

# How to keep a sketchbook

## Creative resource pack

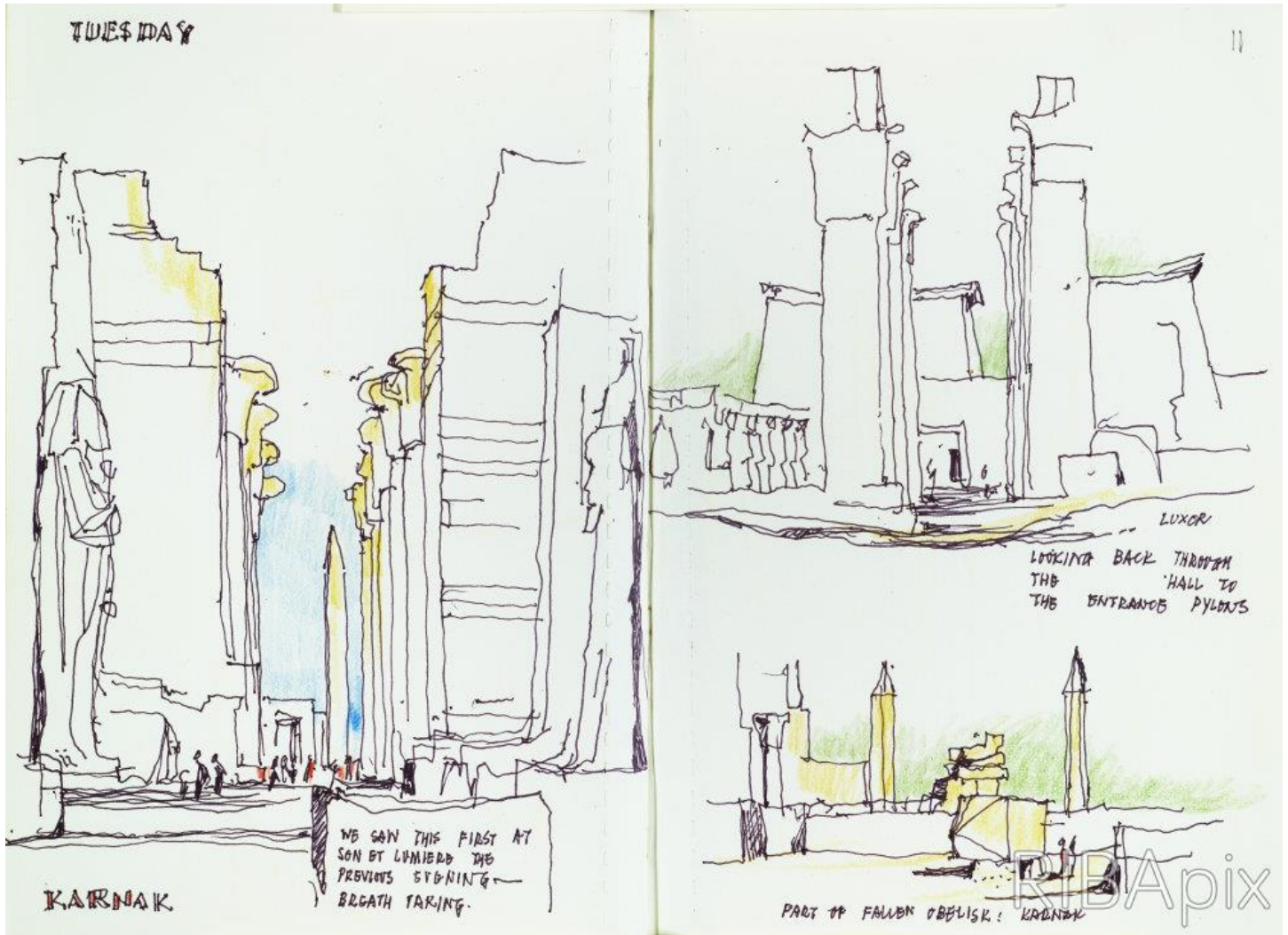
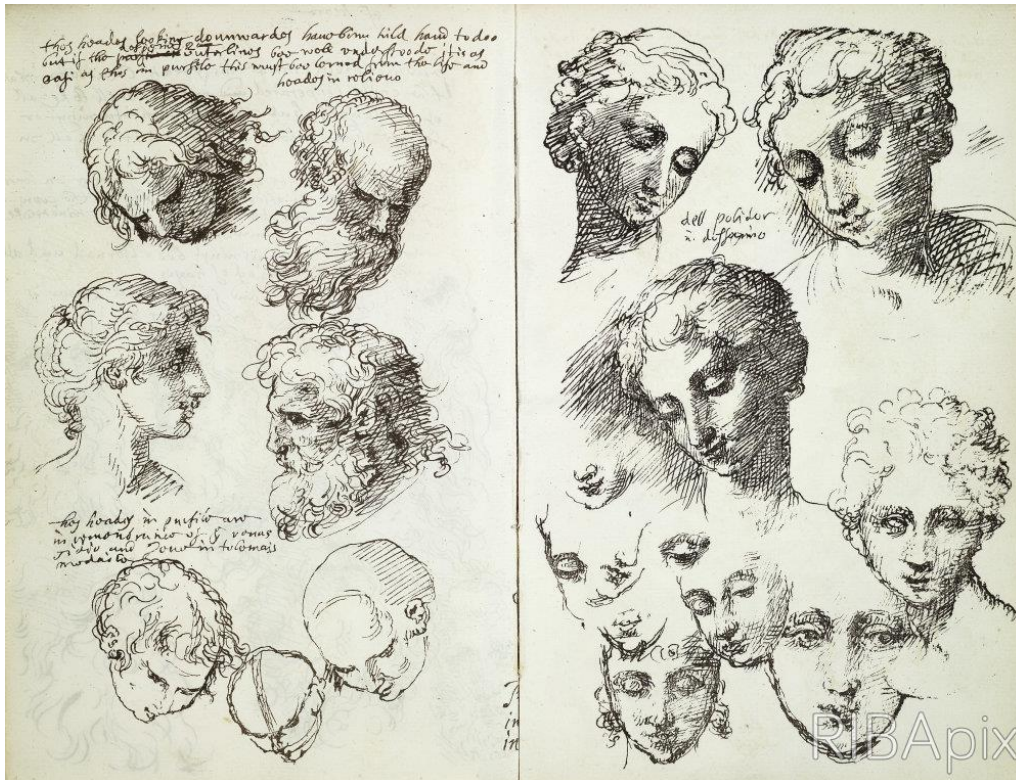


