

THE TRAVEL SKETCHER'S GUIDE TO TRAVEL & SKETCHING



BY TERRY CHRISTOPHERSON

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TERRY CHRISTOPHERSON

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PROLOGUE

Early one September Saturday morning I boarded Emirates at SeaTac airport for a fourteen hour flight, arriving in Dubai on Sunday. Monday I did a seminar in Dubai, on Tuesday I flew to Genoa, did another seminar on Thursday, then back to Seattle on Friday. This was one of the most memorable trips from my 25 years as a seminar speaker.

In my bag I carried a 3.5" x 5.5" Moleskin sketchpad, Windsor & Newton Cotman Travel Pallet, a water-brush, and a couple of Micron pens - my kit. it was rare for me to go anyplace without my kit, sketching was, and still is, a critical component of my travel.

Dubai was quite a surprise. Photos prepared me for the ultramodern buildings, they are dazzling to see in person. I expected to see men dressed in thobes and ghutras, women in hajibs. I figured that my western attire would stand out, but no. Dubai is 80% foreigners who dress western. Men in business suits and women dressed like they just stepped out of Nordstrom. It is a bit overwhelming there.

That evening, after bangers and mash at an Irish pub, I took my sketchpad up to the rooftop swimming-pool-bar of the Raddison. Dubai is actually prettier after dark with the lights of the buildings and the stars in the sky. I ordered a beer and sketched; a night I will always remember.

Tuesday afternoon I landed in Milan, rented a car and drove 118 miles to Genoa. After finally finding parking and my hotel it was already dark; I was hungry so I headed out in search of a restaurant.

The Osteria Marinara A Lanterna da Don Gallo was just a few blocks down the way. I sat at a table on the sidewalk, *al fresco* is always best, ordered wine and food, then got out my



sketchpad.

The next day there was no seminar, just a free day to wander into town. Italy is famous for the squares in the city, and of course coffee.



This trip was one of the most memorable of the hundreds of trips I have taken, I savored the moments by lingering over a sketchpad instead of snapping a selfie. And today as I write and look at these sketches I sense just a bit of what it was like those days five years ago.

This book is about why I sketch and how I go about it. There will be some techniques, as well as a lot of practical tips about traveling and sketching along the way. I hope you enjoy the journey and are encouraged to travel and sketch even more.

WHY?

Have you ever seen a Travelsketcher in action? You were visiting some fascinating location, surrounded by people taking photos and selfies, off to the side, sitting on a bench, you saw a sketcher. They studied the same building you just took a photo of, then they made marks on their sketchpad, studied a bit more, made more marks. Possibly you thought it looked enjoyable, maybe you wished you knew how to sketch. Somehow you knew that they were involved in the place differently, more intimately, than most of the other folks.

Sketching captures the moment better than just taking a quick photo; even a quick sketch takes longer and requires more observation than a photo does. When sketching you immerse yourself in the place and time, you hear the sounds, you see the people, all while forming an indelible picture in your mind.

Why sketch? We travel to experience a place and time. The joy of travel is found in the people we meet, the places we see, the food we eat, the sounds, the interactions with cultures both similar and different to our own. Sketching while traveling is the best way I know to capture those moments. You end up with a journal of the journey - sketches, observations, a glued in map or train ticket, even a photo. Your sketchbook becomes a treasure, a souvenir of the trip. It is unique, and it beats anything the gift shops sell.

What follows are a few thoughts about how to go about travelsketching. Disclaimer: this is how I go about the task, and certainly not the only way.

Note to photographers - I am not anti-photography, I love travel photo blogs where the photographer observes and composes, they do take the time to capture the moment. Take thoughtful photos, not indiscriminate clicks.

PACK LIGHT, BUT DON'T FORGET YOUR KIT

The more years I travel the less I pack. This concept gets at the heart of most everything I do when traveling, including the size of my bag and the size of my sketching kit.

There are obvious benefits to packing less: lower bag fees, less time waiting for luggage at the airport, less to carry when you are on the fourth floor of a Parisian hotel with no elevator. If you travel by train or use the subway you will quickly rue the bulky, refrigerator sized suitcase filled with all those things you “just might need.”

We will talk about what to carry for sketching later, for now just know that I apply the same mindset to my art supplies. Like clothing, “I might need it” is just not a good enough reason to throw in five extra tubes of some obscure colors of paint. But more on that later.

One of my highest priorities when I travel is to avoid standing out as a tourist. Sadly, the cartoon images of the tourist wearing loud colors, talking even louder while demanding service, wearing a huge camera, with maps and guidebooks hanging out of every pocket, do represent some tourists. My goal is to blend in as much as possible, I love it when a tourist mistakes me for a local.

By blending in you experience more of the culture, another of my top priorities. Challenging when you are at a crowded, popular location, but even then I try.

Thoughts on Packing

A simple packing exercise is to lay out everything you think you need to take. Then ask how often do you anticipate wearing the item? If the answer is one time, remove it from the pile.

Next question, what items are you taking “just in case”? I can safely say that the majority of the time you can remove them from the pile. After every trip identify items that you did take but never used, make a note to not take it again.

Part of the challenge is to realize that you don't need a different outfit for each day of the trip, and if the trip is long, you can do laundry.

Mix and match, avoid any item that can only be worn with only one other item. My daughter tends to take solid colors, that can be mixed and matched, then she uses scarfs for accent.

Shoes take up a lot of space, you really can carry fewer pairs; the pair you wear on the plane plus one other is the goal.

When it comes to packing my sketching kit I use the same process. Lay out everything possible then whittle it down to what I will actually use.

My shoulder bag is just large enough to hold my iPad mini, along with a 5x8 inch sketchbook. It holds the pens I need, brushes and paint pallets.

This size makes it pretty easy to blend in, even while sketching. If I want a larger sketchpad I go up a notch in bag size, or carry it in my hand.

