

THE URBAN SKETCHING HANDBOOK

ARCHITECTURE AND CITYSCAPES

Tips and Techniques for Drawing on Location



**GABRIEL
CAMPANARIO**

**THE URBAN
SKETCHING
HANDBOOK**

ARCHITECTURE AND CITYSCAPES

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peek at our crafty world!

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Summary: "Award-winning illustrator Gabriel Campanario first introduced his approach to drawing in *The Art of Urban Sketching*, a showcase of more than 500 sketches and drawing tips shared by more than 100 urban sketchers around the world. Now, he drills down into specific challenges of making sketches on location, rain or shine, quickly or slowly, and the most suitable techniques for every situation, in *The Urban Sketching Handbook* series."

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ARCHITECTURE AND CITYSCAPES

Tips and Techniques for Drawing on Location



**GABRIEL
CAMPANARIO**



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About This Series

As hobbies go, urban sketching is simple and accessible. All you need to do is grab some drawing tools and capture what's happening in your city or neighborhood.

Once you get out and about, pen or pencil in hand, you'll discover the many different layers and aspects of urban sketching: How can I draw people when they move around so much? Do I have to sketch every brick? What should I do with my sketches when I'm done?

Whether you are a seasoned sketcher or just starting out, *The Urban Sketching Handbook* lays out key strategies and examples that will come in handy each time you open your sketchbook.

Sketchbook



Fountain pen



Pencil



Ballpoint pen



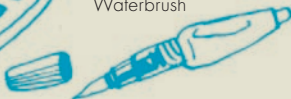
Mechanical Pencil



Watercolors



Waterbrush



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➡ Oh, the places you'll discover! The best part of urban sketching is stumbling upon cityscapes you didn't even know existed.

Blaine Stairway, Seattle

9.6" x 13.4" | 24.5 x 34 cm;

Lamy Safari fountain pen,

Noodler's black ink, and Daniel

Smith watercolors; About an hour.



☺ Think of sketching architecture, especially old buildings, as a time-traveling experience. I like to imagine how life must have been for the original occupants.

Stimson and Green Mansion, Seattle

8.6" x 9.5" | 22 x 25 cm;

Lamy Safari fountain pen,

Noodler's black ink, and Daniel

Smith watercolors; About an hour.



INTRODUCTION

Not every city has an art deco skyscraper or centuries-old cathedrals, but buildings—big and small, old and new, lavish and utilitarian—are everywhere, offering the urban sketcher a wide array of drawing opportunities.

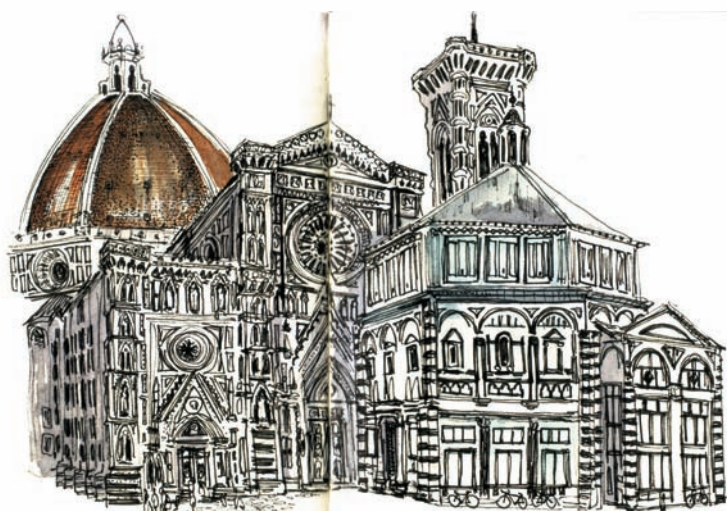
Buildings reflect the history, geography, climate, and lifestyle of the communities in which they were erected. In southwestern Spain, where my family hails from, whitewashed homes cover the landscape of sundrenched towns. In Seattle, where I live now, houseboats are a product of the region's maritime history. In New York, soaring skyscrapers symbolize American ambition.

It's easy to overlook that ample variety of buildings and spaces we inhabit, and how different they are from city to city, country to country. From houses, apartments, and shopping malls to public buildings and places of worship, the structures humans have created over the centuries, for shelter, commerce, industry, transportation, or recreation are fascinating subjects to study and sketch.

In this handbook, I lay out keys to help make your experience of drawing architecture and city spaces fun and rewarding. These keys—composition, depth, scale, contrast, line, and creativity—are my own gold standards. I put a premium on composition and getting proportions right. I also want my linework to carry emotion and, whether I use color or not, I strive to make sketches that have contrasting tonal values and a sense of depth. If I can mix all that with a touch of personal style, I consider myself happy.

The word *architecture* may bring to mind blueprints and meticulously rendered floor plans, but remember that sketching architecture is not an exact science. It's a fun pastime! I hope the tips I share in this handbook will serve as a jumping-off point to develop your own creative approach, no matter what your skill level may be today.

As much as this handbook may inspire you to draw more urban spaces, I also hope it increases your appreciation of the built environment. Drawing the places where we live, work, and play, is a great way to show we care.





☞ Imagine a building as a tabletop still life you could reach with your arms. That approach can make the giant structure easier to grasp.

MURRAY DEWHURST

Il Duomo, Florence

15" x 7.5" | 38 x 19 cm; Sennelier half-pan watercolors, Staedtler pigment liner 0.5 on Hahnemühle sketchbook; 90 minutes.

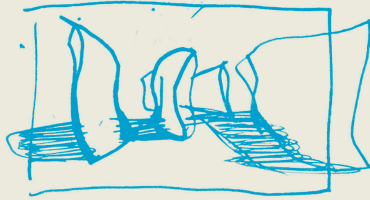
👁 It's less intimidating to draw architecture when you think of it as the backdrop of city life.

MELANIE REIM

Chelsea Street Market

15.7" x 8" | 40 x 20 cm;
Schminke watercolors and Pelikan 200 fountain pen with Noodler's Sepia ink on Cachet Studio sketchbook; 30 minutes.

SKETCH HERE!



KEY I

COMPOSITION

Traffic is buzzing, people are hustling from place to place, and there you are, clutching a sketchbook, eager to draw that historic building on the street corner. Where do you start?

I'd say make nailing the composition your first goal. There's no amount of crosshatching or watercoloring or creative mark making that will fix a poorly composed sketch. Not only that, once you invest time in sketching a boring viewpoint, there's no going back. I hate when I've gone as far as coloring a sketch only to realize I chose a weak angle.

A well-composed scene has a sense of balance and completeness. Every piece seems to fall in the right place. Move one and the harmony gets lost.



Apply the rule of thirds.

Photographers swear by the rule of thirds. I do, too. This handy design principle makes miracles. Imagine the scene you are sketching as if it was divided into nine equal parts (see the figure opposite). A good composition will result from placing the subject of the sketch on or near the points where the lines intersect.



📌 Don't get caught up in the details at this stage. Set yourself a time limit of 5 minutes for each of these preparatory sketches.

Useful habits

If you have the time, walk around and scout the location before starting to draw. Alternate between standing up and sitting down to find new and interesting angles to sketch.

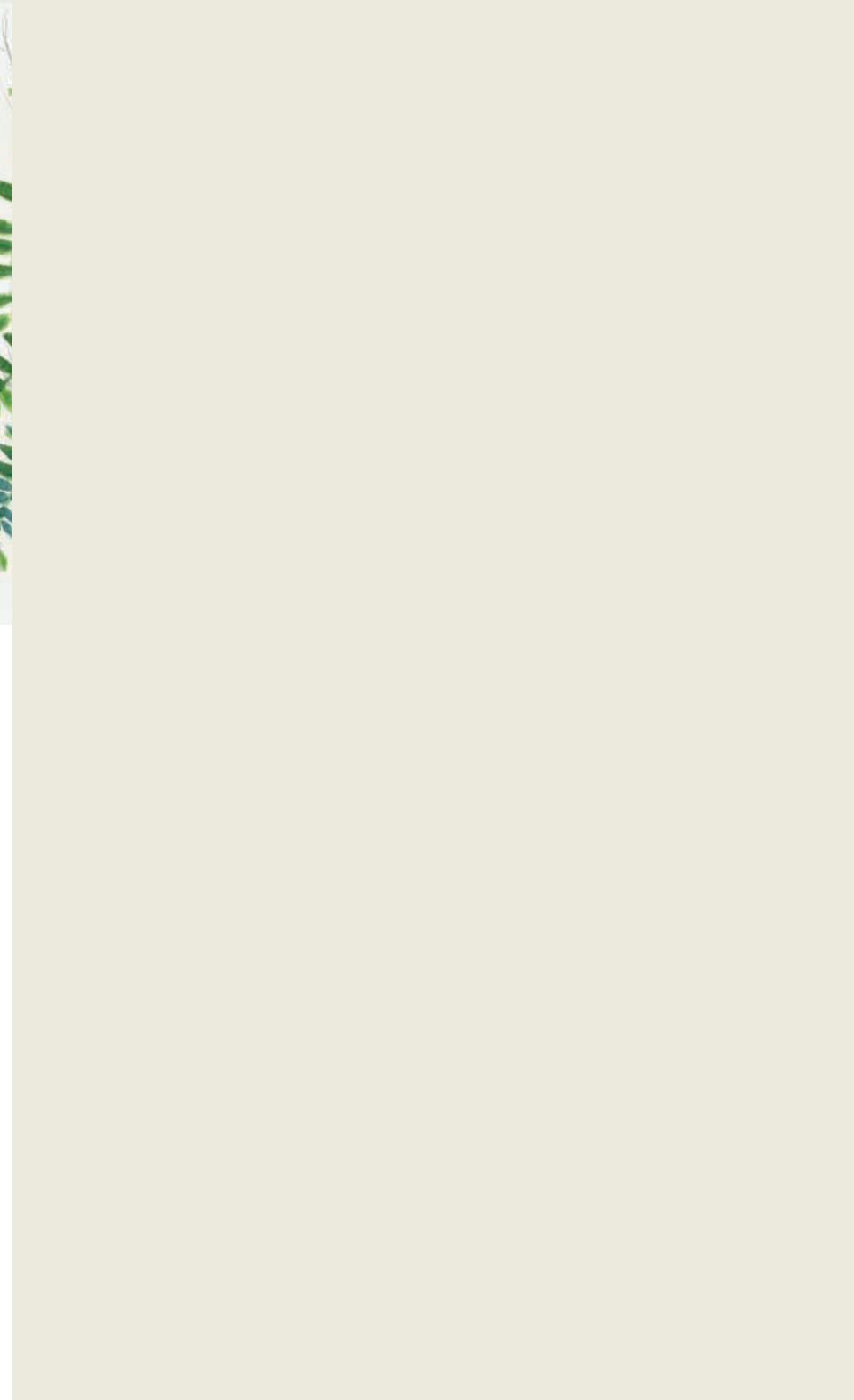


📍 Mukilteo Lighthouse

7.5" x 6" | 19 x 15.2 cm;
 Pilot G-Tech on Stillman & Birn
 sketchbook; 15 minutes.

Warm up with thumbnail sketches.

Sketching is like exercising. You have to warm up and loosen up your hand-eye coordination first. Instead of starting to draw and hoping for the best, I make some thumbnail sketches to test compositions. I love the feeling of simplifying the scene to just a few lines. I could just make these tiny drawings all day long.





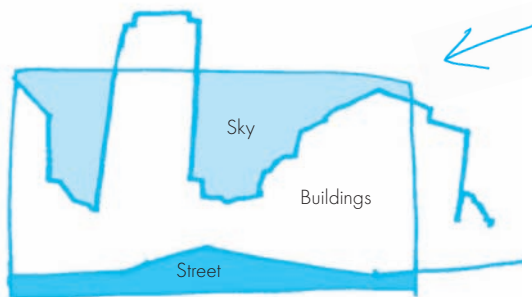
📍 MURRAY DEWHURST

Victorian veranda, Auckland

22.8" x 8" | 58 x 20.3 cm;
Sennelier half-pan watercolors,
Staedtler pigment liner 0.5 on
A4 Hahnemühle landscape
sketchbook spread; about 2 hours.

Start with the big shapes

Billboards, store marquees, and traffic signs are great fun to draw, but they can be distracting at the early stages of making a drawing. To understand the scene, I first look at shape relationships of large areas such as the sky, the mass of buildings, and the ground.



👉 Outline the shape of the sky and you will have drawn the city skyline without even looking at the buildings.

Toolbox

A framing device makes finding good compositions easier. They call them viewfinders for a reason.



A 35mm slide frame



L-shaped cardboard frames



Your hands (and you're not likely to forget those!)

Make it fit ...

Sometimes, an archway or a window will frame the scene for us. Most of the time, though, you have to build an imaginary frame around the area you intend to sketch. It's important to know how much you want to fit on the page; otherwise, you could run out of space.

U ROGER O'REILLY

Trinity College Dublin

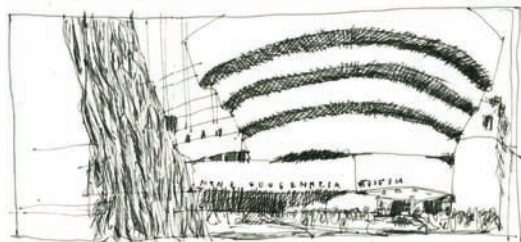
5.5" x 8" | 14 x 20 cm; Diluted black liquid-acrylic ink on Canson A5 heavy cartridge sketchpad; 20 minutes.





❶ Once you know what area you want to draw, trace the shape of the area on the page and create a thumbnail sketch of the composition. Now, will everything fit?