Image: drawings of Karnak, Egypt, from 'A sketchbook in Egypt and Jordan', by Denis Mason Jones, 1982

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

# Introduction



**Image:** annotated studies of male and female heads copied from Renaissance prints or paintings, from a sketchbook by Inigo Jones (1573-1652)

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

This resource pack is designed to inspire you to start and maintain a sketchbook.

People from all walks of life use sketchbooks to support their creativity and help them in their everyday lives. The RIBA's rich architectural collections have many examples of sketchbooks where we can see how architects, artists and designers have recorded their lives, developed ideas, worked out design problems or simply doodled on pages for pleasure, and it is these collections we will use throughout this pack as examples and to provide inspiration. Every sketchbook is individual to its creator, with its own style and focus, using a mix of words, drawings, photographs or a montage of ephemeral materials. The message is loud and clear, there is no correct or single way to keep a sketchbook, it's completely up to you.

Contents:

- A. Why have a sketchbook?
- B. What kind of sketchbook?
- C. Image gallery
- D. Conclusion
- E. Additional resources



## A. Why have a sketchbook?



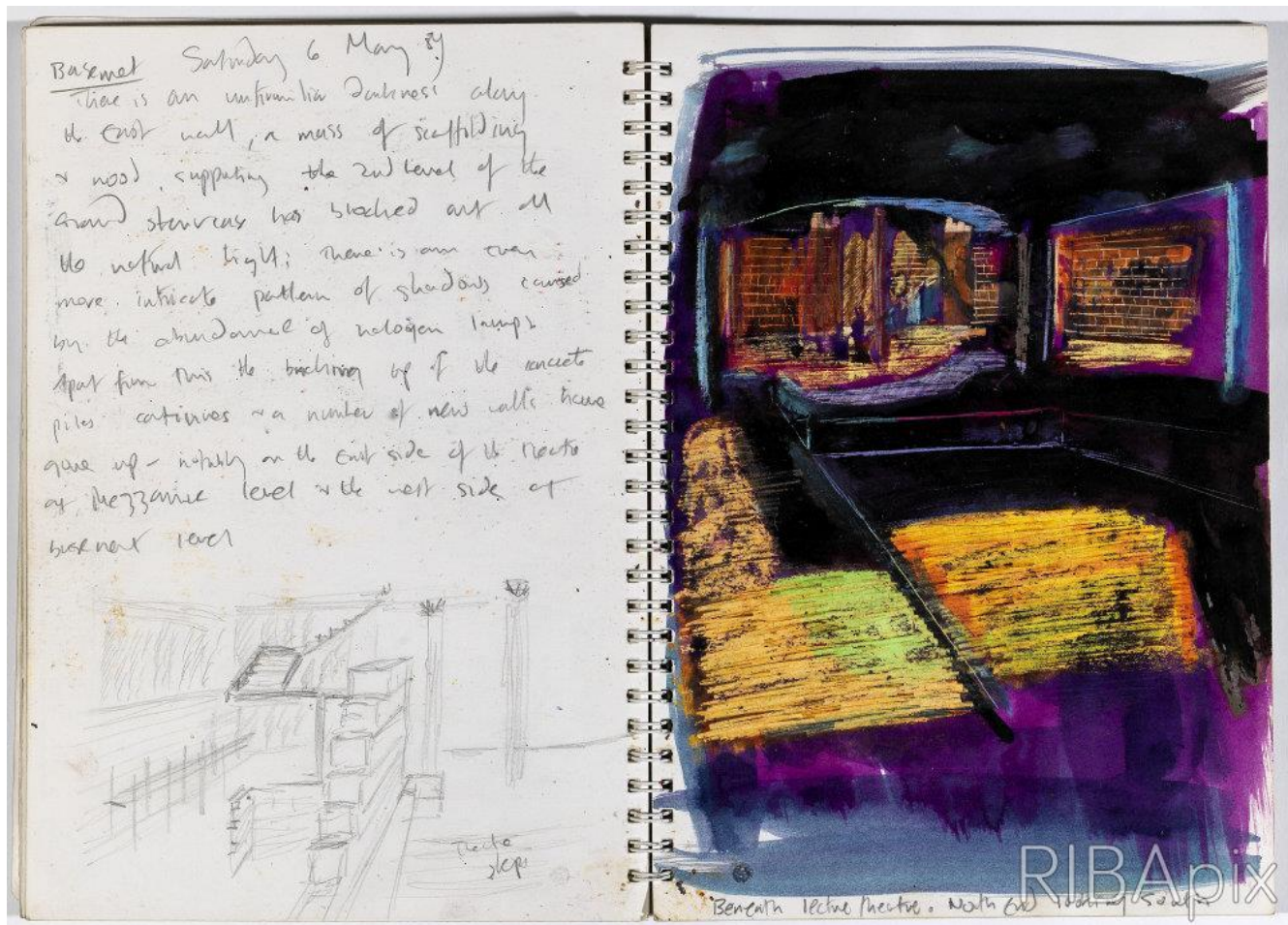
**Image:** sketches for the decoration, featuring stylised bottle and glass motifs, of the ceiling in the Time Life building, New Bond Street, London, from a sketchbook by Oliver Jasper Cox (1920-2010), 1951

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

Sketchbooks are not essential or right for everyone, but they have practical and enjoyable purposes. If any of the questions below seem relevant, then a sketchbook might be what you need!

- Do you want to keep your drawings, images and writing in one place?