I don't write this to be critical of anyone, it is my philosophy, developed during those years when I went on forty trips a year. With a carry-on-roller bag and an 8x14 inch shoulder-bag, I could navigate airports easily, and rarely found that I was lacking anything critical.

On my first seminar trip, to Wisconsin, I did not pack so light. In fact I took two suits for the five day trip, along with extra ties and too many shirts. After a trip or two like that it hit me, "I have a different audience every day, no one will know that I am wearing the same suit as yesterday." Before long it was one suit, two ties (mostly for my own variety), two or three shirts. All went well unless I spilled something.

WHAT TO TAKE - YOUR PALLET

Most of the sketching I do is ink-and-wash style, occasionally a pencil sketch. My basic kit will handle both.

The tools I use for travelsketching have not changed much over the years, a few refinements and tweaks of course, an occasional item added then often deleted later. Like packing clothes for travel, I go with essentials and go light, AND small whenever practical.

Basic List

Here is a list of the essentials.

- * Pocket sized pallet
- * Brush(s)
- * Pen
- * Sketchpad

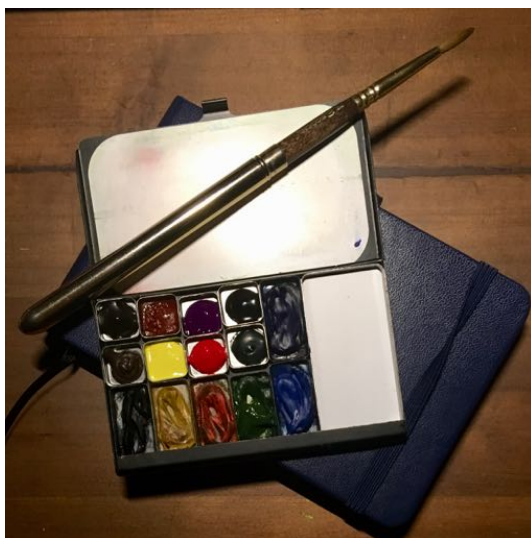
I also have a pencil and an eraser, though I can do without if needed.

Pocket Pallet



For many years I traveled with a Winsor & Newton, Cotman Pocket Box, using the included brush as my only brush. This is still the pallet that I recommend to first time sketchers - first of all it is good quality, and secondly it is not expensive. I want to make it affordable for someone to try sketching, and should they decide it is not something they want to continue doing I don't want them to be out a lot of money.

After 15 years of using the Cotman, I made a switch to the Art-Tool Kit pallet from Expeditionary Art in Port Townsend, Washington.



My criteria for a pallets is first of all size, large enough to carry the paints I want, but small enough to always be with me. There are smaller pallets, and a few folks only carry the three primary colors - red, blue, yellow - and do some wonderful work.

The Art-Toolkit has an advantage in size, it is the size of a business card case. It comes with empty pans, with a variety of pan sizes available for making easy changes in the configuration and selection of colors.

Tip: For the traveling light style of this book, pick a pallet that will fit in a shirt pocket.

Tip 2: Instead of carrying tubes of paint on longer trips, fill extra pans with your most used colors, they will take up less space and can be exchanged when the one in the pallet runs out.

WHAT TO TAKE - PAINTS

The first thing to know about paints is that there are at least two grades - student and professional/artist. The adage that “you get what you pay for” does apply.

The main difference between student and artist grade paints is the amount of pigment used, pigment is what makes paint expensive, so more pigment the higher the cost, but also better quality and results.

Student grade is completely adequate for getting started. The Cotman worked fine for me for many years, I enjoyed sketching and painting all over the world, at a reasonable price.

Another reason I recommend a pallet that comes already filled with colors if you are just starting out is that paint tubes are not cheap, and if you fill your own pallet pans you have to buy a tube of each color. What I ended up doing with the Cotman pallet was gradually moving to a better grade paint as I would empty one of the pans that came with the set.

Color selection for your pallet is a highly personal decision, you will most likely change your preferences over time. Here are some basics.

You will need at least three colors - the primaries. Red, blue, yellow. These are your foundation. Many teachers say you need two of each primary, a warm (tending toward yellow) and a cool (tending toward blue). I am sure they are right about that. However for travelsketching I have never worried too much about it.

Here are my most common colors, in the order of how much I use them:

- * Ultramarine blue - this is my workhorse color, on its own or mixed with another color to darken a green or make a gray.
- * Sap green - my workhorse green. Darkened with ultramarine it works for distant hills, or fir trees. Lightened with yellow it works for flowers and spring colors.
- * Yellow Ocher - I use this as my main yellow. By itself, or with a bit of sepia, it is just right for castles and buildings in Europe. It works well for fields and dried grass. And is almost the exact color of *un croissant* in France.

* Sepia - This is a dark brown that lightens with water to a tan, added to yellow ocher it becomes stones, beaches, tree trunks. Mixed with ultramarine you can get a gray that is almost black, one reason many painters never carry black.

I could survive with only these four colors, they are probably 80% of what I use. Yet there are other colors that add a lot of variation.

* Perylene green - this is a grayed green, with a hint of blue added. It is wonderful for foliage in the distance. Or for plants with a gray hue, lightened with water it has the look of an olive tree.

* Burnt Sienna - added to ultramarine gives another wonderful gray. Alone or with yellow ocher and you have stones and buildings, branches of some shrubs or water plants.

* Pyrrole red - I rarely see this one in the pallet of other sketchers, yet I love it. It is an intense red, and since flowers are often included in what I sketch it works well.

* Cadmium Red Medium - this is a standard red, it comes in most pre-filled pallets, it works well for a more orange leaning red and for “warming” up greens.

* Cerulean blue - I started using this after I went to Nice, France. It is as bright as the sky. It has a bit of a greenish color so it works well for water close to shore.

* Bismuth yellow - Cadmium Yellow is the standard in most pallets, I often have that as well, but Bismuth yellow is there for the same reason as the Pyrrole Red, it is intense.

* Indian Red - so handy for buildings, stones.