*First Baptist Church, Seattle
7.2" x 11.8" | 18 x 30 cm;
Noodler's ink and watercolor
on Canson watercolor paper;
1.5 hours.*



... Or crop it.

Don't try to make the building fit when it doesn't. It's better to crop, as you would if you were taking a photograph.

❷ RICHARD ALOMAR

Guggenheim Museum

*11" x 5" | 28 x 12.7 cm; Lamy
Safari with Noodler's Lexington
Gray ink on Moleskine watercolor
notebook; 30 minutes.*

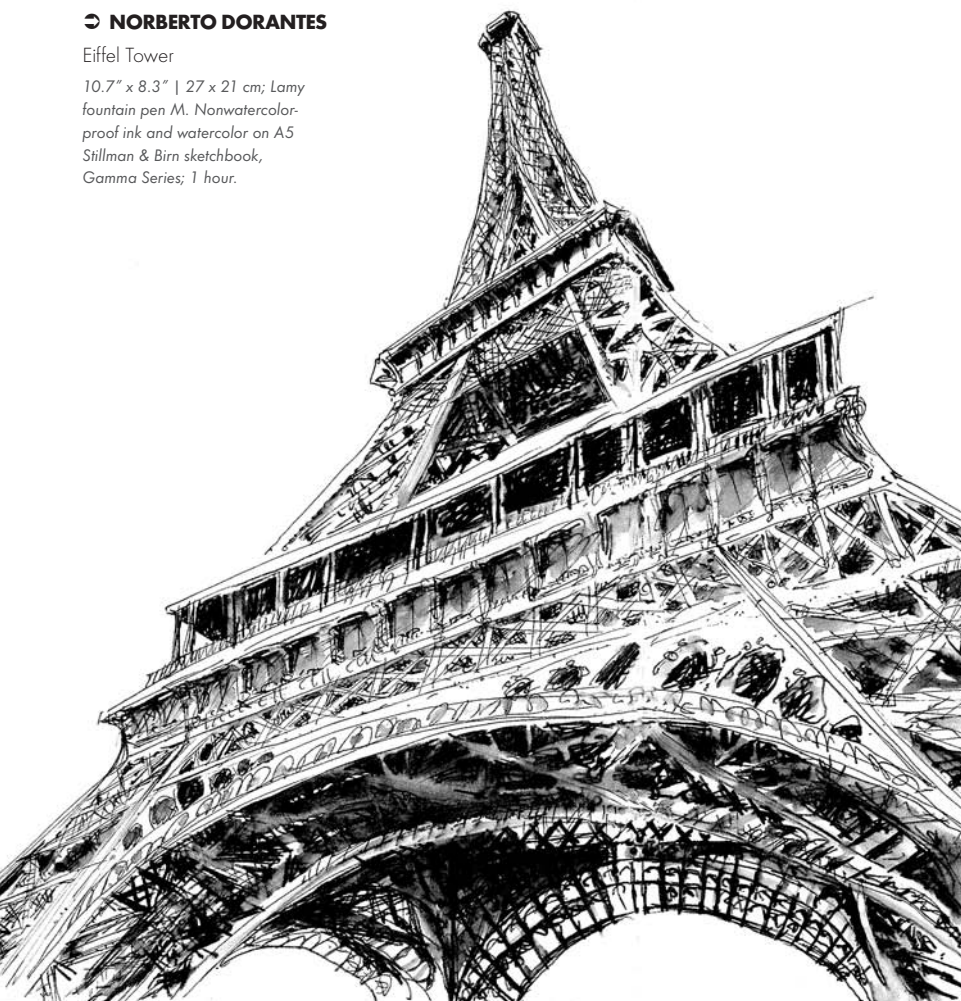
Compose with sharp angles.

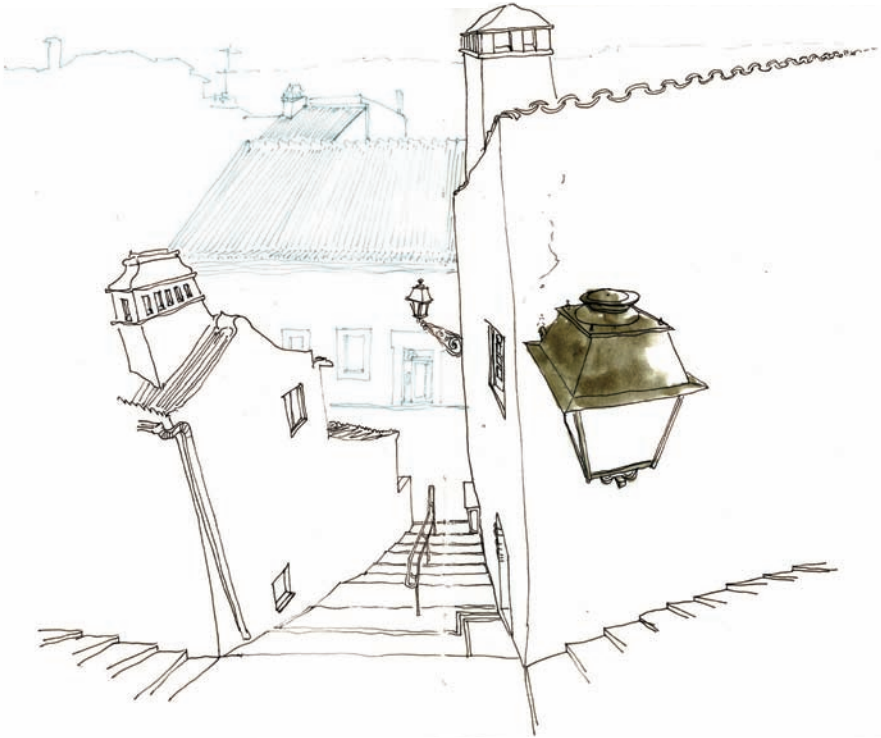
A big part of the success of an urban sketch depends on where you choose to stand or sit to draw. While a straight-on view of a façade may prove to be interesting, sharp angles usually create more dynamic compositions. For example, try standing close to a building or looking down at a public stairway.

➔ NORBERTO DORANTES

Eiffel Tower

10.7" x 8.3" | 27 x 21 cm; Lamy fountain pen M. Nonwatercolor-proof ink and watercolor on A5 Stillman & Birn sketchbook, Gamma Series; 1 hour.

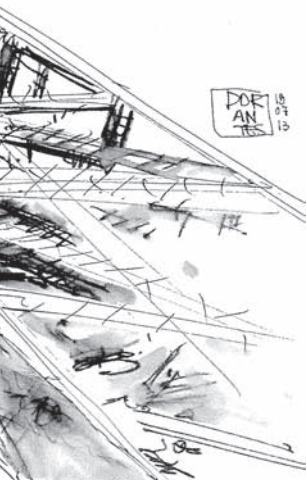




📍 MÁRIO LINHARES

Constância

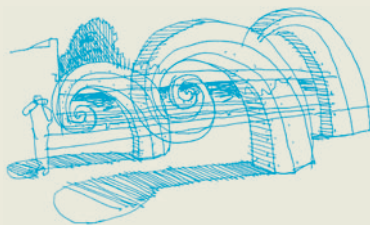
11" x 8" | 28 x 20.3 cm; Uni Pin
0.1 black ink pen; Copic Multiliner
SP 0.3 cool gray ink pen on
Laloran sketchbook with 180 gsm
Clairefontaine paper; 30 minutes.



Workshop

- ➔ Browse through your digital files—assuming you already scan or photograph your sketches to share them online—and identify five sketches with strong compositions. Print them for future reference.
- ➔ Standing at different distances from a window, make thumbnail sketches of three different compositions. Discuss with a friend which one you like better and why.

SKETCH HERE!



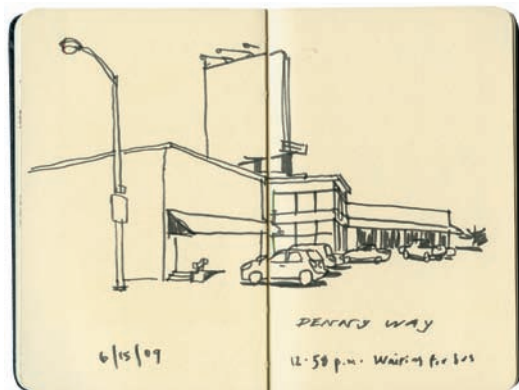
KEY II

SCALE

You've got this down. You've walked around that street corner and found the perfect spot to make your sketch, penciling a few thumbnail compositions in your notebook as a test. Now, what's next?

To make a believable sketch, you'll need the proportions to look realistic. Notice I'm not saying they have to be absolutely right. Realistic is good enough.

The key to drawing the urban environment to scale is to measure the relationships between the elements you are seeing. When I'm drawing architecture, I ask myself, "How tall is this house in relation to the one next door? How does the height of that window compare with the height of the entire façade?"



© Denny Way strip mall

7" x 5.5" | 17.8 x 14 cm; Sakura
Micron black pen on pocket
Moleskine sketchbook; 10 minutes.



Red square
at UW

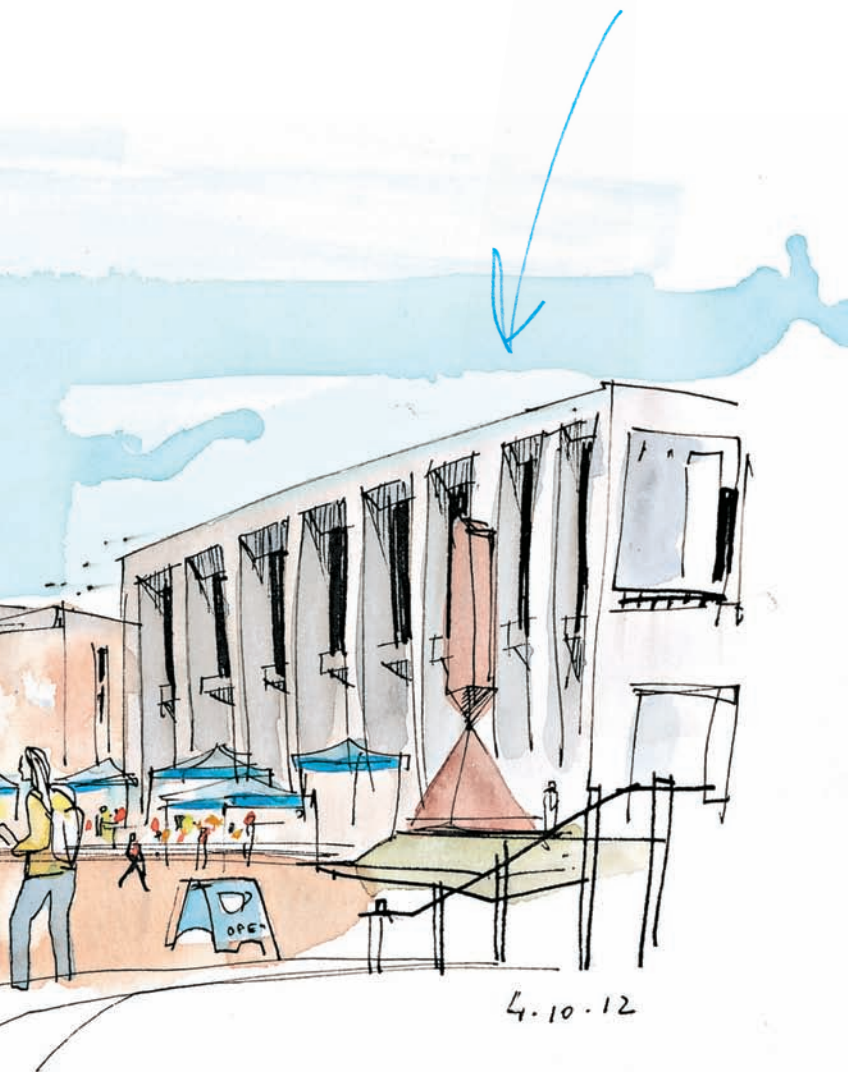
Find a basic unit to measure against.

The height of a streetlight, a public sculpture, or a doorway can give you a reference point to measure the rest of the scene. Pick a basic unit that is not too big or too small in relation to the overall composition.

U I used this monument as a reference to size the rest of the scene.

Red Square, University of Washington

10" x 5.7" | 25.4 x 15 cm;
Noodler's ink and watercolor
on Canson Montval All-Media
sketchbook; 1.5 hours.



Find the center point.

If you know the center of your sketch, you'll be able to assess how much space you'll need above, below, and to the sides to avoid running out of room on the page.

U The crane in the background marks the middle of the sketch. I was careful not to make it too tall, or I would have needed more space to fit all the houses while keeping them proportionate to the height of the crane.

South Lake Union row houses
10.5" x 6.4" | 26.7 x 16.5 cm;
Noodler's ink and watercolor
on Canson Montval All-Media
sketchbook; 90 minutes.



The pencil and thumb measuring method

Stretch your arm with your elbow straight, then place the segment you want to measure between the top of the pen and your thumb. You can then compare that measurement to other parts of the building. Are they twice as long, three times as long, etc.?