- Do you want a place to draw or work out design problems or daily thoughts?
- Have you ever wanted to draw regularly?
- Have you got a way to organise or record ideas, thoughts and tasks?
- Are you learning or practising any new creative skills?
- Do you want a place to experiment and make 'mistakes' without the pressure to create finished 'masterpieces'?
- Do you want to look at things differently?

## B. What kind of sketchbook?



**Image:** spiral bound sketchbook with pages recording the building of the Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, Westminster, London, by Andrew Norris, 1991

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

If you do decide to have a sketchbook, then think about practicality as well as aesthetics. Some sketchbooks are beautifully made and can be considered pieces of art, but great sketchbooks can be created from scraps of paper bound together using thread, clips or staples. Being environmentally conscious is an option, by bringing together wastepaper we can create a unique sketchbook as well as saving resources and money. Look at Leeds Museums and Galleries' handy [video on YouTube](#) and downloadable [PDF](#) for ideas and steps to making your own sketchbook at home with simple and household items. There are digital alternatives, with smart phones and tablets capable of being used to draw, photograph and for writing. In the next two pages we have a quick look at the **paper** and **digital** options you can choose from.



## Paper sketchbooks



**Image:** a range of shop-bought sketchbooks and notebooks with different bindings, papers and covers

**Credit:** Wilson Yau, RIBA

Readymade sketchbooks are widely available to buy and available in various sizes, with different binding and kinds of papers. A4 plain paper sketchbooks are common, but the choice is yours and depends on personal preference – practical and aesthetic.