These are the most common colors for me, though I will often have some form of purple as it works well in flowers.

What about black? Yes I carry it all the time. The classic argument about black for watercolor painters is that “there is no black in nature.” Well possibly so, but there are a lot of places where things are pretty black looking to me and I want more intensity than I get from the grays. Also, if you are an urban sketcher you paint things that are not of nature, they are made by humans that used black. So I recommend it, just don’t get carried away.

What about white? The classic way of doing white in watercolor is to use the paper, just don't paint where you want white to show through. Besides that, most of the whites that come in sets are useless. China White, the most common, just makes things milky, I have no use for it. To lighten colors in watercolor you just use water to thin the paint, so no white needed for that. What I carry, as many do, is a small tube of White Gouache. Gouache is an opaque watercolor, a bit of white after your watercolors have dried works well for highlights.

As far as brands go.

- * Student grade, Winsor & Newton Cotman, it is the best quality of the economy paints I have found.

- * Artist grade

- * Winsor & Newton is a top brands, the choice of many great painters.

- * Daniel Smith is the one I see most often when I look at what other sketchers are using; it is what I use.

- * M. Graham is one of the finest you can find. They have a commitment to the environment that is so important. Their quality is as good as it gets. So, why don't I use it exclusively? The base for their paints is honey, as such it never completely hardens when I put it in a pan. I have made many wonderful messes on my arms and clothes with M. Graham when forgetting that it is always sticky. If I was a studio painter I might reconsider.

Tip: Better to have a few high quality paints, than a bunch of cheap ones. Get the best your budget will allow.

WHAT TO TAKE - BRUSHES

To complete our kit we need brushes and pens, as well as something to sketch on.

Brushes

A internet search of “best type of brush” will yield you enough reading material to last many years. You will find passionate arguments on sable, bristle, or synthetic brushes. Are there differences worth noting, of course, as well as environmental considerations.

Since I am trying to capture a moment while on a journey, the choices I make for travel are different than when I am in my studio.

There are travelsketchers who carry multiple brushes in their kit, that is fine for them, but it takes up too much space for me.

Most of the time I have at most two brushes - a waterbrush and a travel brush.

Water-brush

You either like water-brushes or disdain them. Most of the folks I know that use a water-brush also use, and probably prefer regular brushes.



The compelling advantage of a water-brush is convenience. Since your water is carried in the barrel of the brush you can paint without filling a cup with water, just take off the lid and start painting. A syringe works well for filling from water bottles or a stream

Tip: get in the habit of putting the tip on the end of the brush while painting, it keeps it from rolling down a hillside.

The bristles are nylon, pretty much indestructible, though they will wear down over long use. Unlike sable and bristle brushes

which need a lot of meticulous cleaning, the paint will not dry on the water-brush; dried paint ruins bristle brushes.

While painting it is not necessary to squeeze the barrel unless you are cleaning the brush, or need a bit more water to thin and mix paint.

If you are flying and decide to paint on the plane, one caution - at higher altitudes the cabin pressure is less than it was at ground level, so the water in the brush is under pressure, meaning it can leak when you first use it, making for a soupy first stroke and a blob of too wet paint. I always unscrew the barrel a bit to let the pressure even-out and wipe brush on napkin; the problem is solved.

As far as size goes the medium works well for most any situation I encounter. If you only use small sketchbooks then a fine tip might work. Large ones tend to be sloppy.

Pentel is my preferred brand. The other brands I have tried tend to leak, or it is a challenge to get the water flowing at all.

Travel paint brush

When the situation allows it I prefer using a quality travel brush. The Escoda Reserva is my favorite - a #4 round.



It is a joy to paint with, there are other brands, less expensive, but since I only carry one it is worth the cost. Clean it well after use and it will last for many *voyages*.

When you paint with a quality brush you will understand why some sketchers reject water-brushes, a real brush does paint better. But our objective is to be ready to paint at all times, so the water-brush has an important function, carry both if you can.

WHAT TO TAKE - PENS & INK

Over the years I have done many sketches with only paint and a brush, you may find that is your go-to style. Traditional watercolor instruction suggests doing a pencil sketch before applying paint. The technique I use most often is to sketch with ink first, then apply paint. So we need to think about pens.

There are four basic types of pen that could be used for art:

- * Ballpoint - yes it is true that some artists have done amazing things with a cheap ballpoint, it is not my style as I rarely even write with a ballpoint, but it will work just fine.
- * Dip pens - these are cheap and allow you to use a variety of inks. For the travelsketcher I just don't see the practicality of sitting on a rock, trying to balance a bottle of ink while I sketch. I know I would end up wearing the ink.
- * Technical pens - These are the most common for travelsketchers.
- * Fountain pens - These are my favorites.

People seem to have two attitudes toward pens: "What's the big deal? It's just a pen, so give me the cheapest throw away you have." OR "If you have to ask why I have ten fountain pens, and multiple technical pens... well you just wouldn't understand." Those of us that are pen aficionados love our pens, and are always on the lookout for a new one, which we hide from our non-understanding partners for a few weeks, then when they notice we exclaim, "no it's not new, I have had it for a while."

The two pens I recommend for travelsketching are technical and fountain, I need and use both.

Technical pens

There are two main types of technical pens that work for travelsketching, whether it is ink sketching or line-and-wash style: Refillable or non-refillable.

The first refillable technical pen I ever owned was a Rapidograph.



I bought it in 1989 at Lloyd Center Mall in Portland, Oregon while on a business trip. My hotel was the Red Lion, just across the street from; I went back to my room and did a sketch, here it is.

Sometimes you just sketch what is right in front of you, even argyle socks.



Rapidograph pens come in a range of sizes.

The finest is the hairline 6x0 (.13mm), the broadest is the 4 (1.20mm). If I was to use one today it would most likely be either the 3x0 or the 00.

The big advantage, which is also a disadvantage, is that you can fill these with different colors of ink. What I remember most is that they were a bit demanding as far as keeping them clean so that the ink flowed well. They are an option if you are so inclined, but a bit fussy for what I do.

