

# Try Your Hand at Architectural Sketching

by Eric Jenkins, AIA

If you've ever seen children drawing, you've probably noticed how they become completely engaged with their imagined world. Like children, architects draw an imagined world—a world yet to be realized. To better form these yet-to-be-realized works of architecture, many architects study the existing buildings around them. Sketching helps reveal underlying principles that inform the architecture designed today.

By sketching, you, too, can take apart buildings to find their underlying principles. Focus on what you like. What are the building's proportions? How is it divided into zones or areas? How are lines and rhythms continuous or discontinuous?

**Here are a few things you need to get started sketching:**

## The Sketchbook

Buy a small, simple white paper sketchbook you can carry in a briefcase or coat pocket. Avoid 8.5" x 11" or larger sketchbooks—the large sheets can intimidate even the skilled artist. The paper should have a medium texture or tooth so that the pencil or pen you use will have something cling to.

## The Classic #2 Pencil

I suggest starting simple: a #2 pencil is an inexpensive yet extremely versatile drawing device providing a range of lines, thick to thin, dark to light. When you go to the art supply store, you'll see nearly endless pencils types, from 3B to F and 4H to E. Don't be intimidated. Go right for the classic #2 pencil with its good, medium weight lead. You probably already have one in your desk drawer.

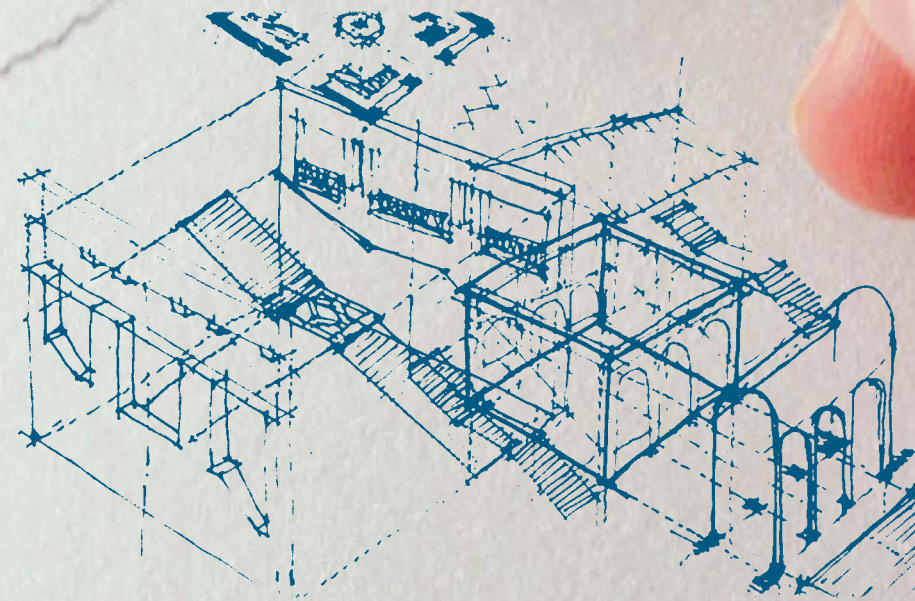
## Training Your Hand

*"Do, or do not. There is no try."*

Yoda, Jedi Master

### Begin with some simple hand-training techniques:

- 1) Sharpen the pencil; don't draw with a dull point. Bring along a pencil sharpener.
- 2) Quiver the line. As you draw a line across the sheet, quiver or wiggle the line like small vibrations on polygraphs or seismographs. This simple technique does two things: first, it keeps you in control of the pencil by automatically self-correcting the line; second, the wiggly line gives an optical illusion of straightness.
- 3) Begin and end the line deliberately. Go backward and then forward again when starting. This gives the line definition, which is an important part of good sketching. The more hesitant you are to put down strong lines, the less likely you are to develop sketching skills.
- 4) Draw one line. Avoid the propensity to draw a long line with a series of small, tentative scratches. Chicken-scratches reinforce insecurity. A confident line shows a confident thinker.
- 5) Plant your hand; don't try to use your entire body to draw. I plant my hand on heel and move my fingers and fist only. The resulting line is only about four inches long, but I am able to control it.
- 6) Doodle in meetings. Draw boxes and series of parallel lines on a page. Just sit on the Metro or at lunch filling the page. This exercises and trains your muscles and mind for the next event: sketching what you see and what you think.



## Drawing to a Close:

After a time, you'll feel confident enough to explore other media like color pencils, collage, and even watercolors. Ultimately, if you stick to it and don't worry about impressing anyone, you'll develop and learn from what you see.

## Further Reading:

If you're interested in reading more about sketching, I suggest Norman Crowe and Paul Lessau's *Visual Notes for Architects and Designers* (Van Nostrand Reinhold) or Iain Fraser and Rod Henmi's *Envisioning Architecture: An Analysis of Drawing*

(Wiley). Frank Wilson's book, *The Hand* (Knopf), is an absorbing study of the human hand and its relationship to thinking. Lastly, Betty Edwards's book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (Tarcher), has been extremely helpful to many adult learners and may be worth reviewing for her exercises and words of encouragement.

Whatever you do, just remember that sketching is probably something you did as a child and can continue to do as an adult—if you give yourself the chance to do it. Today at lunch, sit outside and draw what you see. Bon Appetit! 🍴