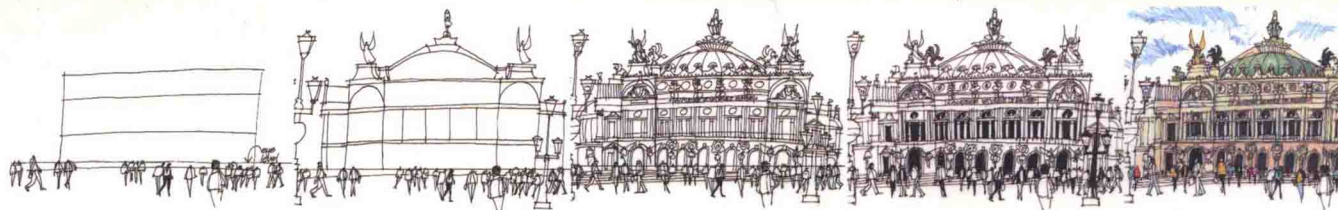
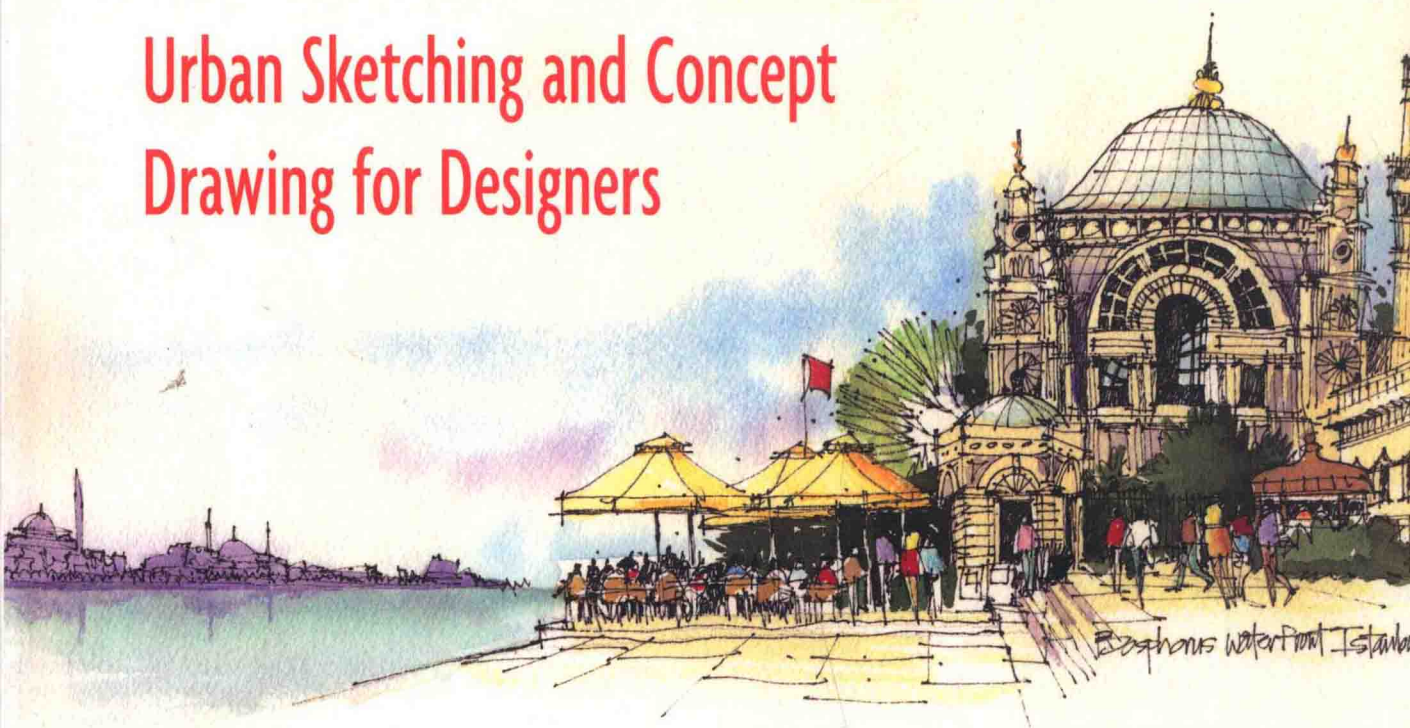