My preference are non-refillable pens, there are multiple brands, nib sizes, and colors. The brand I have had the best results with is the Pigma Micron by Sakura.

Like the Rapidograph they come in a range of sizes.

MICRON 003	MICRON 005	MICRON 01	MICRON 02	MICRON 03	MICRON 05	MICRON 08
0.15 mm	0.20 mm	0.25 mm	0.30 mm	0.35 mm	0.45 mm	0.50 mm



The 01 is the size I use most often, but the 005 and the 02 get plenty of use as well.

There are other brands for sure, what is important is that you have waterproof ink if you are going to use them to sketch and then wash with watercolor.

Fountain Pens

Fountain pens are hands down my favorite and the favorite of many travel and urban sketchers. Fountain pens have an uncanny way of becoming addictive, one is never enough, and the options are almost limitless. From inexpensive throwaway versions, to pens costing hundreds of Euros.

When you add in the wide range of inks, and nib styles and sizes it is clear I can not exhaust the topic here, so I will talk about what I would use if you are going to give fountain pens a try.

An unscientific survey of sketching groups would conclude that the Lamy Safari is one of the most popular.



They come in a variety of colors and nib widths, I recommend the Fine or Extra Fine for travelsketching. I have owned a number of these over the years and they are a dependable pen at a reasonable price, with quality that makes using them a joy.

If you get a Lamy, or most any other fountain pen be sure and get an “ink converter.” It replaces the ink cartridges allowing you to fill the pen from a bottle of ink.

My second recommendation is TWISBI Diamond Mini.



The TWISBI Mini is small enough to carry even in a pants pocket, it has a screw on cap which makes it secure. There are no ink cartridges involved as all TWISBI pens are designed to be filled from bottled ink. It is available in F and EF nibs, I recommend the EF.

These are just two brands, once you start looking you will find plenty of choices. I bought a pen in Italy that continues to be with me most of the time.

Another pen that competes for top spot for me is my Confucius Fude.

A “Fude” pen has a wide, split, bent nib. These types of pens are designed for Japanese and Chinese Kangi writing as you can get fine and broad strokes from the same pen. The Confucius brand is a heavy pen, too heavy for some, the Sailor brand is lighter.

Though I have done detailed sketches with my Fude, it works best for a looser style, like this sketch I did of a ghost town in Montana.



If I was forced to only have one pen for sketching it would be a tough decision. The finalists would be a TWISBI or a Confucius Fude - a choice I hope I never have to make.

Ink

If you are using Micron style of pens the ink is in the pen, but for fountain pens or re-fillable technical pens you will need to decide on which ink to use.

Of supreme importance, **never, never, never use India Ink in a fountain pen!** India ink is basically ground up carbon, which means it has particles that can clog up a fountain pen. Yes, there are a few meticulous souls who use India ink, but they clean the pen almost daily; too much work for me.

What you want is dye-based inks, and for the kind of sketches most of us do when traveling you want it to be waterproof.

Two brands stand out: De Atramentis and Platinum Carbon. My preference is Platinum Carbon, it dries the fastest and seems to have the least amount of bleed on the paper. Having said that,

fountain pen folks love debating the merits of ink, so know that many will be happy to explain why I make the wrong choice.

Another brand that is popular is Noodler's, which comes in a wide range of colors. I use their brown in one of my Lamy pens, but it is not waterproof. And their waterproof is not near as resistant to water as the Platinum or De Atramentis.

Note: Fountain pens work best when you are doing the ink sketching before the watercolor wash. If I am doing watercolor first, then putting ink on top of the dried paint, a Micron works better. The reason is that fountain pen ink needs to absorb into the paper, when used on top of paint it tends to bleed a bit. So I carry both styles of pens if possible.

Traveling with pens

There are folks who worry about fountain pens leaking on an airplane. After 25 years of flying I must admit it has happened, but quite rarely if you do a couple of things. First, the air pressure does not affect a full pen as much as a pen low on ink, so try to have your pens full. Secondly carry the pen with the point up.

AND ink bottles are quite rugged, the glass is thick, so I never worry about it in my checked or carry-on. If you are worried, put it in a plastic bag. I find that if I fill my pens before I leave I have enough for the whole trip and don't carry an ink bottle most times. Just to be safe though I carry Platinum Carbon cartridges as a back up. They do not fit in a Lamy, but they do work in most other pens.

WHAT TO TAKE - THE REST

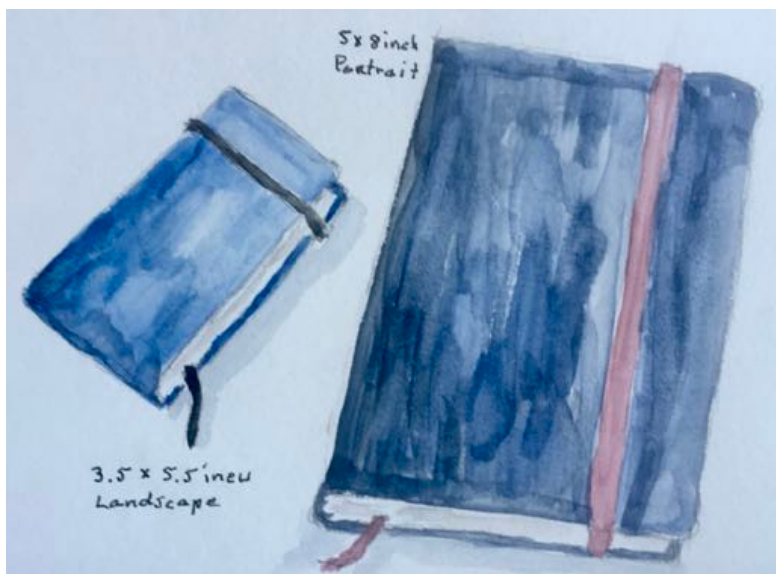
Sketchbooks

With paints, brushes, and pens we are ready to sketch, but we need something to sketch on.

