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ART CLASSES, WORKSHOPS AND HOLIDAYS

PARADISICAL PAINTING HOLIDAYS IN THE DORDOGNE WITH ADAM COPE

29th January 2014 by Lisa Takahashi 2 🗨

Adam Cope has taught painting holidays at his home in the Dordogne for 16 happy years. We sat him down to ask him more about his life in South West France, his art, and the reputable holidays he runs.

Lisa: What is your artistic/teaching background?

Adam: I studied painting in the 1980s at Newcastle University under Norman Adams RA. For the most part, I now paint landscape 'en plein-air', painting outside on location. Colourist, expressive & light-sensitive. The spirit of the place. The poetic aspect. Though of course, any individual painting is always about Painting itself, a dialogue with all the other paintings that gone before. I also try my hand at portraiture, as my life is full of many wonderful people. I paint in watercolours & oils and enjoy the tension between these two mediums. But drawing remains my first love & recently I've been doing some stone lithography.



'Champêtre, Printemps' Watercolour, 28 x 38 cm © Adam Cope

Then, in the early 1990s, I gained my teaching & art therapy qualifications & taught at The Arnolofini MOMA & Bristol Printmakers Workshop. I was also an 'arts worker' with adults with learning difficulties for several years. Then, in 1997, I moved out full-time to France & married a local french lady who is a 'Guide-Interprète,' a specialist in tourism. Together we built up 'Chateaux Painting Holidays.' We've had sixteen fabulous, sunny & creative years running these courses, so you might say we're now 'mature' as a team. Not every painter can be a

Château running Monday. We've had sixteen fabulous, sunny & creative years running these courses, so you might say we're now 'mature' as a team. Not every painter can be a good tutor nor does every tutor have that hard-won, hands-on knowing. A knowing that evolves slowly over the years of practicing painting. I once wrote a blog post entitled 'What Makes a Good Tutor', you can read it by [clicking here](#).

"I had such a good time on your course , I wasn't sure how I would feel about doing art again, since I had decided to abandon it for the most part. Still, I had not anticipated the power of persuasion that the location, good people(the back-up team), but most of all your very intuitive methods of tuition had on me. I do really appreciate too all the tremendous hard work and enthusiasm you and the mighty Sue (what a mum!),must have put into this project to make it run so smoothly." Nerina, Ireland.

June 2009

Lisa: Where are the courses run and how would you describe the venue?

Adam: Le Château de Bédier is a wonderful french country château with a beautiful park. On top of a hill, with stunning views, it dates from the Medieval period. Huge, thick, old, defensive walls, towers & ramparts. Ghosts of Hundred Years War. The Pilgrims Path to St Jaques de Compostelle runs right past, so you'll see the occasional pilgrim trudging along with her cockle shell. The chateau has been added onto again & again, notably in the Renaissance. It's what we call in French 'génereux,' meaning it's big & comfortable. It's also full of history & intrigue. Great place for 'murder in the dark'!



Le Château de Bédier

The south west of France is the 'other south' France. Unspoilt & off the beaten path. High in the rolling fields, in beautiful pastoral calm, amongst walnut trees & singing grass, Bédier defends the mouth of the Célé, a crazy valley with wild & strange cliffs.

"Just thinking about being in Beduer lowers my blood pressure hugely!" – Sheila

Lisa: What subject matter can students expect to paint on a trip with you?

Adam: Whatever they want! Whatever grabs their fancy... & whatever they find



The Potager and Poppy Field

I'm not too prescriptive about this, though I do take beginners under my wing & help them find easy stuff. Never leave anyone floundering. Sometimes we might work together on a set challenge & go through it slowly step by step. It might be a view or a still life or one of the atmospheric historic interiors inside the chateau. I think it's important that a tutor doesn't overly impose his style, though this will happen this will inevitably happen to some extent. As a teacher, I enjoy helping other painters find out how & what they wish to paint. As a painter, I enjoy my own process of discovery & found it liberating when it really clicked that one size doesn't fit all. That it was up to me to discover how & what I wanted to paint.

There's many good painting possibilities at Bédier. The charming rose gardens, the fruit, the many old trees & the far views that make you feel you're flying away into the blue distance. Of course there's the historic architecture & the old crumbling textures in walls, or maybe a charming little vignette of the old french doors. There's still-lives inside the chateau or, importantly, studio painting away from the motif inside our equipped studio.

