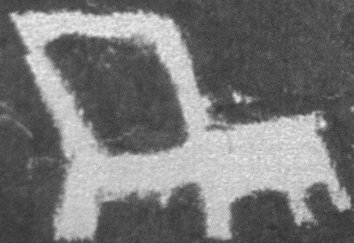
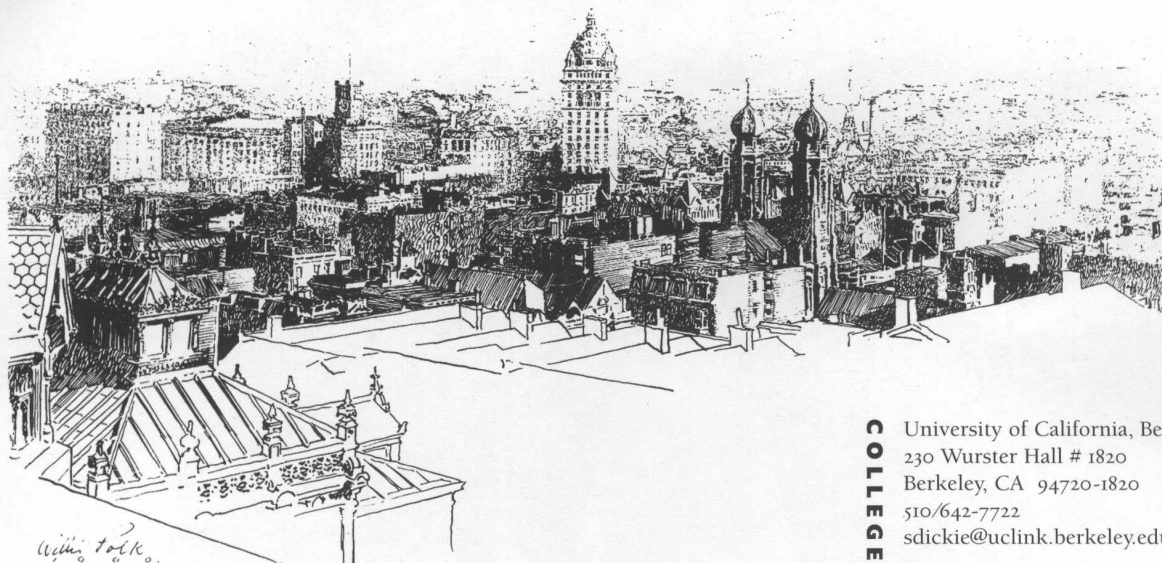


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**Front and back covers: Cannes beach
illustration and Cannes Café photograph
by Melissa Harris (Fig. 13, 14)**

**(above) Willis Polk Collection, Skyline,
San Francisco 1901. Environmental Design
Archives.**

LESSONS FOR LIFE¹

LEARNING FROM STUDENT TRAVEL

BY Annmarie Adams, M.Arch. '86, Ph.D. Arch. '92
Melissa Harris, M.Arch. '85
Cathy Schwabe, M.Arch. '87

Annmarie Adams:

Whenever Melissa, Cathy, and I have met, talked on the phone or e-mailed over the last fifteen years, the subject almost always turns to our tour of Europe in 1985-86. We each remember different things, but we all agree that this time spent far away from books, classrooms, and professors was the most instructive year of our lives. I think it's when I decided, subconsciously, to become an educator rather than a practitioner of architecture, and I think it cemented some of my other architectural values.

When I found out that I had won a John K. Branner Traveling Fellowship, Melissa and Cathy had been my classmates and friends for the two previous years at Berkeley. When I first met Melissa at International House, where we both lived, she was carrying a sketchbook and had a black felt pen tucked behind her ear. Melissa had been sketching since she was a toddler, keeping a journal as a way to document everything around her. To me, her spontaneous, high-contrast, multi-media sketches of everyday life were incredible (fig. 1). Her father, Abie Harris, an architect, had long since established the procedures of journal-keeping in the Harris family. These hardcover books had both images and text; no pages could be removed; the drawings and notes were not precious, but were just ways to remember.