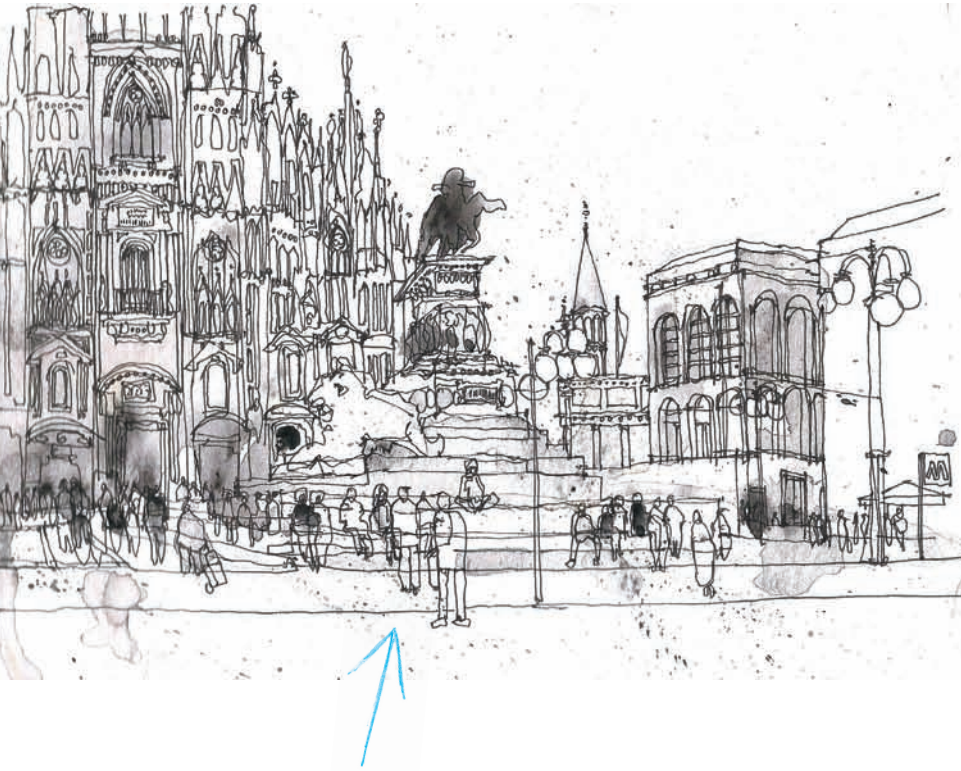




Toolbox

For extra accuracy with measurements, use a transparent grid divided into squares. Pan over the scene and compare sizes. How many squares wide and tall is the building? You can make your own device using a clear, acetate sheet.





Add people to create a sense of scale.

The height of a person is something everyone can relate to. Add at least one passerby to every sketch. Without that individual, it may too hard to know how big the setting really is.

📍 Crowds help convey the spaciousness of the square in front of Milan's cathedral.

SIMONE RIDYARD

Piazza del Duomo, Milan

16" x 5" | 40.6 x 12.7 cm;
Fineliner pen 0.3/0.1 mm and
watercolor on Moleskine A5
sketchbook; 1.5 hours.

Use urban furniture to emphasize proportions.

City spaces are packed with what I like to call urban furniture (utility poles, traffic lights, benches, fire hydrants, etc.). Don't overlook them. These elements help you get a sense of proportion for the entire space.

Focus on small areas.

It can be overwhelming to try to size a big space. Practice drawing a smaller element, such as a simple building façade, trying to get accurate proportions of doors/windows and some activity, such as a person walking by.

👉 Cars can also provide a sense of scale.

Quick Pack minimart

11" x 6" | 28 x 15.2 cm;

Noodler's ink and watercolor on Canson Mixed Media sketchbook; 45 minutes.





① STÉPHANE KARDOS

Off Sunset Drive

11.4" x 8" | 29 x 20.3 cm;

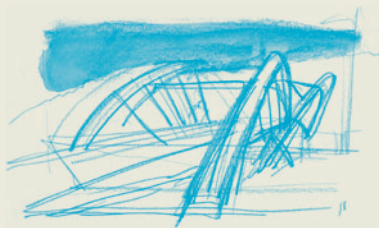
Gray and black Pentel brushes,
permanent ink pen and watercolor
on Seawhite of Brighton
sketchbook; 30 minutes.



Useful habits

- Don't trust your instincts; measure distances before starting to sketch.
- Measure distances in your head as you walk on the street. I do that all the time. It's good practice to measure.

SKETCH HERE!



KEY III

DEPTH

Good composition and proportions are the pillars of sound architectural sketching, but they aren't enough to make believable sketches of the urban space. Remember those drawings of a flat-looking house and a tree we used to do as kids? They are beautiful compositions and to scale, but they lack a key ingredient that makes urban sketches pop: depth.

Creating the illusion of depth on a flat piece of paper may seem like magic, but it is a very achievable task with a basic understanding of perspective that can be gained from keen observation.

The quality of my sketches went up several notches when I sat down to learn some fundamental notions, such as finding the horizon line and establishing vanishing points.





Remember the foreground.

Don't ignore that car or streetlight within arm's reach just because you are drawing the buildings farther away. The illusion of depth is almost guaranteed when your sketch includes elements close to you, a little farther away, and very far away.

C The busker in the foreground not only adds liveliness to this urban space, it establishes depth in relation to the people far into the alleyway.

SUHITA SHIRODKAR

Music in the Barri Gòtic,
Barcelona

9" x 12" | 23 x 30.5 cm; Pen,
ink, and watercolor on Stillman &
Birn Beta sketchbook; ab out 45
minutes.

ROÍSÍN CURÉ

The Long Walk from the
Claddagh, Galway

18" x 13" | 45.7 x 33 cm; Pencil,
waterproof ink, and watercolor.
Winsor & Newton watercolors and
Platinum Carbon pen on Daler
Rowney 300 gsm watercolor
paper; 2 hours.



Silhouette for simplicity and depth.

Obstructed views are a common annoyance for the urban sketcher. If only those trees or cars weren't blocking that beautiful façade. A useful technique is to silhouette everything in the way of the subject. The welcome side effect of this approach is an enhanced sense of depth in the composition.

BRUNO AGNES

Påle soleil

9" x 8.3" | 23 x 21 cm; Fineliner
Staedtler 0.2 and 0.5 mm and
Winsor & Newton watercolors on
Moleskine sketchbook; 40 minutes.

🗨 A simple outline of the building in the background resolves the composition and adds depth.

EMILY NUDD-MITCHELL

Paris rooftops

11.5" x 8.2" | 29.2 x 21 cm; Ink gel Pilot pens (black, white, and gold), watercolor and watercolor pencils on A5 sketchbook; 3 hours.



Think cubes.

Buildings in the real world may seem too big to handle. Think of them as if they were little Lego blocks. Master drawing a cube from different angles, and next time you are drawing streetscapes you'll see cubes instead of buildings.

🕒 This commercial building in Seattle is shaped like a shoebox.

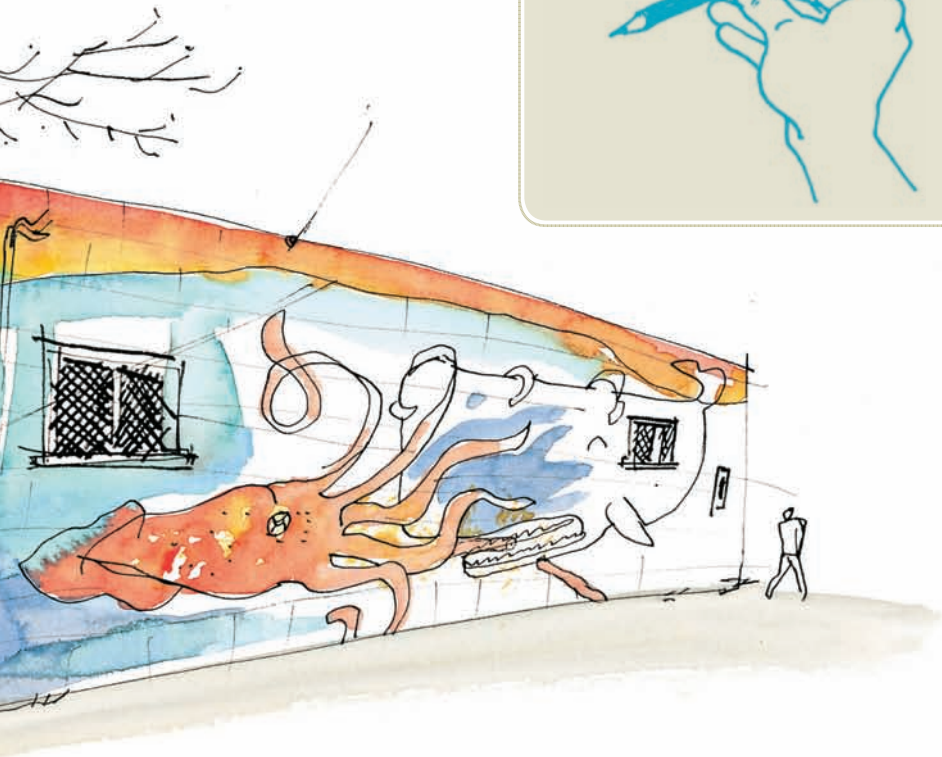
Central District

11.8" x 5.8" | 30 x 15 cm; Ink and watercolor on Canson Mixed Media 11" x 14" | 28 x 35.6 cm; sketchbook; 30 minutes.



Toolbox

Here's a handy way to measure angles: While closing one eye in order to flatten the image, hold your pen against the subject at the angle you need to represent on the page.



Find the horizon line, or your eye level.

If you are relaxing on the beach looking out to the ocean, the horizon line is easy to find. But it's a bit more challenging when you are in the middle of the city, surrounded by buildings. Here's my recommendation: Forget the word *horizon* and just identify your eye level—the line where your eyes rest when you look perfectly straight ahead.



👁 In this case, the horizon line falls halfway down the road.

MICHAEL WEBBER

Autumn in Pioneer Square

5" x 14" | 12.7 x 35.6 cm;

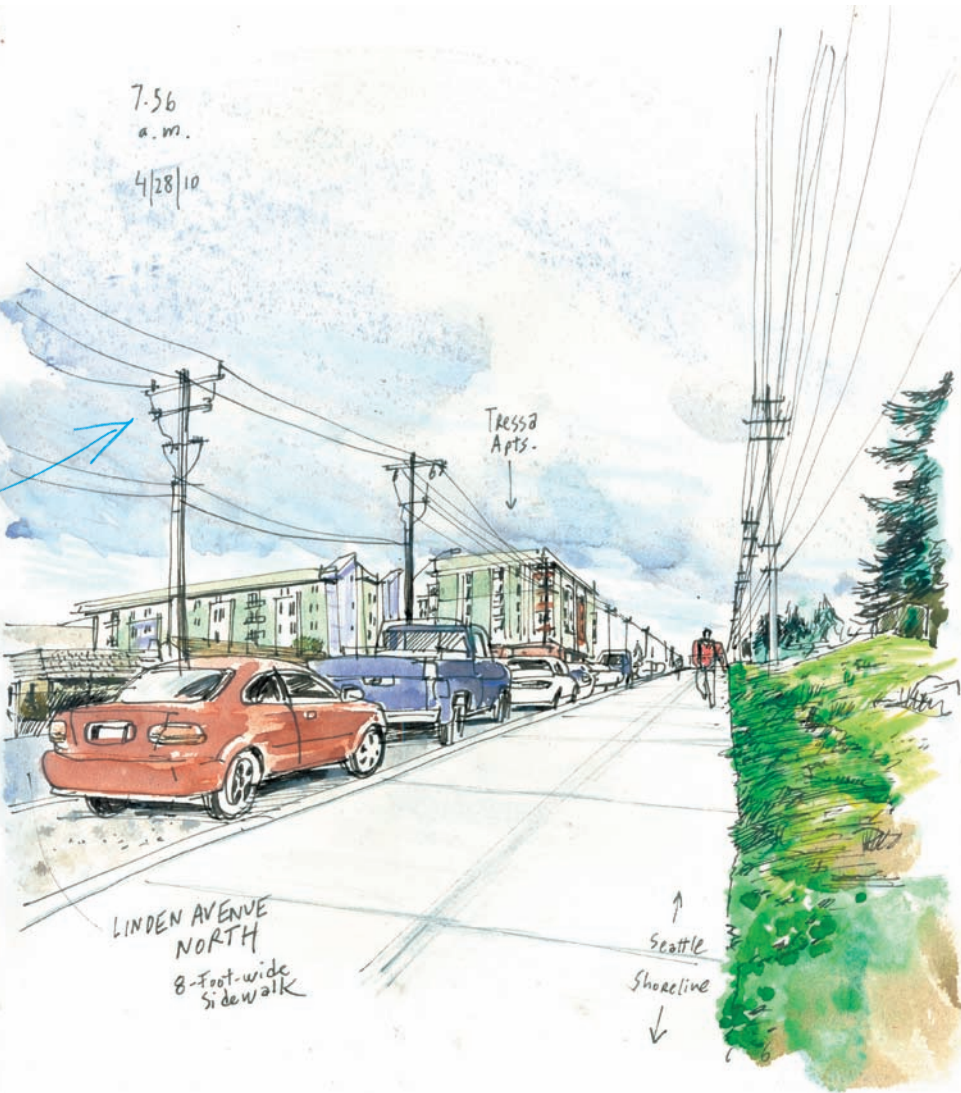
Koh-I-Noor Rapidograph pen using Rapidograph Black India Ink and Winsor & Newton pocket watercolor set on Hand Book sketchbook; about 25 minutes.

👁 Objects the same size, such as utility poles, look smaller the farther away they are.

Bitter Lake neighborhood

11" x 12.3" | 28 x 31 cm; Ink and watercolor on A4 Moleskine sketchbook; 1 hour.





Useful habits

To establish the horizon line, and this can't be emphasized enough, look straight ahead!