Before making or buying a sketchbook think about:

- **Size:** think about portability; are you going to have it at home or office, or will it need to be small and light for travelling?
- **Medium:** what kind of medium are you likely to use? Thin paper is fine for pencil work or sketching, watercolours may need a thicker paper.
- **Paper type:** sketchbooks will be available in plain, lined, graph and other paper types.
- **Two sketchbooks:** are you going to be the only one that sees it? Personal thoughts and private drawings are ideal for sketchbooks or to create a visual diary; consider having an extra sketchbook if you are going to use your sketchbook for professional or shared work, separate from your personal work and ideas which you may want to keep private.
- **Binding:** spiral bound sketchbooks can be laid flat, concertina-style sketchbooks allow for continuous drawings, hardbacks protect the pages well, while paperback sketchbooks can be lighter and cheaper.

## Digital sketchbooks



Image: digital drawing apps can combine drawing, photography and text  
Credit: Wilson Yau, RIBA

There are many drawing apps (software) for digital drawing. Most will allow text and photographs to be added. There are some apps that replicate a sketchbook experience on screen, through digital pages. Apps are available for smartphone but the majority work best on bigger screens which are available on tablet devices. They vary in cost; some are free though they may have additional features which need to be bought. There is also the relatively high cost of buying a device to consider. The advantages of digital sketchbooks are that the drawings or pages are easily duplicated, shareable with others online and can be backed virtually on the cloud. Paper sketchbooks are cheaper and open to being used with many different media. There is, of course, no reason why you can't use both paper and digital sketchbooks together or separately for different purposes.

### List of useful drawing apps

Please note that there are many other apps available and new ones or updates are released on a regular basis with additional features.

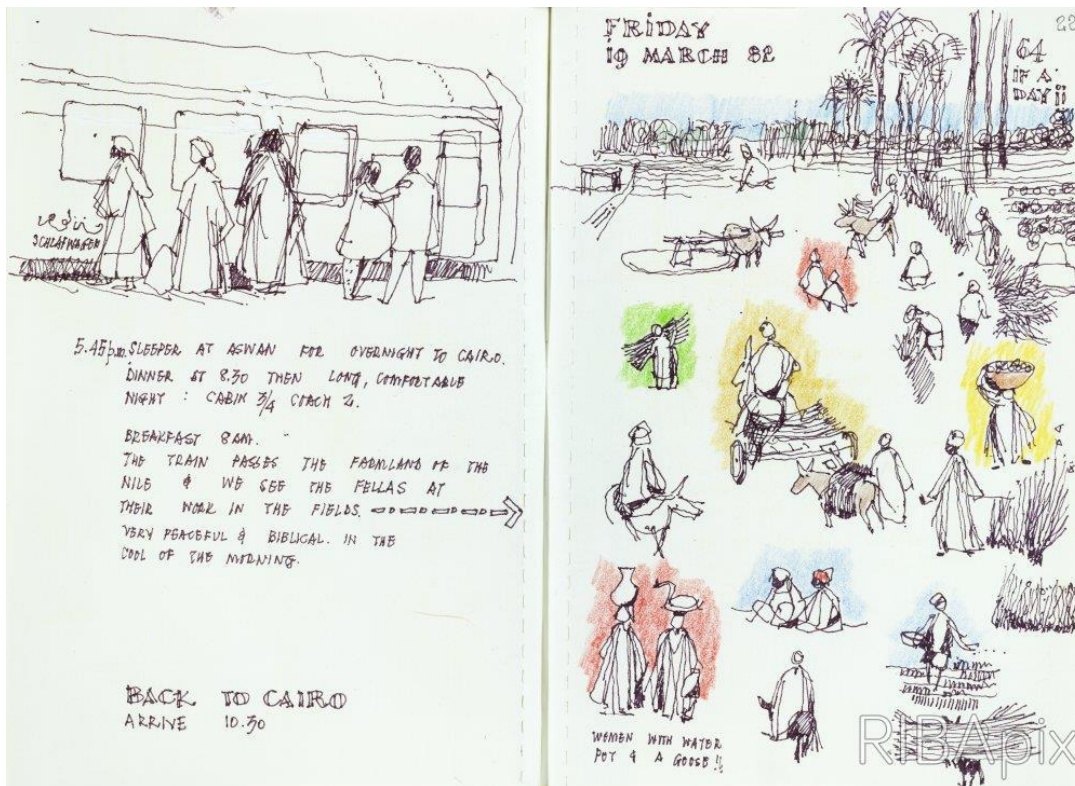
- [Paper](#) by WeTransfer (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Brushes Redux](#) (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Adobe Illustrator Draw](#) and [Adobe Fresco](#)
- [Procreate](#) (for iPhone and iPad)
- [Autodesk SketchBook](#)