When Cathy won a Branner Fellowship, too, and Melissa got the AIA Henry Adams Medal and the Eisner Prize, which came with some cash, we decided to travel together. We charted our course quite roughly using a map of the world's cheeses, found in the front of a cookbook, and adopted the Harris method of architectural-education-in-a-blank-book as our mandate. We shared one guidebook, Brian Sachar's *Atlas of European Architecture* (1984). From August 1985 through May 1986 we covered most of western Europe and a little of the Soviet Union. What follows are some of the lessons that we derived from our trip.

Melissa Harris:

Annmarie and Cathy, my former studio mates and now lifetime friends, profoundly shaped who I have become. Through mutual experiences and conversations, they continue to inspire me in clarifying questions I pursue in my work as a teacher and an architect.

Scanning through my past sketchbooks which we maintained religiously during our "grand tour," particular thoughts coalesce. The time elapsed between those travels and today enables a refreshing degree of objectivity—enough to risk calling our reflections "lessons."

Cathy Schwabe:

Since my thoughts are mostly about sketchbooks, a passage from Somerset Maugham's "A Writer's Journal" which I copied into a sketchbook that year seems like a good place to begin.

I forget who it was who said that every author should keep a notebook (sketchbook), but should take care never to refer to it. If you understand this properly, I think there is truth in it. By making a note of something that strikes you, you separate it from the incessant stream of impressions that crowd across the mental eye and perhaps fix it in your memory. All of us have had good ideas or vivid sensations that we thought would one day come in useful, but which, because we were too lazy to write them down, have entirely escaped us. When you know that you are going to make a note of something, you look at it more attentively than you otherwise would, and in the process of doing so words are borne upon you that will give it its private place in reality.

figure 1.
Melissa:
Pastel of Hands

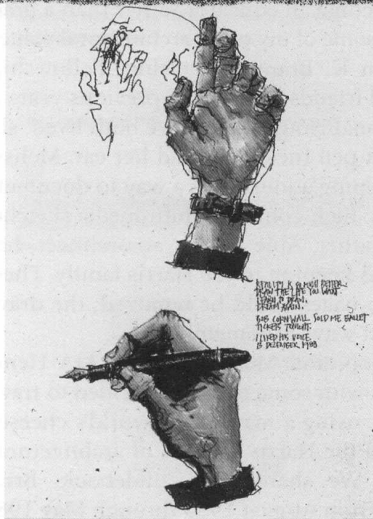


figure 2.
Cathy:
Melissa Drawing



In school, teachers said "keep a sketchbook." I don't remember ever seeing one of theirs. Always the dutiful student I tried; I hated my drawings, so mostly I doodled, wrote a little and then quit. But, for this trip, I was determined to do better and stick with it.

I took two new sketchbooks with me at the start of the year. When I began I couldn't imagine that it would be possible to fill even one of them. One was a cheap

8 x 10 softcover, bad-paper notebook which I found in a drugstore. The other was a beautiful hardcover book with good paper that Melissa had bought for me for graduation. I started in the cheap one. The way I saw it was since I couldn't draw anyway, why waste a good book on my lousy drawings?

No surprise it wasn't fun to draw in that book. The ink soaked through the pages, the binding got in the way of my hand, the pencil just slid over the shiny paper and I quit. I complained to Melissa about this in a letter and she wrote to ask what I had done with the sketchbook she gave me. She reminded me that drawing was the primary thing I was intending to do for the year so, I needed to draw in a book that I loved. Stop being so worried about how bad the drawings seemed, she wrote, it was only paper. So I switched (fig. 2).

Annmarie:

LESSON #1: THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN WORK AND PLAY WHEN YOU REALLY LOVE WHAT YOU'RE DOING.

We produced about ten drawings per day. We worked very hard on these drawings, but never considered it work. Every day we would be out on the architectural beat, no matter what the weather conditions, or at least researching where we would go to next. And we drew everything from the greatest hits of architectural history (fig. 3) to the most mundane moments of our daily existence. To us, the drawings were ways of remembering.

Melissa:

Drawing was a hands-on approach. We did not theorize potential relationships between perspectival and orthographic projection. We drew what we saw and drew in the way we had been taught to describe our own projects—with plans, sections, and elevations. By regularizing this process of shifting between these types of drawings, a certain fluency of imagining and then translating mental images to paper developed. What time also reveals is that fluency is elusive. Drawing is a language and flourishes only with practice.

