

SIMPLE SCENERY AGING - HOLLYWOOD STYLE

By Donna Wymore, Colorado Scenery

The Painter's Journal, Spring 2006

Ever watch a film and wonder what techniques were used to paint the scenery? If so, you're not the only one!

As a scenic artist on many feature films, television shows and commercials, I was often asked to make the scenery or the film location "look old." Sometimes it was scenery built in a scenery studio and sometimes it was a real building at a film location. Depending on what the art director (that is what the set designer is called on feature films) had required, aging a set could be as complicated as a twenty step/three day procedure or could be as simple as the process I've outlined here.

What you will need:

- 2 pump-style, gallon-sized garden sprayers, one filled with water

- a strainer bag

- 2-4 chip brushes, at least 3" wide

- some raw umber paint

- some universal tints (raw umber, burnt umber, raw sienna and black are very handy); some brand names are

Pro-line and Cal-tint

- some Rosco (or other brand) flat PVA medium

- some sawdust (this technique is messy, so you will need something to soak up the excess off the floor or ground)

- a pair of safety glasses

- drop cloths for covering up surround tools and scenery

Step One

Make sure your scenery is standing vertically. Prime and base coat your piece of scenery as you would normally do. If you have a choice, this technique works best on semi-gloss finishes because the slicker surface allows the glaze (see step two) to roll off more easily. Flat-finish paint is fine, too, but the aging glaze will sink in faster. When using a flat finish, you may have to do a sample board to insure your final look.

Step Two

Mix your aging color or colors. Usually, something in the raw umber range works well. You can vary it, depending on the look you want to achieve. Use a combination of paint, polyvinyl acrylic (also called PVA) or a product like Rosco flat, and universal tint to create your mixture. You will be making a “glaze” or semitransparent paint. Sorry, no formulas here. The ration of the items depends on the look you want to achieve. Remember, never use just tint alone; because it has no binder, it will not dry properly nor stick correctly. By adding the PVA and tint, you can change color and extend the viscosity of the paint while not making extra volumes of paint. Because it has to be rather thin to go through the sprayer, add water to the mixture as needed to make it the right consistency for spraying. Fill your second sprayer with plain water. Put on your safety glasses and pump up both sprayers.

Step Three

Place the sawdust at the bottom of your scenery to soak up excess water and paint. Twist the nozzle on both sprayer ends to be a little more toward “stream” rather than towards “spray.” Be sure no one is walking behind your scenery and that you’ve covered up any tools and other scenery with a drop cloth. Pointing the paint-filled sprayer at the top of your scenery, squirt a small amount of paint along the top edge.

Step Four

Quickly take your water-filled sprayer and squirt the water onto the wet paint, moving it to flow downwards. Beware of “snaky” runs. You want it to look “smooth.” If it gets “snaky,” apply more water to smooth it out. The amount of water used will determine the opaqueness of the color and the overall look. Remember, the paint will dry LIGHTER than what it looks like wet. While the glaze is still wet, use the chip brush to remove anything that is spotty or that you don’t like.

Step Five

Let the paint dry completely! After it’s dry, you can repeat the process by adding more colors or you can just plain leave it alone. For instance, by adding more colors and layers, different effects can be created, like a rust effect.

Voila! Easy “Hollywood-style” aging.

Films in which this technique was used:

The Hanoi Hilton (1987) - prison courtyard scenes and prison hallway scenes midway through the film.

Great Balls of Fire (1989) - church interior scene, which is the last scene of the film.

Switchback (1997) - aging on real trains in the train fight scene, which is the second to last scene of the film.

Never Too Young to Die (1986) - amphitheater gang war scene midway through the film.