## C. Image gallery: finding inspiration

In the next few pages are examples of architects' sketchbooks, grouped into different categories to help you get started and to provide further inspiration. You can see more images on the RIBA's online database, [RIBApix](#); type in 'sketchbook' into the search field to see what else we have in our collections. Each category investigates what the motivator was for those pages – naturally, some could easily fall into more than one category:

1. To record travels, places and everyday observations
2. Experiments and juxtaposing different ideas
3. Imagination: designing and drawing what is not there
4. Mix and match: montage
5. Speed: quick drawings and being economical with lines
6. Breaking the rules

### 1. To record travels, places and everyday observations

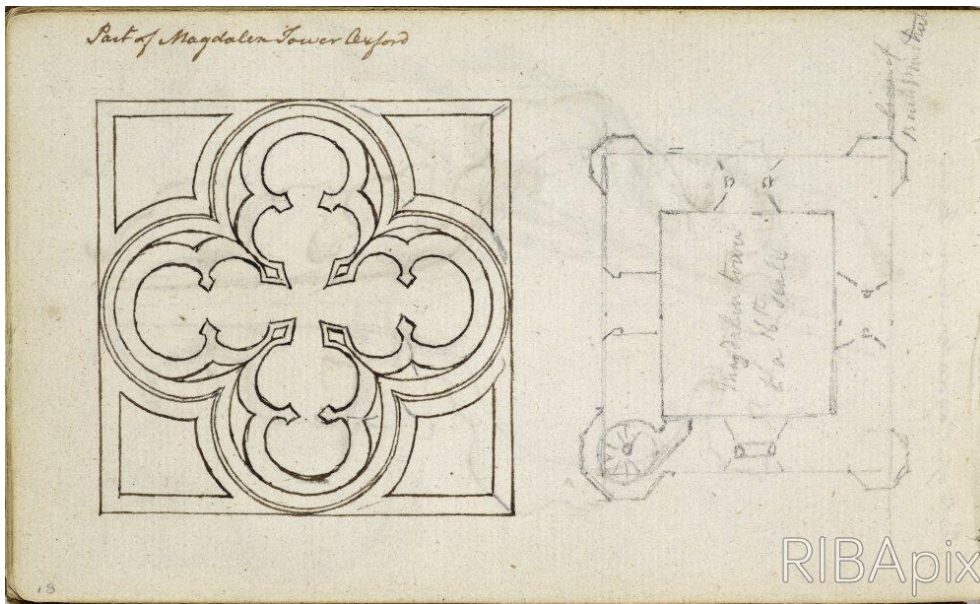


**Image:** Drawings from 'A sketchbook in Egypt and Jordan': train back to Cairo and people working in the fields, by Denis Mason Jones, 1982

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

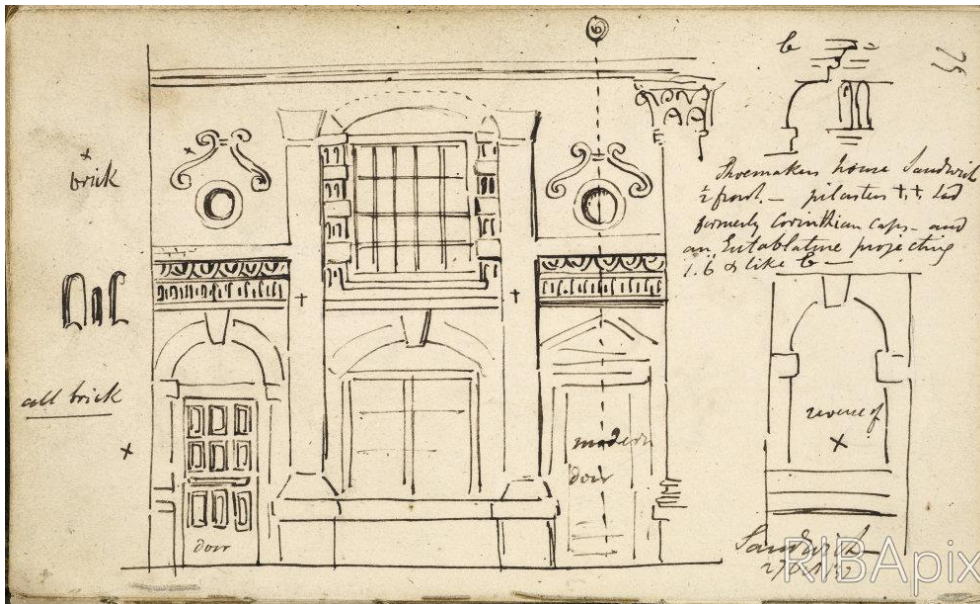
Here, the architect Denis Mason Jones is recording his observations from his travels.