# Freehand Drawing & Discovery

Urban Sketching and Concept  
Drawing for Designers

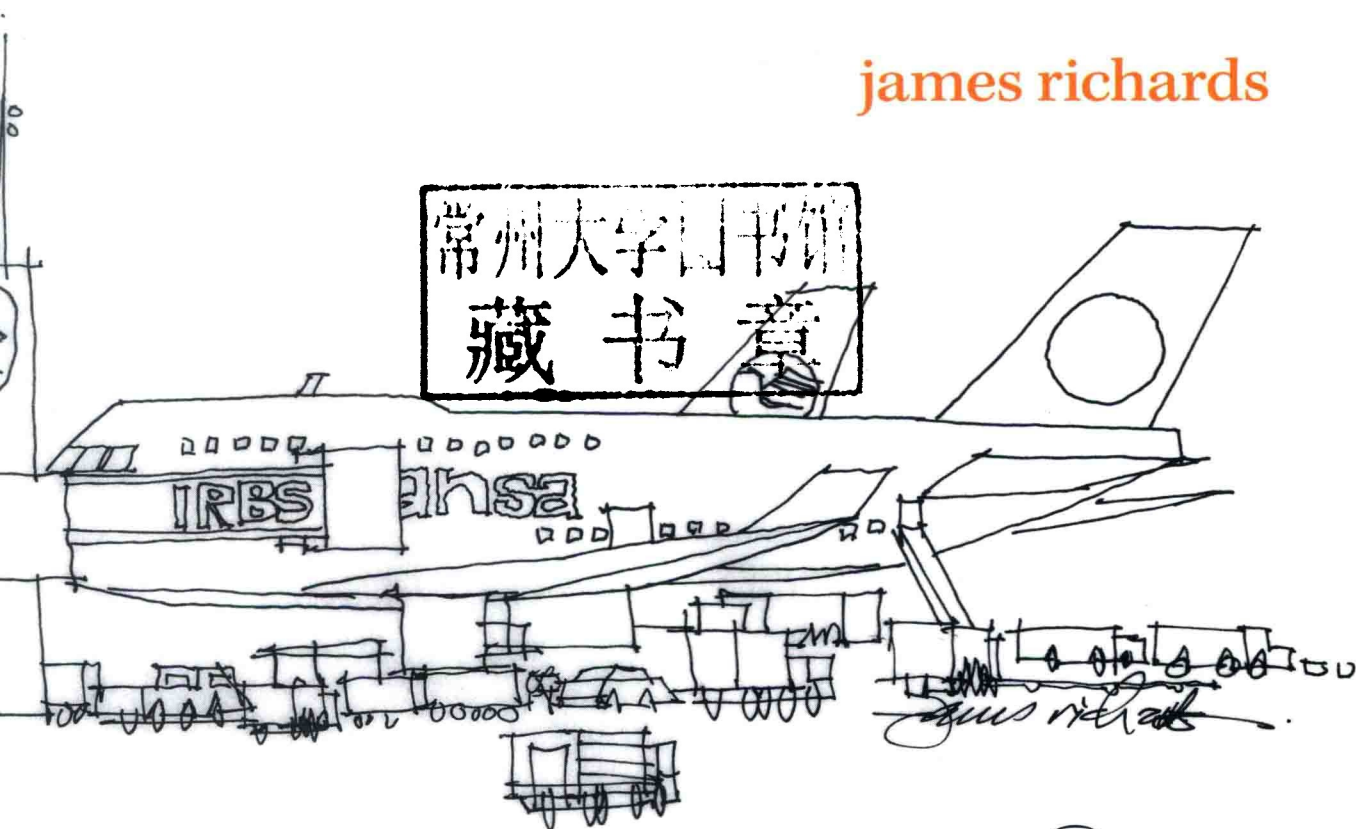


James Richards  
Foreword by Francis D.K. Ching

# freehand drawing *and* discovery

urban sketching and concept drawing for designers

james richards



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



Cover Illustration courtesy of James Richards  
Cover Design: Michael Rutkowski

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey  
Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Richards, James, 1955-

Freehand drawing and discovery : urban sketching and concept drawing for designers / James Richards.  
pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-118-23210-1 (cloth); 978-1-118-41946-5 (ebk); 978-1-118-42120-8 (ebk); 978-1-118-43388-1 (ebk);  
978-1-118-47995-7 (ebk); 978-1-118-47997-1 (ebk); 978-1-118-63566-7 (ebk); 978-1-118-63567-4 (ebk)

1. Architectural drawing--Technique. 2. Cities and towns in art. I. Title.

NA2708.R53 2013

720.28'4--dc23

2012025750

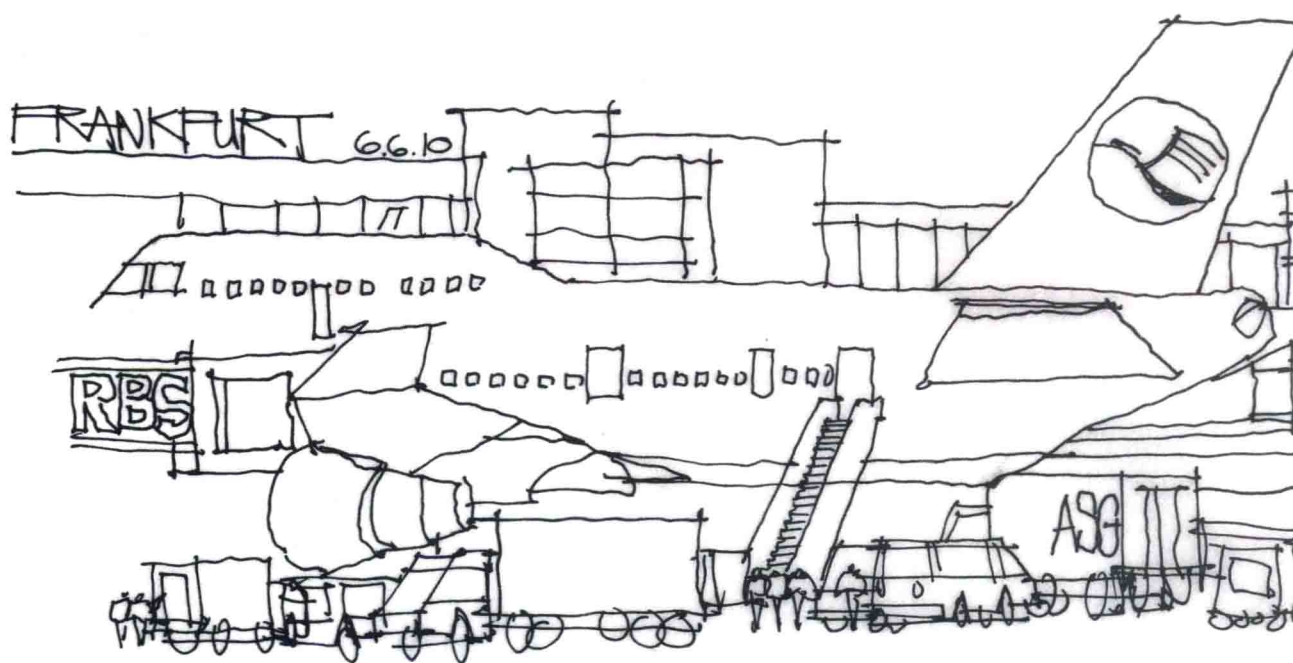
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# freehand drawing *and* discovery