Cathy:

When I first started to draw I didn't have a clear idea of what I was going to draw. I would sit down somewhere and look about and then randomly choose something to sketch. What I drew didn't look much like what I was looking at and it quickly got boring. Sketching, it seemed, was like playing at being a sidewalk artist and I was pretty bad. And then one day I happened on two small openings in a wall in Ronda in southern Spain. I looked through them and saw two narrow alleys fronted on each side by row houses. They sat back-to-back with one another (fig. 4).

On one side, Callejon del Indiano, new three-story housing and on the other, Patio de Santa Ana, old traditional one-story housing. I forced myself to overcome the sense that I was trespassing and entered each "street," walked around and started to draw. I drew plans and wrote about the differences in what I saw and experienced and I found my "topic" for the year—small semi-public exterior spaces made by housing.

There were many lessons here. One was to have a theme or several themes to give me a reason to stop and draw. Another was to have an idea about what I was going to draw before I started. This helped me to structure and focus my looking and

recording. A third was to use the architectural drawing skills which I already had to help me record my observations.

The more I drew the more confident I became, the more I enjoyed what I was drawing and the better I got. I learned to ignore, tolerate and then actually enjoy people watching me. Since what I was drawing was often where they lived or worked I was proclaiming it special. Of course it helped that I often did not understand the language and could just be imagining their responses, which leads me to my big lesson of the year—there is no such thing as a sketchbook police. No one is going to come by and check out whether you got it right and then mark you down in the book of life if you don't measure up (fig. 5).

Annmarie:

LESSON #2: THE BEST WAY TO SEE IS TO DRAW.

One of the most disciplined things we did was to record, in plan, every hotel room we stayed in, so the juxtaposition of high-style and vernacular architecture was implicit. Having just been out to see and record Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia or the Roman Pantheon, we drew the Hostal Palacios in Barcelona or the Albergo Vecchia Roma with the same seriousness. The hotel drawings often included brief narratives. From Room 4 in the Hotel Italia in Ravenna on April 8: orange and green flowered wallpaper here; train noises from this side of the room. On January 9 in Langogne, France: two bubble baths; should have been a window here (I'm not sure now whether this meant the builder had missed an opportunity, or whether the note pointed to a mistake in my plan). What we learned from this exercise is how deceptive plans really are; a hotel room might look in plan like the monument we had seen that day, yet we hadn't really learned in school how to analyze anonymous spaces. Why not?

We paid a lot of attention to these hotel drawings, perhaps because of the cold weather we encountered in the north, but also because our modest lodgings revealed themselves as surprisingly sophisticated architecture. Three of us slept most nights in one tiny space. We dried our laundry on radiators. We even cooked with a coil intended only to heat water for tea or coffee (and planned to write a cookbook for travelers, "Cooking by the Coil," that never happened). These hotels were the only constant for us during the year and we found rather ingenious ways of finding privacy in our fairly crowded little world.

We found remarkable agreement on where we should go and how long we should stay. During the drawing sessions, we generally kept within sight of each other. Even when I look back at my worst drawings, I can feel myself back in the exact spot I sat to draw and can imagine where Cathy and Melissa were at that moment. While my worst drawings at least function as souvenirs, other images are rather archaeologically correct, accurate, as if drawn from a photo or from measurements (figs. 6, 7).

Melissa and I took thousands of slides, perhaps because even then we knew we would need them to teach some day. We drew very quickly and tried to capture the spirit of the places we visited. At night we were often surprised to find out how similarly we had seen certain places, like these cartoonish drawings of Pisa (figs. 8-10). But just as often we delighted in how different they were. While one of us had focused on the details, another had emphasized what was not there.

Cathy:

I had this idea that you couldn't be a real architect without a camera. So I bought one. I carried it with me everyday and rarely used it. I tried to tell myself that the way a camera crops one's view is similar to the editing or distilling process one uses when you draw. But for me it wasn't the same. When I draw, part of what I love is the pace of the experience. I get caught up in the drawing process. One drawing will suggest another. Put pen to paper and the results are immediate. As I drew what I saw and experienced, I understood it better and it became mine. The drawings began to "speak" to me and I found that I learned from myself. Keeping a sketchbook is not always easy. Some days just end up being bad drawing days. However it is a wonderful way to record the special qualities of a space and remember years later why a place was so moving.