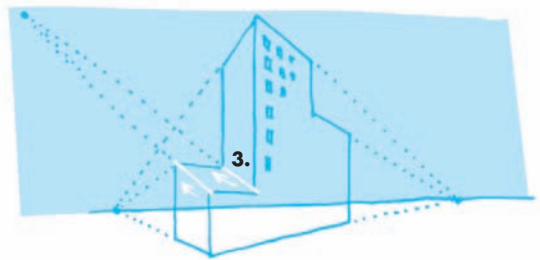
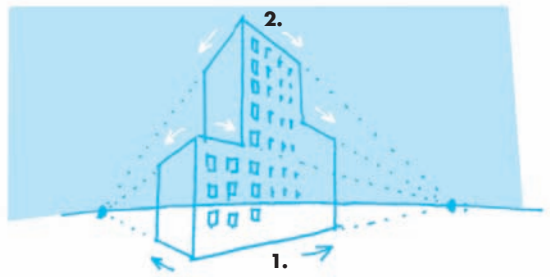
Find vanishing points. They are everywhere!

I lost a few battles with perspective in my early sketching days because I thought vanishing points always rest on that horizon line. What was I thinking? The truth is, those pesky dots where parallel lines seem to converge can be anywhere. When the lines are parallel to the ground and the ground is flat, they converge at our eye level. But if they are at an angle with relation to the ground, they can converge above or below the horizon line. Once I knew that, finding them became easier, almost like a game.

❶ The roof lines aren't parallel to the ground; therefore, the vanishing point is way up in the sky (see diagram at right).

Nelson House

12.7" x 8.6" | 32 x 22 cm; Ink and watercolor on 11" x 14" | 28 x 35.6 cm; Canson Mixed Media sketchbook; 2 hours.

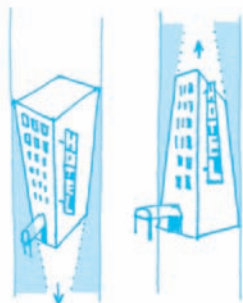


❶ Once I learned to find the horizon line and identify vanishing points, perspective started making much more sense.

1. Lines parallel to the ground below the horizon line rise up.
2. Lines parallel to the ground above the horizon line fall down.
3. Lines not parallel to the ground, such as the inclined roof, will have vanishing points above or below the horizon line.

Spot vertical depth.

It's called *three-point perspective*, and it happens when you have to look up or down a building to sketch a view that is bound to give you a bit of a neck ache. The sides of the building will converge towards each other to a vanishing point located high above the building when you look up or somewhere under your feet when you look down.



👁 Look down, look up





i Draw what you see, not what you know. Your brain may tell you a wall is always straight, but that's not how it manifests itself in the real world.

Pacific Tower

12" x 6.4" | 30.5 x 16.3 cm; Ink and watercolor on Canson Mixed Media sketchbook; 40 minutes.



C MURRAY DEWHURST

View from hotel window, Rome
15" x 7.5" | 38 x 19 cm; Sennelier half-pan watercolors, Staedtler pigment liner 0.5 on Hahnemühle sketchbook; 45 minutes.

Build depth through tonal value.

Perspective is not the only way to create the illusion of depth. Shade helps create a sense of volume.

Gradation creates the same effect in what is known as “atmospheric” perspective.

Useful habits

- Find your eye level first.
- To get a flattened view of the scene and take accurate measurements, always close one eye.
- Remember to stay still. If you move, all your vanishing points will shift.





📍 STÉPHANE KARDOS

Mister Fox

10" x 7" | 25.4 x 17.8 cm;
 Gray and black Pentel brushes,
 permanent ink pen on Seawhite of
 Brighton sketchbook; 30 minutes.

🕒 The farther away the buildings, the less detail they need. That helps emphasize a sense of distance.

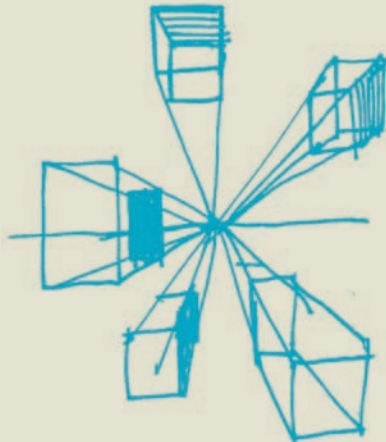
📍 EDUARDO BAJZEK

Ladeira Salto Grande

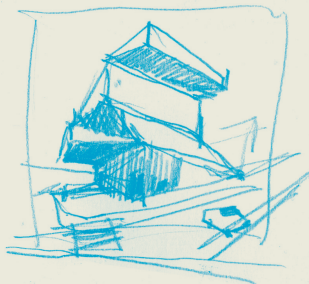
10.9" x 11" | 27.6 x 30 cm;
 3B to 7B pencils, and blending
 stump on Cachet Daler Rowney
 sketchbook; 2 hours.

Workshop

- ➔ Practice drawing cubes and boxes from different angles. Draw through them to understand their structure.
- ➔ Sitting on a street bench or an outdoor café, find the horizon line and draw a schematic sketch with a least five different vanishing points.



SKETCH HERE!



KEY IV

CONTRAST

When a written story includes vivid descriptions that transport the reader to the scene, it is said to have “color.”

In urban sketching, I find a sketch to be colorful when it’s rich in contrast and detail, whether it was drawn in black and white or actual color.

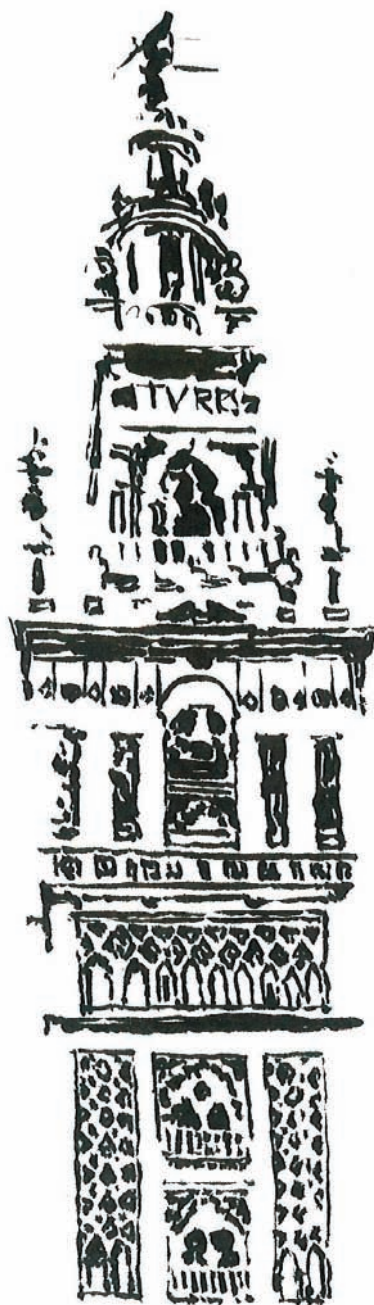
You see, what’s the point in pulling out the watercolor set to make color sketches if they feel dull? Wouldn’t you rather do black-and-white sketches rich with intense values and contrast?

Whether you are sketching in black and white or color, you’ll want your drawings of architecture to have contrast. Without it, that sense of depth and volume that is essential to making architecture look solid can be very hard to achieve.

➤ **NORBERTO
DORANTES**

Giralda, Sevilla

2" x 6.4" | 5 x 16 cm; Pentel brush
pen on A4 sketchbook; 30 minutes.



Workshop

On a lit streetscape,
draw only the shadows
in black.

Make contrast in black and white.

We know the world isn't black and white, but it's possible to simplify a scene into areas of white and areas of black. What's lit? What's in the shade? By drawing only the dark spots, you'll be suggesting the illuminated areas at the same time.



📍 Windows and entryways create strong dark areas that can be filled with black. This technique also adds compositional balance to the sketch.

MÁRIO LINHARES

Mafra, Portugal

8" x 4" | 20.3 x 10.2 cm; Uni

Pin 0.1 black ink pen on Laloran sketchbook with 180 gsm

Clairefontaine paper; 30 minutes.

Useful habits

- ➔ Train your eye to assess the grayscale value of what you see in terms of light and shade, not color.
- ➔ Describe the space to yourself using "image words": dark, light, long, tall, big, small, curvy, straight.

Make contrast in grayscale.

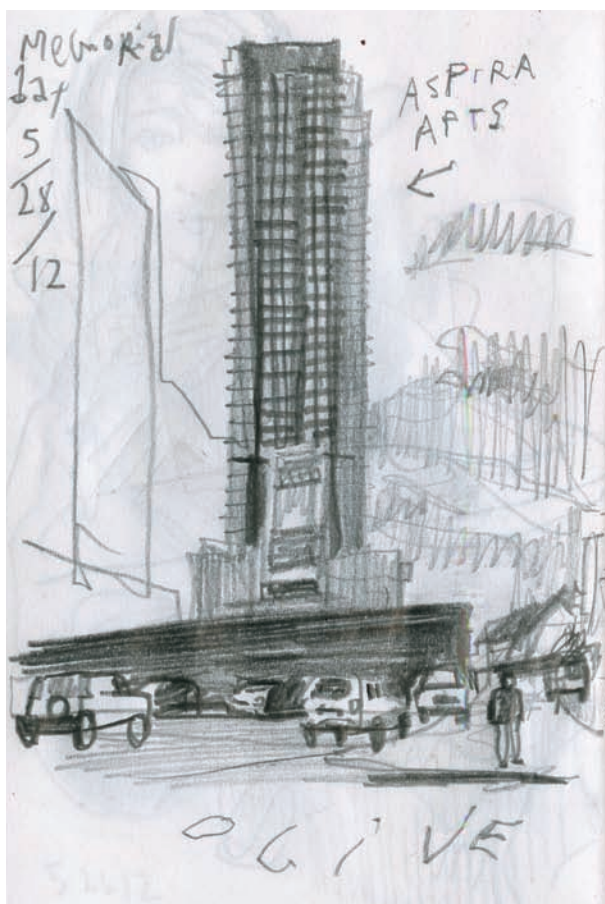
Sketching in grayscale is a good exercise to understand tonal differences. Forget about color, and pinpoint the darkest and lightest spots in the scene first. A common mistake may be to think the sky is the lightest part. You can create a full range of grayscale values in pencil, watercolor, washes of ink, or even in pen through crosshatching.

➡ Aspira Tower, Seattle

8" x 6" | 20.3 x 15.2 cm;

Pencil on Miquel-Rius

sketchbook; 20 minutes.



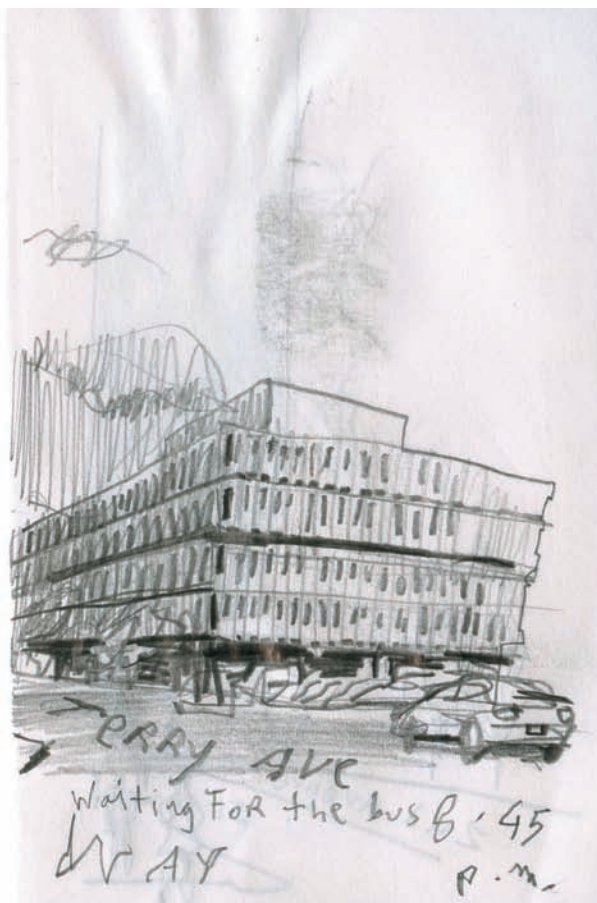


Working with multiple washes of ink, Fred Lynch covers the entire range of grayscale values in this sketch.

FRED LYNCH

Robbins Hall,
Lexington, Massachusetts

14" x 10" | 35.6 x 25.4 cm;
2H pencil and Winsor & Newton
black ink on Arches hot press
watercolor block paper; 2 hours
onsite plus spots of dark ink added
in the studio.



Workshop

Work in pencil to get a better sense of grayscale values. Limiting your tool set to just one pencil forces you to evaluate tonal relationships.

Squint for tonal value.

The smorgasbord of outdoor color and light is easier to process when you squint your eyes. Detail and sharp edges disappear, and you can see the tonal relationships between things much better. Ask yourself these questions as you squint: Is the road's asphalt lighter or darker than the buildings next to it? How about the windows, are they darker or lighter than the façade of the building?



👁️ Pay close attention to the value relationship between shaded and lit areas. It may feel scary to paint such dark values, but that's how they appear in real life.

EDUARDO BAJZEK

Prato 7

10" x 7" | 25.4x 17.8 cm; Art markers on Arches hot press watercolor block; 45 minutes.

👁️ Squinting is a way to read the tonal values of a scene, and also to test if you are getting them right. While you are drawing, squint not only at your subject but also at the sketch you are making. Do values on paper match what you see? If you squint at finished work, like this sketch of a church at dusk, you can tell if the artist interpreted the values correctly.



