

Adobe Illustrator

# Be inspired by everyday objects

**Aaron Miller**

demonstrates how to turn inanimate objects into characters full of life and personality

**If you're struggling for character inspiration, just look around your desk, studio or house for ideas: you'll be amazed at the opportunities that present themselves.** Whether it's a basil plant, the fridge in your kitchen or ice cubes in your drink, inanimate objects make a great base for new characters – try bringing one to life and see how your character unfolds.

In this project I show you how to take inspiration from a simple, everyday object, and develop it into a unique character in Illustrator. I discuss the use of colour, and share a few expert tips to inject some depth and personality into your design.



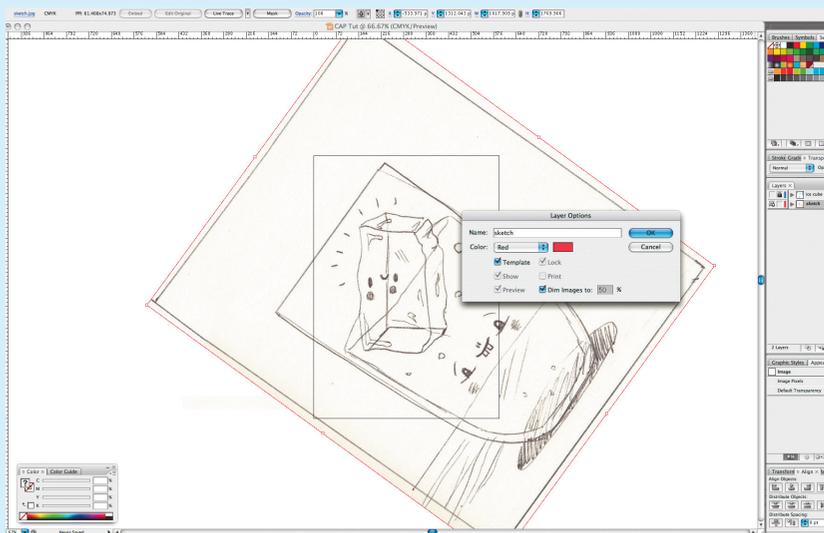
**Aaron Miller**

A freelance illustrator based in Cheltenham, UK, Miller took the leap into full-time freelance illustration after nearly a year of working as a pizza chef by day and illustrating by night.  
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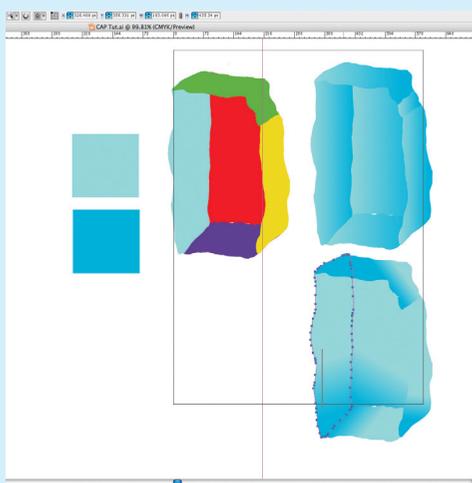
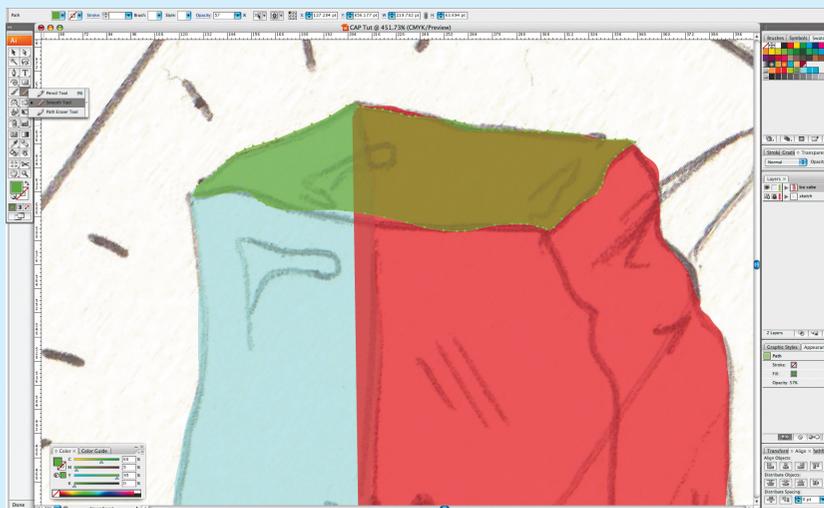
**Skills**