*The Blue Mosque, Istanbul.*



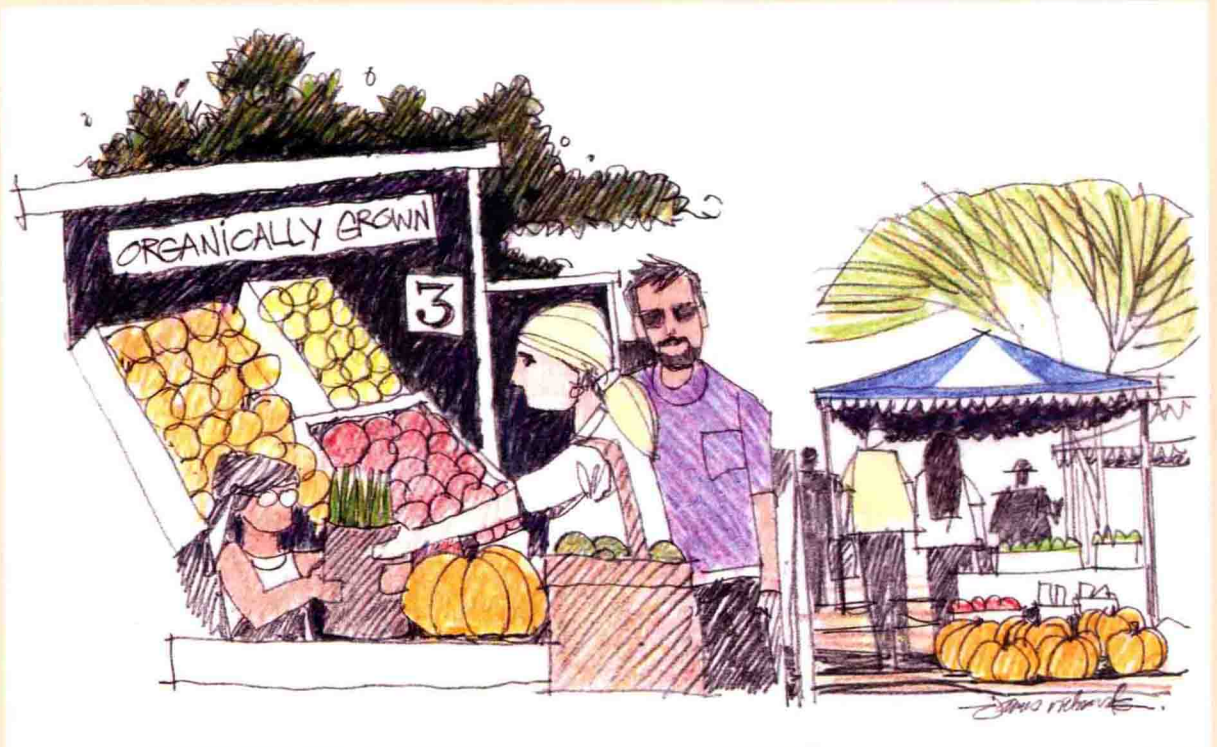
*Layover in Frankfurt, en route to Athens.*