**Image:** architectural detail and plan of the Great Tower, Magdalen College, Oxford, in drawings from a sketchbook by George Stanley Repton (1786-1858), 1798 to circa 1805.

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)



**Image:** Old Dutch House, King Street, Sandwich, Kent: sketch elevation and details, from a sketchbook recording visits to east Kent between 1829 and 1837 by Charles James Richardson (1806-1871)

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

What you record doesn't have to be the same scale and you don't have to draw everything you see, only what is useful or enjoyable to add.



## 2. Experiments and juxtaposing different ideas



Image: studies of real and imaginary animals (left) and the Ponte Vecchio, Florence, Italy, (right) from a sketchbook by William Burges (1827-1881), 1860  
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

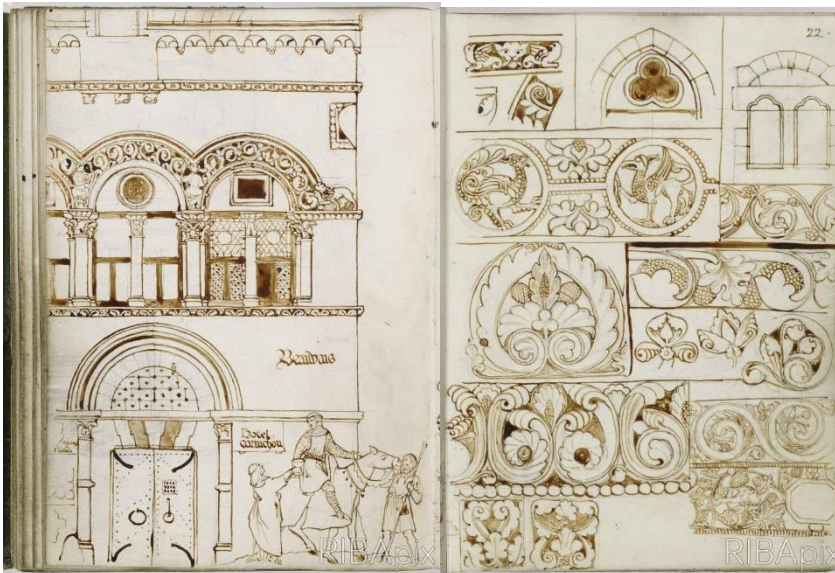


Image: sketch of town house in Beauvais, France, with imaginative scene of a knight departing (left) and sketches of decorative stonework (right), from a sketchbook by William Burges, 1860  
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

*A sketchbook doesn't have to be all about the same subject, and each page can have unconnected ideas and notes.*



**Image:** sketch of floors in a house near Pompeii, Italy, from a sketchbook entitled "Greek & Roman" covering travels in Greece and Italy, by Thomas Leverton Donaldson (1795-1885), 1816

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)



**Image:** study for the painted wall of the dining room in St Crispin's Secondary Modern School, Wokingham, Berkshire, 1949, from a sketchbook by Oliver Jasper Cox (1920-2010)

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

*What goes into a sketchbook doesn't have to 'mean' anything, feel free to experiment and draw in different ways.*



### 3. Imagination: designing and drawing what is not there



Image: design for an entrance to an imaginary palace from the "Castle in the Air" sketchbook by Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869-1944), 1890  
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)



Image: unexecuted pattern study for painted wall design, 1949, from a sketchbook by Oliver Jasper Cox (1920-2010)  
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