📍 JOSÉ MARÍA LERDO

Iglesia de Santa Ana, Sevilla

7.5" x 8.5" | 19 x 21.6 cm;

Watercolor on Van Gogh 240 gsm
paper; 1 hour.



Enhance with color.

Ink and watercolor is perhaps one of the most common media used by sketchers. If you don't have time to add the watercolor washes on location, you can always do it later. But it's important that the line-art sketch stands on its own. The watercolor wash will enhance it, but it won't magically turn a poorly composed drawing into a good one.

🕒 Notice how Wong's composition follows principles we covered earlier in the handbook: rule of thirds, depth, and contrast. The watercolor enhances all the good qualities that are already present in the line drawing.

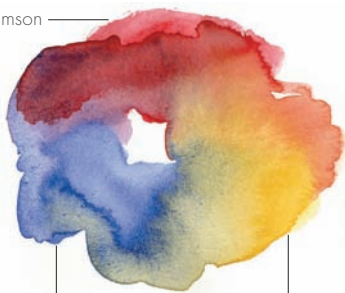
GAIL WONG

Granada, Spain

16" x 5" | 40.6 x 12.7 cm; Ink and watercolor on Moleskine watercolor sketchbook; about 1 hour for the line art sketch and 45 minutes for the watercolor.



Alizarin crimson



Ultramarine blue

Yellow ochre

Toolbox

Just starting with watercolor? Use three primaries instead of the twelve-color sets that usually come with watercolor sketching kits. It's a good way to understand color relationships, and you'll be surprised at the possibilities. Does the range of colors in this blob seem enough for you?

SKETCH HERE!



KEY V LINE

Have you ever stopped to think about the kind of lines you make? Short, long, straight, curvy, thick, thin, swoopy, hard, and soft.

Lines are the backbone of drawing and are especially important when sketching architecture. Short, evenly spaced lines can represent a wall of windows. Long, confident strokes will make that drawing of the Empire State Building look as grounded and majestic as the real thing. The architectural details of a baroque building call for squiggly lines, even dots.

You can't draw every building with the same set of marks. Vary the type of lines you make to add interest and richness to your work. And remember that a line made with assertion, even if it's in the wrong spot, is worth a thousand marks made with hesitation.



Find patterns and repetition.

Windows. Bricks. Arches. If you pay close attention, you'll realize the urban landscape is full of recurring shapes. Building façades are ideal places to spot patterns. Draw one shape and you'll have a template to fill in the rest.

PAUL WANG

Shophouses at Club Street,
Singapore

11.5" x 9" | 29.2 x 22.9 cm;
Pencil, water-soluble color pencil,
and watercolor on Cotman 425 gsm
cold press watercolor paper; 1 hour.

👉 Focus on the design of one window and repeat the process to complete the row.

TEOH YI CHIE

Purvis Street, Singapore

13" x 17" | 33 x 43.2 cm; Hero

fountain pen, on Daler Rowney

Aquafine watercolor paper

300 gsm; 1.5 hours.



Be economical; don't overwork it.

Unfinished always beats overworked. A sketch is about suggestion, so you can never go wrong being too economical or stepping away from it too early. Make every line count. Too many lines can muddy the sketch.

U Straight lines on the building contrast with the swoopy linework on the water.

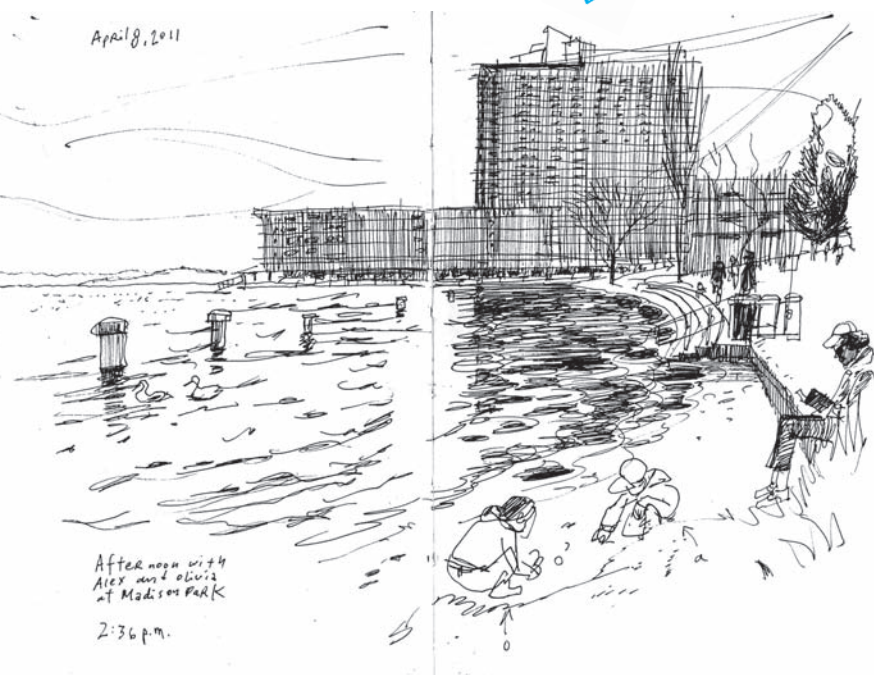
Madison Park

8" x 6" | 20.3 x 15.2 cm; G-Tec

Pilot pen on Stillman & Birn

Gamma Series sketchbook;

30 minutes





i The idea of being economical also applies to watercolor sketches. There's no need to draw every brick—less is more.

CATHY JOHNSON

Saint George Hotel,
Weston, Missouri

8.2" x 7" | 21 x 17.8 cm; Pencil
and watercolor on handmade
journals on Fabriano hot press
watercolor paper; 45 minutes.



Twist and shout.

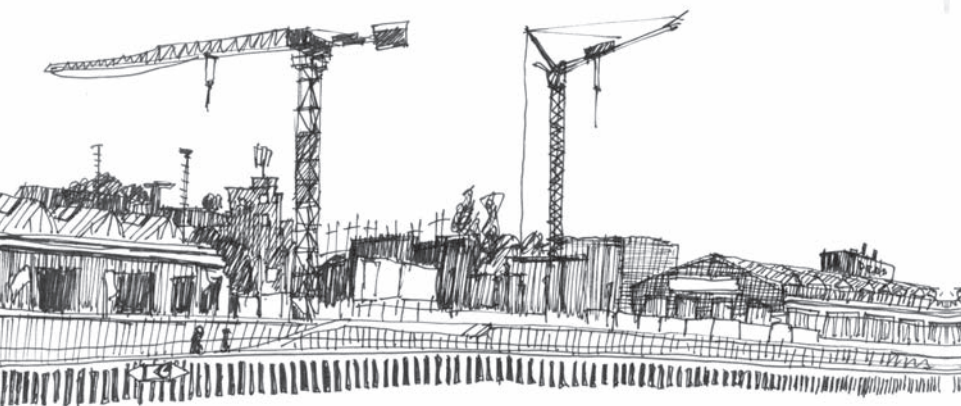
A sketch is like a conversation. Sometimes, you speak softly, sometimes you shout out to make a point. You can emphasize or understate certain parts of the sketch using lines that flow in different directions and by varying the stroke width. This can be done without sacrificing composition and depth.

U MANFRED SCHLOSSER

Europahafen, Bremen

8" x 5" | 20.3 x 12.7 cm;

Faber-Castell Pitt pen on paper on
Moleskine sketchbook; 10 minutes.



Europahafen
Bremen
4. August 09

C By using an old-fashioned dip pen, you can create distinctive strokes of different weights.

VERONICA LAWLOR

Empire State Building

9" x 12" | 23 x 30.5 cm; Dip

pen and Higgins black ink,

with colored pencil in spots on

Bienfang 601 sketchbook; about

20 minutes.

Make it look solid with assertive straight lines.

Can you draw a straight line? How about two parallel straight lines? It's easier said than done. To draw buildings that will look believable, this is an important skill to develop. Lines don't necessarily have to be perfectly on the right spot. If they are drawn with confidence, they still contribute to the character of the sketch.

➤ Even without anchoring the building to the ground, Dorantes made this building look solid thanks to his confident linework.

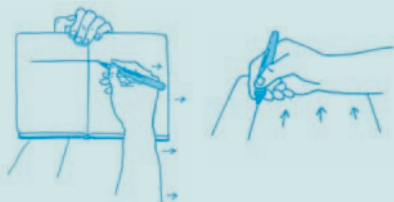
NORBERTO DORANTES

Edificio Aguas Argentinas

11" x 7.4" | 28 x 19 cm; Art Pen F with nonwaterproof ink and watercolor on Canson A4 sketchbook; 40 minutes.

Useful habits

- ➔ I've found that straight lines seem easier to make when I lock my wrist and move the entire arm along the way, pressing my hand gently against the page as I go.
- ➔ Vary the direction of lines to create pattern and texture.





LUIS RUIZ

Málaga, Alameda Principal

18.5" x 8.5" | 47 x 21.63 cm; Ink and watercolor, Canson Montval 300 gsm watercolor paper; about 2 hours.

Workshop

Practice drawing straight parallel lines on a piece of paper. No rulers allowed!

SKETCH HERE!



KEY VI

CREATIVITY

A building is a building. Are there really that many creative ways to sketch it?

I believe so. Not every urban sketch needs to be loose and, well, sketchy. If you want to spend 2 hours drawing on location and add another hour on top of that at home to color the sketch methodically, why not?

Conventional wisdom may say that you don't write on a piece of art, but I like to put the names of the streets on my drawings. I know a sketcher who includes the outside temperature, too.

As you get out to draw more and more, strive to be creative, making sketches in a way only you can make, with your own voice and personality.

Sketches convey a message.

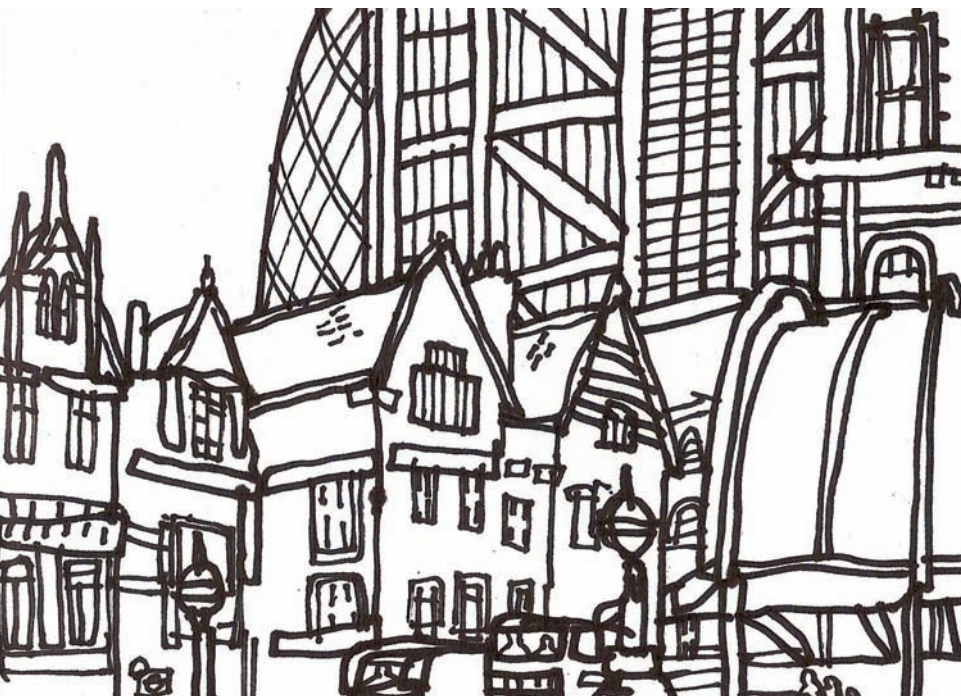
When I look at a sketch, I look for meaning. What's the message? A creative sketcher will find ways to connect with the viewer, as Melanie Reim does in this drawing, limiting her color use to the pack of taxicabs crowding the street.

U MELANIE REIM

Taxi Jam Line

12" x 12" | 30.5 x 30.5 cm;
Pelikan 200 fountain pen with
Noodler's Manhattan ink on
Cachet studio sketchbook;
15 minutes.





❶ Don't feel you have to use the same drawing tools others are using. Find that special type of pen that best fits your drawing style. James Hobbs relishes the bold linework he can produce with thick markers.

JAMES HOBBS

Bishopsgate, London

6" x 4" | 15.2 x 10.2 cm; Pentel NMS50 permanent marker, Seawhite of Brighton sketchbook 140 gsm; 15 minutes.



Take artistic license.

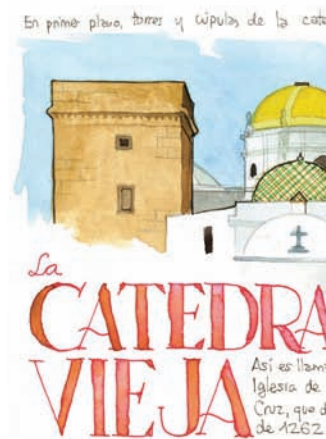
Portuguese sketcher Mário Linhares took an original approach with this sketch. He combined the building façades of a Lisbon city square into a panoramic drawing. The result shows the four sides of the square unfolded into a continuous façade. Isn't that clever?

📍 MÁRIO LINHARES

São Carlos Square, Lisbon
22" x 7" | 56 x 17.8 cm; Copic
Multiliner SP 0.2 black ink pen on
220 gsm Conqueror Stonemarque
paper; 90 minutes.

Create a playful layout.