Angkor Wat Cambodia

*On location at Angkor Wat, Cambodia.*

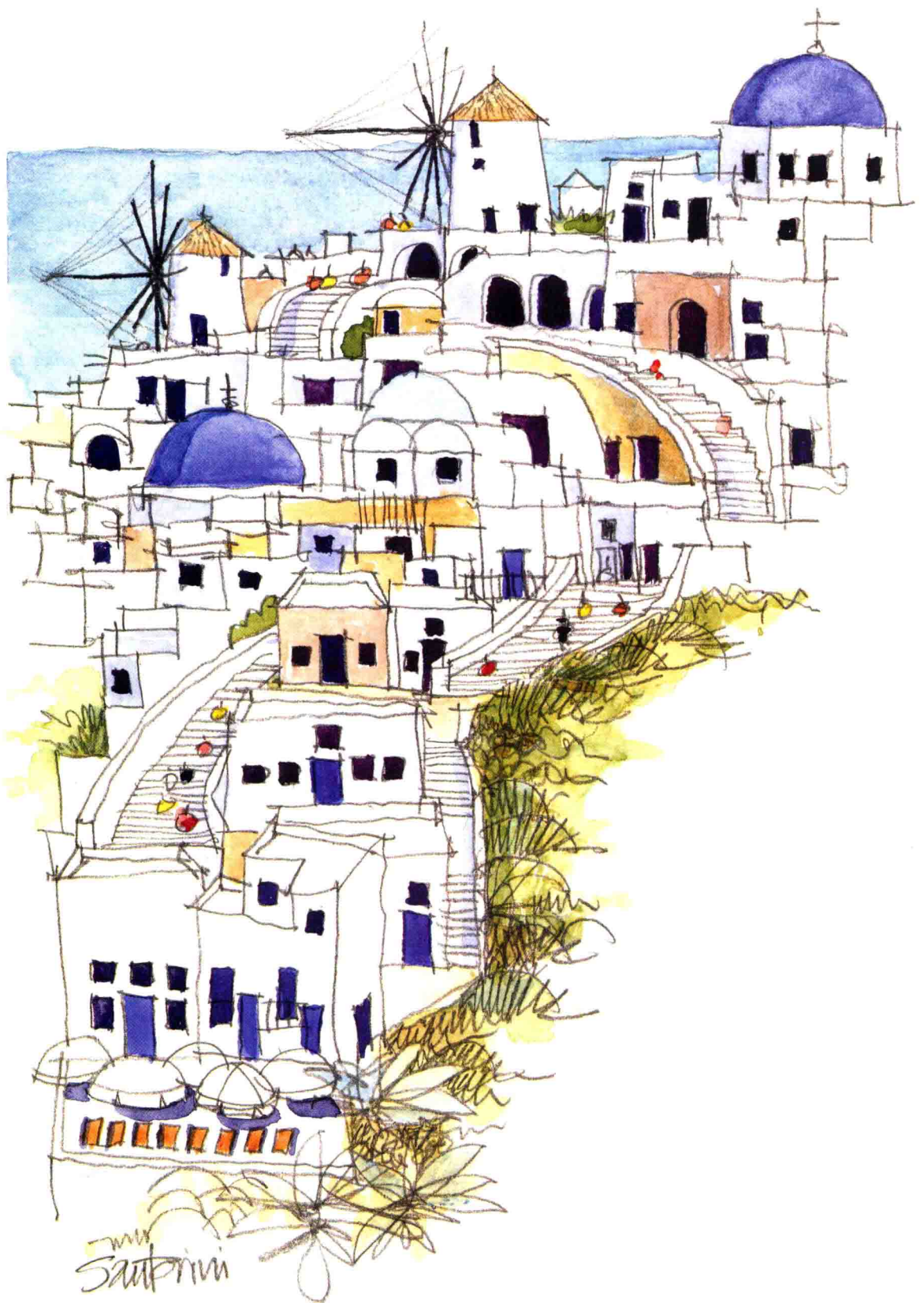




*Farmer's market concept sketch for urban design study.*

*This work and the creative journey that led to it could not have been done without the love and support of my wife and best friend, Patti. This book is for her.*