One option is to use loose sheets of paper. I sketch on watercolor paper from 2.5x3.5 inches up to 6x8 inches quite often. This works well if you plan to frame something or give it as a gift.

For most travelsketching a sketchbook is the best option. Like most everything there are a lot of choices so lets look at some basics.

Most sketchbooks come in either landscape or portrait, and it is purely a matter of taste and style as to which you use. While traveling for business I used a pocket size landscape, however for the last few years a larger portrait orientation has been my constant companion.



Sketchbooks with rigid covers work the best for me, I use them to support my pallet, which I will demonstrate later. Some folks do like soft covers, so explore both.

The paper is important. If you are going to use watercolor you need paper labeled as mixed-media or watercolor paper. The paper has to be able to stand up to getting wet, thin paper will buckle.

Paper is rated by weight - In the U.S. it is the weight of 500 sheets of paper, which can be a bit confusing and hard to compare one product to another. The better way to rate paper is "grams per square meter." Mixed Media paper will be around 80lbs (190gsm), water color paper will be heavier, 140lbs (300gsm). Disclaimer, there is a lot more to it, beyond the scope of this book, a good topic for a web search.

Tip: The wetter you paint, the heavier, thicker paper you need.

The second consideration is the surface of the paper, rough or smooth. Hot Pressed paper will be smooth, cold pressed will be rough, with a wide range of textures on the market.

Brands like - Moleskine, Stillman & Birn, Pentalique, Strathmore, Canson, Arteza - are all good choices with advocates for each.

Another consideration for me is how it feels. Is this a book I will like carrying down some street in Provence, sitting at a cafe or a bench in a park?

Pencil

For those times you want to sketch something quick you need a pencil, or for laying out a sketch before painting or using ink.

A 2H, H, or HB pencil will work fine, the numbers relate to the hardness, and thus the darkness of the graphite - there really is no lead in a lead pencil. You don't want it too dark or it will show through the paint.

I use wooden pencils (be sure to carry a sharpener), a 2mm lead holder, and a 6mm lead holder. Rarely do I have them all with me at any one time, but the variety is nice. The 6mm is nice to do a quick loose sketch, often I have used watercolor over the graphite with a nice effect.

Odds and ends

- * Quality art eraser. Many recommend the soft pliable ones, but they elude me. Just a good white eraser will be fine.
- * Pocket size ruler, it is quite all right to use a ruler to measure and even draw a line.

- * White gel pen for highlights
- * Collapsible water container

It is pretty safe to say that most artists and sketchers are easily attracted to new bright-shiny-objects, that pen, pencil, case, sketchbook... Thus I have more pencils and markers than I could use in multiple lifetimes. There is no cure that I know of, but I do resist the urge to take it all with me.

Reminder - Pack what you will use, 95% of the just-in-case tools will just be extra weight.

LET'S GO SKETCHING - SOME INITIAL THOUGHTS

With our kit packed we are ready to do some sketching - some basic considerations to get started.

In my experience there are two approaches to sketching: am I heading out for the purpose of sketching or am I sketching as a result of being out already. Let me explain.

Since I have a column in the local newspaper there are deadlines to meet, so at times I find myself needing to sketch something for the paper. There are times, quite frequently in fact, when I just want to sketch or paint. In both of these situations I may head out with my kit in hand looking for something inspiring.

Honestly these are often frustrating trips. We have a tendency to look for the “perfect” scene, and walk or drive by a dozen wonderful scenes in the process, discouraged that there is “nothing to sketch.”

We could learn a lesson from Plein Air painters who often look, not for objects but views that have contrasts of color or shade, then they paint that scene regardless of how mundane it is - common locations take on a certain attractiveness when they are recorded by paint or ink.

I heard once that the great artist Turner would find a view he felt would work, then he would turn around and actually paint whatever was behind him. I have no idea if it actually true, but I like the concept.

When I head out looking for something to sketch I notice that I tend to look for too large of a scene, so what I do is look for objects, or a specific building, that is of interest, then sketch it in its context. A odd shaped tree, a gate that is falling down, flowers in bloom, a battered dumpster, broken down car.

Another trick is to slow down, get out of the car and walk. If it is a familiar location, walk in a different direction than normal. Or walk for a set time, five minutes, and sketch whatever is around you. Some of my best sketches started with things I would have normally ignored.

Tip - Art is about observing, if we can't find something to sketch we are just not looking closely.

Thankfully, most of the time we sketch because we want to capture a moment or a place, not so much create a masterpiece. For this reason a high percentage of my sketches have been done in cafes and pubs, an outdoor deck with a view is perfect - a cup of coffee, a pint of ale, people bustling about, and my sketchpad.

One of my practices when traveling is to rise early, I can't imagine sleeping in and missing the wonder of a new place; the morning light, sounds, and local folks scurrying to the cafe or to work has an energy unique to that time of day. More often than not I end up sitting on a rock wall or a bench, or in a cafe sketching. Thankfully the folks I travel with usually do not rise as early as I do so my absence is welcomed by them and treasured by me.

One morning in Tokyo I ended up sitting on the steps of the local police office (felt quite safe) while sketching the Buddhist Temple across the street.

When you settle in to sketch give consideration to yourself, the object sketched, and other people.



People who stop to watch

Maybe it is the many years of being in front of a room of people but I don't mind at all when people stop to watch or ask questions. Even some experienced sketchers are a bit uncomfortable, we worry that we are not good enough. What I have learned is that most everyone who stops to chat is a bit envious, they are like so many folks who think they are not artistic but wish they were. The most common comment I get is, "that is so beautiful." They say that even when I only have three lines drawn on a page and you cannot identify what is being painted. Never once has anyone said, "that is bad."

One of the benefits of sketching while traveling is the chance to meet people, few things will open that door more than sketching. When you are sketching you are complimenting the place, people notice that you appreciate where they live; given the chance they will be glad to fill you in on some history or background. When other travelers stop there is a camaraderie and curiosity about your mutual adventures.