- Master transparencies and the Pathfinder palette
- Experiment with layer properties
- Use Illustrator's Blur effects

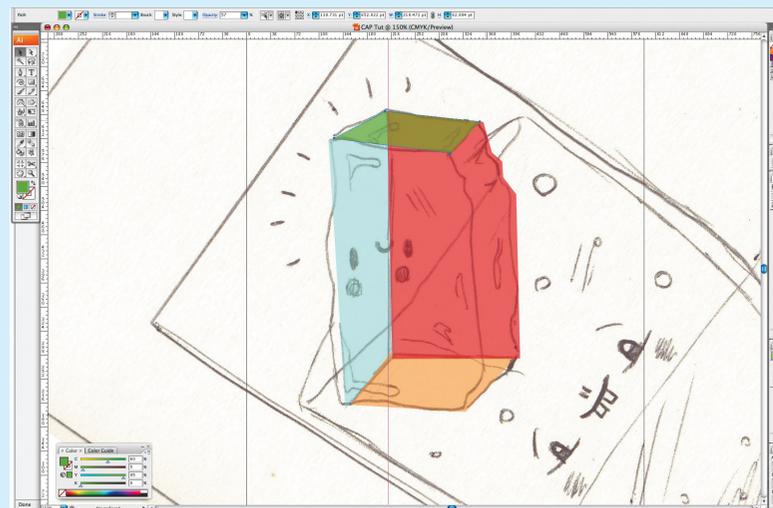




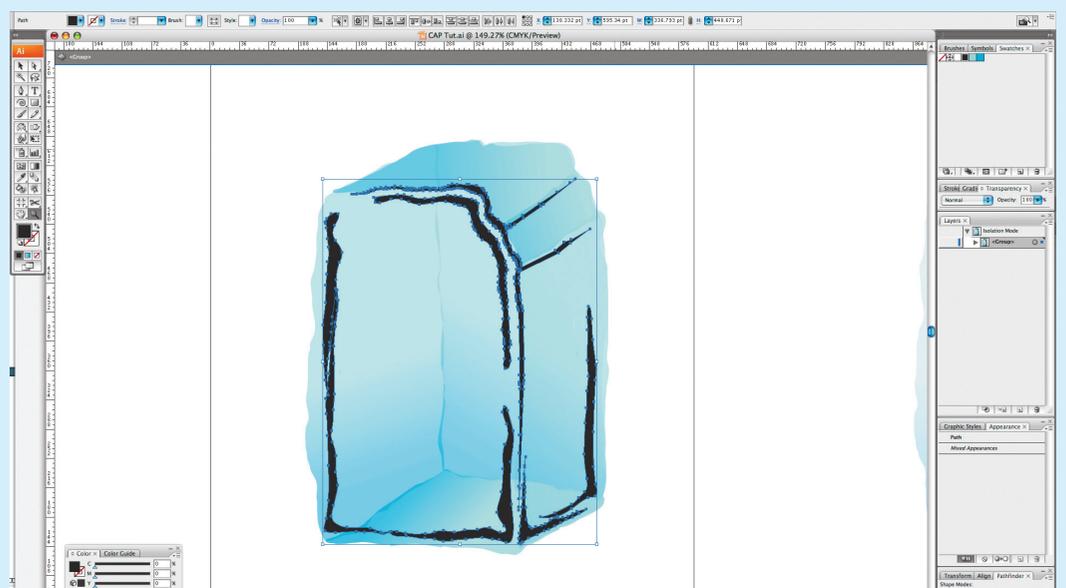
**01** Start with a blank page of your sketchbook, and begin drawing whatever catches your eye: for me, it was the ice cubes in my orange juice. Your drawing will be noticeably better if you use real life reference. Once happy with the final sketch, scan it in, and place it in a new Illustrator document (File>Place). I rotated my image so that the ice cube would be ready to trace. Double-click the layer in the Layer palette, and click 'Dim Images to 50%', then lock and template the layer.