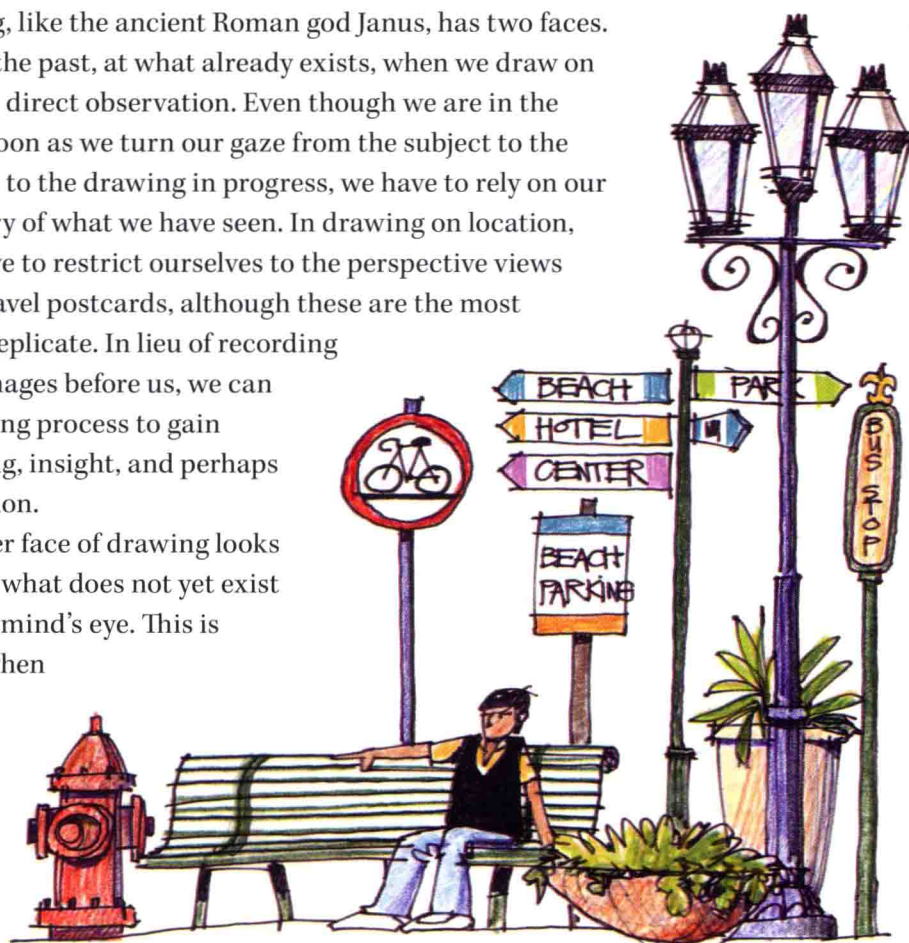


*In the village of Oia, Santorini, Greece.*

I first met Jim Richards in the summer of 2011 in Lisbon, at the Second International Urban Sketching Symposium sponsored by the Urban Sketchers group. Before then, I had already been acquainted with and admired from afar his beautifully rendered drawings, his sure hand, and his skillful eye for composition and detail. But, as is so often the case, physical artifacts become much more real when you meet their maker. Not only did Jim's drawings become more alive in Lisbon but also now, I can hear him speaking in this introduction to freehand drawing.

Drawing, like the ancient Roman god Janus, has two faces. One looks to the past, at what already exists, when we draw on location from direct observation. Even though we are in the moment, as soon as we turn our gaze from the subject to the blank page or to the drawing in progress, we have to rely on our visual memory of what we have seen. In drawing on location, we do not have to restrict ourselves to the perspective views typified by travel postcards, although these are the most tempting to replicate. In lieu of recording the optical images before us, we can use the drawing process to gain understanding, insight, and perhaps even inspiration.

The other face of drawing looks to the future, what does not yet exist except in our mind's eye. This is what we do when we design,



*Street furnishings.*

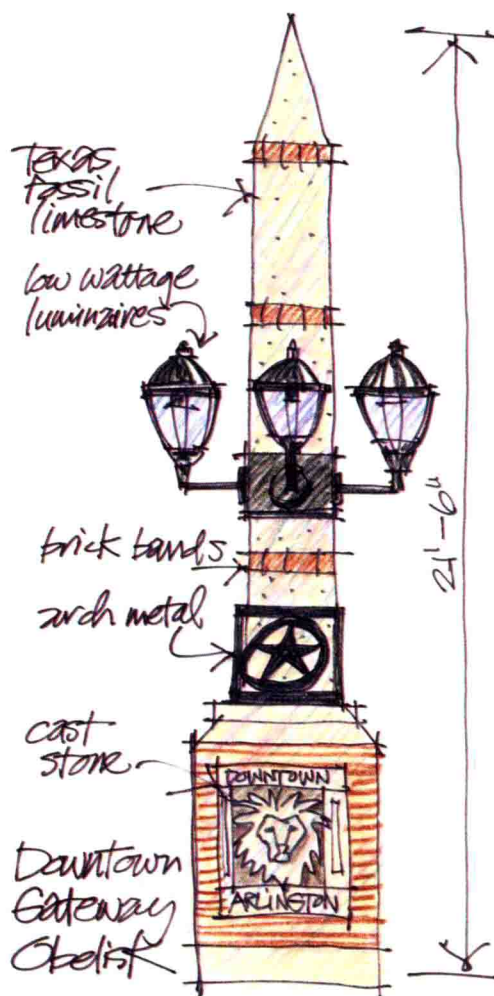


externalizing our ideas so that we can act on them, whether with a pen on paper or with digital tools on the computer monitor. This kind of drawing stimulates the mind and can make visible aspects that cannot be seen by the naked eye nor captured through the lens of a camera. In this way, we can use the drawing process to figure things out on paper, thinking not only with the pen or pencil but with the head as well.

As Jim rightly points out in this book, these two faces of drawing are related. The things we learn about our environment when we draw on location help us as we imagine, draw, and design the future.

While I share Jim's passion for drawing, we each have different approaches. I view my drawings as being much messier than Jim's and he uses more precise linework, values, and textures in his work. This is as it should be. As he so eloquently points out, "one's persona always emerges in a sketch. Your sketches won't look like mine, or mine like yours. That's beautiful." So while this book is full of beautiful drawings, don't let the mastery that they embody intimidate you and prevent your learning to draw if you are a beginner, or continuing to draw, if you are already a designer or sketcher. Anyone can learn to draw, and this book is an excellent way to enter the satisfying world of freehand drawing.