During the year I spoke with one of my former teachers Sandy Hirshen about my struggle with the camera. He told me that when he traveled he would decide in the morning if it was a sketchbook day or a camera day and then just take with him what he needed. This sounded like a great idea. So each morning I would wake up and decide what kind of day it was. The funny thing is that it was always a sketchbook day.

Annamarie:

LESSON #3: GO INTO EVERY BUILDING YOU CAN.

It's the only way to understand the plan, even in architecture intended for the dead. We went to enormous lengths to get into particular buildings, maybe because we had come so far to see them. The extreme example was the time I unknowingly attended the funeral of a Swedish Mafia boss at Gunnar Asplund's Woodland Crematorium. Marc Treib had told me to go to the building, to wear black, to carry a single rose, and to wait at the entrance for a funeral party to arrive. It was the only way, he said, to get into the modern masterpiece.

His instructions worked, although appearing to know the prayers in Swedish was problematic for me. But the next day my photo and description appeared in a Stockholm newspaper. I was the unknown young "American" whom nobody could identify, apparently grieving for the deceased. When the police contacted me, I confessed to being an Asplund junkie.

The places in which we spent more time, not surprisingly, became most meaningful. We slowed down at Christmas, for example, and stayed for two weeks in an extraordinary place: Corippo, Switzerland (fig. 11), a tiny village perched on a Ticino mountainside and constructed entirely of local stone. We tried to record

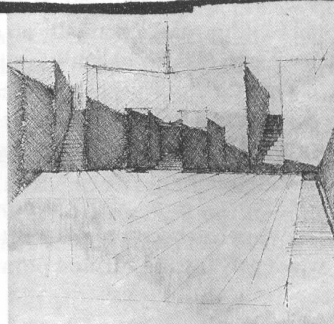
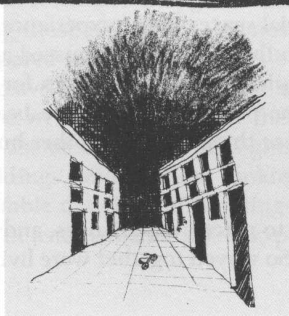
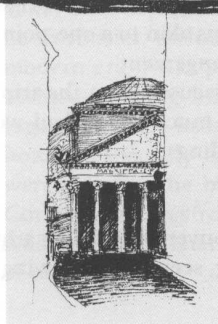


figure 3 (left).
Melissa:
Pantheon

figure 4 (center).
Cathy:
Pation de Santa Ana

figure 5 (right).
Cathy:
Monument to the Deportees



figure 6, 7.
Annmarie:
Scarpa

every detail of our beloved Corippo, using all kinds of drawings. I think it will always be one of my favorite places in the world.

LESSON #4: I LIKE SMALL PLACES.

Our drawings often converged when we looked at smallish spaces, like Corippo, or Matisse's chapel of the Rosary (fig. 12). Perhaps the scale seemed familiar from all those nights in cheap hotels. And Melissa was especially good at editing our world through drawing, like the way she turned this café at Cannes into a beach (figs. 13, 14 — *front and back covers*).

LESSON #5: I LIKE PLACES THAT COMBINE OLD AND NEW.

I knew this before we began the trip. My proposal for the Branner, in fact, had been based on documenting new additions to historic buildings. I wanted to study the detail which joins new and old in buildings of national or civic importance and I did. My one hundred plus sites ranged from obvious examples of monumental juxtapositions to mundane do-it-yourself renovations.

Scarpa's museums, not surprisingly, were among the most poignant examples of this detail. Seeing his work in person, in fact, made me change my position on additions to some extent. I started out assuming that the best additions to historic buildings were those that continued patterns initiated in the original building. Scarpa's Canova Museum at Possagno, however, did no such thing. While the original building was essentially an axial space, whose experience was akin to a one-point perspective, Scarpa's addition is a fluid, rather unfocussed arrangement.

Our thesis projects provided plenty of opportunities for discussion on the trip. We agreed on one thing: that the projects would have been much better had we finished them after drawing two or three thousand other buildings.