Courtesy and respect

It is important to respect the people around you, as a result I work hard to not be in the way of pedestrian traffic, sitting or standing to the side. I don't mind getting attention while sketching, but I don't want to be the center of attention by blocking the sidewalk.

Use caution when sketching other people. Much discussion takes place over asking permission to sketch a person or not. If I was doing a portrait style painting, then possibly, but since most of my sketches are people in context of places, not that specific, I don't worry about asking. However I do avoid staring at a person I am sketching, that makes people uncomfortable.

Remember that there are places and cultures where sketching and art are considered offensive, obviously in those situations don't sketch.

Make friends

Trading card art, 2.5x3.5 inches, is a genre of its own followed by thousands of artist all over the world. For me these small sketches are a ticket to friendships.

Early on I started doing these for servers, flight attendants, people I met at the cafe or bar. They were always welcome. Over time I developed a few basic themes that I could whip out in about 10 minutes. What is most fun for me is to ask my standard question of, "we have tickets to anyplace in the world, where are we going?" This is a good conversation starter, and after doing a lot of these I can usually sketch something from memory that looks like a French hillside, or a Greek building with a blue domed roof. If I can't, I ask them to come back in 15 minutes, this gives me time to do a quick internet search of the place, the images will trigger an idea.

Here are a few I did while traveling.



Safety

I have never had a problem with safety. However 25 years of traveling internationally made me aware of security precautions. I attempt to blend in and I don't leave things laying around for easy pickings. Sadly most of the time when I hear a story of a sketcher who had things stolen it was due to their own negligence.

My bag is always shut, and in front of me on the ground, never open behind me. In addition I am alert to the sounds of people approaching, a smile and a nod lets them know you are there. (I like music, but never have earphones in and you miss the local sounds.) If I am in an area where I feel at all uncomfortable I take a photo and get out.

The idea that it is dangerous to travel is foreign to me. It is no more dangerous to travel to most countries than it is to be in your home country. The reason tourists are targets is because they get distracted, draw attention to themselves, and are not careful. As a sketcher you can fit in pretty well by sitting off to the side, quietly doing your sketch. If you are still worried go with a friend, or stick to cafes.

YOUR SETUP

When sketching at a cafe or a pub your setup it is pretty easy - you have a table in front of you. So the only real decisions are which sketchbook, and do you use a water-brush or get a container for water and use a natural brush. Most often I just ask for a small glass of water with no ice. I do carry a collapsible metal container that reduces down to about 2" in diameter and $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick.

When in the field it helps to have a system, trying to balance a pallet on my knee has resulted in many dropped pallets and a lot of frustration. Here are my two basic travelsketching setups.

Here is the setup I use most often:



This is the reason I prefer hard sketchbooks, though the same setup does work fine with soft covers.

Quite often I end up sketching on my lap, even when there is a table in front of me, must be a habit from all the times I have sketched sitting on rocks or logs; with the pallet clipped to the pad it does not slide and fall. This is pretty easy and quick. The other clips hold down the pages.

If I am using loose sheets this is the setup:



I used the cardboard backing from a pad of watercolor paper, they are about $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick and quite rigid. White duct-tape covers

the edges, and creates a hing so it folds in half. The two clips on either side hold the paper in place, and they are on the fold, holding the board in place; it is quite sturdy.

The water cup is collapsible and held in place by another clip, as is the pallet. Of course if I am using a water brush no cup is needed.

This folding board also works with a sketchbook if you are painting on double pages, or with a wire bound sketchpad.

Though I use both, the first is the easiest to carry, all it takes is a couple of clips. Most all of my sketchbooks have a clip clipped to the cover so I always have one ready to go.

The last question is how to carry it all. Artists are notorious for their bag envy; most of us have many in our possession, not that we need them. My selections are based on what I am doing that day.

My lightest, most compact set-up fits in my pocket with no bag needed.

The sketchbook is 3.5x5.5 inches, which fits in my back pocket. A mini-pallet, pencil, water-brush, and pen all fit in my front pocket.

The bag I carry most often is this small shoulder bag; the bag is only 7 inches wide but there is room for all that I need.



I have a 13 inch messenger bag if more space is needed.



Though I have tried many formats it seems I always end up with the green shoulder bag, sadly I don't think it is available any longer, however there are many selections in the same size range that would fit most budgets.

STUDY & SIMPLIFY

If you have a process when you begin to sketch then even the most daunting scenes are a bit more manageable. My process is essentially the same if I have five minutes or an hour.

Study and Simplify

Always begin by studying what you are going to sketch.

An easy path to frustration is to feel that you must capture everything that is in front of you. Standing on a hillside with a valley at your feet and trying to capture it in a sketch can be most daunting. Our first question is, “What do I want to sketch? And Why?”

Use a viewfinder, either a store bought, or using your hands like the movie folks do in comedies, it does work. The objective is to find a scene that fits on your sketchpad.

Identify the focal point or object - what draws your attention to the scene: a tree, a building, a rock, some flowers, a coffee cup, a book, etc.

Be sure to consider the distant and the close. Is there a tree or plant in the foreground that gives perspective to the hills in the distance? Are there hills in the distance that make the vase of flowers on the table stand out?

Part of composition is deciding what to leave out, just because there are power lines in front of you does not mean you must put them in your sketch, however you may want them. When I was sketching in narrow streets in Tokyo the maze of power lines were part of the ambience, so I put a lot of them in. You may choose to sketch some building a mile away on the horizon, with little of the foreground at all.

The goal of this step is to see the scene more clearly, and to reduce the scene to basic shapes. At this point the colors themselves are less important than the shapes and what we call values.

SHAPES AND DARKS - THE FOUNDATION

Shapes, darks, and colors are the building blocks of art, be it painting, sketching, or photography. Of the three, color is the least critical. Shapes are the most basic, shapes along with darks are the essentials of what we sketch - black and white photographers use only shapes and darks, often with striking results

Sketch shapes not things.