*Sketchbooks are there for you to imagine as well as for direct observation.*

#### 4. Mix and match: montage

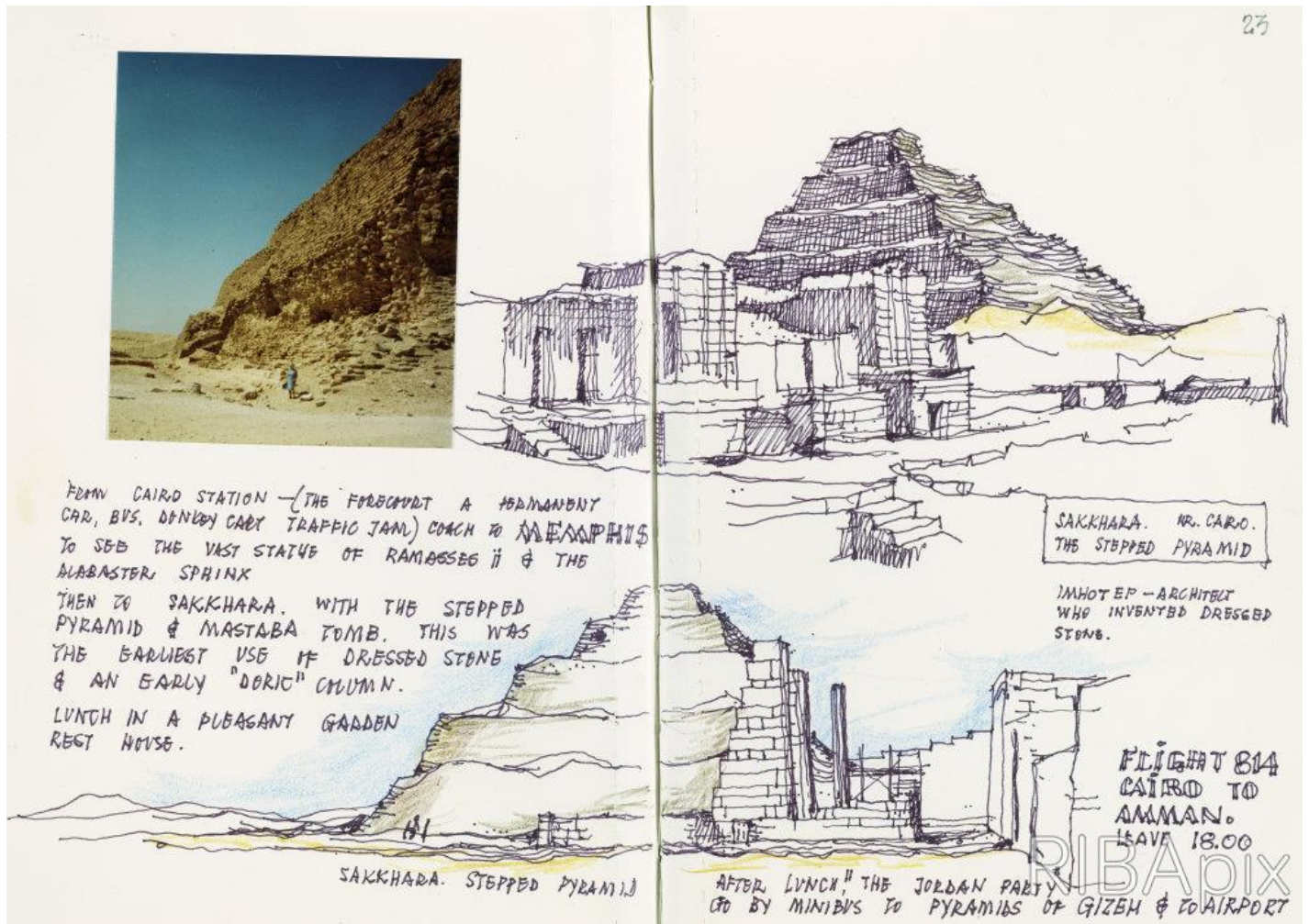


Image: notes, drawings and a photograph of the stepped pyramid, Saqqara, Egypt, from 'A sketchbook in Egypt and Jordan' by Denis Mason Jones, 1982

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Explore different media and methods together to draw, imagine and record.



## 5. Speed: Quick drawings and being economical with lines



**Image:** rapid sketches of peasants, with colour notes, in a sketchbook by Alfred George Stevens (1817-1875) during his time in Italy, 1833-1842

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)



**Image:** sketch of Munstead Wood, Godalming, by Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869-1944), 1893

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

*Only draw what is important and useful to you, or relevant to communicate what you see and think to others. A few lines are sometimes all you need – or have time for! Not everything needs to look 'finished' or be in detail.*