It's the south of France, so expect warm sunny light. Yellow ochres, raw siennas, the odd flick of cadmium yellow pale or cadmium red, succulent sap & lime greens, cobalt blues & violet shadows...

Lisa: How is a typical painting holiday with you structured?

Adam: Yes, a painting holiday needs structure. I try to balance the need for quiet, individual painting time, supported by one-to-one tuition vs. group learning time.

Learning in a group is beneficial. Sometimes many minds are better than one mind. It's surprising just how wide a spectrum of different solutions students can come up! I also deeply believe that painting is something you do, a practice & not a theory. Thus watching someone paint is one of the very best ways to learn. [See one of my painting demonstrations in watercolour.](#)

Conversely, painters need quiet time on their own to concentrate intensely without any distractions. A good painting retreat should give you this, should help you relax into a good state of mind. Dialogue with a good tutor can help identify & resolve problems.



Painting en plein air

During these last few years, I've been focusing more on colour & composition than drawing, tonality & techniques, though naturally, they always come inescapably into play. Colour mixing, colour & light, colour relationships, colour in composition, colour as feeling tone. Always nice to see the colours really singing in the warm southern light 😊

"Thank you both so much, Adam & Suzanne, for a wonderful week. Your	<i>Lisa: What do you love most about teaching?</i>
	Adam: The students 😊

had a superb time was tremendous. I have joined a little art group here & was asked what I learnt from France – & I think it was to look & to see – thank you Adam for that & also for the experience of seeing the prehistoric cave of Pech Merle. How wonderful. " Joan, Australia. June 2009.

potential. There's a lovely french word 's'épanouir' which literally means 'to blossom' but it's frequently used in the sense 'to flourish'. I love seeing students flourishing. Their creativity in full swing & making successful paintings that work. This probably sounds very flowery... But the truth is that painting & learning are difficult. And anyone who tells you otherwise is not telling you the whole truth. We all hit blocks in our painting practice. We all want to take the next step up. Sometimes we need help to do this. I really enjoy seeing painters overcome these blocks

to flourishing. It is possible. Learning is possible. Flourishing is possible. I have seen it many times. Many beautiful paintings & leaps of learning have been made at Béduer.

I really enjoy these residential painting retreats. They bring together an interesting spectrum of people, who frequently gel well together as there's this shared passion for painting. The energy that a group of painters can generate is remarkable. I consider myself lucky because I have learnt so much from other painters, be they absolute beginners or Leonardo da Vinci. I like this supportive atmosphere. I believe most painters need it & search for it.

Then there's the camaraderie, conviviality & table talk at the end of the day. These courses are pretty well international, so expect good company.

"I had a great time and learnt lots, which is pretty amazing since I was eating and drinking so much and socialising. It was just such a great holiday. " Karen, Australia, 2012

Lisa: What sets your painting holiday apart from others in the South of France?

Adam: Four things really. First – A great venue. Chez-nous, there is no need to get in a car to find a good painting spot. Secondly, on the day when we do go out, we visit some remarkable sights, including the prehistoric painted cave of Pech-Merle. This cave is probabaly the best paleolithic sanctuary still

open to the public. Truly awe inspiring. I've been intrigued by this period of human prehistory for many years. Been researching it in depth at the Musée Nationale de Préhistoire... and so I propose an in-depth presentation to support this opportunity to see for real this masterpiece.





photo : <http://www.lifeproof.fr>

Thirdly, I've have painted the château & the area for many years. I'm not a tutor coming in from the outside of the area. I know intimately the light, the local colours, the landscape, its little folds & the stories that belong to the region. I like to share this.

Lastly, and I think this important if you'll allow some immodesty, we've got a great team at Bédrier. Sue, my assistant, is a gem at making things work seamlessly. Marie-Line helps in the planning & the office, which can make or break a workshop. And then there's Eric, our french chef, a warm hearted professional of the hospitality business, who ensures that 'la table est bonne!'

Lisa: Where can readers find out more and book one of your holidays?

Adam: The Châteaux Painting Holidays website here <http://www.artists-atelier.com>

Warm welcome to all levels.

We run four weeks every year in June & September.

Established 1997.