Sketches of architectural details are fun to lay out in a sketchbook spread. Think of each sketch as a piece of a larger mosaic. Organize your layout around a large central image, and be sure to include other sketches of medium and small size, as well as written type.





🔊 A great exercise to understand urban spaces is to draw a map of the location.

JOAQUÍN GONZÁLEZ DORAO

Catedral Vieja

16" x 6" | 40.6 x 15.2 cm;

Watercolor and marker on

Laloran sketchbook with 200 gsm

Clairefontaine paper; about 3 hours.



Strive for authenticity, making marks you can only make.

There's no one way to sketch. The random splashes of color that make Tia Boon Sim's sketches so "hers" wouldn't work if drawn by Steven Reddy, or vice versa. Reddy's own voice comes across through swoopy lines and saturated colors.

Each artist's work speaks in its own way while meeting the standards of the keys I go over in this handbook: composition, depth, scale, contrast, line, and creativity.

☞ STEVEN REDDY

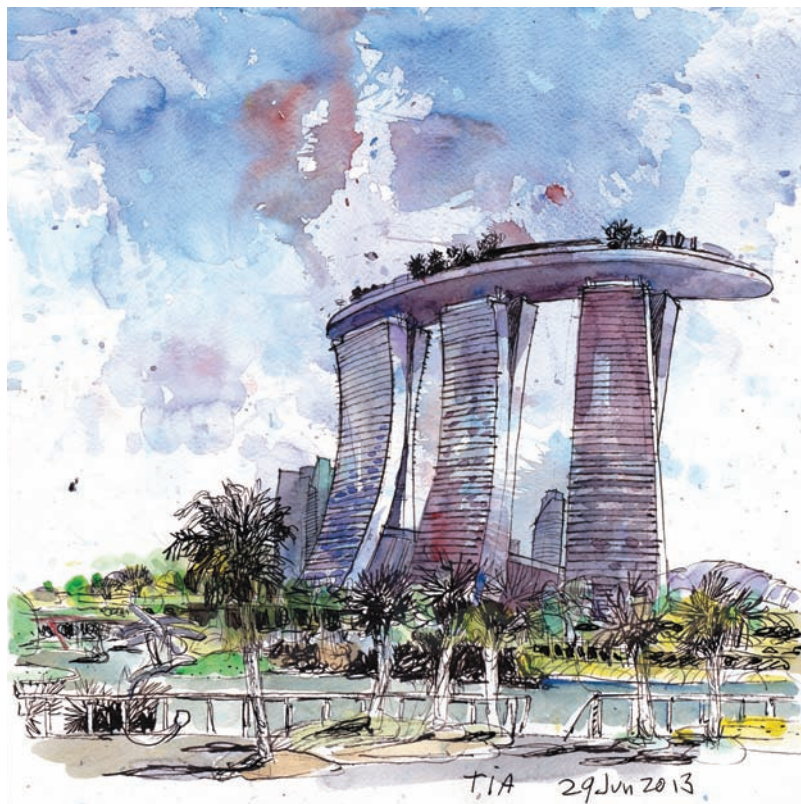
St. Spiridon Cathedral,
Seattle

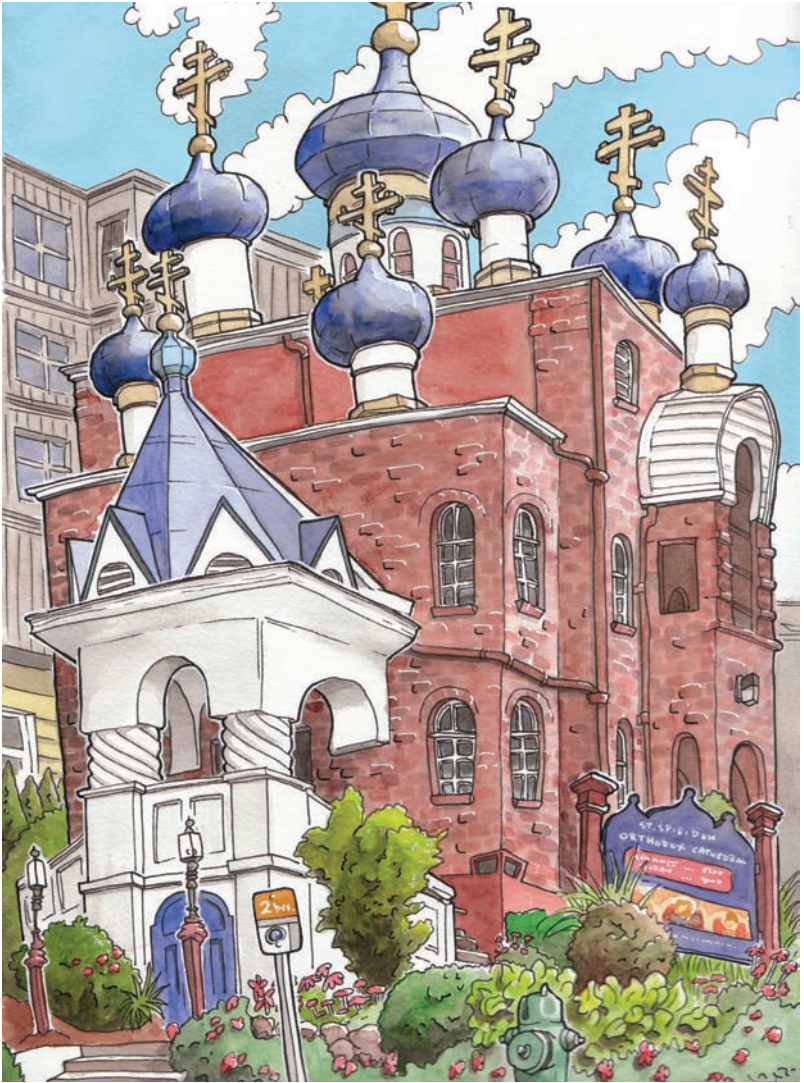
8.3" x 11.7" | 21 x 29.7 cm;
Uni-Ball ink pen, India ink and
watercolor on Canson All-Media
9" x 12" | 23 x 30.5 cm spiral-
bound sketchbook; 2 hours on site
and 90 minutes in the studio for
coloring.

☞ TIA BOON SIM

Marina Bay Sands

10" x 10" | 25.4 x 25.4 cm;
Hero fountain pen model M86, ink
and watercolor on Daler Rowney
Aquafine paper; 1 hour.

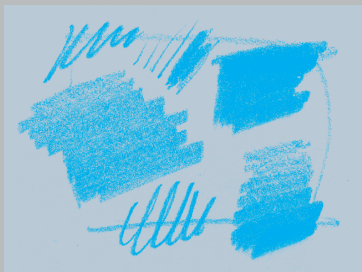




Useful habits

Developing your own drawing style takes time. Be patient. You risk not finding it if you give up too soon. For every ten sketches I make, I'm often satisfied with only one, but that's what keeps me going. Remember what Goya said at an old age: "I'm still learning."

SKETCH HERE!



GALLERY I

PENCIL

Pencil is the most versatile and affordable drawing tool. Graphite responds well to pressure, so you can easily create strokes of varying intensity.

When drawing urban spaces in pencil, first make soft construction lines to mark the horizon line and block out the main parts of the sketch. These are the skeletons of the buildings you are representing, but there's no need to erase them. Let them become part of the background as you build more confident lines on top.

A pencil lets you create strong areas of shade that add volume to the scene. Rub the graphite with your fingers to smooth out the sky or the texture of landscaped areas.

Line. Shade. Texture. A pencil, like a four-wheel-drive automobile, can handle everything. Don't underestimate it.



↑
PASTELIS
A X\$13,50

LARGO SRA CECÍLIA
26.08.2012 12:42h
DOMINGO, DIA DE FERIA
O/ CAMILA

DIA DE ENCONTRO PENSAR DE URPAN SKETCHERS.
ENCONTREI UM CHUUS WABEK, ALEXANDRE COELHO,
ANA GIL, SCHADEK E JOEL.
EU E CAMILA COMAMOS UM PASTEL NESTA BARBADA
DA ESQUETADA. LEVEI CERCA DE 1,5 HORA PARA
FAZER O DESENHO. FINALIZEI HOJE, SEGUNDA-FEIRA

Feira da Santa Cecília

10" x 11" | 25.4 x 28 cm; 3B to 7B pencils and blending stump on Cachet Daler Rowney; 1.5 hours.



↑ ABRIGADO
NÃO CHAMA
MOÇA DESCASCANDO
ALGUMA COISA

"I've developed the painterly approach with different kinds of media. Among them, I think pencil is the easiest one, as you can avoid being distracted by colors and focus more on masses." —Eduardo Bajzek





I Armenian Street

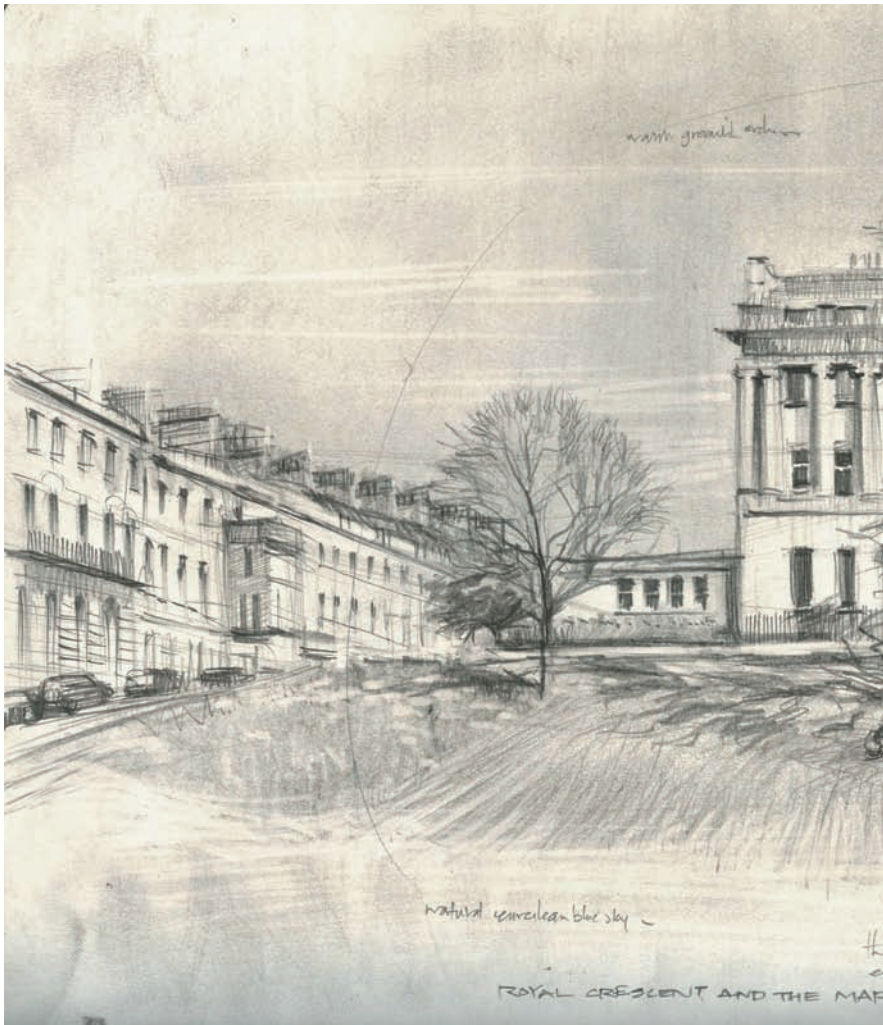
30" x 11" | 76.2 x 28 cm;
Graphite on heavy-weight
cartridge paper; about 2.5 hours.

"Sketching in graphite allows me to control the different tones, although they are in black and white. Normally, I prefer to use the softest graphite, which is 9B, together with 6B and 4B." —Ch'ng Kiah Kian

C Schulstrasse, Munich

6" x 5" | 15.2 x 12.7 cm;
Faber-Castell 2B pencil, Boesner
sketchbook; about 40 minutes.

"Pencil is the most direct, versatile, and sensitive drawing medium. You can do very thin loose, lines or apply more pressure to get intense lines or dark shadows through hatching." —Florian Afflerbach



“When sketching architecture in pencil, it all depends on how you sharpen the pencil. Use a cutter blade to sharpen the pencil to a chisel point for broad strokes, or you can also get solid detail by using mechanical pencils. There are opportunities to smudge and even mix graphite powder with water to get special effects.”

—Adebanji Alade



© Royal Crescent and the Marlborough Buildings, Bath
11" x 8.5" | 28 x 21.6 cm;
Graphite on Moleskine
sketchbook; about 1.5 hours.

SKETCH HERE!

