



Always ask permission of the manager or hostess before photographing for an interior painting, such as *Waiter* (9x12). Then, take photos of the walls and tables, too, so it doesn't appear that the people are your primary subject.

PARIS

Is for (Art) Lovers

Creatives of all sorts flock to Paris to soak in the city's *je ne sais quoi*, and if painting an urban environment is your thing, the French capital is a sure bet for artistic inspiration.

By Desmond O'Hagan

I've visited Paris seven times, and it's my favorite city in the world. In the late 1980s, when I made my break from graphic designer at an advertising agency to full-time fine artist, my wife and I had more flexibility for travel. At the time, my wife worked in the hotel industry and was able to get a complimentary room at any of the company's international hotels. As a young married couple, it was an opportunity we couldn't pass up. Because I was excited to explore the world of fine art and eager to

visit the world's great museums, Paris was an ideal destination. Although we visited other European cities as well, Paris was always a starting point or final stop before heading back to the U.S. These travels to Paris were essential in broadening my knowledge of impressionism, expressionism, abstract expressionism, sculpture—and French pastry. I took hundreds of reference photos, which inspired many many paintings. I fell in love with the light, the architecture, the

PACK SMART

Traveling light gives you the flexibility to change directions and plans, and hop easily on and off trains. My equipment list for a trip in which I don't plan to paint en plein air includes a decent pair of walking shoes plus a small camera, a few large-capacity image cards, smartphone and an iPad mini.

For plein air painting trips, I add a portable Edgmon easel. My selection of dark-, medium- and light-value pastels fits inside the easel, which fits inside a carry-on bag. I pack a Judson Outfitters tripod in my checked luggage. I also bring a paper assortment (Canson Mi-Teintes and UART 600 in 8x10, 9x12 and 11x14), along with a small drawing board cut from Masonite.



It rained six of the seven days my family and I were in Paris. For me, I loved the resulting reflections which created unique abstract shapes as seen in *Early June, Paris* (12x9). Look for spontaneous scenes such as these, and take several quick photos, because everything changes so rapidly.

“Inspiration can occur at any moment, so have your camera ready.”

streets, the cafe culture, the parks, the interiors, and ... *have I mentioned the pastries?*

A Plan for Work and Play

Fast forward to 2016, our most recent trip to Paris, which this time included our 20-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son. The trip was a great family adventure as well as an opportunity to gather more inspiration and material for an upcoming exhibit of my paintings that would focus on the City of Lights. The show

was planned to open at my Denver studio and then move to the galleries that represent my work.

Our seven days in Paris required an itinerary that balanced sightseeing with my need to gather reference material—in a limited time frame. I knew that I specifically wanted to capture images of Paris at dusk and nighttime for the show, so I tried to find times to slip away and photograph as many scenes as possible at those times. Still, patient travel companions are essential in such

circumstances. When planned with like-minded friends or family, combining travel and art-making can be a rewarding experience for all.

Gathering Reference

I do enjoy plein air painting on some of my travels. When time and subject matter allow, it's a great way to spend the day. But, because I enjoy painting scenes at the times of day when light is fleeting—at dusk, for example, with people and traffic moving—setting up to paint on-site

I love the architecture of the bridges in Paris. The key to painting these scenes is to simplify the detail, and concentrate on contrasts, strokes and color, as seen in **Bridge at Night, Central Paris** (9x12). By doing so, you can avoid a stiff architectural rendering.



There was a lot of activity in the scene that inspired **The Blue Awning** (14½x23). It was important to simplify areas and leave out unnecessary detail.

An Artist's Guide to Paris

Pastel Journal had a few more questions to put to O'Hagan about his personal recommendations when visiting the City of Lights.

You've checked into your hotel, the taxi is waiting. What's your first stop?
My first stop would be the Pont Neuf bridge and the surrounding area. It's very central with much to see.

Circumstances have left you with only one hour to spend in the Louvre. What room do you visit?
I'd probably view the rooms with the gigantic Napoleon paintings. I have a love of history, and these paintings are some of the best political marketing I've ever seen.

Cézanne, Pissarro and many other art heroes walked these streets. What's the best spot in Paris for tuning in to artists past?
Even though it's a bit touristy, Montmartre still has that historic artistic vibe.

"Bonjour. Un café, s'il vous plaît." What's your favorite street or neighborhood for soaking in cafe culture?

There are great cafes everywhere in Paris, many with outdoor seating facing the busy streets. My favorite area is near the Seine in the 5th Arrondissement, also where the Shakespeare and Company bookstore is located.

And, finally, to really important matters: éclair au chocolat or macaron? Eclair au chocolat.



PIERO DAMIANI/GETTY IMAGES

Paris at dusk or nighttime is stunning. **Early Evening Traffic, Paris** (9x12) features one of the city's major boulevards near the Seine. These scenes are fleeting, so you have to be quick with your camera.



The scene that became **Night Lights, the 9th Arrondissement** (12x18) was difficult to capture with my camera, as it grew dark quickly. Back in the studio, I experimented with pushing the color and contrast.



Take a photo of the sky. When photographing urban scenes, in particular, it's a good idea to take a second photo directly of the sky. Many urban scenes appear dark, so the camera adjusts and lightens, which then washes out the sky. I find it helpful to have a more accurate record of the sky color.

Take a second shot (and perhaps a third and a fourth). Because traffic and people are always moving in an urban scene, take a few photos. This will provide you with additional options when working out the final painting composition.

Be flexible. Weather can change your game plan, so be flexible. If bad weather is in the forecast, re-arrange

your schedule to concentrate instead on interior scenes.

It's a Process

Each time I travel, I always learn new ways to be more efficient. For details on packing tips, see "Pack Smart" (on page 7). Although I continue to fine-tune, I feel I've developed an

approach to travel-painting that's both productive and enjoyable. *PJ*

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can be difficult. For this reason, and in order to maximize what's usually limited travel time, I mostly choose to gather photographic reference for future studio paintings.

Here are some of the lessons I've learned for getting the best references when traveling.

Do your research. I've learned enough from previous visits to Paris that I've fine-tuned the process for choosing what to take photos of and where, but even when you have

familiarity with an environment—and especially when you don't—some advance research of the area you're visiting will maximize your efforts and prevent wasted time. That being said, inspiration can occur at any moment, so have your camera ready.

Blend in with the crowd. I've found that my Nikon Coolpix digital compact camera does an excellent job, and it doesn't attract the attention that a big camera with a long lens might. So, I'm able to take more

candid photos that capture the vibe of a scene without alerting others to my presence.

Avoid the postcard view. When it comes to selecting a subject, I tend to avoid well-known landmarks, as I feel they've already been painted to death. A bustling international city will offer a variety of unique scenes to inspire you. If you do choose to include a well-known landmark, make it secondary in your composition to avoid that postcard look.

With winter approaching & thoughts of the cold to come we often forget the warmth of the season. Looking out on the perfect snowy day and anticipating the adventures to come.

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