, then erase on the white layer and it'll only expose grass, it won't go 'outside the lines'.

On the one hand this may seem a bit too precise for such a loose technique, but on the other it makes it more real in that it stops those long strokes which miraculously pass across different colour zones. Those are always a dead giveaway, if you were using real colours you would most definitely work one zone at a time, as Dennis points out.

The masking also makes it super-quick - you can scribble as fast as you like and stay inside the lines.

I used this technique quite a bit, though simplified a bit, I only use 2 layers. It's so fast I was able to use it to do a mock-up of a watercolour on my laptop in a client meeting a few months back. The client had decided on a point of view and I had saved a page. We were discussing where to fade the detail out when he had to take a phone call. I had my stylus with me so I thought "what the heck". I exported 2 images, zipped around with the eraser, and when he returned I was able to say, "How about this?"...