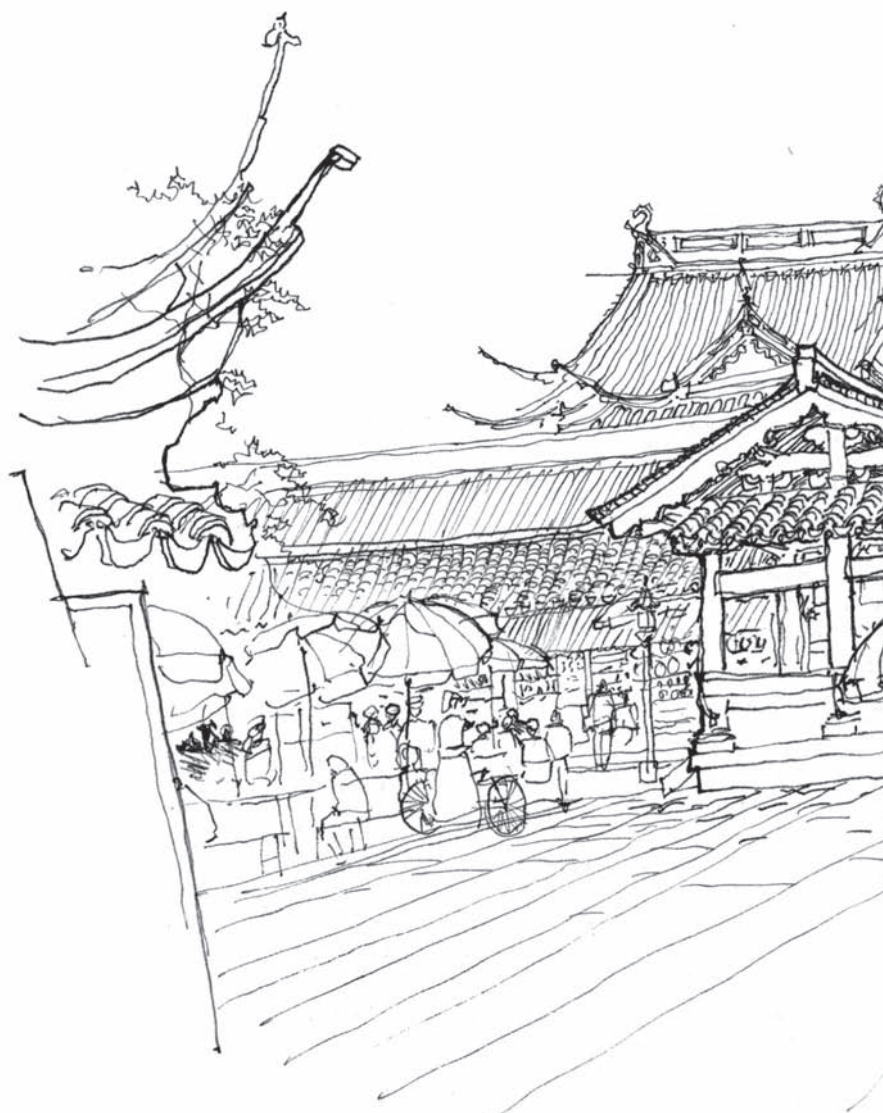


GALLERY II

PEN

Sketching directly with pen can be intimidating, especially with a subject as unforgiving as architecture. But the goal isn't to produce error-free illustrations. Every mark counts, even the misfires. They show the drawing process and make the sketch more interesting than if you fixed every misstep along the way.

Sketching with pen can also be liberating, like going for a swim in cold water. Sure, it may feel scary at first, but once you are flapping around for a while, you adjust to the temperature. You can always get past the initial hesitation by making thumbnail sketches, or marking dots on the page where you think the lines should go. Dots are less obvious in case you are too worried about drawing lines where they don't belong.



SHOPPING AREA NEXT TO FUZI MAO . (CONFUCIUS TEMPLE) 9.3.93

☉ Nanjing Fuzimiao

7.7" x 7" | 20 x 17.8 cm; Fountain pen on sketchbook; 30 minutes.



"I usually sketch with a Lamy fountain pen with the nib turned upside down for a finer line. When people ask me why, I tell them that I like the tactile feel of a nib as the wet ink flows through it onto paper. I like the fluidity, incisiveness, and decisiveness of ink lines." —Frank Ching

"I like the simplicity that a pen line conveys. Pen-and-ink drawings are usually more striking than pencil drawings because of the contrast. Even without tones or washes, lines that meet at junctions and the overlapped lines can all work together to produce drawing with depth and clarity." —Teoh Yi Chie

📍 Kampong Glam,
Singapore

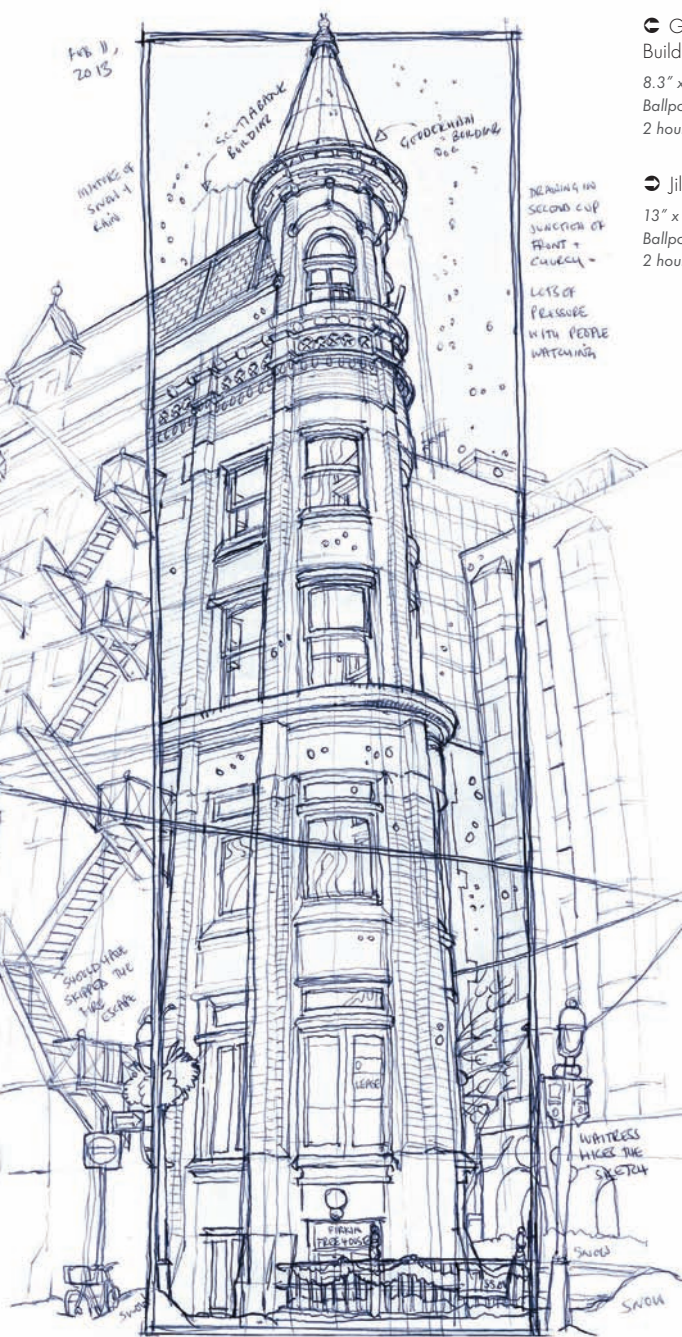
12" x 9" | 30.5 x 23 cm; Hero
pen on Daler Rowney Aquafine
watercolor paper 300 gsm;
1.5 hours.





"I prefer working in pen because it requires a certain kind of assertiveness in one's decision making. Even if I've roughed out the basic composition in pencil first, I think my lines are a bit more confident and somehow truer in pen." —Paul Heaston

i 29th and Umatilla
8.5" x 5.5" | 21.6 x 14 cm;
Staedtler Pigment Liner pen on
Stillman & Birn Epsilon Series;
about 3 hours.



➤ Gooderham Building, Toronto
8.3" x 18" | 21 x 45.7 cm;
Ballpoint on regular paper;
2 hours.

➤ Jilly's Strip Club
13" x 18" | 33 x 45.7 cm;
Ballpoint on regular paper;
2 hours.



"The ballpoint pen is such a ubiquitous instrument. There is almost always one within reach. And so without having to spend a cent on special paper or drawing tools, anyone can draw at any time. All it takes is motivation. It is my hope that my everyday ballpoint sketches motivate others to give it a try." —Richard Johnson

SKETCH HERE!



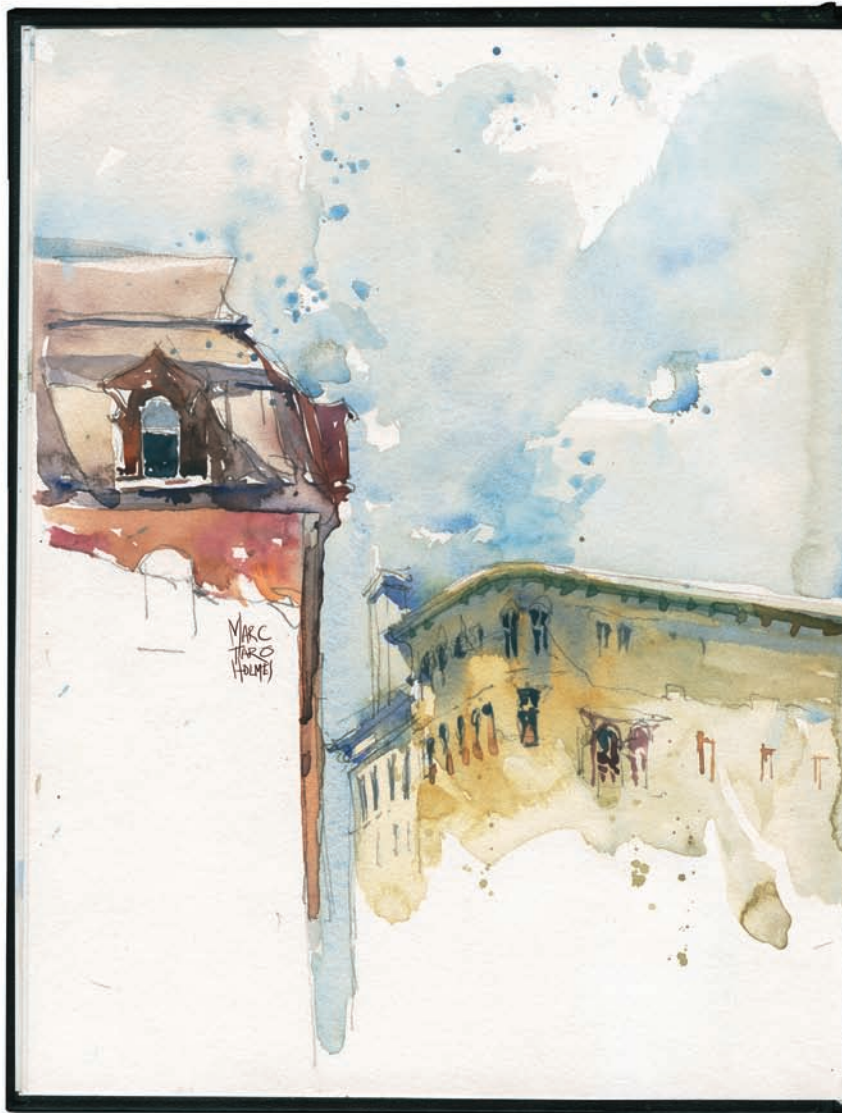
GALLERY III

WATERCOLOR

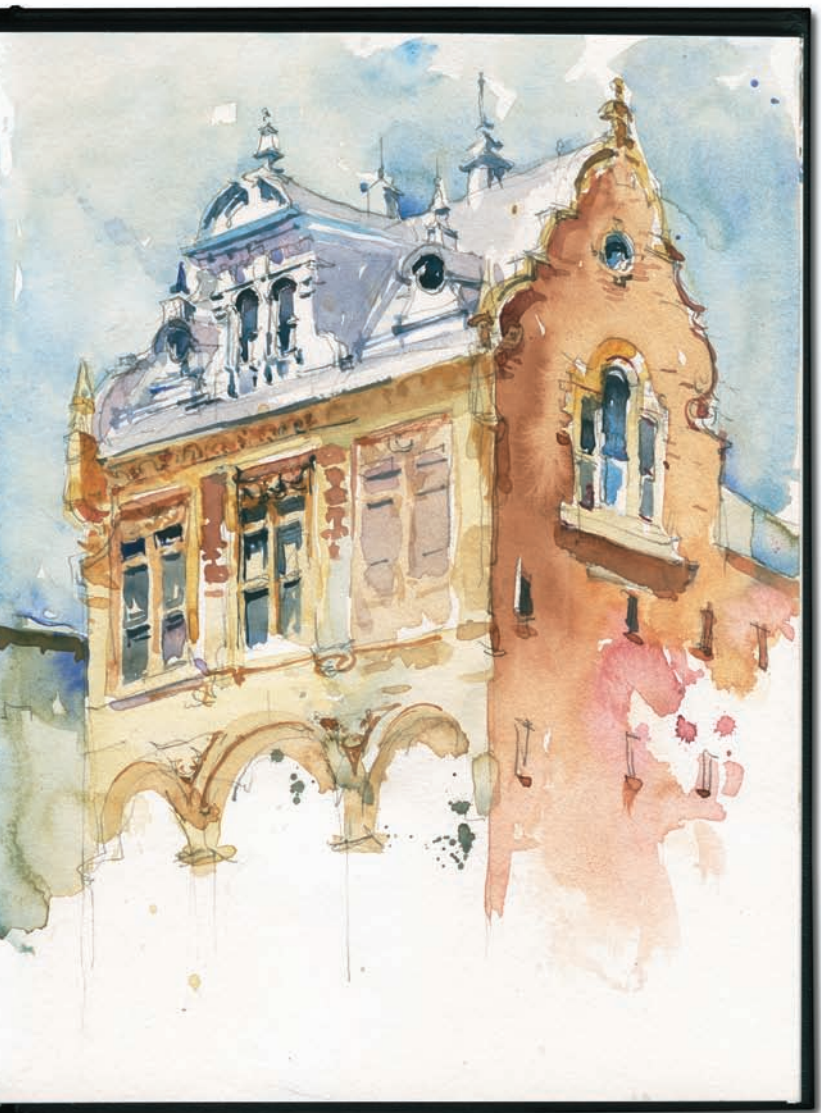
Drawing architecture in watercolor takes longer than in pen or pencil. Don't forget to allow for drying time!