*Frank Ching*



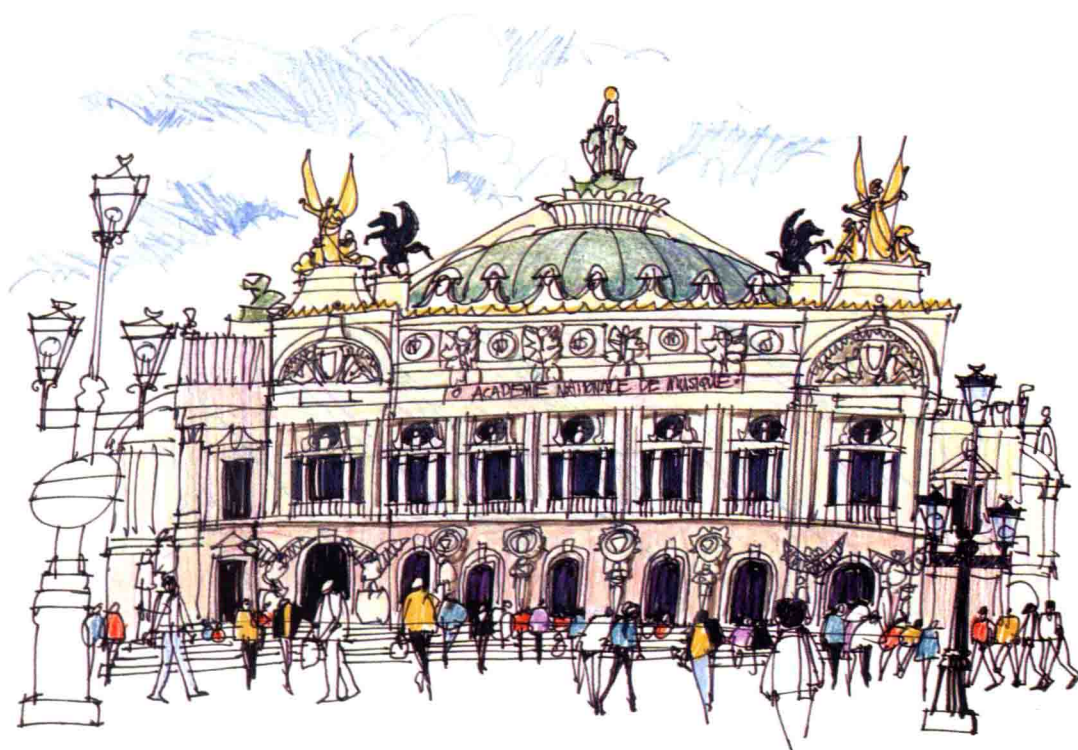
*Concept sketch for a downtown gateway obelisk.*



The first drawings weren't very good, really. I had been led to undergraduate studies in landscape architecture and urban design by my love of drawing. Looking at sketches made in my first years at LSU, it's apparent that my sketching ability had no where to go but up.

Yet here I was, drawing, and thinking, and drawing more, and receiving college credits for it! Design and design thinking were realms where not only was drawing encouraged, it could serve higher purposes of effecting change and enhancing lives. We were changing the world with freehand visions, and there was no turning back.

With excellent teachers, generous classmates, and mountains of project work, drawing became a very natural second language to me. To my surprise and relief, I realized over time that in sketching, mastery isn't requisite. In fact, a preoccupation with perfection may be the greatest enemy of the freshness and spontaneity that characterize great sketches. I learned that freehand sketching isn't about photographic realism. It isn't about art, per se. It's more about authenticity. It's about being in the moment, honestly recording what's in front of you or in your mind's eye, and gaining a deeper awareness and appreciation of your subject or idea. Mostly, it's about experiencing the joy of the creative dance of the mind, eye, and hand.



*The Palais Garnier, Paris.*

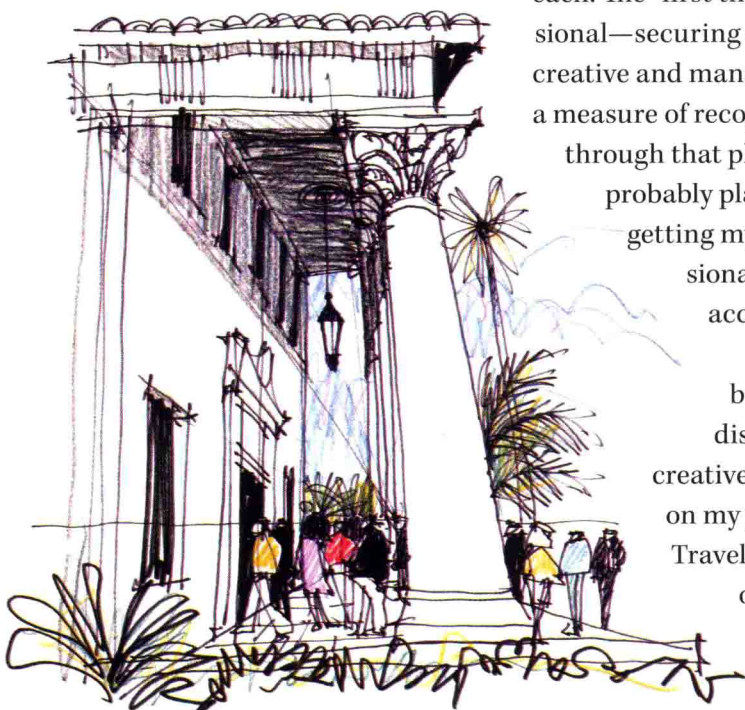
*Freehand sketching isn't about art, per se. It's more about authenticity.*

Something of one's persona always emerges in a sketch. Your sketches won't look like mine, or mine like yours. That's beautiful. A great sketch is an unself-conscious fusion of pen and place and personality. It will have its own unique creative energy, reflective of its subject and its maker. And if you don't draw it, that unique expression won't be voiced.

