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Inspired by the Seasons

Jeremy Ford approaches
winter with his
brushes at the ready

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City Breaks ...

... in pen and wash



Join PA **Allan Kirk** as he captures the essence of Albi in south west France

A short break in a great old European city is one of my favourite ways to take a holiday. The history, architecture and café atmosphere of some of Europe's greatest cities are so compelling and sitting in pavement cafés with my ink pens is my way to discover a city.

Albi is a hidden gem in south west France - a world heritage site, it excites my passion for history, architecture and the café life of old European cities. Responding to Albi in pen and wash is thrilling, I try to capture the mood, and hustle and bustle of this elegant historic city that is still the working capital of the Tarn Department of south west France. The preserved medieval centre built of salmon red brick has Roman origins, medieval bridges and the tallest red brick cathedral in the world. This unspoilt combination on the banks of the Tarn River is breathtaking.

The immediacy of pen and wash was made for city work. Take a view from a table in a pavement café, an A4 sketch pad, ink pen and a small water brush. Add a coffee, the sun and shadows and before you know it two hours have passed. Do this at least once every day on a short break and you start to connect with the heartbeat of a city and understand how modern life breathes energy into the narrow streets, ornate buildings, churches and the river at Albi.

I have taken to carrying a fisherman's stool to sit on and draw those views that can't be seen from a café. Everywhere you look in Albi inspires. It is worth crossing the river and looking up towards the monumental cathedral. This is a view I love and have drawn and painted several times.

Drawing with a pen can be daunting, but my advice is to try it - the rewards make it more than worthwhile. When you draw with pen be bold, not anxious and never worry about



△ 'Rue St Cecile'

mistakes. My philosophy is to "keep my pen moving" work quickly with a light touch, jump about the page, don't get bogged down in one corner of your drawing. Never worry about straight lines and don't be heavy handed. Plan your composition then work as quickly and lightly as you can, be carefree, not careless. You do not want hard rigid slow lines, always remember mistakes are meant to be, not problems.

I love the way that I can brush the lines with my Water Brush to create tonal values as the ink dissolves and spreads. I like to produce my work in steps, a line step where I draw, a water step where I brush the ink into tonal values and then another line step and if needed a final water step. I don't want too many steps or my work will become hard and lacking in light, but I need to resolve the work to some detailed level to convey the mood and atmosphere of the view.



△ 'Place de Doitre Restaurant'



△ 'Albi Square'

Albi Pen and wash step by step

For this exercise I have chosen a classic 'postcard' view of Albi. The Cathedral dominates the old town and towers above the river and towers above the river.

1 Line Drawing. In my first line step I concentrate on my planned composition. I have started my drawing by placing the cathedral tower about a third of the way along from the right. Placing the tower lets me move outwards to complete the line drawing and balance my composition. The bridge is important - I did not try to complete the top span of the bridge in one line, instead I broke the line and completed the whole span in small steps, some not even joined. The cluster of medieval houses on the left, rising to the horizon line is just suggested, not drawn in detail. To complete this step I have added loose pen 'scribble' lines that help me to define dark tones when I come to use my Water Brush for the first time.

Materials

- Stabilo Point 88 (Fineliner) Black
- Pentel Water Brushes
- Watercolour sketch pad

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2 First Wash. The purpose of this wash is to identify the broad tonal areas and get some light into the work. Using my Water Brush I squeeze gently to get the water flowing and paint over my lines to create tonal values. I need to be careful at the horizon and the top of the bridge as I don't want to lose the clarity of line here.

3 Line Drawing. It is important to review the work and identify any tonal areas that may need more work and also to identify my next darker tone levels and details. At this stage the drawing detail helps define the darker tones, for example in the windows in the cathedral and houses. In addition I have tried to add darker areas to the trees behind the bridge. Again, I try to be loose and free with my ink lines and particularly with the foliage where I use a 'scribble' action.

4 Second Wash. In this wash I used my pen in a more controlled way to drop in the windows, especially on the cathedral. I sometimes use a finer Water Brush for this step, though it is not essential. It is important to get the foliage right and to run it down into the river water. I tried to be loose and random to indicate darker tones in the trees and bushes and get the bridge to pop out of the work.

5 Review and Finish. As I reviewed my work I felt I hadn't described the water well enough and it didn't read that well. To overcome this I added some darker 'squiggles' to the water and then brushed them down with the Water Brush to indicate soft reflections and slow water movement.

Don't wait until you are on holiday to put these techniques into practice - have a go at capturing everyday objects and familiar scenes. We would love to see how you get on - email paint@saa.co.uk

Visit Allan's website www.tarnincolour.com where you will find details of his painting holidays, and find a wealth of watercolour tips in his step by step watercolour lessons and on his blog.