Sketch what you see, not what you think you see.

Oh that we would learn these, tattoo them on our arms, memorize them; it would make life so much easier.

Shapes are the foundation for sketching as our mind quickly recognizes shapes, even with little detail. We can suggest shapes with either lines or with paint, or a combination of both.





Though there is little detail in either of these sketches ...our mind identifies the shapes and both would qualify as a genuine sketch. Frequently when traveling you have little time to stop and sketch, yet you can capture a moment in five minutes or less. Our mind has a catalogue of images, we think in pictures, that is why it works, all we need is just enough shape to trigger the right image.

We also interpret shapes based on their relationships to each other.

- In the line drawing the people are larger than the house, yet, because of the placement of each, our mind knows that the house is just farther away.
- In reality the Eiffel Tower is 180 times taller than a person, yet in the blue painting it all makes sense.

Here is a five minute sketch I did of Yosemite Falls, with little time to do any more. The color was added later, but it was an identifiable sketch



without the color because of the shapes, which I discovered later I did get a bit off, yet it works for a travelsketch, and I remember the day very well.

Darks, for our purposes include shade, shadows, and dark vs. light colors. The rule is this - **Get the darks right and the rest is easy.** More on this later, when we get to discussing color.

Just a bit of shadow and shading make a big difference to our simple sketch.



Before you begin to draw or paint take a moment to identify the major shapes, ignore the details. In this scene we know we have mountains, house, hills, a tree, and people.

Next pick out the darkest areas. One trick that artists have used for many years is to squint, the dark areas will stand out, remember them. Some look at the scene through a red filter, it takes out all the color and makes the darks easy to see.

After identifying the darkest areas find the lightest areas, squinting or the filter works for this as well. Everything else are the mid-tones.

Another way is to take a photo then turn it into a black and white. Notice how the dark areas stand out. The lightest areas are the sky, the edges of the buildings, the side of the building on the left. The rest are the mid-tones.



If you get the darks and the lights right, the mid-tones can be off yet the sketch will be quite impressive.

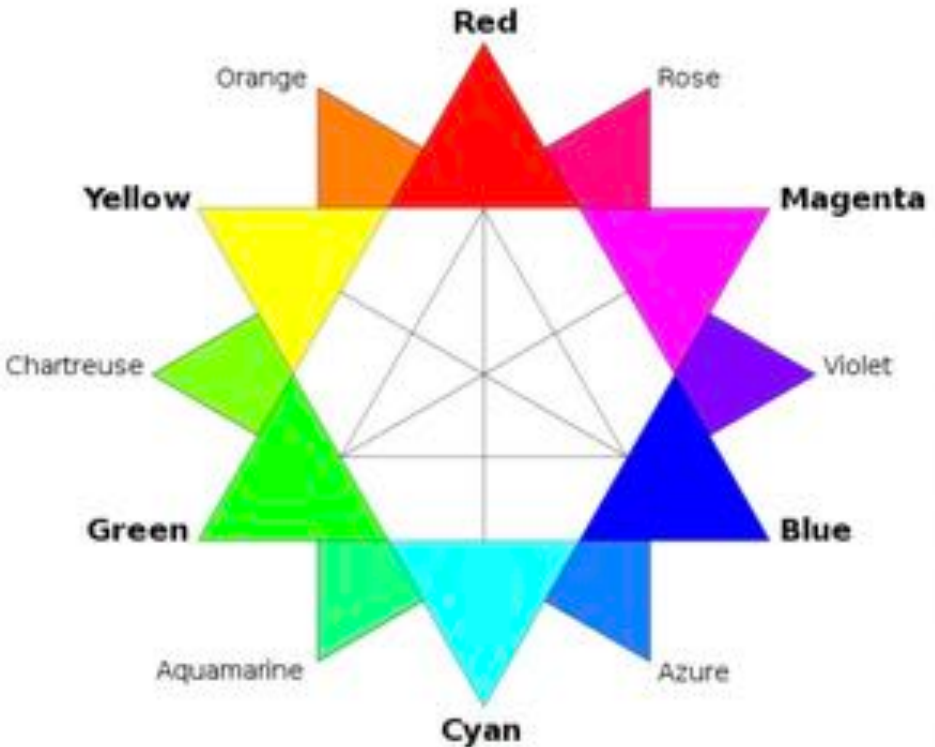
COLORS - KEEPING IT SIMPLE

There are volumes written on color and theory, by folks whose credentials far exceed my own. What we are looking for as travelsketchers is just a few tips to get us going, then we can add to that knowledge as we grow.

Most of what we need to know is in this diagram below.

Example: If you want green, mix yellow and blue, the ratio of one to the other makes the green more chartreuse or azure.

If you mix across the circle you get different grays.



On page 11 I listed some of my favorite paint colors. Here are a few mixing and painting tips that have served me well over the years.

Sap Green is my go to for foliage, which is the green that we paint most often. Add a bit of yellow for the green of spring, or the highlights on a bush where the sun hits. Add a bit of blue and it becomes the color of mid-distant hills or the shadow areas of a tree.

Yellow Ocher is the base for the colors of wheat fields or patches of brown in grassy areas. It is also the basis for many of the stone buildings I find in Europe, accented with a bit of brown for highlights.

Ultramarine blue and sepia makes a gray that can be almost black. Wonderful for stone work, pavement, and some shadows. Thinned down, and with a bit more blue added this is a nice sky color, one I use a lot for the gray skies of the Puget Sound area. More sepia and it becomes the color of tree trunks.

The key is to experiment, play with different colors, remember that you don't have to have a perfect match. One reason is that anything you are sketching will change color as the light changes, it gets darker with shadows, or reflects colors off the water.

Tip: Don't be too quick to clean off the mixing area of your pallet, you can often find some interesting colors there for your next painting, remember watercolor reactivates with just a bit of water.