Seeing sketching as a window into one's personal creativity underscores its value in an age when digital tools so thoroughly dominate design education. I was recently asked in an interview for a Turkish magazine whether “crayons or computers” were the essential tool for design students. I responded that the essential tools were openness, imagination, and the creative impulse. Then, the question becomes, how does one nurture and develop creative capacity? At the beginning of the creative process, one needs to be able to generate a lot of ideas quickly, and to be able to record and communicate a flow of ideas as they occur. Spontaneous freehand sketching remains the most efficient and effective way to do that. Very soon afterward, it's critical to be able to quickly explore various aspects of concepts in three dimensions and in increasingly greater levels of detail. These are applications where digital programs are indispensable. The best designers in many creative fields—architecture, graphic design, advertising, filmmaking—have learned to merge the advantages of computer technology and workflow with the speed, creative flexibility, and emotional connection of hand drawing. The wisdom lies in using the tools and techniques that are most appropriate for where you are in the creative process.

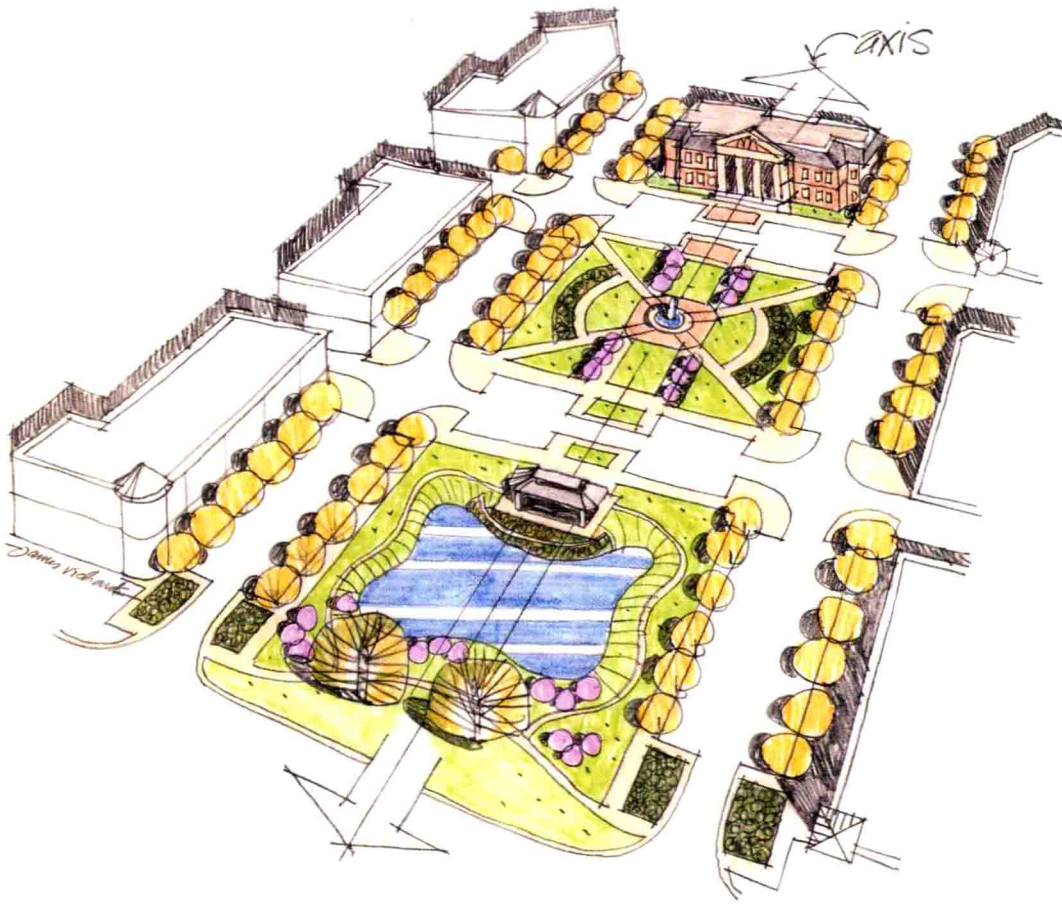
In reflecting on the path that's brought me to writing this book, it became clear in hindsight that my career has unfolded in thirds, and drawing has been central to each. The “first third” was about becoming a design professional—securing a position, learning from mentors, assuming creative and management responsibility for projects, achieving a measure of recognition from peers. Frankly, drawing my way through that phase of my career (whether invited to or not) probably played a significant role in landing great jobs, getting my work noticed, and in affording me professional opportunities that may have been harder to accomplish otherwise.

The “second third” was about moving beyond established career tracks and disciplinary bounds and learning to trust my creative instincts. I started my own firms to focus on my passions for cities, design, and drawing. Travel and drawing became the fuel for a journey of self-discovery, resulting in the development of project work, writing, and a discipline of sketching that helped me find my own creative voice.



*Entrance to campus building.*





*Aerial sketch for urban design guidelines.*

The “third third” has become about helping others find their creative voice—sharing hard-won lessons I have learned about using drawing and other means to record impressions and explore ideas that result in change. And the best teaching I can offer at the outset is this: Jump in. Pick up whatever notebook or business card or scrap of paper is within reach, and begin making marks, just for the pure joy of it. There’s a reason writers, artists, and designers carry notebooks and sketchbooks. There’s the convenience of being able to record a fleeting impression or idea. But just as importantly—perhaps more so—it becomes a portal to a stream of creative thought. In my experience, drawing is a gate through which we can enter the stream, and let it carry us along where it will. When truly in connection with that stream and tapped into its flow, we lose a sense of time, its ideas move through us, and we become a medium through which the dreams living there become visible.