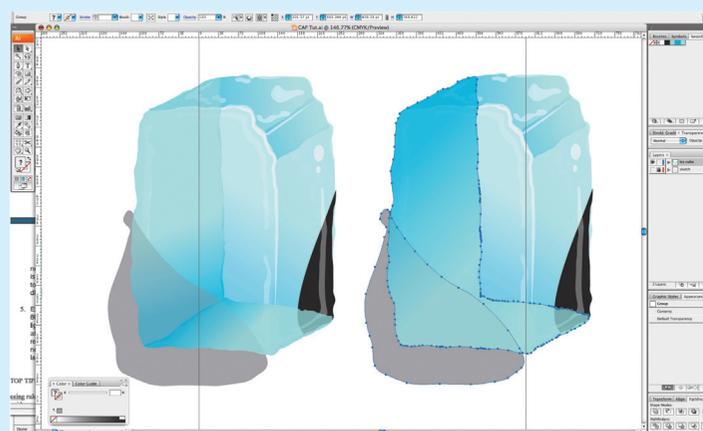
**03** Continue to draw the remaining sides, and give them a light-to-dark blue gradient (I used: #AFDFE5 and #58B7DD). Select the other layers, and give them the same gradient using the Eyedropper tool. You need to align the gradients in such way that the centre of the ice cube is darker than the edges, so drag the Gradient tool diagonally towards the centre, and repeat for each face. Experiment with the direction until you're happy. (I've included a vector file on your cover disc for reference.)



**02** On a new layer, drag a vertical ruler (Ctrl/Cmnd+R) onto the canvas. Now create the basic ice cube by tracing your sketch with the Pen tool. I've changed the colours of each face so you can see how I constructed the basic shapes – notice how I've missed out the front face. Once you've traced the basic shape, use the Pencil tool to roughen the edges a little, and add some character to the lines.



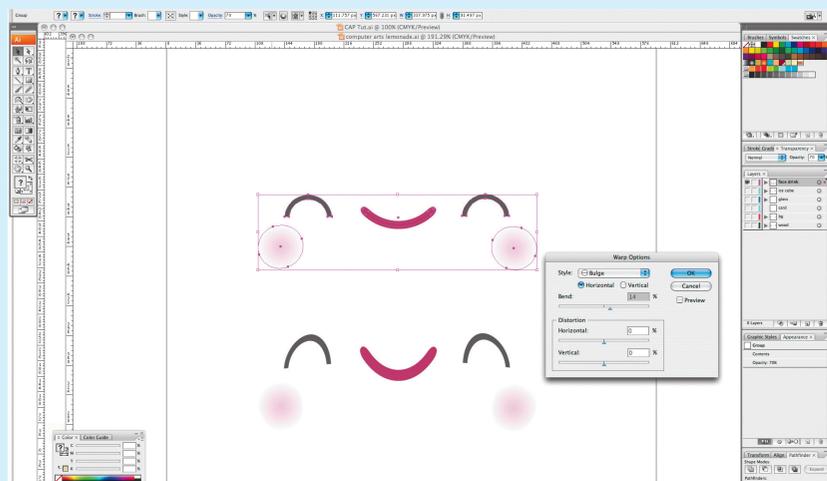
**04** Experiment with the transparency of each side, anywhere from 40-80% as there is no right or wrong way. You now need to add some highlights to make the object look more realistic, and help define its shape. Try looking at real life reference for this if you can, and keep them as simple highlights around the edges of the ice cube. Use the Pen tool, set the Blending Mode of the highlights to Screen, change the colour to white, and experiment with the transparency.



**05** Now add some large reflections. Using the Pen tool, draw a large shape over the top of the ice cube. Select the left and bottom faces, duplicate them in front (Ctrl/Cmnd+F), then in the Pathfinder palette select 'Add to Shape Area'. Select the new shape and the reflection, and click 'Intersect Shape Areas' in the Pathfinder palette, and then expand its appearance. Remember to vary the opacity of each shape.