## 6. Breaking the rules

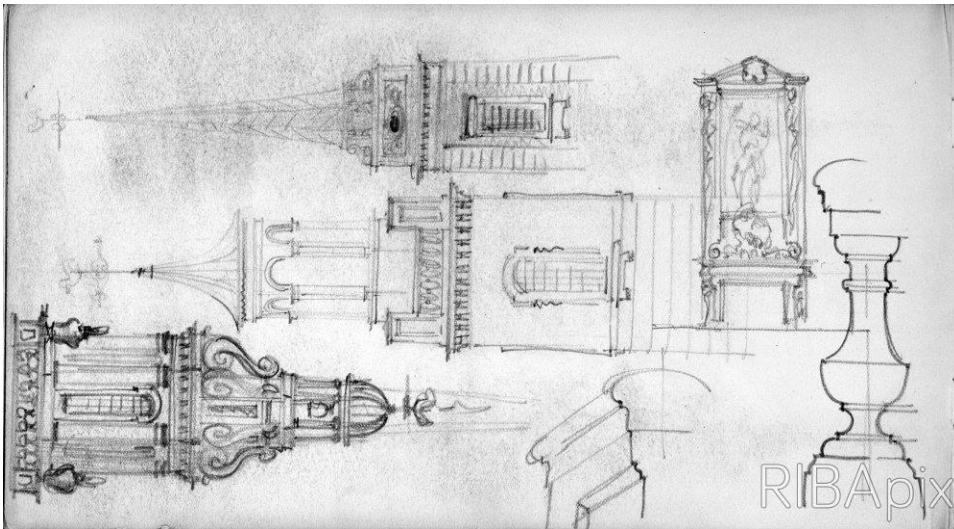


Image: details of buildings in Preston, from Sir John Summerson's (1904-1992) travel diaries and sketchbooks, 1930

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

*No one said everything had to be the same way up!*



Image: studies of birds in a sketchbook by William Burges (1827-1881), 1860

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

*Fill up as much or as little of a page as you want.*



## D. Conclusion



**Image:** view of a ruined castle on a mound with a church spire and houses in the foreground, probably located in the Rhine Valley, from a sketchbook by Philip Charles Hardwick (1822-1892), 1839

**Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

Keeping a sketchbook can help improve your wellbeing and encourage creativity, it should be a practical or pleasurable activity. Below are a few points to help you start and maintain one, by looking at what has worked for architects and artists in the past:

- They gave it a purpose and they knew when, how often and where they want to use it, e.g. for travel, specific projects or daily
- Using a sketchbook was a natural habit, sometimes triggered by a need or time of day
- They enjoyed it
- They didn't stress about it or obsess about perfection, they treated it as a low-pressure way of drawing
- It fitted into their timetable and working patterns, or they gave it time
- They used it as a place to experiment and express themselves freely
- They wanted to communicate their ideas, observations or thoughts regularly via drawing, writing or montage - neatly over time or as quick sketches, which ever was most appropriate to them

## E. Additional resources

### Online

#### Walks

Sketchbooks can be used outdoors or inside. The RIBA organises many bookable architectural walks. One of these walks was in the Leaway in East London and can be viewed online. Imagine some of the ways the author, Anthony Palmer, could have used a sketchbook alongside his walk, before, during and afterwards. Use his online walk and photographs to inspire your experiments and observations in drawing, writing or montage in your sketchbook.

<https://www.anthonypalmer.me/journal/leaway>

#### Images

Search RIBApix, the RIBA's online image database, for over 100,000 images on architecture, including more images of sketchbooks, just type 'sketchbook' into the search field.

<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html>

The Victoria and Albert Museum also has a collection of sketchbooks, type in the keyword 'sketchbook' for appropriate results from half a million images.

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

The Sketchbook Project is a crowd-sourced collection of 25,000 contemporary artist sketchbooks, available to view via their digital library.

<https://www.sketchbookproject.com/>

#### Making sketchbooks

Leeds Museums and Galleries' YouTube video on making your own sketchbook

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89AZRu1Hcn0&feature=youtu.be>

Leeds Museums and Galleries' PDF on making your own sketchbook

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XThcTZSvXQHnLrjXzjJJb6FDWQeyZptK/view>

### Books

#### RIBA Library and collections

The RIBA Collections, as well as having original architects' sketchbooks in their collections, also has a range of historic and contemporary books on the subject, available from the RIBA Library, 66 Portland Place, London, W1B 1AD. Free entry.

<https://www.architecture.com/contact-and-visit/riba-library>

#### Bookshop

RIBA Bookshops also has a range of modern books on the subject of sketchbooks.

<https://www.architecture.com/riba-books/search.html?searchterm=sketchbook>

*Pack created by the RIBA (RIBA Learning), 2020.*

More online resources available from [www.architecture.com/Learning](http://www.architecture.com/Learning)

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