Melissa:

Drawing has been my passport—to places, experiences, and conversations. Our trip was a galvanizing turning point. So woven together were living, seeing and drawing,

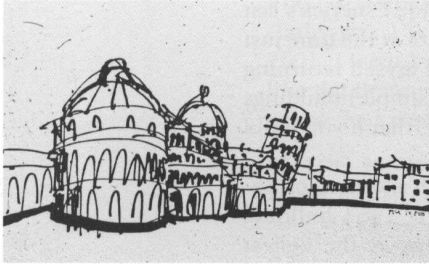


figure 8.
Melissa:
Pisa

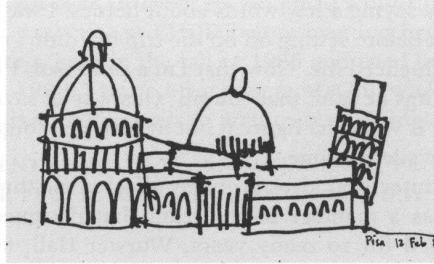


figure 9.
Annmarie:
Pisa

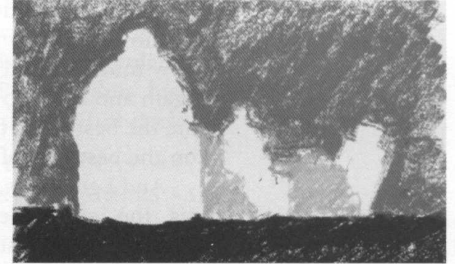


figure 10.
Melissa:
Pisa

that a lifelong philosophy and path emerged silently. Only with the clarity of hindsight am I able to see points stretching into lines.

It is an addiction now—drawing. I notate random and conscious aspects of my life not to celebrate or even validate, but because I have to. It is almost like events did not happen or places went unseen if they remain unrecorded. And I love what drawing has enabled for me so far—from encounters with curious spectators, to measuring a pyramid in Egypt with EHDD or documenting buildings in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, to getting a teaching job at Michigan and winning awards, to trips with students past and future.

Architects draw to create, assess and describe ideas about buildings. But few architects sketch as a way of seeing. It is this activity which fosters a reciprocal relationship between drawing and critical vision, and lends the capacity to quickly evaluate the built environment. The task of the image is to recollect a total experience.

In a world in which information is transferred and acquired electronically, it is easy to overlook that how one acquires information has great effect upon the depth of retention. There is no substitute for long hours of shifting between existing realities and those constructed visually. The aim is to prime and refine the intuitive sense.

Annmarie:

LESSON #6: STUDY THE ENTIRE OEUVRE OF AN ARCHITECT.

What a luxury. I've been fortunate enough to visit many of the major buildings of Le Corbusier, including those in Japan. Like most architects educated in the post-modern era, I was prepared not to like Corbu's buildings. This photograph shows Melissa drawing his grave (fig. 15). Much to my surprise, I loved La Tourette (again, perhaps because we were able to stay there a while), and many of Corbu's houses, especially the use of materials, the lighting, the little details. Because we were drawing the buildings, and not just looking at them, I realized how much Corbu's buildings resemble drawings of buildings. When I look back on the journals now years later, I'm astonished at the discipline we showed and at the depth of our studies.

LESSON #7: HAVE HEROES.

I'd like to conclude by saying a few words about heroes. I was in Joe Esherick's last studio at Berkeley just before setting off on the trip but didn't realize at the time just how much he had influenced me. Now that I'm a professor, I find myself returning again and again to things he said: that "dumb" (his way of saying simple) buildings are the best ones; that if you can't figure it out in plan just forget it; that if you build on the best part of the site it's gone.

And I guess his architectural ideas probably affected me through a kind of osmosis, too, since Joe was a member of the team that designed the 1964 building in which I had studied for so many years, Wurster Hall, famous as the ugliest building on the Berkeley campus. The general idea behind this most brutal of Brutalist buildings is that the architects left it unfinished, a shell for others (read students) to complete. Besides its reputation for ugliness, Wurster Hall is also much celebrated for its graffiti. Like everything at Berkeley, its very existence invites commentary.