Watercolor can be temperamental. The best tip I've found to tame its fussy behavior is to control the water/pigment ratio, layering washes of different consistency. Montreal-based sketcher Marc Taro Holmes aims for these consistencies: tea (more water than pigment for light areas of color); milk (more opaque mix of water and pigment for richer areas of color); and honey (dense mix of pigment and water for thick accents).

Though many urban sketchers combine watercolor with another medium, such as ink, this gallery shows watercolor-only sketches or those where only underlying pencil was used. They deserve their own category.



“Record only what interests you and ignore everything else. The most detail, greatest contrast, and brightest color should overlap in the area of interest, smoothly fading away to the edges.” —Marc Taro Holmes



📍 Old Montreal

17" x 11" | 43.2 x 28 cm;

Watercolor and 0.7mm

mechanical pencil on Stillman &

Birn Beta sketchbook; 45 minutes.





"I got in the habit of drawing using lots of pen lines to create form in drawings and wanted to try and push myself to do something new. I couldn't quite let go of lines completely, so I used a pencil to sketch in the main shapes." —Lis Watkins

i Tower Bridge, London
23" x 8" | 58.4 x 20.3 cm;
Pencil and watercolor;
about 1.5 hours.

"For me, capturing architecture in watercolor is a quicker and easier way to get the whole structure, volume, ambience, light, and shade at the same time. And most importantly, it is as fun as singing a song along with your favorite music." —Kumi Matsukawa

c Yakushi-do Shrine
12" x 8" | 30.5 x 20.3 cm;
Colored pencil and watercolor on
Moleskine watercolor notebook;
1 hour.

“Play with geometric shapes. Begin with a general shape of the roof, then the walls, then the ground, making sure everything fits in the frame. Above all, relax and have fun, it will enrich your sketch.” —Emily Nudd-Mitchell

U Villa Strassburger,
Deauville, France
11.5" x 8" | 30 x 20.3 cm;
Sennelier Schmincke Smith tube
watercolors applied with custom-
made Denis Beaux Arts brushes
on A5 140 gsm white paper
sketchbook; 2 hours.





📌 Brick and Stone

11" x 7.5" | 28 x 19 cm;
Watercolor on Fabriano
Artistico 140 lb soft press
paper; about 2 hours.

"I love picking up two different neutral washes on my biggest brush and allowing the magic to happen as paint goes down on paper. If you're lucky, you get lots of interesting texture on the buildings without painting every brick and stone!"

—Shari Blaukopf

SKETCH HERE!



GALLERY IV

MIXED MEDIA

You've tried pencil, ink, and watercolor and learned the characteristics of every medium. Now is the time to mix things up.

It's a leap to be taken with caution, though. The possibilities can be overwhelming, not to mention the extra time and juggling these type of sketches usually require, and how much heavier your bag will be! Forget about surreptitious sketching—once you spread all your tools out on the street, you'll become a performer.

To start, try combining two mediums: pencil and watercolor, or ink and watercolor. Ultimately, the more techniques you learn, the better equipped you will be to respond to any sketching situation.



📍 Huesca Cathedral, Spain

12" x 9" | 30.5 x 23 cm; Sailor fountain pen, watercolor and water-soluble Caran D'Ache Neocolors on Estudio Ductus sketchbook with Cyclus paper; about 30 minutes.



"Buildings are static and serious elements that can come alive applying energetic strokes of color, organic shapes, and distortion." —Inma Serrano



f Franklin Fountain,
Philadelphia, PA

11" x 3.5" | 28 x 9 cm; Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pen (size S), Winsor & Newton watercolor and white gouache, Harmony squirrel-hair mop brush, Winsor & Newton pointed round sable brush, Maleskine watercolor notebook; 30 minutes for line art on the spot, 45 minutes for coloring and lettering details afterwards.



"When looking at architectural subjects, I'm usually drawn to ornate detail and repeating patterns. As a lettering artist, I'm also attracted to signage and other found typography on buildings. Whenever I find a vintage faded mural advertisement, I've got my sketchbook at the ready." —Chandler O'Leary

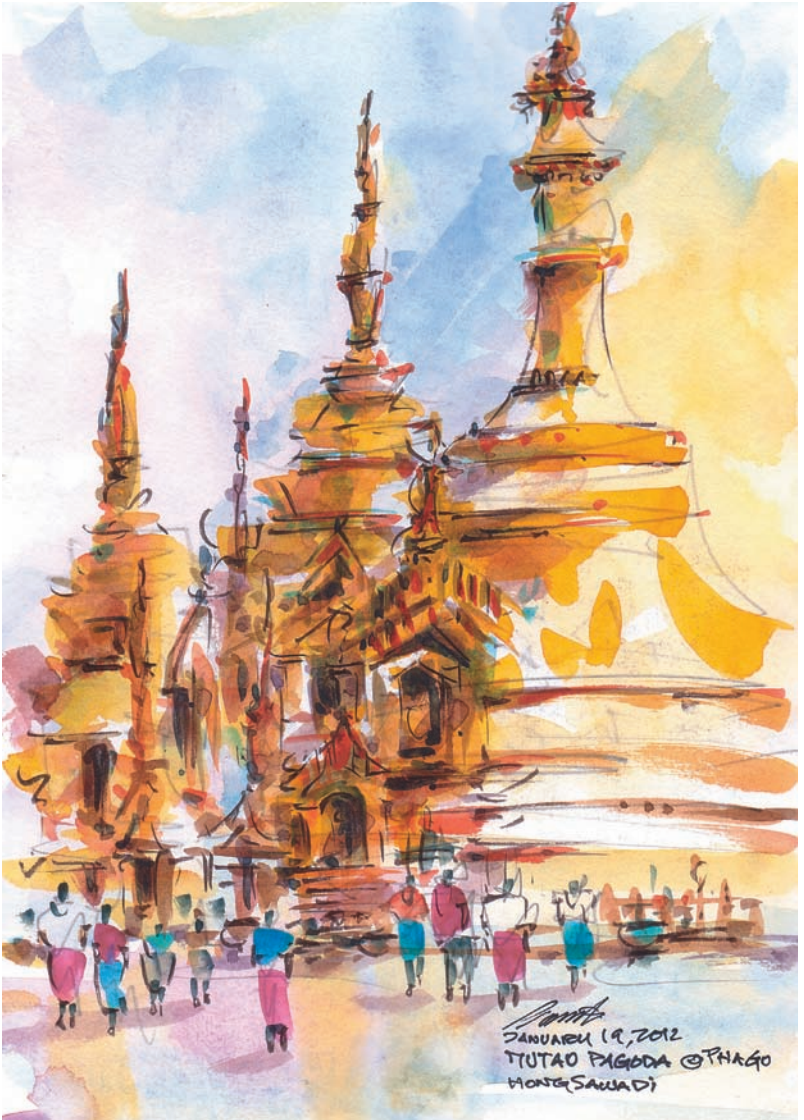
🕒 Zürich, Josefstrasse
10" x 8" | 25.4 x 20.3 cm;
Faber-Castell felt pen and
Winsor & Newton watercolor on
Clairefontaine 300 gsm, 140 lb,
cold press watercolor paper;
1.5 hours.

🕒 Mutao Pagoda, Hong-
sawadee City, Myanmar
7" x 10" | 17.8 x 25.4 cm;
Watercolor and ink line on
150 gsm sketchbook; about
30 minutes.



“Drawing buildings is having a close look at many beautiful architectural details I’d not have noticed otherwise.”

—André Sandmann



“I prepared the background with blue, pink, and yellow then drew the line with pencil. Paint with watercolors, put the shade, and paint people with a flat brush. Touch up with black ink brush pen.”

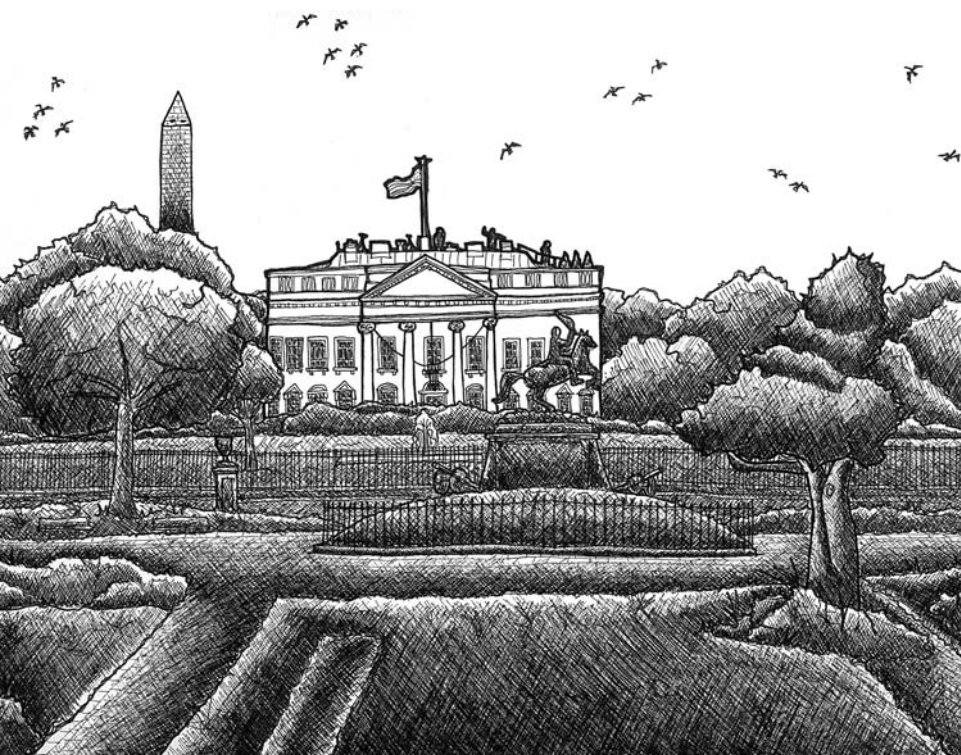
—Pramote Kitchumnongpan

ETIQUETTE

Sketching in public puts you in contact with the world. Be prepared to handle human interaction in a courteous manner.

You have the right to draw in public spaces.

As long as you are not trespassing on private property, you should be able to draw to your heart's content, just like news photographers can't be prosecuted for taking photos on the street. Buildings are not "copyrighted." Nor can a security guard chase you away from a public space because you are drawing the building he's guarding. Of course, laws vary by country—and you should always respect the law—but I think we can all agree that sketching is part of our freedom of speech.



Nice job. Are you an artist?

People will stop and peek over your shoulder when you draw on the street. Don't brush off their positive feedback by dismissing your work or skill with toss-off comments like "It's just a sketch" or "I'm not really an artist." You don't want to insult their taste. Take the opportunity to ask them about the building you are sketching. Do they know about its history? Do they have a story about that place? Remember that urban sketching is about immersing yourself in your city or the places you travel. You'll miss out if you wear headphones or don't welcome interaction.

Can I have that sketch?

It will happen sooner or later. Someone will want your sketch, the original or a digital file, for a brochure, a calendar, a save-the-date wedding card, or just to decorate a room. You may be flattered but, please, take my advice: Think twice before you agree to let others use your artwork. You may offer the sketch in exchange for valuable exposure, or because the person asking is a relative or a friend, but, for example, you don't want a business to put it on T-shirts without fair compensation. You see, in some cases you may be undermining the work of professional artists and illustrators who draw for a living. When in doubt, consult a professional illustrator. The takeaway here is simple: Teach people that a sketch has value. While it may have only taken you a few minutes to make, its quality is the result of many more hours, even years, of learning and practice.

C When drawing the White House, regular sketcher Guido Seoanes was confronted by the Secret Service. "This is the third time that we see you around the area, what are you doing?" they asked him. "Just exercising my freedom of sketching, sir," he replied.

GUIDO SEOANES

White House

11" x 8.75" | 28 x 22.2 cm;
Several Sakura Pens Pigma Micron from 005 to 08 on watercolor and multimedia 80 lb Holbein Multi-Drawing Book; 2 hours.

CHALLENGES

1. Draw a façade.
2. Draw an architectural detail.
3. Draw looking up through a window.
4. Draw looking down through a window.
5. Draw a town square.
6. Draw an alley.
7. Draw a skyline.
8. Draw a piece of urban furniture.
9. Draw a monument or statue.
10. Draw an old building.
11. Draw a modern building.
12. Draw a storefront.
13. Draw a flat street.
14. Draw a street that goes uphill.
15. Draw a street that goes downhill.
16. Draw a narrow street.
17. Draw a wide street.
18. Draw a building under construction.
19. Draw a building at night.
20. Draw a tiny building.
21. Draw a skyscraper.
22. Draw a brick building.
23. Draw a wooden building.
24. Draw a glass office building.
25. Draw a single-family home.
26. Draw an apartment building.



DON MCNULTY

Engine 55, New York City
Fire Department

3" x 5" | 7.6 x 12.7 cm; Picasso bent nib
calligraphy pen, Noodler's waterproof black ink,
Winsor & Newton and Daniel Smith watercolors on
Canson 140 gsm watercolor paper; 40 minutes.



BRUNO AGNES

Fountain, St. Martin Place

4.5" x 5.7" | 11.4 x 14.5 cm; Staedtler Fineliner
0.2 and 0.5 mm and Winsor & Newton watercolors
on Canson 150 gsm sketchbook; 2 hours.

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