**06** Now add a few drips and drops to really boost the level of realism. Using the Ellipse tool, draw a circle, and use the Direct Selection tool to tweak its shape. Add a smaller, white ellipse, then go to Effect>Blur>Gaussian Blur. I used a 3-pixel blur, but experiment depending on your canvas size. Duplicate the droplet, and paste it behind. Move it down slightly, and give it a darker blue colour to act as a drop shadow.



**08** To make the ice cube look as though it's floating, duplicate the juice shape, and paste it in front (Ctrl/Cmd+F). Change the Opacity to around 30%. We need to give the glass some character, so draw a face on one of the sides. The expression will define the illustration, and show the bond between the characters. Once you're happy with it, group it, and go to Effect>Warp>Bulge, and change the Bend value to 14%.



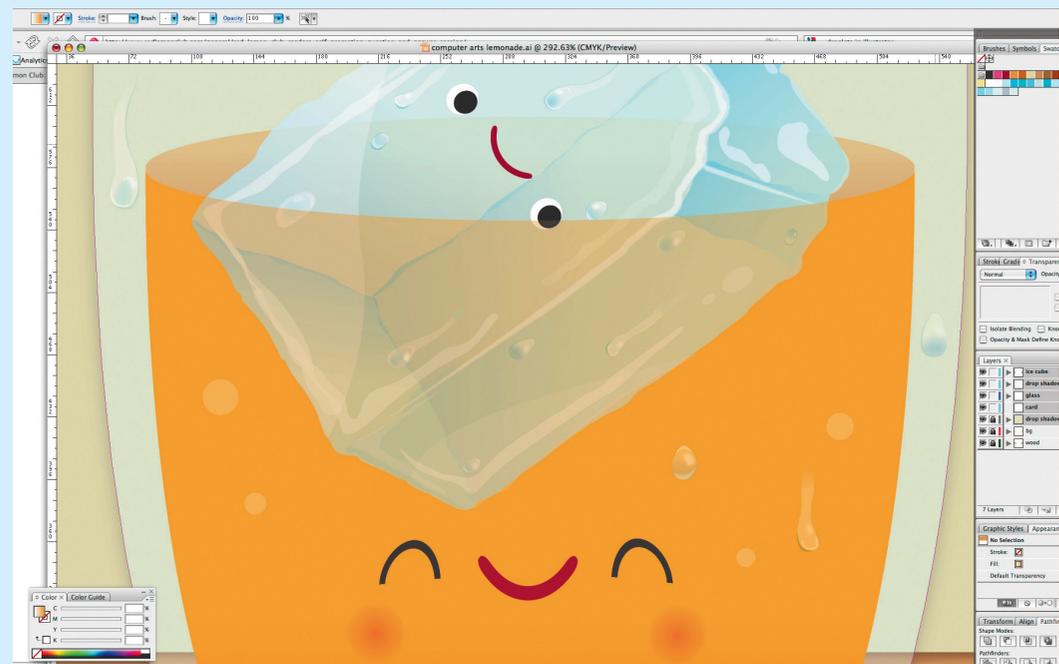
**07** It's time to put the character in context and inject some personality. I've added a face by using the Ellipse tool for eyes, and the Pen tool for a simple smile. Select everything, and group it all together (Ctrl/Cmd+G). Add a background to the illustration, and draw a glass using the Pen tool and Pathfinder palette if you need to. Duplicate this to create the juice. You'll find some swatches on your cover disc, which will show you the colours I used – feel free to use them in your work.

### Wood grain effect

The wood grain is made up of a series of lines. Group them all, and apply the Rotate tool. Now single-click the object until the drop-down list appears, and select the Warp tool. Double-click this to bring up its settings, and change the Width and Height values to around 15px, depending on your canvas size. Try to apply this effect sparingly to keep the effect random. For increased realism, then apply the Twirl tool, which is also found in the drop-down list.

### Crop your image

When you've finished your illustration, draw a rectangle with the Rectangle tool to the size of the canvas. In the Align palette, click the Align To Artboard button, then click Horizontal Align Centre, and Vertical Align Centre. Keep the shape selected, and go to Object>Crop Area>Make.



**09** The final elements to add to the illustration are some droplets to the outside of the glass, bubbles (white ellipses set to around 60% Opacity), and some wood grain. This project is all about experimenting, and the techniques can be applied to numerous projects: the possibilities are endless, just look around.