Wurster Hall is not a precious space. There are no beautiful moldings, no expensive materials, no details its architect-to-be inhabitants would ever want to copy. Nobody yells at you if you cut on the floor. And the pipes, I noticed after spending three years in studio, are painted the colors they should appear in plans of mechanical systems. If anything, Wurster Hall is more like a living editorial of architectural education. It's a building you must inhabit in order to love, and that's why nobody at Berkeley from outside the College of Environmental Design understands it.

Not all of Joe's buildings are so brutal. The smallest building on the Berkeley campus, the Pelican Building, is also his design. It accommodates the student newspaper, pays homage to the Spanish Revival architectural traditions of the area, and recalls other masters of the region like Bernard Maybeck, who, like Joe, used industrial materials in a rather irreverent way.

Joe's most famous projects, however, in addition to his 1968 re-use of The Cannery in San Francisco, are probably his houses at Sea Ranch, a few hours up the coast from the Bay Area. As his students, we designed houses for two sites at Sea Ranch. As part of the project, we had a chance to stay in the famous Sea Ranch condominium, designed in 1964 by MLTW (Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull, and Richard Whitaker). Later I learned that the structural bays of the condominium had been determined by the architects while they were playing with sugar cubes. Looking at Joe's houses at Sea Ranch, which seemed to come from more human concerns, made me realize that the best buildings, in my burgeoning architectural opinion, were those that began with an architectural idea, rather than one drawn from another realm, such as sugar. I still believe this.

The same impulse that made me begin this essay with my penchant for connect-the-dots has convinced me to end by mentioning another hero, Julia Morgan, best known as the architect of Hearst Castle. I worked on her library at Mills for my thesis and this gave me the chance to do some research on her design process. This was difficult to do, since she burned all her papers before she died in 1957, ensuring that we would know her only through her buildings. And although this absence of documentation made my research more difficult, I realize now that she was right to do it. It forced architecture students like me to get out of the classroom and to judge her work through real buildings.

Melissa went to work for Esherick Homsey Dodge and Davis (EHDD) in San Francisco when we got back in 1986; she accepted a full-time teaching job in 1990. Cathy was a Senior Associate at EHDD before opening her own practice in spring 2001. I went back to school in the fall of 1986 and tried to win more scholarships like the Branner. In 1990, I started teaching at McGill, where Peter Collins' history course had first sparked my interest in architecture. Things had come full circle.

LESSON #8: STUDENTS ALWAYS LEARN MUCH MORE FROM THEIR CLASSMATES THAN FROM THEIR PROFESSORS, ALTHOUGH SOME DAY WHAT TEACHERS SAID MAY MAKE SENSE.

Dead architects have things to say, too.

LESSON #9: APPLY FOR TRAVEL GRANTS. □

figure 11.
Melissa:
Corripo

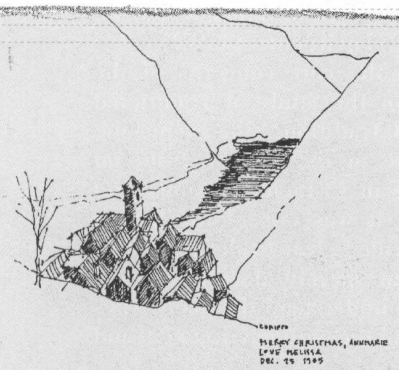


figure 12.
Annmarie:
Matisse door

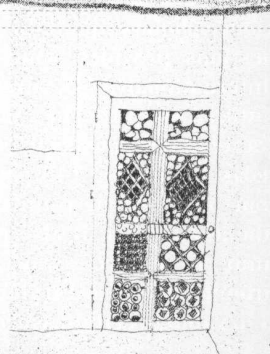


figure 15.
Annmarie photo:
Melissa at Corbu's grave



Annmarie Adams is Associate Professor at the McGill School of Architecture. Melissa Harris is Associate Dean of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan. Cathy Schwabe, formerly a Senior Associate at Esherick Homsey Dodge and Davis, has recently opened an independent practice in Oakland.

1 A longer version of this article appeared as "Travels with Annmarie, Melissa and Cathy," in *The Fifth Column, the Canadian Student Journal of Architecture*, vol. 10, No. 2/3 (1998). The lessons originated as a lecture by Adams to second-year students at McGill, to which Harris and Schwabe added their comments. We are grateful to *The Fifth Column* editors for their skillful integration of our three voices.