APPLYING COLORS

The basic principle of watercolor is that you work from light to dark. There is good reason for this. Watercolor paints are all to some degree transparent, which means that if you paint over another color the underneath color will show through.

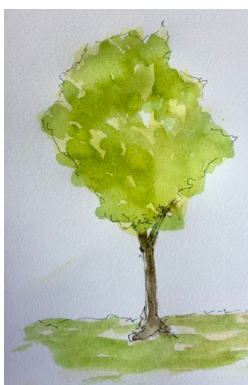
A common way to approach applying the paint is a three step process, working from light/thin to dark/heavy.

Once the shapes are defined, apply the first pass of color only as dark as the lightest areas of the sketch.

When this is dry, apply a second layer of paint in the mid-range, leaving areas of the lights to show through.

Lastly we lay down the third and darkest of colors for shadow, shade, intense areas and details.

As you are painting leave bits of the white of the paper, or the underneath color showing through, it makes natural looking highlights. One danger in doing the ink work first is to think of the painting as a coloring book, just fill in the space. The result of that is a flat looking sketch. The natural uneven darkness of the paints is one of the wonders of watercolor, it does much of our work for us.

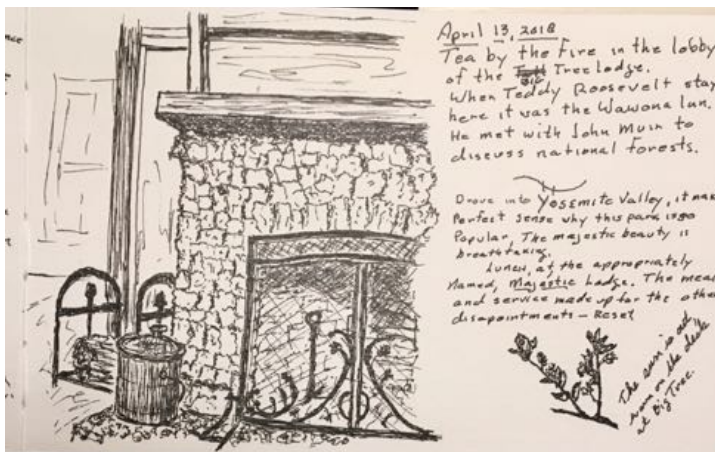


TRAVELSKETCHING IN ACTION

Here are a few pages from my travel journals. I have specifically chosen a variety of styles to show that there is not one way, and that we all end up expressing our mood at the time.



Much of my sketching is done at cafes and pubs, both of these bring back good memories. Coffee in Ballard (Seattle) one morning and a 104°F day on the deck in San Antonio, TX.





The page on the left was from a Washington State Ferry ride, fast because the ferry was only stopped for about five minutes. The Festival of Lights sketch was done one evening while sitting on a rock in Seoul, South Korea.



SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

One last piece of advice: *Just sketch and keep on sketching.*

One of the best sketchers out there is Maria Coryell-Martin, owner of *Expeditionary Art, she reminds us that it is, “Practice not perfection.” There is no better way to say it.

Our goal is to “capture the moment.”

I do a lot of plein air (outside and on location) sketching and painting, quite often the results is not something you would hang on your wall, but that is not the point.

When my knees were younger I spent many days hiking the hills and mountains of Mt. Hood, Columbia Gorge, and the Jefferson Wilderness area, I wish I had been a sketcher then. Today when I get out and sketch, even in a city park, I feel the same pleasure of being outside on those trails; the “perfectness” of the sketch does not matter. Travelsketching is all about the moment and the memories.

So get some paper and paint, and start making marks. Sketch for you and resist the urge to compare with others in self-judgement. The purpose for all of this is enjoyment.

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BONUS - A FEW RANDOM TIPS

1. On buildings make the edge that meets the sky a bit more defined, it makes the building stand out.
2. Don't paint the fleas before you paint the dog - big shapes first, then details.
3. Things tend to be darker in front, lighter in the distance, and more blue.
4. The key to expansive landscapes is to connect them with something in the foreground.
5. When you get a new sketchbook paint swatches of your pallet on the first page for reference.
6. You don't have to put all of the background details in, emphasize your object, focal point.
7. You don't have to fill the whole page.
8. Always carry something to sketch with, the more you practice the better your eye-hand coordination will become.
9. Learn from other sketchers, but resist comparing yourself with others. Art is subjective, not perfection.
10. Develop your own style rather than trying to emulate someone else.
11. It is pretty hard to have too many clips.
12. Put the cap on the end of brushes or pens, I have lost too many rolling down some hill.
13. If you get the big shapes roughed in you can usually fill in the details from memory if your subject moves or you do.
14. Don't be afraid of the dark areas, they are your friend.
15. White gel pens are great, but never use them on even slightly damp paint, it clogs them.

BONUS 2 - QUOTES

“Try to forget what objects you have before you - a tree, a house, a field, or, or whatever. Merely think, ‘Here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow,’ and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives you your own impression of the scene before you.” **Claude Monet**

“It was amazing what an hour with her sketchpad could do for her mood. She was sure that the lines she drew with her black marker were going to save her years of worry lines in the future.” **Victoria Kahler, Their Friend Scarlet**

“And the first rude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart, till the Devil whispered behind the leaves ‘it’s pretty, but is it Art?’ **Rudyard Kipling**

“I just wanted to paint and sketch and tell stories by drawing.” **Robert Redford**

In spite of everything I shall rise again: I will take up my pencil, which I have forsaken in my great discouragement, and I will go on with my drawing” **Vincent Van Gogh**

“Drawing makes you see things clearer, and clearer, and clearer still, until your eyes ache.” **David Hockney**

“It is only by drawing often, drawing everything, drawing incessantly, that one fine day you discover to your surprise that you have rendered something in its true character.” **Camille Pissarro**

“Being creative is my idea of heaven. I’m just incredibly fortunate that I can do it in artwork. Watercolor is what I started out with. What I love about watercolor is that a lot of happy accidents occur.” **Jane Seymour**