The last thing we want when recording or communicating our impressions is for inhibition or lack of a few basic drawing skills to get in the way. My aim with this book is to give you tools to transcend that hesitation, and to make freehand sketching an unself-conscious joy and a valuable tool on your own journey of self-discovery.

Start now. On this page, if you like. Don’t wait to find a picturesque scene to record, or for “inspiration” to strike. Move the hand. The mind and imagination will follow.



## A Note on the Contributors

I'm very grateful for the richness of imagery and the diversity of drawing styles my contributors bring to this effort. They represent a range of disciplines and interests, but share a passion for seeking out the truth of a place through sketching, and celebrate the seminal role it plays in their creative process. Because they represent different backgrounds, experiences, and parts of the world, they each have their own distinctive voice. I've chosen not to heavily edit their narrative styles for the sake of consistency, but rather to let the reader meet them through their own words, unique personalities, and views of drawing.



*St. Peter's Square, The Vatican.*

This book could not have been written as a solo endeavor. It was co-written with the help of what American mythologist Joseph Campbell referred to as “Unseen Hands,” and undoubtedly my strongest contribution was in trying to stay out of the way of that unfolding creative process. But just as importantly, there have been very active teachers, supporters, friends, and family whose influence has left an indelible stamp on me and this work.

I recall that while a kid in New Orleans, my parents, Jim and Mary Richards, openly worried (only partly in jest) that I might end up with a beret and goatee hawking paintings and living on Lucky Dogs in Jackson Square. Yet they loved me unconditionally, kept me stocked with art supplies, sought out lessons, and later encouraged me to pursue drawing and design with the same focus on excellence and leadership that they insisted my brothers and I bring to any endeavor. And the personal and professional accomplishments of those four brothers—Larry, Dave, Don, and Steve—have always kept the bar high. I’m grateful beyond words for that foundation.

My TOWNSCAPE co-founder and partner Dennis Wilson has extended friendship, support, and encouragement to pursue creative directions that required him to cover my flank on countless occasions. Our associate Wade Miller has likewise been an indispensable supporter and advisor. To them, and to our clients and collaborators, I extend my heartfelt thanks.



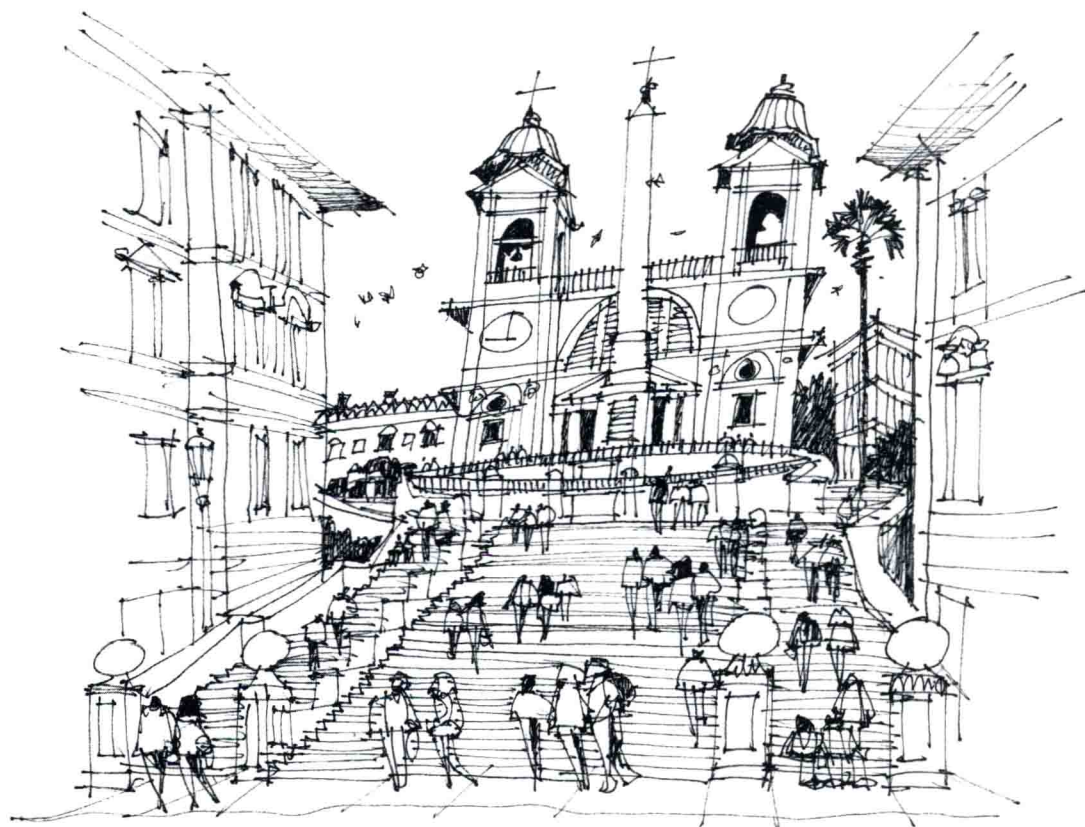
*Panorama, Malaga, Spain, by Luis Ruiz.*

LUIS RUIZ PADRÓN





*The Duomo in Florence, Italy, seen from Piazzale Michelangelo. Micron .5 ink pen and watercolor, 8 in. × 10 in.*



*The Spanish Steps, Rome, Italy.*