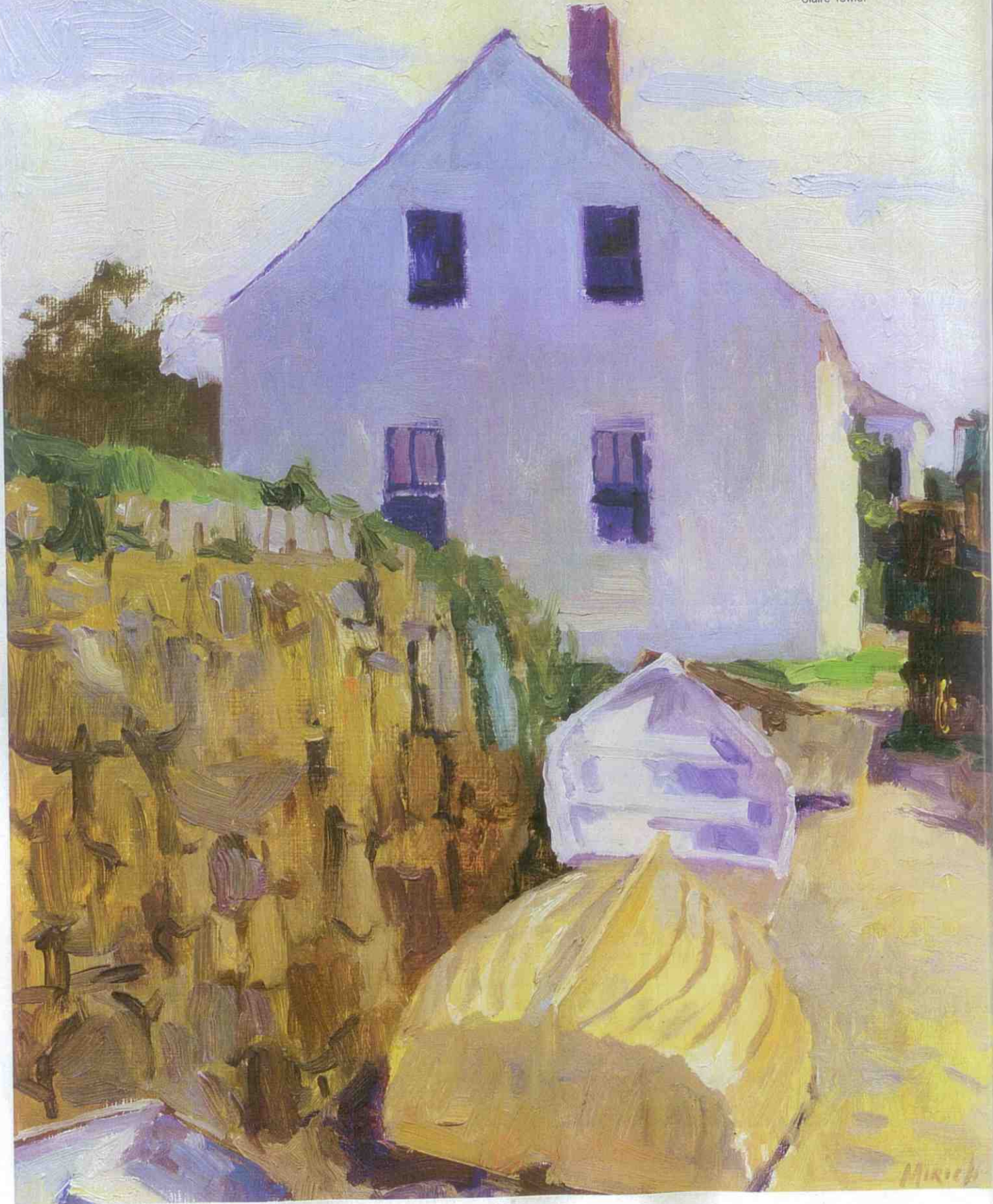


The White House  
on Monhegan  
Island, Maine  
2003, oil on board,  
16 x 12. Collection  
Claire Towle.



# Drawing Upon & Local Community Landscape

Fellowship with other artists and strong ties to the land and sea in his area have strengthened the artwork of Southern California artist **Stephen Eugene Mirich**. | **by Molly Siple**

Oil painter Stephen Eugene Mirich has always lived close to the sea. He was raised in San Pedro, California, an active fishing port that is part of the Port of Los Angeles. "This huge port is a unique inspiration for my work, as are the boats and all the activities associated with the fishing industry," he says. Mirich drew as a child, assembled a good number of model ships, found high-school art classes lacking, and enrolled in architecture at the local city college because this was the only program he could find that offered classes in structural drawing. But he soon realized that his fascination with painting would not wait for retirement.

The sea and land that speak to him are now right outside his studio. In 1986 he settled in Portuguese Bend on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, just south of Los Angeles, where the view from his back porch includes hillsides dotted with eucalyptus and chaparral, unspoiled coves, and a swath of blue Pacific with Catalina Island on the horizon. He needs only to step out the door to have his pick of subject matter to hone his painting skills.

Over the years this setting has also become a gathering place and urban oasis for artist friends. Visitors sense the natural peace of the place as soon as they open their car door. They might even be greeted by the screech of one of the peacocks

that perch in the trees, imported long ago by affluent residents. Mirich is known as a welcoming and generous host with a reputation for good food—his résumé includes various stints as a cook on tugboats. "Being part of a community of artists and sharing ideas around a dinner table are essential parts of my lifestyle as an artist—another good reason, along with living in a beautiful setting, to follow a career in painting," he says.

Mirich's art training included formal instruction coupled with practice and more practice—"putting in the miles," as he says. Theodore Lukits (1897–1992) was an important teacher. "Lukits insisted that the ability to draw was not just a gift for the chosen few but could be learned by following an exacting procedure that starts with reference points and finishes with defining contour lines," Mirich says. "He gave us a way to 'prove' our drawings that I rely on to this day.

"You need a strong grounding in drawing for hand-eye coordination," Mirich continues. "It's drawing that controls where you want your brush to go. Skilled drawing is especially important when you're painting a very well-known locale that the viewer will be familiar with. The scene you paint must appear accurate, but an artist has to walk a tightrope between what a place actually looks like and what works artistically."

Drawing is Mirich's first step when starting a painting.

